GREASE
Religion, Diversity and Radicalisation

Country Report

Belgium

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This Country Report offers a detailed assessment of religious diversity and violent religious radicalisation in the above-named state. It is part of a series covering 23 countries (listed below) on four continents. More basic information about religious affiliation and state-religion relations in these states is available in our Country Profiles series. This report was produced by GREASE, an EU-funded research project investigating religious diversity, secularism and religiously inspired radicalisation.

Countries covered in this series:
Albania, Australia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Morocco, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

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The EU-Funded GREASE project looks to Asia for insights on governing religious diversity and preventing radicalisation.

Involving researchers from Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Oceania, GREASE is investigating how religious diversity is governed in over 20 countries. Our work focuses on comparing norms, laws and practices that may (or may not) prove useful in preventing religious radicalisation. Our research also sheds light on how different societies cope with the challenge of integrating religious minorities and migrants. The aim is to deepen our understanding of how religious diversity can be governed successfully, with an emphasis on countering radicalisation trends.

While exploring religious governance models in other parts of the world, GREASE also attempts to unravel the European paradox of religious radicalisation despite growing secularisation. We consider the claim that migrant integration in Europe has failed because second generation youth have become marginalised and radicalised, with some turning to jihadist terrorism networks. The researchers aim to deliver innovative academic thinking on secularisation and radicalisation while offering insights for governance of religious diversity.

The project is being coordinated by Professor Anna Triandafyllidou from The European University Institute (EUI) in Italy. Other consortium members include Professor Tariq Modood from The University of Bristol (UK); Dr. H. A. Hellyer from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) (UK); Dr. Mila Mancheva from The Centre for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria); Dr. Egdunas Racius from Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania); Mr. Terry Martin from the research communications agency SPIA (Germany); Professor Mehdi Lahlou from Mohammed V University of Rabat (Morocco); Professor Haldun Gulalp of The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Turkey); Professor Pradana Boy of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang (Indonesia); Professor Zawawi Ibrahim of The Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (Malaysia); Professor Gurpreet Mahajan of Jawaharlal Nehru University (India); and Professor Michele Grossman of Deakin University (Melbourne, Australia). GREASE is scheduled for completion in 2022.

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GREASE - Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing Together European and Asian Perspectives

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Religious diversity in Belgium: socio-demographic context, institutional framework and radicalisation challenges

Introduction

In Western Europe, two approaches to the governance of religious diversity that are often contrasted are the 'radical secularism' of France and the more moderate secularisms of the UK and Germany. Belgium offers an interesting case study for while these kinds of comparisons are usually made *between* countries, owing to its federal structure, in Belgium we find such variance *within* the same country.

Belgium is a federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy and has a complex institutional organization comprising three territorial regions, Wallonia, Flanders and the Brussels-Capital region, and three linguistic communities, French, Dutch and German, all of which have devolved areas of competency. As a result, within one overarching national framework, there are also two distinct models of governance of religious diversity: the more radical form of secularism in the francophone region of Wallonia, as well as a multicultural form in the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders, which bears greater similarities to the UK. Belgium thus represents a country case that is multicultural and multilinguistic, as well as also representing quite different approaches to the governance and place of religion in society within one state. As well as this structure providing an interesting case for analysing Belgium's model(s) of governance of religion, it is also from this that key challenges arise. This has been particularly important in recent decades with regard to a growing Muslim population.

Moreover, the complexity of the regional and institutional structure has also provided considerable challenges when it comes to addressing violent religious radicalisation, and in recent years this has become focused on violent Islamic radicalisation. Belgium is in fact a particularly important case in Europe in relation to violent religious radicalisation and has found itself at the centre of recent European concern over the issue. Belgium has seen more of its citizens per capita leave to fight in recent wars in Algeria, Iraq and Syria than any other European country and was the first to experience an attack from a returnee foreign fighter. Furthermore, as well as facing its own violent terrorist attacks in recent years, networks in Belgium have been found linked to terrorist activity in other European countries.

In unpacking these issues, this report is organised in the following way: The first section provides socio-demographic context and an overview of the most pressing challenges regarding religious diversity governance in contemporary Belgium. The second section then traces the historical developments of church-state relations, linking these to the current constitutional and institutional framework. Finally, the third section analyses how the threat of violent radicalisation linked to religious claims has emerged, shifted and been addressed.

Socio-demographic context

Belgium's three regions and three communities each have different demographic characteristics. The regions are organised territorially, although also along linguistic lines, and comprise Dutch-speaking Flanders, French-speaking Wallonia and most recently the bilingual Brussels-Capital region. The three communities are organised along linguistic lines: Dutch, French and German. There are also bilingual municipalities within the regions. Belgium's total population stood at 11,376,070 as of 1st January 2018, with 51% of the population female and 49% male[1]. The growth rate of the population is 0.5%, with 82.5% of this a result of net migration and a higher proportion of people migrating to the Flemish region in comparison to the Walloon or Brussels-Capital regions. The Flemish region is the largest by population, at 57.5% of the total, the Walloon region follows at 32% and the Brussels-Capital region with 10.5% of the total. The population of Brussels is officially bilingual, compared to the unilingual regions, and it has been described as marked by 'multinational politics' (Jacobs, 2004: 281). A large part of Brussel's population, well over a third, is of non-Belgian origin, considerably more than the regions, where around 10% in Wallonia and 5% in Flanders are non-Belgian nationals. Of migrants coming to Belgium between 2010 and 2016, it is estimated that 57% of 230 000 were Muslim and Belgium is in the top ten destination countries for Muslim migrants in Europe (Pew, 2017).

Belgium's GDP per capita was $49 512 in 2017[2], with a growth rate of 1.4% for 2018 and projected to drop by 0.1% each of the next two years[3]. Flanders, covering 44.8% of the territory, provides the largest share of the GDP (58%) and has an employment rate above that of the Belgian average[4] . Brussels-Capital region is ranked first in GDP and Wallonia 3rd, and both have unemployment rates above the national average[5]. As of the third quarter of 2018, an employment rate showing a slight increase on previous years stood at 70.1% of people aged between 20 and 64 and unemployment had fallen below 6%; youth unemployment also decreased, to 16.3%[6]. These figures are at the lower end among EU Member States[7].

In its cities Belgium has one of the highest risks of urban poverty and social exclusion of EU member states[8] and there are important differences between the regions on socio-

[1] Figures in this paragraph are from statbel.fgov.be. unless otherwise indicated
[2] https://data.oecd.org/belgium.htm
[3] https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-performance-and-forecasts/economic-performance-country/belgium/economic-forecast-belgium_en
[4] https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regional-innovation-monitor/base-profile/flanders
[5] https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regional-innovation-monitor/base-profile/brussels-capital; https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regional-innovation-monitor/base-profile/wallonia
[6] https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/work-training/labour-market/employment-and-unemployment#news; https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/lfs/visualisations
[7] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/9087772/KS-02-18-728-EN-N.pdf/3f01e3c4-1c01-4036-bd6a-814dec66c58c p.28
[8] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/9079352/KS-DZ-18-001-EN-N.pdf/884f6fec-2450-430a-b68d-f12c3012f4d0 p.32

economic measures. There is also a much larger unemployment rate among non-EU born residents[9]. The National Register in Belgium does not provide data on migration background, and so reliable data is difficult to attain, particularly when it comes to second- and third-generations (Bovenkerk, 2017). A survey in 2007, nevertheless, showed large discrepancies between ethnic groups for those living below the EU poverty line. The total figure for the country was 12.66%, with the figure for ethnic Belgians below this at 10.16%. Italians were double this figure (21.49%) and those of the main non-European immigrant groups, Turkish and Moroccan, were between 5 and 6 times that figure, 58.94% and 55.50% respectively (see Bovenkerk, 2017: 47). This suggests considerable challenges when it comes to integration and inclusion of non-European migrant populations. This is not least as there is a reciprocal relationship between social and economic deprivation and levels of crime (Bovenkerk, 2017: 55) and, moreover, that following the terrorist attacks in Brussels in 2016 criminologists established a link between 'ordinary' crime and terrorism (ibid: 58).

There is no religion question in official Belgian demographic statistics, so accurate and reliable figures are difficult to come by[10]. Yet, for Belgium Christianity remains overwhelmingly the dominant religion in the country in terms of identification. Those who are unaffiliated to any religious tradition form the second largest group, with Islam being Belgium's 'second religion'. Notably, while the number of those identifying as Christian is steadily declining, for Muslims this number is rising. The following table captures these trends as they are projected[11]:

	2010		**2020 (projected)**	
Christian	6 880 000	64.2%	6 590 000	60.5%
Muslim	630 000	5.9%	810 000	7.5%
Unaffiliated	3 110 000	29%	3 370 000	31%
Hindu	< 10 000	<0.1%	10 000	<0.1%
Buddhist	30 000	0.2%	40 000	0.3%
Folk religions	20 000	0.2%	30 000	0.2%
Other	10 000	<0.1%	10 000	0.1%
Jews	30 000	0.3%	30 000	0.3%

In terms of religion's explicit place in politics, Christian political parties have been a steady part of Belgium's political scene since its inception. In recent decades, however, the previously strong Catholic identity of these has shifted to a more generically Christian and humanist identification and discourse. Various attempts at founding a specifically and self-defined Islamic political party have been made since the first in the early 1990s, although none have enjoyed any real success (Koutroubas et al., 2009). Muslim candidates have served in the national and European parliaments, however.

[9] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/8787947/KS-05-17-100-EN-N.pdf/f6c45af2-6c4f-4ca0-b547-d25e6ef9c359 p.20
[10] http://www.euro-islam.info/country-profiles/belgium/
[11] from https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/2050/number/Europe/

Main trends and challenges

As is the case with other Western European countries, Belgium has been a country of immigration from the early to mid-20th century, although immigration and greater religious diversification began in Belgium while it was still a unitary state (Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2010). Belgium was slow to acknowledge and respond to its status as an immigration country - a consequence of originally encouraging labour migrants on a temporary 'guest worker' basis with the assumption that these migrants would return to their countries of origin, a policy which ended in 1974 (Loobuyk & Jacobs, 2006). While in the early part of the twentieth century these migrants were predominantly from other European countries (notably Italy from the 1920s), since the 1960s there have been increasing groups of migrants from, notably, Turkey and Morocco, and more latterly (since the 1990s) from Belgium's former non-European colonies: Democratic Republic of the Congo and the territory of Ruanda-Urundi. Patterns in the last couple of decades have also seen large numbers come from France and the Netherlands. Settlement patterns in these successive migrations have generally followed labour market trends at the time and immigrants have tended to become concentrated in particular municipalities (Bovenkerk, 2017; Imeraj et al., 2018).

As a result of these migration patterns, and in parallel with a number of Western European countries, Belgium has undergone increased ethnic and religious pluralization. This is most notable in relation to Islam and Muslims who now form the second largest and most culturally and politically significant religious minority in Belgium. The differences in organizational and institutional structures between the regions, as well as the politico-ideological difference in inclusion which underpins them, present considerable challenges as different regions pursue different models for the governance of religious diversity.

In 1997 Belgium ranked as the country with the most racists among all European countries investigated and in 2000 it had levels of intolerant attitudes towards Islam and Muslims well above the EU average in Eurobarometer surveys in those years. Explanations for this, as with everything, vary between the regions, with the Flemings tending to emphasise issues around perceptions of cultural threat in relation to immigrants and Walloons perceptions of an economic threat (Billiet et al., 2006). Such feelings of threat in Flanders declined through the second half of the 1990s, with economic recovery and low unemployment, but increased again in the early 2000s, when Belgium experienced a significant rise in net migration from between 15 000 and 20 000 to 27 790 in 2003 (Loobuyk & Jacobs, 2006), during which time there was a concomitant drop in the percentage of people evaluating multiculturalism positively (Billiet, 2006). Moreover, minorities face forms of institutional discrimination; they are more likely to be stopped and arrested by police, detained in custody, given longer prison sentences, and relations with police can be 'dismal' (Bovenkerk, 2017: 62). Further indications are that second-generations are proving more successful than their parents, but, notwithstanding differences between and within ethnic groups, still tend to concentrate in certain labour market sectors and do not perform as well in school as

non-immigrant Belgians (Bovenkerk, 2017). It also seems to be the case that second-generations exhibit higher rates of crime than the first, especially among those who are socio-economically disadvantaged (ibid).

Migrants' electoral and civil society participation has been increasing, albeit in atchy fashion, since the mid-1990s and particularly since the mid-2000s. To a large extent, this has been a result of institutional arrangements such as proportional representation in Brussels that have facilitated an openness to minorities' inclusion (Zapata-Barrero & Gropas, 2012). In terms of identification, a consequence of this patchy inclusion and institutionally disadvantaged position relative to other more established religious communities, means that in Belgium young Muslims return lower levels of national identification than the majority as well as other minorities, and, moreover, religious importance is a key explanatory factor for this negative effect on national identification of being Muslim (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2018: 51, 53, 56). Belgians of immigrant background tend to identify with a Belgian national identity or with a city more than with one of the regional or community identities (Loobuyck & Sinardet, 2017: 398). A recent study, however, has found that there is no evidence to support a reactive Muslim religiosity in relation to a negative discursive climate or political opportunity structure (Torrekens & Jacobs, 2016).

Following the federalization of the country, competencies over significant legislative and policy areas were devolved to the regions. Political competencies are shared between the federal government (with jurisdiction over maters such as defence, finance, social security and justice), the regions (territorial issues, employment, economic development, environmental and housing issues), and those devolved to the communities (such as culture, education, media, and some social services) (Adam & Loobuyck, 2014; Jacobs, 2004). One result of this is that there are few unified policies or data measures, which provides considerable challenges.

In addition, there are a few notable characteristics of Belgium's federal composition that bear on the different governance structures between the regions and mean that the challenges faced also manifest in distinct ways. It has been designed to limit intergovernmental cooperation and since the late 1970s political parties have been regionalised into two distinct party systems between the regions along linguistic lines (Billiet et al., 2006). There are, therefore, no country-wide political parties or a "genuine country-wide public sphere" (Loobuyck & Sinardet, 2017: 394). Moreover, this has meant that two distinct and separated sets of media have developed largely in isolation from one another, in turn aiding the development of different cultures (Loobuyck & Sinardet, 2017; Billiet et al., 2006). Also, the relation between the region and communities is not identical in Wallonia and Flanders. Whereas the regional and community institutions in the latter have merged, this is not the case in the former (Adam, 2013: 558).

History and current regulatory framework: Devolved federalism

Historical overview

The reasons for Belgium's particular model of federalisation are rooted in historic conflicts along linguistic lines between the Flemish nationalist movement and Francophone responses to it. Belgium declared independence from the Netherlands in 1830, at which time it was a unitary state with the monarch being installed in 1831. However, it embarked upon a series of constitutional reforms towards federalism beginning in 1970 and followed in 1980, 1988, and then 1993, when Belgium was officially transformed into a federal state[12] (Jacobs, 2004).

Belgian politics and policies are often analysed with reference to three main cleavages, which overlap in important ways: The first is a religious cleavage between Catholics and non-believers, the second a linguistic cleavage between Francophones and Dutch-speakers, and the third a socioeconomic cleavage, which opposes employers and workers (Adam & Torrekens, 2015). Along the third, Wallonia industrialised early in the 19th century while Flanders remained more agricultural and poorer for longer. It is, however, the first two of these are particularly and directly pertinent for the considerations of this report.

It is perhaps the second, linguistic, cleavage that "Belgium would not be Belgium" without (Adam & Torrekens, 2015). Following the creation of the independent Belgian state in 1830, a French-speaking bourgeois minority ruled a Dutch-speaking majority, resulting in a series of mobilizations that went on to combine linguistic, cultural and social issues and demands, gradually succeeding in attaining rights along linguistic lines, and leading to the unilingualism of each region, and eventually the bilingualism of the Brussels-Capital region. A result has been that the Flemish government, in contrast to its Wallonian counterpart, has often pursued a form of nation building involving the development of a Flemish national consciousness (Billiet et al., 2006) with language a fundamental part of this. Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that Flemish identity is in any way separationist. Whilst emphasizing the importance of a Flemish identity, Flemings simultaneously, and complementarily rather than conflictingly, regard themselves as Belgian also, and, moreover, a feeling of being Belgian has been rising (Billiet et al., 2006). Indications are that Belgian identity is significant and these relations between a Belgian identity and regional identities represent a form of 'nested nationalities' (Loobuyck & Sinardet, 2017) that may also be conducive to a multiculturalist identification (Modood, 2017: 22). Moreover, trends seem to suggest that the stronger an identification with a Belgian national identity, the more positive the attitude towards foreigners (Maddens et al., 2000; Billiet et al., 2006; Loobuyck & Sinardet, 2017). Some point to the significance of the general popularity of the Royal Family for this common bond and unifying factor, as well as the Belgian national football team (Billiet et al., 2006; Loobuyck & Sinardet, 2017). Furthermore, although not yet common and standard practice, politicians and media are increasingly crossing the

[12] Although the linguistic borderline became fixed in 1963 (Loobuyck & Sinardet, 2017: 392)

language border and addressing the different communities (Loobuyck & Sinardet, 2017: 396).

Along the first, religious cleavage, Belgium has historically been a Catholic country, Catholicism having been the state religion in the 17th and 18th centuries in what would become Belgium. This meant a cultural monopoly for the Church, socialization in Catholic culture being legally imposed (Dobbelaere, 2010: 284; Dobbelaere & Voyé, 1990). Following the French Revolution, at the end of the 18th century this alliance between Church and State came to an end and the Church became a society amongst others (Dobbelaere, 2010). It retained significant influence, however. Belgium inherited the French Concordat, setting the role and dominance of the Catholic Church and the relations between Church and State. Under this agreement the Catholic Church gave up its direct political role for state recognition of its significance (Adams & Torrekens, 2015). Notwithstanding methodological and interpretive cautions, in the census of 1846, 99.8% of the population was registered as Catholic (Dobbelaere & Voyé, 1990; Billiet et al., 2006: 919). Historically, nevertheless, the Flemish are more Catholic and the Walloons more anti-clerical. Arrangements between the state and other religious faiths have followed the model inherited from this historical arrangement. In addition to the Catholic Church, Judaism was recognized in 1832, Protestantism and Anglicanism in 1870.

During the early period of independent Belgium, the state was organized jointly between Liberals and Catholics. This period of Unionism shifted, however, and from the second half of the 19th century radical liberals gained greater control and, along with the socialist party, set about implementing secularist policies (Dobbelaere, 2010: 284). This political shift resulted in one of the most significant areas in which the religious cleavage has played out: through the so called 'school wars' over the role of the Church in education. The first of the school wars occurred between 1879 and 1884, when the State established its own school system (Dobbelaere & Voyé, 1990). In fact, pillarization, the system of vertical pluralism, emerged as an outcome of the first school war, with the Catholic Church developing a private school system to mirror the state school system as part of Catholic revival (Dobbelaere, 2010). This Catholic pillar expanded to include schools from kindergartens to universities, youth and adult organisations, cultural organisations, media, hospitals, trade unions, banks and more (Dobbelaere, 2010). Pillarization thus represented a form of segmented differentiation (ibid: 286) and served to establish a form of collective consciousness that integrated the pillar. The Catholic pillar formed one of three pillars, the other two being a socialist pillar and a smaller liberal pillar, each with their own systems of schools, hospitals and so on. In 1921 the Catholic pillar was institutionlised with the Catholic Union party representing its political channel (Dobbelaere, 2010: 287).

The second school war occurred in the 1950s, when the Catholic pillar was at its apex and a socialist-liberal government began restricting the subsidies allowed to the Church. The schoolpact-law of 1959 sealed a compromise, establishing basic principles later (in 1988) brought in as constitutional revisions. These ensured freedom of religion, in part to meet the religious and non-religious plurality of students. This freedom, guaranteed by the constitution, means support for faith-based schools and the possibility of

education in the recognized religions or non-confessional ethics, although Catholic schools have maintained their prominent position in Belgium's education system (Franken, 2016a; 2016b). Again, there is regional variance here; the role of the Church has been defended more in Flanders than in Wallonia, which can be seen translated into the preference for Catholic schools in Flanders and for state schools in Wallonia. The outcome of this period was also a notable shift from a Catholic pillar to a Christian pillar, with many of the organisations and even the political party switching from the former to the latter term.

Billiet et al. note that the traditional depiction of "Flanders is Catholic and Christian democrat, Wallonia unbelieving and socialist, and Brussels liberal and free-thinking" has been steadily eroding, the differences between the regions shrinking, and de-pillarisation increasing (2006: 913). Significant have been more recent trends that in many ways mirror parallel patterns of secularization found across Western Europe. On numerous indicators a gradual decline of religion's place in social and political life can be seen from the 1960s to the present day (Franken, 2016a). Survey results indicate a steady decline in those identifying as Catholic, with indicative figures from different European surveys showing a fall to 72% in 1981, 55% in 1990, and 43% in 2003, this figure being higher for the younger as compared to older generations (Billiet at al., 2006). Furthermore, a separate survey for 1981, although finding a slightly higher percentage (77%) also found that "only half of them had the orthodox Christian belief in God, the other half believed in a spirit, a life force or did not know what to think" (Dobbelaere, 2010: 288). Again, showing a similar trajectory but returning higher figures for the end of the 1990s, it was found that "in 1999, the percentage of those believing in God had declined to 65% of which only one third had the orthodox Christian belief in God" (ibid). Moreover, declining Church affiliation, involvement and attendance, along with organization membership have all declined (Dobbelaere & Voyé, 1990; Franken, 2016a). The figures are also higher in Flanders than Wallonia and Brussels, with the consequence that overall, and notwithstanding some important differences and patterns, religious affiliation is proving a weaker indicator of voting behavior than previously, a process which itself seems to be occurring more gradually in Flanders (Billiet et al., 2006; Dobbelaere & Voyé, 1990), where the Flemish Christian pillar remains institutionalized (Dobellaere, 2010: 294).

Whether or not this represents a process of de-pillarization is a matter of interpretation (Billiet et al., 2006; Dobbelaere, 2010). The Catholic/Christian pillar, which has proven able to adapt its 'collective consciousness' to the changing social and cultural process of secularization, now perhaps increasingly represents a 'socio-cultural Christianity' with 'soft' values that are no longer specifically Christian (Dobbelaere, 2010: 289-290) and more characterised by *bricolage* in contrast to orthodoxy (Dobbelaere & Voyé, 1990). Franken suggests that this might represent a form of 'mental depillarisation' (2016a: 312). Indeed, it may be for this reason that it is argued that "religion has definitively been bypassed by the linguistic and territorial divide as the strongest impulse behind the identity struggles in Belgium" (Foret & Riva, 2010: 806). In relation to education and the continued dominance of Christian schools, Franken notes how often these are now chosen for practical rather than confessional reasons, including by those of other faiths

(Franken, 2016a; Franken, 2017). In terms of state support for religions more generally, a small majority of the population is in favour as long as subsidies are fairly distributed, compared to about a quarter who are not in favour and a fifth who are indifferent to state support for religion (Franken, 2016b).

Current regulatory framework

The separation of church and state in Belgium is not a formal constitutional separation, however; it is not explicitly mentioned in the Belgian Constitution and Belgium may thus be considered a form of moderate secularism (Franken, 2016b: 149; Franken & Loobuyck, 2012; Modood, 2017). Moreover, formal recognition by the federal state brings support and financial benefits. This has meant Belgian church-state relations being characterized by, on the one hand, separation, and on the other, active support for religion by the state, in the form of financial subsidies, for example (Franken, 2015; 2016b; (Adams & Torrekens, 2015). It is reckoned that in 2000 these subsidies totaled $523 million[13].

Articles 19 and 20 of the constitution fix the positive freedom and negative freedom of religion respectively (Franken, 2015: 66) and state support as found in art.181, for instance, has the purpose of guaranteeing these religious freedoms (Franken, 2016b: 150). The state pays the salaries and pensions of the 'ministers of religion' (art. 181), and article 24 stipulates that "all pupils of school age have the right to moral or religious education at the community's expense" (Franken, 2016a: 309). Article 21 of the Belgian Constitution prohibits the state from "interven[ing] either in the appointment or in the installation of ministers of any religion whatsoever". Further forms of support and privileges recognized religions receive from the state include the funding of religious courses in schools (both state and private), and in the French Community they are provided with free broadcasting time on radio and TV (Franken, 2016b: 150). Catholicism retains its central position in public life; on the King's birthday and national holidays, for instance, the Catholic Church performs civil-religious rituals (Dobbelaere, 1995: 171). Furthermore, there is an annual general assembly of the National Ecumenical Commission to discuss various religious themes at a national level. The Catholic Church plays a leading role in national and local level religious affairs between religious organisations and with the state, helping to maintain inter-faith dialogue and promote tolerance among all religious groups[14]. Franken also points to how financial support is not necessarily fairly distributed upon recognition, favouring Roman Catholicism (2016b: 155n; also Dobbelaere, 1995). Indeed, this point has been commented on various bodies, by the United Nations Human Rights Committee (in 1998), a 'commission of wise men' reporting to the Belgian Ministry of Justice in 2005, and a follow up study group report, set by royal decree, in 2009 (Franken & Loobuyck, 2012: 491). In 2015 the allocations of funds were: Catholic Church 82.3%, Protestantism

[13] http://www.euro-islam.info/country-profiles/belgium/
[14] http://www.euro-islam.info/country-profiles/belgium/

3.5%, Anglicanism 0.5%, Judaism 1.0%, Orthodoxy 1.5%, Islam 2.0%, and Secular humanism 9.3 %[15].

In the second half of the twentieth century further religions have gained official state recognition in addition to the Catholic and Protestant Churches and Jewish Consistory: Islam was recognised in 1974, Orthodoxy Christianity in 1985, non-confessional free-thinkers in 1993, and Buddhism in 2008 (Adam & Torrekens, 2015), while a union of Hindu associations and the Syrian Orthodox Church have requested recognition (Franken, 2016b). The inclusion of atheist worldviews indicates that religions are not uniquely privileged in this sense. Recognition here, however, is of a particular sort, and requires isomorphism that reflects the inheritance and importance of the Catholic Church model. In order to be recognized a religious faith must organize according to this model, requiring a nationally representative institution. In addition to this structural-institutional condition, four further criteria must be fulfilled, namely, they must bring together "several tens of thousands" of adherents, have been present in Belgium for a fairly long period, be of social benefit, and not contravene public order in their activities (Franken, 2015: 67; 2016b; Franken & Loobuyck, 2012).

These requirements have often meant that more recent minority religions have faced difficulties in gaining official recognition. Islam provides a good example here. The institutional requirement meant it was necessary for Muslim communities to set up a nationally representative Islamic council. of 1974. The main interlocuter for the Belgian state until 1990 was the Islamic and Cultural Centre (*Centre Islamic et Culturel* [CIC]), although this was not officially recognised by the Belgian state as representing Belgian's Muslims as it was not seen as completely legitimate by them (Citak, 2010).

It wasn't until 1999 that the Belgian Muslim Executive (*Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique*, BME) was established, although beset with debates about legitimacy, the implementation of recognition was delayed further until the early 2000s[16]. This in part a result of the fact that Islam does not traditionally organize in hierarchical ways similar to that of the dominant Christian churches, in part owing to disagreements between different ethnic and sectarian groups, and in part about issues over government interference in elections of the body. Particularly important for the BME has been Turkish groups, these being dominated by religious rather than national Milli Görüş in the BME's early incarnation, and by the *Diyanet* (the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey) since the mid-2000s, which had the not inconsiderable backing and influence of the Turkish government. This itself has meant a tension between Belgium's institutionalization of a 'Belgian Islam' and the *Diyanet*'s resistance of what it sees as a de-culturalization and de-ethnicization of a Turkish form of Islam, although it has in general been respectful of the Belgian state's position and as a partner in matters pertaining to the Turkish diaspora (Citak, 2010). In terms of Belgian government interference, the social and political context marked by fears of religious radicalisation, the government stipulated further interventions for the recognition of Islam. These

[15] http://www.o-re-la.org/index.php/eu-countires/item/1333-belgium

[16] Technically recognition was gained in 1998, although for various reasons and disagreements recognition can be said to have occurred in 2003, although this was not the end of controversy, see http://www.euro-islam.info/country-profiles/belgium/ . Also, Citak, 2010.

included government organized elections for representative candidates, opposed by some Muslim leaders, and screening of these candidates. Islam has also not been able to obtain differential recognition for different groups, Sunni and Shi'a for instance, whereas different Christian denominations are recognised (Franken, 2016b: 154-155). As a result of these kinds of issues, the BME has had an erratic institutional relationship with the state[17]. As a result, Islamic organizational structures in Belgium are less developed than, for instance, England (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2018: 48).

A significant development for minority incorporation began in 1974 when competence over the 'welcoming policy for migrant workers' was devolved to the regions, setting the conditions for regional variation in this area (Adam, 2013). In 1980, integration policy was transferred from the regions to the communities, when the wording of the migrant worker policy changed from 'reception policy' to 'reception and integration policy' (Adam, 2013), reflecting the end of the earlier temporary guest worker policy. It was also during the 1980s that immigration and integration first became prominent on the agenda in Belgium (Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2010). In Francophone Belgium, this was shifted again in 1993, this time to the Walloon region and the French Community Commission of the Brussels-Capital Region, the latter region having been created in 1988-89 (ibid). Two events, the creation of the Brussels-Capital region in the Francophone region and the electoral success of the right-wing populist Vlaams Blok party (changed to Vlaams Belang following a conviction for racist propaganda) in Flanders in 2004 (gaining almost a quarter of the vote), brought immigrant integration to the foreground (Adam, 2013: 553).

Until 1984 the policies of the two main regions continued along the inherited policy path. Picking up pace during the latter period of the 1980s, however, integration policies began to diverge and the regions have pursued quite different strategies of inclusion of minority faiths based on different conceptions of citizenship. Indeed, for some commentators "immigration and migrant integration policy are areas in which Flemish and Francophone political elites tend to hold diametrically opposing views" (Adam & Jacobs, 2014: 65). Jacobs has in fact referred to ethnocentrism/multiculturalism as a new political cleavage in Belgian politics (2004). Significantly, the sources of inspiration that give rise to these divergences can be traced along linguistic lines; Francophone Belgium often inspired by France and French republicanism for its policies, and Dutch-speaking Flanders by the Netherlands and a more pragmatically multicultural model. This can be seen, for example, in different understandings of national identity, where Flanders is generally seen to represent a more ethnic conception in contrast to the more civic conception of Wallonia (Adam, 2013: 559). There is thus not one Belgian model but a combination of a central immigration policy with divergent migrant integration policies between the regions as a result of competency in this latter area being devolved. Whereas the Flemish region has tended toward a more multiculturalist set of policies, Francophone Wallonia has followed a more colour-blind, assimilationist model. For these reasons and divergences, Belgium has been characterised as an example of maybe something more than constitutional patriotism but less than liberal nationalism, whilst

[17] http://www.euro-islam.info/country-profiles/belgium/

'the Flemish integration policy is clearly inspired by liberal nationalism and the policy is used as a tool for nation-building' (Loobuyck & Sinardet, 2017).

Nevertheless, Bousetta and Jacobs argue that if we shift from analyzing the content to the style of policy making, we can observe a common driving force of pragmatism (2006: 28). Both regions mix assimilationist as well as multiculturalist policy measures, the significant difference between the two being one of the balance of emphasis between cultural homogeneity and cultural diversity, and between the degree of interventionism each considers necessary to achieve the preferred balance for successful integration (Adam, 2013).

Approaches to integration in Francophone Belgium can be characterised as *laissez-faire* assimilationist and adopt more radically secular and colour-blind policy approaches. There is thus no explicit categorical policy towards ethnic groups that easily allows comparisons (Jacobs, 2004; Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2010). This policy approach was institutionalised on 30th April 2004 under the name of 'social cohesion policy' (Adam, 2013: 555). More recently, however, this has shifted to a policy frame that is slightly more interventionist-assimilationist (ibid). For example, minority language courses are supported by the state through the education system, and numbers have risen significantly in the last 10 to 15 years (Adams & Torrekens, 2015; Loobuyck & Sinardet, 2017). Moreover, in 2016 French language and citizenship courses were introduced for non-European newcomers (Loobuyck & Sinardet, 2017: 410).

Approaches to integration in Flanders can be characterised as multiculturalist and more interventionist than the path pursued in Wallonia, with far more resources allocated to integration measures. In fact, we might note that in its pursuance of a form of multiculturalism Flanders bears a largely unremarked upon similarity to the UK (Modood, 2017). Notably, the Flemish Community began to officially recognize sub-regional support centres for migrants and established a regional organization, VOCOM (*Vlaams Overleg Comité Opbouwwerk Migratie*) to co-ordinate their activities (Adam, 2013: 553). Other policy measures included public financing of grassroots ethnic minority organisations, incorporating diversity concerns into most policy sectors, renaming 'immigrants' to 'ethno-cultural minorities', and the creation of the Minorities Forum that brought together minority organisations enabling them to jointly organise (Jacobs, 2004; Loobuyck & Sinardet, 2017: 410). These policy measures for 'ethno-cultural minorities' are not forms of official recognition in the way that religions are granted, however. Nevertheless, what can be seen in Flanders, especially following the electoral success of the Flemish Liberals (VLD) is a hybridic approach at once multiculturalist and assimilationist. In 2003 a compulsory civic integration policy was introduced, bringing in Dutch-language courses and courses on Flemish social norms and values. Yet these more assimilationist measures reinforced the existing multiculturalist policies as well as introducing new multiculturalist measures; for example, legitimate absence from school on religious festival days for all recognised religious denominations (Adam, 2013: 557; Jacobs, 2004).

In terms of accommodation for religious diversity more specifically, under Belgian law there is no general duty for public or private institutions to grant forms of reasonable accommodation on grounds of religion. In 2008 the issue of reasonable accommodation

on the grounds of religion was taken up by the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism, which sought to learn from the practice of other countries (notably drawing on the *Bouchard-Taylor* report) (ibid). The Centre has highlighted 'pragmatic creativity' rather than general principles as "the Belgian way" (ibid: 107; Bousetta & Jacobs, 2006). In fact, the concept of reasonable accommodation for religious diversity was absent from Belgian public discourse until 2009 (Bribosia et al., 2011). There is provision for religious worship in the 1978 Act on employment contracts, coming under an earlier Act from 1900, which imposes the obligation "to grant the employee the necessary time to fulfil his religious obligations as well as the civil obligations imposed by the law" (ibid). General employment law though has largely left matters of religious accommodations to ad hoc measures rather than general principle, and the granting of accommodations remains contingent on a variety of localized factors (ibid).

Demands on grounds of reasonable accommodation have been made, although not always granted, in relation to areas including dress, diet, prayer space, and holidays for religious celebrations. Despite the lack of a general law, various exemptions and accommodations have been enacted, the rule for animal slaughter dictating that animals must first be dazed does not apply to religious ritual slaughter, for example. Such exceptions and accommodations are, however, with regional, sector and institution specific variation as already noted. Flemish authorities, for instance, have developed lines of case law interpreting and adapting the definition of reasonable accommodation from the Employment Equality Directive directed at discrimination based on disability to include other forms of discrimination, including religion (Bribosia et al., 2011). Although there is no provision for *halal* or *kosher* meat, school children can get meals which take their religious faith into account – they will not be served pork, for example. In Flanders school children may take days off school to celebrate "in conformity with the pupil's philosophical beliefs as recognised by the Constitution" (Bribosia et al., 2011). In contrast, in the French community no similar provision exists and pupils must rely on more *ad hoc* measures.

As in a number of Western European countries, Belgium has been concerned with issues around religious signs and symbols stimulated by the presence and politicization of Islam and Muslims in the public sphere, and again, regional approaches to these vary. While both regions have followed similar policies and discourse around the language of 'neutrality', in Wallonia justifications have relied on arguments based in anti-clerical secularism, a feature not found in Flanders (Adams & Torrekens, 2015).

Two areas of note relate to places of religious worship and to religious signs and symbols in the public sphere. Notably, these measures apply only to Islam and Muslims. In regard to the first of these, in Flanders, for instance, in order to be recognized, mosques must have written documents stating and proving their commitment to a) their use of Dutch as their *lingua operandi* (with the exception of the *Khutba*), b) their respect for the Constitution and basic rights and liberties, and c) their not being involved in terrorist activities (Adam and Torrekens, 2015). These sorts of interventionist policies are more absent in Wallonia, where only administrative conditions have been introduced to fulfil requirements for recognition (Adam and Torrekens, 2015). With regard to religious

signs and symbols, this can be seen by considering the Islamic headscarf, which in common with several other European countries has proved controversial.

While Belgium has introduced a criminal ban on face-covering in the public sphere (in 2011 and upheld by the European Court of Human Rights following a legal challenge in 2017), provoked by the desire to outlaw the wearing of the *niqab*, a general ban on head coverings has not been brought in. Nevertheless, such bans have appeared in rather ad hoc and inconsistent ways. What is noticeable here is that responses have been similar between the regions, although for quite different reasons (Adam & Torrekens, 2015). Bans on religious signs, stimulated by concerns over the headscarf have appeared in both regions. Public schools run by the Flemish community have prohibited the wearing of religious signs for both teachers and pupils, teachers of religious education classes excepted. For Flemish private schools as for both public and private schools in Francophone Belgium, the decision is left to the discretion of the individual school authorities, resulting, nevertheless, in *de facto* bans (Brems et al., 2017; Adam & Torrekens, 2015). Similarly, bans have also been introduced for employees of the French Community Parliament when in contact with the public, as have other local municipalities, although a general public sector ban has not been brought in, despite proposals for such a ban (ibid).

Brems et al. (2017), terming the situation relating to headscarf bans 'headscarf persecution', note how some judges are applying a dubious interpretation of Article 759 of the Belgian Judicial Code in order to ban Muslim women's headscarves from courtrooms. Dating back to the early 19th century, this originally intended to ensure decorum and respect in recognition of the authority of the court, when one was expected to remove one's cap, and never applied to religious attire, such as Catholic nun's head coverings, for instance. Brems et al. argue that reliance on this Article and its extension to Muslim women's headscarves that some judges are implementing is a purposeful misinterpretation of the Article, having no legal basis in Belgian law, and is in breach of religious freedoms – they note too that the ban is extended in this way only to headscarves and still exempts Catholic nun's. There have also been several cases where women wearing *hijab* have been refused access to goods or services; for example, in gyms, restaurants, and the housing market (Brems et al., 2017: 895). The courts response to challenges to these bans has been mixed but case law is developing "in which they extend the possibility to justify headscarf discrimination on grounds of neutrality from the public to the private sector: they accept headscarf discrimination against employees by private sector employers as soon as the company has a neutrality charter or policy" (Brems et al., 2017: 896). In addition to these *hijab* bans, 'burkinis' have also been banned by a number of municipal swimming pools (Brems et al., 2018).

The significance of the politicization of Islam can be seen in that, despite "the most high-profile Belgian headscarf ruling to date, in which the Council of State [having] found the headscarf ban in Flemish public schools to be discriminatory, [this] has not led to a change of policy in the umbrella organization of those schools. Such blatant defiance of a ruling of the highest administrative court is extremely rare in Belgium. It testifies to the strength of public opinion, which simply refuses to see headscarf discrimination as discrimination" (Brems et al., 2017: 897). As with other European countries, veiled

Muslim women, and moreover the appearance of veiled women as candidates in elections, have divided feminists and provoked moral panic in the media over secularism (Göle & Billaud, 2012).

Violent religious radicalisation challenges

Belgium had experienced forms of far-left and far-right terrorism in the 1980s but faced its biggest challenge in relation to violent religious radicalisation in 2016. There had been precedents, but nothing on the same scale when, on March 22nd, 2016, bombs were exploded at Brussels airport and Maelbeek metro station, killing 32 and injuring 340, and for which ISIS claimed responsibility (Ponsaers & Devroe, 2017). The attackers in these two incidents were known to authorities and connected to the network that organized the 2015 attacks in Paris.

Although not facing a major terrorist attack on its soil prior to the Brussels bombing, Belgium had frequently found itself at the centre of recent issues surrounding religious radicalisation. During the 1990s Brussels "became a staging area or transit country for Islamists instead of serving as a prime terrorist target", at that time related to conflict in Algeria (Lefebvre, 2017: 2). Following 9/11, issues of multiculturalism and the position of Islam were firmly put centre stage and brought a new focus and negative character that was not as evident in previous discourses of managing ethnic, cultural and religious diversity (Bousetta & Jacobs, 2006). A number of recruitment networks for foreign fighters appeared in Belgium following 9/11 and the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Belgium in fact is the European country to have seen the most fighters per capita travel abroad to fight for terrorist groups[18] (Starr and Pazos, 2018). Since 2011 over 500 Belgians, predominantly from Brussels and Flanders, with an average age of 25-26 but including about 45 accompanied and unaccompanied minors, had left the country to fight for terrorist groups in Syria or Iraq (Lefebvre, 2017; Boutin et al., 2016; Renard & Coolsaet, 2018). Many of these returned, something which became a source of concern itself; in 2014 four people were killed at a Jewish museum in the first attack committed by an EU returnee from the conflict in Syria (Ponsaers & Devroe, 2017; Lefebvre, 2017). The table below presents disaggregated foreign fighter figures by region. The number of foreign fighters has dropped considerably in the last couple of years, however; with the number in 2017 described as "limited or non-existent" (see Europol, 2018: 26).

Belgian foreign fighters by region

	In Syria/Iraq	Returnees	Failed attempts	Candidates for travel	Total
Brussels	128	67	28	44	267
Flanders	133	41	36	48	258
Wallonia	21	17	21	20	79
Unknown	6			1	7
Total	**288**	**125**	**85**	**113**	**611**

adapted from Renard & Coolsaet, 2018

[18] Belgium together with the UK, France and Germany, the other Western European countries in this series of reports, comprise the main source countries of foreign fighters leaving from this region (Europol, 2018, 2016).

Yet, with the lower numbers of foreign fighters and returnees, home-grown terrorist attacks are now considered a greater threat in Belgium (Europol, 2018:27). Since the Brussels bombing in 2016, Belgium has witnessed several terror-linked attacks, albeit on a much more minor scale: two policewomen were wounded in a machete attack in Charleroi and three people were similarly attacked on a bus in Brussels in August 2016, with ISIS claiming responsibility; in October 2016 two policemen were stabbed; in March 2017 a man attempted to drive at high speed on a busy shopping street in Antwerp (Starr and Pazos, 2018) and in August that year a man attacked a group of soldiers with a machete, wounding one (Europol, 2018: 24). It is also noteworthy, not least because of similarity with the UK, that converts to Islam have attracted attention when it comes to violent forms of radicalisation. In fact, the only Belgian Muslim to have committed a suicide attack, Muriel Degauque (in Iraq in 2005), was a Belgian (Koutroubas et al., 2009).

Two areas of the country that have come under particular scrutiny are Verviers in Wallonia and Molenbeek in the Brussels-Capital region. Verviers is the area where many of the first Belgians to leave for Syria came from, and where Belgian federal police killed two men as a result of a terrorist related investigation following the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in Paris. Molenbeek has the highest concentration of fighters going to Iraq and Syria in Europe (Starr & Pazos, 2018) and was also linked to the November 2015 attacks in Paris. It "has for a quarter of a century been seen as the heart of Islamism in Belgium" (Lefebvre, 2017: 4), subsequently finding itself the focus of police and media attention. Molenbeek has historically been an area in which immigrants have settled in high numbers and, in part following an agreement with the Moroccan government in 1964, has welcomed among the largest number of migrants from North Africa in the capital region (in Andre, 2017: 72). Part of the so called "poor crescent of Brussels", with above average levels of unemployment, inadequate housing and schools, high levels of school drop outs, low educational attainment, and high crime levels, the media attention it has received has reinforced and increased levels of discrimination and fear, particularly focused on young men of Moroccan descent (Renard & Coolsaet, 2018; Andre, 2017). Nevertheless, despite an often-drawn link between radicalisation and 'ordinary' crime, Bovenkerk cautions that it would be erroneous to draw too direct a line between poor socio-economic circumstances and terrorism. Despite this type of activity clustering around certain urban areas, individuals who undertake terrorist activities have been heterogeneous (2017: 59).

Policies and practices addressing / preventing such radicalisation

Belgium has had consistent challenges in ensuring smooth operations between the federal and regional levels. Following a series of failures in the 1980s, a reform in 1998 led to federal government taking control of policy for Federal Police while local authorities were responsible for Local Police policy. The integration of police forces in this way was founded on a local level community-oriented approach to policing (COP)

coming under a federal framework (Ponsaers & Devroe, 2016). Belgium's complex institutional structure was also a key reason for criticism it received internationally of its apparent weakness and inability to deal effectively with security matters related to terrorism. Belgium has routinely been criticised internationally for its preparedness and response to terrorist activity, despite being among the first European countries to adopt related legislation (Lefebvre, 2017). As an example, Brussels alone faces considerable difficulties co-ordinating operations owing to the delineation of forces along linguistic lines, with six different local police zones and nineteen mayors with different political affiliations, and also divided between Dutch-speaking and French-speaking municipalities, all of which can lead to a lack of communication and fragmentation rather than integration in security matters (Devroe & Ponsaers, 2018).

In Belgium terrorism had been a criminal offence long before the Paris and Brussels attacks, although its legal framework was considerably strengthened following them, when the issue of security and policing came to the fore. Government action had begun with the first action plan against radicalisation; *Actieplan Radicalisme* or 'Plan R', was established in 2005 and revised in 2015. This was led from the federal level, Security and Home Affairs and Justice coming under federal government jurisdiction (Ponsaers & Devroe, 2017), but with each region also having its own plan to be carried out in coordination with it. Relevant counter-terrorist actors had already been subsumed under the Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment in 2006 as a response to 9/11 (ibid) and several institutional and organisational changes have occurred to address the evolving challenges presented by violent radicalisation. These have included expansion of legislation and the Criminal Code, including legal reforms criminalising activity related to terrorist groups; security reforms; detention and prison reforms, including an increase in detention periods for terrorism charges; development, expansion or reform of institutions or founding new institutions; budget increases; information sharing; and investment in technology (see Lefebvre, 2017; Starr and Pazos, 2018).

At a country-wide level, despite previously having had "one of the most open and liberal nationality laws in the world", legislation on attaining Belgian nationality became significantly stricter from 2009, in part because of increasing anti-immigration policy platforms following the Paris and Brussels terrorist attacks (Loobuyck & Sinardet, 2017: 402; Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2010). As such, this legislation and the stricter conditions on citizenship, including evidence of integration (such as language competence), came under criticism for stigmatizing Muslims (Loobuyck & Sinardet, 2017: 403; Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2010).

The Terrorist Offences Act of 2003 criminalized terrorism. Article 137 of the Criminal Code defined a terrorist offence as an offence which may cause serious harm to a country or an international organization with the aim of seriously intimidating a population or unduly forcing public authorities or an international organization to take or refrain from taking certain action. The state's definition was criticised by civil rights groups and the UN Human Rights Committee for being too vague[19]. In 2013 Article 140bis was introduced, which criminalized any person who diffuses ideas or messages to incite

[19] http://www.euro-islam.info/country-profiles/belgium/

terrorist acts, and Article 140ter, amended in 2013, criminalized recruitment for terrorist purposes. Both the civilian *Sûreté* (the State Security Service) as well as the military intelligence service (General Intelligence and Security Service of the Armed Forces, SGRS) were granted additional powers from the early 2000s.

In 2006 four terrorism threat levels were introduced (Boutin et al., 2016), with the highest level being declared following the Paris and Brussels attacks. In 2013 articles targeting incitement to commit terrorist acts, recruitment for such acts, and giving training or travelling abroad for training relating to terrorism entered the Criminal Code.

In 2015, following the attacks in Paris and the emergence of links to Belgian nationals, the government decided on a package of 30 counter-terrorism measures released in two packages, including legislative and institutional measures (Ponsaers & Devroe, 2017; Boutin et al., 2016; Seron & André, 2016). These included amongst others, a new terrorist offence related to travelling abroad for terrorist purposes; the enlargement of cases in which Belgian nationality can be revoked; an increase in the security budget with a focus on terrorism measures; police raids and home searches were made easier; surveillance techniques were expanded; border security was tightened; and dismantling unrecognized places of worship if there are concerns of radicalisation was made easier. Indeed, on this last measure, the *Sûreté* became increasingly concerned with radical discourse recruiting young second- and third- generation young Belgians within and without mosques, including by organisations such as the now banned and disbanded *Sharia4Belgium*.In a recent move the Belgian government has terminated Saudi Arabia's lease on the Grand Mosque of Brussels over concerns it is promoting radicalism. In a statement the Justice Minister said it was doing so "in order to put an end to foreign interference in the way Islam is taught in Belgium… From now on, the mosque will have to establish a lasting relation with the Belgian authorities, while respecting the laws and the traditions of our country, which convey a tolerant vision of Islam"[20].

Additionally, a National Security Council was established along with a plan against radicalisation from a National Taskforce (Ponsaers & Devroe, 2017; Devroe & Ponsaers, 2018; Boutin et al., 2016). The National Security Plan 2016-2019 [21] emphasizes integrated cooperation between different bodies as part of state security apparatus and areas of focus include radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism, cybercrime and cybersecurity (Elnakhala, no date). Funding has also been significantly increased (ibid).

Concern was also raised about radicalisation occurring in the prison system and in 2015 the *Sûreté* set up a unit to focus on this led by criminal justice responses (Renard & Coolsaet, 2018). Returning foreign fighters are jailed automatically upon return and often kept in their own wing and in isolation (in Andre, 2017: 142; RAN, 2017).

It is worth mentioning that Belgium also plays an active role in international efforts and organisations, such as counter-terrorism strategies implemented by the EU Council, such as CoPPRa, which was led by Belgian police. Belgium has also played a leading role in information sharing and contributing data to Europol and Eurojust (Renard, 2016).

[20] see http://www.euro-islam.info/2018/03/29/muslims-politicians-react-belgiums-decision-take-back-grand-mosque/

[21] https://justice.belgium.be/fr/nouvelles/autres_communiques_27. Accessed 02/09/2019

As already noted, in responding to issues of violent religious radicalisation different policies have been enacted in the different regions at the same time as there have been increasing attempts at a more centralized and coordinated approach. Renard and Coolsaet (2018) have commented on how since the attacks in 2015 and 2016 the government has stepped up efforts to implement a more coherent and connected approach, replacing the more ad hoc and improvised approach in the years prior and introducing a series of new counter-terrorism measures. One way of addressing this has been developing a single database into which information can be collated from the various municipalities and organisations engaged in different areas and in different ways (in Andre, 2017: 170). The National Security Council, headed by the Prime Minister, was created following the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris to coordinate the overall intelligence approach. In 2016 the Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment (CUTA) was set up to coordinate analyses of threats and set the threat level. To address particular areas that have been identified as important targets for counter-terrorism efforts, 'The Canal Plan' was brought in to help coordinate focus in different areas between authorities by the federal government. Yet regions have also developed their own similar plans, with the two not necessarily coinciding (Ponsaers & Devroe, 2016).

Although counter-terrorism policies are enacted by the federal government, following the attacks in Paris in 2015, and building on existing initiatives such as having contact points between police and schools for issues of delinquency, the Flemish government initiated an action plan of forty 'softer' measures across areas such as education, welfare, youth, employment and integration. This includes measures requiring front line professionals such as teachers and social workers to report to the government any person they suspect of radicalisation. Expert groups were created and guidelines developed such as one "for the prevention, tackling and handling of radicalisation in education" (in Andre, 2017: 115). Two organisations were created by the Wallonia-Brussels Federation: a support and resources centre (CREA) with responsibility for support and training regional service providers; and the Center for Help and Support for anyone concerned by Extremism and Violent Radicalism (CAPREV), established to support young people and adults who had been radicalised, drawing on experts across several fields, and with a focus on disengagement and reintegration (in Andre, 2017: 146). CAPREV runs a confidential hotline for anyone concerned about radicalisation, for example family members, offering support and advice. In 2015, the Islam Expert Network was created to offer an alternative to radical Islam. As part of this schools would invite, for example, imams or teachers of Islam to speak to pupils, to guide conversations about Islam or to speak to individuals where there is a concern about radicalisation, and to teachers to help them identify but not overreact to concerns of radicalisation. This action plan was updated and extended in 2017 to include polarization (in Andre, 2017: 115-117).

Concluding Remarks

Belgium officially recognises a number of religions as well as non-religious world views, providing they demonstrate they can meet several conditions. The result of this is that on the one hand, several different faith traditions benefit from this support and relationship with the state. On the other hand, however, as an historical inheritance, and owing to differences between religious traditions and their organisation, it has been much more difficult for minorities to take advantage of this. This has been particularly the case with Islam and Muslims, where there was a near generation-long gap between official recognition status and beginning to gain the benefits of this status.

Moreover, as a result of the process of devolved federalism along cultural and linguistic lines, Belgium's regions have developed forms of governance of religion quite distinct from one another on philosophical and institutional grounds. This has meant a significant differentiation within one state territory in the conception of freedom of religion and the place of religion in the public sphere. Whereas Wallonia parallels the French model, Flanders arguably comes closer to the British case of a multiculturalised moderate secularism (Modood, 2017).

Belgium has a long history of conflict and compromise between religion and politics. Yet, Islam and Muslims have again brought these differences, and the challenges they give rise to, to the fore. Belgium is by far the smallest country of those considered in these reports on Western European cases, yet its importance in terms of the challenges faced by violent religious radicalisation in Western Europe belies this. It has been a country of a few 'firsts': the first to warn of the phenomenon of young foreign fighters, and the first to face an attack from a returning foreign fighter. It has found itself at the centre of issues of both terrorist attacks on its territory as well as its nationals travelling abroad to fight for groups and causes motivated in some way by religious radicalisation. Some of the challenges appear similar to other Western European states, discrimination and poor socio-economic indicators all play a role. In addition, governance challenges also uniquely emerge from Belgium's federal structure. Officially it adopts "a holistic and integrated approach at national level"[22], yet its layered policy levels through the regions, municipalities and police zones all below the level of the federal government, as well as its criminal justice led approach create challenges that Belgium has struggled to coordinate, though has been increasing efforts to do so.

[22] see https://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/policy_areas/peace_and_security/terrorism

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