

Press Release

## New Flemish Decree for the Recognition of Religious Communities Places Mosques under Government's Authority

The Flemish government proposed a new decree that on the one hand is an attempt to please the Muslim community by “officially” recognizing mosques and on the other, enforces control and “monitoring” within prayer houses. Although the decree speaks in general terms, it is clear it solely targets mosques.

The so-called “official” recognition of mosques is tied to strict conditions. According to the decree, local religious communities like mosques and their boards are no longer allowed to receive funds from abroad. They are also required to sign a statement in which states that the contents of the Friday prayer must agree with the boundaries that the secular government opposes on them.

Moreover, the decree draws the line ever further by subordinating mosques to the “moslim executive” (the representative organ of the Islamic worship services and the Muslim community in Belgium). All the while the executive does not have a good reputation with Muslims. Half of the chosen members were rejected after “background checks” by the Flemish government. Therefore, it is an organ whose members are accepted by the Flemish government and not by the Muslims.

In doing so, the Flemish government does not only impose who represents the religious community of the Muslims, it controls mosques through it. Justice Minister Vincent van Quickenborne who is a proponent of cooperation with the moslim executive described it as follows: “It is my ambition to, together with the ministers of the member states, realize a progressive Islam in our country that cuts all ties abroad and provides a space to the many youths that want to practice their faith in a manner that is reconcilable with our society.”

Islam is viewed as a problem, henceforth mosques that are an expression of Islam must be combated. They want to realize this by “recognizing” them first so that it is easier to influence them to dictate an “Islam” that agrees to them.

It is clear that in practice, the decree solely targets Islamic houses of worship and not the other religious communities. Apart from the fact that it is a sly attempt to mislead Muslims, it is also most discriminatory.

Our advice to the sincere Muslims is as follows: reject this decree whose goal is to limit the Muslim community. It also opens the door to incriminate those mosques that do not want recognition as to pressurize them.

**Okay Pala**

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