

## Resolution 2237 (2018)<sup>1</sup>

# Regulating foreign funding of Islam in Europe in order to prevent radicalisation and Islamophobia

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The question of foreign funding of Islam in Europe has occupied a prominent place in public debate in many Council of Europe member States for a number of years now, and may raise concern. The Parliamentary Assembly considers that whatever these concerns may be, member States must ensure that they do not result in widespread suspicion of foreign funding in general.
2. Reiterating that, according to the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), the right to request and receive voluntary donations, regardless of their origin, is inherent to religious activities, the Assembly calls on member States to clearly reaffirm that not all foreign funding of religion is a problem in itself and that, on the contrary, it can help to foster interfaith dialogue and more openness in religious worship.
3. The Assembly notes that, beyond the differences in situations, in relations between States and religions, in the organisation of the Muslim faith itself and in how it is funded, in certain cases the questions that surround foreign funding of Islam reveal a reality which cannot be denied, despite the absence of global and aggregate statistics.
4. First of all, this reality concerns the use of religion by some States as a means of exerting influence in a foreign country, which becomes a problem when it goes beyond simply providing support to a religious community to enable it to practise its faith freely and is designed either to export a radical form of Islam or to foster a sort of Islamic nationalism in the target communities.
5. In this connection, the Assembly refers to its [Resolution 1743 \(2010\)](#) on Islam, Islamism and Islamophobia in Europe in which, already eight years ago, it noted with concern that "some Islamic organisations active in member States have been initiated by governments abroad and receive financial support and political guidance from those governments. ... National political expansion into other States under the guise of Islam should be brought to light. ... member States should require transparency and accountability of Islamic as well as other religious associations, for instance by requiring transparency of their statutory objectives, leadership, membership and financial resources".
6. With regard to the different types of measures taken by some member States to regulate foreign funding of Islam, the Assembly urges member States to:
  - 6.1. prevent the funding of Islam in their territory which is proved by objective criteria to be used by other States for the purpose of national political expansion under the guise of Islam;
  - 6.2. reject all attempts at interference in their territory by foreign organisations which aim to put in place a parallel society, and not allow foreign funding to reach any organisations which undermine human rights and dignity, and which oppose living together as guaranteed by the principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. In particular, any foreign attempt to indoctrinate young people must be prevented;

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1. *Assembly debate* on 10 October 2018 (32nd Sitting) (see [Doc. 14617](#), report of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, rapporteur: Ms Doris Fiala). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 10 October 2018 (32nd Sitting).



6.3. ensure full compliance with the framework established by the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, the Venice Commission and the Assembly; this implies, in particular, that a general ban on all foreign funding is arguably unreasonable and not necessary in a democratic society, that regulations introducing discrimination between different religious groups on religious grounds must be banned and that any regulations governing funding should be proportionate;

6.4. focus on increasing transparency, for example through annual financial reports clearly identifying the origin of any foreign funding and how it is used, including funding received through informal transfer systems, such as money brokers or *hawala* networks. It also recommends involving Muslim organisations in this increase of transparency, through preventive actions vis-à-vis donors and the entities which receive the donations.

7. When more drastic measures are considered, such as a sweeping ban on foreign funding, the Assembly recommends:

7.1. first organising a broad consultation, with clearly defined aims;

7.2. treating all religions on an equal footing;

7.3. refraining from placing the Muslim community under any general suspicion that may lead to Islamophobia and, on a broader level, from instrumentalising the question of foreign funding.

8. The Assembly notes that regulating the funding of the Muslim faith can have positive consequences for the integration of Muslim communities into European society, by encouraging the emergence of representatives to liaise with the public authorities. It is also convinced that the appropriate response to the rudimentary and literalistic Salafist theology that cultivates the breeding ground from which terrorist acts can grow is an enlightened Islam. In this respect, it notes a fairly widely shared tendency in several member States to improve the level of training for imams, including theological training, and to limit the intake of imams trained abroad, while consulting with the representatives of Muslim communities.

9. The Assembly therefore encourages member States to introduce courses that promote an enlightened Islam, calls on them to devote substantial means to this, which also meet the needs of the religious communities, and supports initiatives to set up European faculties of theology open to Islam.

10. The Assembly also takes note of recent studies showing that the integration of Muslims in several European countries, as shown by their strong attachment to their countries of residence for example, seems to have progressed over the last fifteen years; that features specific to them, in terms of their religious beliefs and their ties with their countries of origin or those of their ancestors remain; and that they continue to be the victims of Islamophobia on a significant scale.

11. Referring to paragraphs 3, 13 and 20 of its [Resolution 1743 \(2010\)](#) and to [Resolution 2076 \(2015\)](#) on freedom of religion and living together in a democratic society, the Assembly calls on member States to take these specific features into account and to increase their efforts to combat Islamophobia, for while foreign funding can facilitate radicalisation, Islamophobia is also one of its breeding grounds.

12. Lastly, the Assembly invites member States to implement the Committee of Ministers Action Plan on the Fight against Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism, while at the same time noting the importance the action plan accords, in its preventive proposals, to measures which encourage living together on an equal footing in culturally diverse democratic societies.