

Moslems in Europe – Specific challenges to national and local policies – Belgium (EUROJESS – Granada – 27.08.2009)

Guy Cossée de Maulde sj (Centre AVEC, Rue M. Liétart 31/4, B-1150 Bruxelles, www.centreavec.be)

Before I discuss the challenges that the Moslem population presents for Belgium and before I explore how best we can live together - a central precept for all democratic societies - we need a better understanding of the context¹.

The context – demographic situation

It is difficult to estimate (statistically) the precise number of Moslems resident in Belgium. Indeed, as a general rule, due to privacy concerns, official data rarely contains information on a resident's philosophical or religious beliefs (or even country of origin). As a result, we can only reach an indirect estimate of who might be Moslem and must proceed with caution in doing so. When using the country of origin as a reference point, we have to remember that not all people from countries perceived as Moslem (Turkey, Syria, etc.) are necessarily Moslem (Turkish Armenians and Syrian Arameans are cases in point). Furthermore, once people of foreign origin acquire Belgian nationality by naturalisation, no statistical record is kept of their country of origin. This applies equally to the children of Moslem families (whether or not they are immigrants) who acquire Belgian nationality at birth. Finally, we should not forget ethnic Belgian converts to Islam, who are not registered as such in official statistics.

Nevertheless, according to experts, out of a total population of approximately 10.7 million currently living in Belgium, some 400 to 450 thousand are Moslem (i.e. 4% of the total population)². In the absence of precise statistics, this figure must be taken as a conservative estimate.

The context – History

Records of Moslems living in Belgium date back to the early 20th Century, and even the early 19th Century³. However, it was only in the 1960s that the Moslem population began to grow, following the signature of immigration conventions by the Belgian State (for economic reasons: Belgium needed labour) with Morocco (1964), Turkey (1964), Tunisia (1969) and Algeria (1970). Although the Belgian State decided to halt immigration in 1974 (due to the petrol crisis), this population continued to grow

¹ In 2004 the Centre Avec published “L’islam aujourd’hui en Belgique » in *Évangile et Justice* (68, March). Read especially Felice Dassetto « L’islam belge en Europe. La rencontre complexe... ».

² The figure 400 000, referring to people with a Moslem cultural heritage, had already been quoted in a summary report published in September 2003 by Hassan Bousetta and Brigitte Maréchal entitled *L’islam et les musulmans en Belgique. Enjeux locaux et cadres de réflexion globaux* (Brussels, *Fondation Roi Baudouin*, September 2003, pp. 8-9 – This document can be downloaded from the website of the *Fondation Roi Baudouin*: <http://www.kbsfrb.be/publication.aspx?id=178144&LangType=2060>). For your information: *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* vol 1, Ed. Jørgen S. Nielsen, Samim Akgönül, Ahmet Alibašić, Brigitte Maréchal, Christian Moe, Nadia Jeldtoft, Leiden, Brill, 2009.

³ In 1928, a quarter of migrant coal workers were Moslem. They came from Algeria (3 303), Morocco (1 291), and Tunisia (560). In 1828, the Moslem population was 5 571 (in an estimated total population of 7 875 000)... (Figures quoted from a study by Mohamed El Battiui and Myriem Kanmaz, *Mosquées, imams et professeurs de religion islamique en Belgique. État de la question et enjeux*, Brussels, *Fondation Roi Baudouin*, September 2004, p. 7 – This study can be downloaded from the website of the *Fondation Roi Baudouin* http://www.kbsfrb.be/uploadedFiles/KBS-FRB/Files/FR/PUB_1448_Mosquees_imams_prof_islam.pdf).

(births, family regroupings). Furthermore, due to legislation facilitating naturalisation, the number of Belgians from a "Moslem background" mainly began to increase in the 1990s⁴.

The following key figures concerning foreigners who acquired Belgian nationality between 1991 and 2007 give some indication of the situation:

Turks 107 290; Moroccans 179 298; Algerians 12 892; Tunisians 8 099; and Pakistanis 4 293, that is a total of 311 872⁵. Other people from predominantly Moslem countries of origin (Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Syria, some eastern European countries or Africa) also acquired Belgian nationality during this period, but they are much fewer in number and can be estimated in tens of thousands. Needless to say, this total figure for naturalised Moslem citizens relates to an influx (between 1991 and 2007), in order to obtain precise statistics for the current situation, births and deaths in now-Belgian families would have to be calculated for the reference period.

Other key figures relate to non-Belgian nationals residing in the country in 2008:

Turks 39 954, Moroccan 79 465; Algerians 8 185; Tunisians 3 591; and Pakistanis 3 797, that is a total of 134 992⁶.

These populations are unequally distributed across the country. They are concentrated mainly in major urban centres (Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent and Liège) and the old industrialised regions (Limbourg and Charleroi). And in a single town, they may be concentrated in specific neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, these populations are usually young since their birth rates (albeit decreasing) tend to be higher than the ethnic Belgian population's.

The context – "Established and diverse"

This demographic data - whose overall figures tally well with the estimate that Moslems approximate 4% of the total Belgian population – sheds light on two important factors for consideration.

The first observation is that Moslems **have been living in Belgium for many years and are an integral part of Belgian society**.

Some 73% of people of Turkish origin and 69% of people of Moroccan origin have acquired Belgian nationality. Figures for other countries of origin are as follows: 69% (Tunisia), 61% (Algeria), and 43% (Pakistan).

Their involvement in society is considerable, at work, of course, but also in politics, social life, and culture. For a long time, trade unions (which are a strong social force in Belgium) have had a policy of giving non-nationals responsibilities within their bodies and the necessary training. Similarly, political parties ensure that ethnic North Africans or Turks feature on their lists of election candidates, especially in 1994 (local elections) and in 1995 (regional elections). Today they are well represented at

⁴ On the whole topic of immigration and integration, one might read: Jean-Marie Faux, *Première, deuxième, troisième génération... (Les populations d'origine immigrée, spécialement marocaine et turque dans la Région bruxelloise)*, Bruxelles, Centre Avec, 2005. To be downloaded on the website: <http://www.centreavec.be/analyses/Premi%E8re.%202%E8me.%203%E8me%20g%E9n%E9ration.pdf>.

⁵ This figure can be compared with the number of people from EU-27 (mainly Italy) who acquired Belgian nationality during the same period: 112 633. Source: *Migrations et populations issues de l'immigration en Belgique. Rapport statistique et démographique 2008* (Brussels, Centre pour l'égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme, 2009, Table 5.3, p. 116) – Available for downloading at: www.diversite.be (heading "migrations, publications").

⁶This figure can be compared with the number of people from EU-27: 659 256. Source: *Migrations et populations issues de l'immigration en Belgique. Op. cit.*, Table 4.2. It should be noted that in 2008 the total number of non-nationals was 971 458 (this figure does not cover illegal or irregular migrants, which are estimated at about 100 000).

the parliamentary level (federal and federated bodies) as well as in local councils⁷. In 2009, a woman of Moroccan origin took up a ministerial post in the government of the French-speaking community and a man of Turkish origin took up a ministerial post in the government of the Brussels-Capital region.

We must also recognise that the **Moslem world is diverse** even if all Moslems share a common reference in the oneness of Allah, the Koran and the prophet Mohammed.

Being from a Turkish, Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian, or Pakistani background, inter alia, has a cultural impact on lifestyles and can have repercussions on relations between these communities⁸.

From a religious perspective, Islam has been pluralist for a very long time: Sunni, Shi'a, Sufism... Today, in Belgium, as in the rest of Europe, according to Farid El Asri⁹, tendencies have developed "concerning the way in which the meaning of the Koran or the prophetic tradition is interpreted. Some adhere strongly to the spirit and spirituality of the Koran" (the mystic interpretation found in Sufism), "others adhere to a literal interpretation" (notably, Salafism), "whereas others speak of the autonomy of human reason vis-à-vis the text" (rationalist approach). "There are those who live their faith on the basis of established practice" (traditionalist reading) "and others raise the question of the purpose of the text" (reformist reading).

With regard to Belgium, Farid El Asri believes that "the first generation tends towards traditionalism. Obviously, there is a literalist strand..., which is well-established and outspoken, but which remains a minority. I believe that this to be a transitory tendency since it chooses to exclude itself from societal dynamics, and this is not usually sustainable... In general, Moslems incline towards unconscious reformist interpretations... Many Moslems are trying to live their faith while also seeking routes that clarify new questions and remain faithful to the message"¹⁰.

The diversity can be seen in mosque membership. According to a 2004 study, of 328 mosques studied in Belgium: 162 in Flanders, 89 in Wallonia and 77 in Brussels¹¹, the majority were organised on the basis of ethnicity or nationality. In the Brussels region, 36 were Arab (mainly Moroccan), 22 Turkish¹², and 5 Pakistani... In Wallonia, 45 were Turkish and 44 Moroccan. In Flanders, 82 were Arabic-speaking, 67 Turkish¹³, and 6 Pakistani.

Questions and challenges

⁷ At the regional and European elections of June 2009, 17 Belgian nationals of North African or Turkish origin were elected to the parliament of the Brussels-Capital Region (21.4% of MPs); 5 to the Flemish parliament (4% 124 MPs), none to the Wallonia parliament (75 MPs) or the parliament of the German-speaking community (25 MPs). One of the 22 elected MEPS was of Moroccan origin on his father's side.

⁸ The largest community is the Moroccan community (about 260 000), followed by the Turkish community (about 150 000) and, far behind, the Algerian community (20 000), Tunisian community (12 000), and Pakistani community (8 000).

⁹ Anthropologist at the *Université Catholique de Louvain*, member of the *Centre interdisciplinaire d'études de l'islam dans le monde contemporain* (CISMOC). Cf. his contribution "Lecture spécifique de l'islam et des musulmans » dans *L'image de l'autre: chrétiens et musulmans, acteurs de réconciliation*" (Brussels, *Commission Justice et Paix*, study 2008, pp. 39-40)

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

¹¹ Mohamed El Battiui and Myriem Kanmaz, *Mosquées, imams et professeurs de religion islamique en Belgique*, *op. cit.*, p. 13-23. Website (www.embnet.be) of the *Exécutif des musulmans de Belgique* (faith organisation), provides the following data (August 2009): 151 mosques in Flanders, 76 in Wallonia, 54 in the Brussels region.

¹² 60% of the latter belong to the Diyanet (Turkish State), 30% to the Mili Görus movement (non-governmental) and 10% to groups like Alévi, the Suleymanli and the Sufi brotherhoods.

¹³ 35 belong to the Diyanet (Turkish State), 18 to the Mili Görus movement (non governmental) and, 14 to other strands (Alevi, Suleymanli, Sufi).

Although Moslems have been living in Belgium for a very long time, this does not mean that living together does not present its difficulties.

A recent study by CISMOC¹⁴ reveals that **some Moslems as well as non-Moslems experience feelings of uneasiness, fear and even rejection.** It also reveals that **both want to be fully themselves, with their values, and that they often feel hindered in this by the other.**

Moslems believe that **relations have deteriorated** since the New York attacks of 11 September 2001. They have the impression that people are wary of them and see them as potential terrorists. The study shows that non-Moslems are rarely sensitive to the distress experienced by Moslems.

Non-Moslems believe that Moslems are becoming **radicalised** and that their **sense of identity has hardened**: veils are becoming more common and longer clothes are being worn to school. Moslem pupils and their parents are becoming more demanding: gender relations, relationship with science, attitudes to atheism and to other religions. Some Moslems hold undemocratic political views. Perpetrators of violence often claim to be acting in the name of Islam. The study notes that when confronted with these assertions, Moslems often remain silent or argue that they are exaggerated.

What are **the causes of this uneasiness**? The participants in the study also gave their opinions on this point. It is interesting to listen to them.

Moslems as well as non-Moslems cite **socio-economic and socio-cultural causes**: discrimination at job-entry or relegation to lower educational tracks, family poverty, ghettoisation of neighbourhoods and schools, unemployment... feelings that their culture or religion of origin is being devalued... International injustices are also mentioned, such as the situations in Palestine and Iraq, support for dictatorships...¹⁵

Moslems believe that **deformed caricatures of Islam** should be criticised, pointing their fingers mainly at the media. Islam is being associated with terrorism. Religious demonstrations are being labelled as fundamentalist due to ignorance of religious practice.

Moslems criticise **the inability of non-Moslems to accept difference** and live with people who are unlike them. State efforts at assimilation are mentioned.

Non-Moslems, for their own part, raise questions of **the responsibility of Moslems**: What of the founding texts of Islam and its preachers; radical sermons in some mosques; Saudi Arabian, Moroccan, and Turkish influence on some imams; confusion of religion with politics? ...

The CISMOC study presents a clear picture of the current situation in society. It raises questions that warrant reflection and call on us to take a position.

¹⁴ Jordane Carpentier de Changy, Felice Dassetto and Brigitte Maréchal, *Musulmans et non musulmans. Les nœuds du dialogue*. Brussels, *Fondation Roi Baudouin*, September 2006. Available for downloading at: (<http://www.kbs-frb.be/publication.aspx?id=178368&LangType=2060>). This study was carried out by the *Centre Interdisciplinaire d'Etudes de l'Islam dans le Monde Contemporain* (CISMOC – *Université Catholique de Louvain*) and seeks to assess relations and trust between Moslems and non-Moslems. It was based on 7 discussion forums held between September 2005 and October 2005, which addressed 7 questions: Islam at school; political Islam; ethnic, cultural and religious identities; Islam in the media; the wearing of the veil; youth values and their relations with religious figures; relations between religion and the State. The same authors published a more comprehensive study: *Relations et co-inclusion – Islam en Belgique*, Paris, L'Harmattan (coll. *Compétences interculturelles*), 2006.

¹⁵ The study points out that although this assessment is shared by Moslems and non-Moslems, some (especially Moslems) tend to blame the world powers. The authors draw attention to the risks of shirking responsibility. Needless to say, this is not the prerogative of a single social group!

With regard to **discrimination**, especially at job-entry level, legislation and official declarations by the economic and social leaders can be used to expose and condemn such practices and to make changes¹⁶.

This applies equally to acts of **racism**, whether or not it takes the form of "islamophobia". The *Centre pour l'égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme*¹⁷ and many other civil society organisations¹⁸ have been working in this direction but there still remains a lot to do on the ground, in our day-to-day lives ...

Wearing the **veil**, either at school or, for example, in parliament¹⁹ – is a cause for concern for many people. Passionate debate nevertheless sought to make distinctions²⁰ and to look deeper into what was at stake²¹.

The **ghettoisation** of some **schools** is undoubtedly a problem. It not only raises the issue of self identity-exclusion, but also of cultural impoverishment, including an insufficient knowledge of French and Dutch. Another form of ghettoisation which can be harmful if preponderant or exclusive, is watching TV programmes from the country of origin (especially Turkey), which can inhibit the learning of the languages of the country of residence, and ultimately the ability to live together²².

The concentration of a community in **certain neighbourhoods** can bring on the negative effects of ghettoisation. There have already been instances of violence among young people. It should be noted that these have usually been brought under control, mainly thanks to the concerted action of the public authorities, socio-cultural leaders, and members of associations, as well as parents. Some of these violent incidents were mainly of an ethnic or inter-ethnic nature²³.

Nor is violence unknown within **the security forces**. Racial profiling is all too frequent and the police often show disrespect. Obsessive fears relating to security can be counterproductive.

International injustices can lead to frustration and deep feelings of rebellion. In this context, it is undoubtedly worth pointing out that ethnic Belgians may often share these feelings, which draws them into an effective solidarity against these injustices.

¹⁶ It is difficult to "prove" discrimination: job applicants can therefore be turned down unobtrusively, and even before the job interview stage, on the basis of a surname... About discrimination, see the annual reports "Discrimination, diversité" of the Centre pour l'égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme (http://www.diversite.be/?action=publicatie_detail&id=106&thema=2).

¹⁷ Rue Royale 138, B-1000 Brussels (www.diversite.be).

¹⁸ Inter alia, *La Ligue des droits de l'Homme* (www.liguedh.be), *Liga voor Mensenrechten* (www.mensenrechten.be), *Mouvement contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme* (MRAX – www.mrax.be)...

¹⁹ Mahinur Özdemir, who was elected MP at the regional elections of June 2009, wore the veil when being sworn into office at the Brussels-Capital regional parliament. This led to another MP wishing to introduce a law against this.

²⁰ A scarf is not a burka.

²¹ In an article entitled "*La question du voile qui occulte l'autre*", David D'Hondt, a secondary school teacher states that it is not the veil that turns schools into ghettos or relegates pupils to lower educational tracks or grants them a "diploma in unemployment". (*La Revue Nouvelle*, September 2007, p. 20. This issue included an entire dossier entitled "*Musulmanes et musulmans d'ici*" (Moslems and Moslems here). See the argued position of about 50 Belgian organizations (10.09.2004): *Manifeste contre l'interdiction du foulard à l'école* (http://www.mrax.be/article.php3?id_article=625). Cf. Jean-Marie Faux, *Et le voile ?...*, Bruxelles, Centre Avec, 2005 (<http://www.centreavec.be/analyses/Et%20le%20voile.pdf>).

²² See Hélène Laigneaux, *École et diversité culturelle*, Bruxelles, Centre Avec, 2007. Available on the website: <http://www.centreavec.be/analyses/Ecole%20et%20diversit%E9%20culturelle.pdf>.

²³ Turkish nationalism can create problems. See, for example, the comments (with nuances, because other factors such as lack of well-being, come into play) of Ural Manço on clashes between young Turks and Kurds in Schaerbeek and Saint-Josse-ten-Noode (*Le Soir*, 26 October 2007): <http://centres.fusl.ac.be/CES/document/WEBCES/DocsMembres/UM/226.pdf>). Cf. Jean-Marc Balhan, *Nous et les autres. De la difficulté à être 'différent' en Turquie*, Bruxelles, Centre Avec, 2009. Available on the website: [http://www.centreavec.be/analyses/Nous%20et%20les%20autres%20\(Turquie\).pdf](http://www.centreavec.be/analyses/Nous%20et%20les%20autres%20(Turquie).pdf)).

Thus there is no shortage of questions and challenges to be addressed if we are to achieve the necessary level of harmonious living for a "good" life and a "good" society that lies at the heart of democratic society.

Possible responses

Since the questions and challenges are global and societal, answers must be found at different levels. They must be structural as well as personal.

At the institutional level, *Islam has to be recognised*, in the spirit of the Belgian Constitution, on a par with other religions²⁴. This was done by the Belgian State in **1974**. 25 years later, in **1999**, the ***Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique*** was set up. Its core mission is the management of the religion regarding the appointment of teachers of Islam²⁵ and moral guidance councillors in prisons and hospitals. Since its inception, however, the *Exécutif* has been dogged by difficulties and internecine tensions. Recognition of local communities (and the corresponding funds) is still ongoing (recognition of mosques and imams).

At the political level, it is certainly important to involve all people who have strong roots in the country through their participation in the management of public affairs. For a long time, civil society has been lobbying for non-EU nationals to be granted ***the vote at local elections***. Finally, despite strong reservations, the right to vote was granted to non-EU nationals in **2004**. It is equally important for parties to have non-nationals on their lists of candidates. Once ***elected***, they must help to overcome the self-exclusion of these communities and to work for the common good, even if, like all elected representatives, they must guard against clientelism. The benefits brought by the involvement of politicians of North African or Moroccan origin can be seen.

We should remember that the involvement of people of foreign origins in **trade union bodies, civil society associations** is not only normal, it is also essential to building our lives together. It is fortunate that major Belgian trade unions (which play an important role in Belgium) have been attentive to this issue for a long time.

Legislation is indispensable in fighting racism and discrimination even if it is not always easy to enforce. A new and well-formulated law came into force in 2007²⁶. The role played by associations in this field is essential²⁷.

Generally speaking, **the third sector**, which is very diverse, is ideally situated to promote cultural and religious interface. There are many third sector associations in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels.

With regard to the Brussels region and Wallonia, a recent brochure entitled *Comprendre et agir dans la société multiculturelle*²⁸, gives a broad overview of **intercultural an interfaith (interconvictional) dialogue initiatives**.

²⁴ The Belgian Constitution (Article 19, 21, 24) recognises the freedom of religion. It provides state funding for religions recognised in law, which provide moral assistance on the basis of a philosophy or faith (cf. Caroline Sägeser and Vincent de Coorbyter, *Cultes et laïcité en Belgique*, Brussels, *Dossier du CRISP* 51, 2000). The religions currently recognised are Catholicism (since 1802), Protestantism (1802), Judaism (1808), Anglicanism (1870), Islam (1974), the Orthodox religion (1985) and secularism (1993). Buddhism is soon to be recognised. See Jean-François Husson (2007), *Le financement du culte islamique en Belgique* (2007). Available: <http://www.cil.be/files/PC7%20Le%20financement%20du%20culte%20islamique%20en%20Belgique%20JF%20Husson.pdf>. See also the website of the *Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique*: www.embnet.be.

²⁵ Since 1975, there has been Islamic religious instruction in state schools.

²⁶ See Jean-Marie Faux, *Une nouvelle législation contre les discriminations*, Brussels, *Centre Avec*, January 2007 (http://www.centreavec.be/pages/Pub_analyses_legislationdiscriminations.htm).

²⁷ See footnotes 17 and 18.

²⁸ *Comprendre et agir dans la société muticulturelle*, Brussels, *Pax Christi* and *Centre El Kalima*, 2008.

Some of these initiatives come from the **public authorities**. There are permanent bodies such as the *Centre Bruxellois d'Action Interculturelle* (CBAI, 1981), which has also become (2006) a regional centre for supporting the social cohesion policy; the *Centre pour l'égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme* (1993, a federal government initiative); the *Centres régionaux d'intégration* of the region of Wallonia (decree 1996). Councils can also play a role. Examples include a Brussels city initiative from the municipal councillor for family and religion, which resulted in an interfaith platform. Its charter was signed (2006) by a number of secular and faith-based associations²⁹. In Charleroi, one municipal councillor launched (2002) the *Groupe de rencontre et d'actions interreligieuses* (GRAIR)³⁰.

Initiatives have been taken by **secular civil society**: neighbourhood or residents' committees organise fetes, or neighbourhood centres and sports or cultural associations...³¹. The fun side of things should not be neglected. A major and colourful cultural event celebrating creativity, the *Zinnekeparade*, is held in Brussels every year. This multicultural, colourful and popular event attracts many people from all walks of life (200 000 spectators). But more importantly, it is organised each year by several groups (thousands of participants) from the city's many neighbourhoods³².

Finally, initiatives have come from **faith-based groups and movements**, and there are many of them. They are sometimes very modest affairs and they are sometimes short-lived, but all are convinced of the importance of coming together with respect. Opinions gleaned from members of these groups stress certain guidelines for success in coming together, mainly: giving yourselves time, beginning by coming together on the basis of real human experience and full of mutual good will (as opposed to "discussion"); showing respect; seizing opportunities; being motivated; willing to prepare and evaluate... Guidelines which might probably appear as self-evident but it never hurts to keep those in mind though.

On the Catholic side, let us note the role played by *El Kalima*, a Christian Centre for the relations with Islam³³. And on the Muslim side, *Les amis de l'islam* (of Sufi allegiance, founded in Algeria in 1948 and present in Belgium since 1982)³⁴, la *Plate-forme de Dialogue Interculturel / Intercultureel Dialoog Platform* (IDP) that was created in Hasselt in 1998 and has anchor points in Brussels, Liège, Gand and Anvers³⁵. These three organisations, in collaboration with Protestants and Jews, have organized for a few years meeting days entitled « Together, let us build bridges ». In Flanders as in Brussels, one must underline the important work achieved by the *Kerkwerk Muticultureel Samenleven*³⁶. They notably organize meetings in between Muslims and Christians, aiming a young audience (18-35 year old). They publish for years a calendar 'Feesten met de bureu' (Celebrate with the neighbours) which is widely used in schools, firms, and so on. They also work with and some other French speaking organisations, among other things for the publishing of a "inter faiths calendar".

It would also be good to mention the **more localized initiatives** taken by local communities, for example at the occasion of religious celebrations. An example of such initiatives is the invitation launched by Muslims to come celebrate with them the end of Ramadan, under a big tent planted on a public place. Those are occasions of meeting and discoveries.

²⁹ The platform's charter is available at <http://www.wcrp.be/Charte%20plateforme.pdf>. See also: <http://www.dialoguesetconvictions.be/historique.html>.

³⁰ <http://home.scarlet.be/decalog/grair/index.htm>. Charte : <http://home.scarlet.be/decalog/grair/charte.htm>.

³¹ For instance, *le Bouillon de culture* (cultural centre in a Brussels neighbourhood), the social project *La Porte Verte-Snijboontje* in Molenbeek...

³² See the website: www.zinneke.org.

³³ www.elkalima.be.

³⁴ www.lesamisdelsislam.org.

³⁵ www.idp-pdi.be.

³⁶ www.kms.be.

It is of course essential to remember the role of the **schools**: not only the contents of courses (especially history) but also the way of life at school.

Finally, we should not ignore **our own day-to-day actions**, with our neighbours, in shops, at work and on public transport.

When we consider the expectations of people – as expressed by Moslems and non-Moslems during the discussion forums mentioned above – we can see that at all levels of action, it is important to take into account the need for recognition felt by all citizens, and not to disregard any feelings they might have about being misunderstood and, finally, not to run away from the need for clear responses... This is indispensable if we are to build trusting relations.

Those trustful relations³⁷ are the foundations of a shared common life in a « good society ».

A lucid and trustful work

We should not hide to ourselves that living together with our diverse cultures, our different views is not an easy task. The, under some respects, growing unease in between Muslims and non-Muslims makes it appear clearly enough.

As for all situations of debates and conflicts, everyone has **to share the desire of “understanding” what the others think, want, live.**

But there is more to that. We also have **to “deal with” the difficult issues which are friction points**, by examining beyond those issues (such as the scarf), **the values involved**. Those frictions points also affect the persons or groups which are fighting against racism. For example, on the Muslim side, one could observe the following points:

- the claim for the « cultural diversity recognition » ;
- the demand for « reasonable accommodations »³⁸ ;
- the denunciation of Islamophobia.

And on the « secular side »:

- the denunciation of « communitarianism ».

We have to clarify together the religious fact and the legitimacy of its expressions into the public sphere in our society. To clarify together about what are cultural diversity and communitarianism. To clarify together their justifications (on the level of values): what justifies the acceptance or the refusal of a given particularity? what justifies or not the acceptance of an accommodation said “reasonable”? We also have to work together on what is Islamophobia and what is not³⁹.

As one can see, we are now sent again towards the debate on the essential components of democracy, on the foundations of society. It belongs to us, as citizens, to start working with lucidity, respect and steadfastness, intelligence and trust.

³⁷ See, in line with *Comprendre et agir dans la société multiculturelle* (footnote 28), the thoughts of Albert Bastenier, *La confiance, ingrédient nécessaire des sociétés multiculturelles*, Bruxelles, Pax Christi Wallonie-Bruxelles, 2008. Available on the website:

<http://www.paxchristiwb.be/pages/documents/Laconfianceingredientnecessairedessocietesmulticulturelles.pdf>.

³⁸ « En droit québécois et canadien, l'obligation dite 'd'accommodement raisonnable' (sans contrainte excessive) est considérée comme une 'conséquence naturelle' du droit à l'égalité » (Pierre Bosset, *Réflexion sur la portée et les limites de l'obligation 'd'accommodement raisonnable' (sans contrainte excessive) en matière religieuse*, Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, Québec, 2005). Available on the website: <http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/bs53626>.

³⁹ See Jean-Marie Faux, *Le 'pluralisme confirmé' de la société belge*, Bruxelles, Centre Avec, 2008 (<http://www.centreavec.be/analyses/Le%20%27pluralisme%20confirm%E9%27%20de%20la%20Soci%E9t%E9%20belge.pdf>).