

EUROPEAN MONITORING CENTRE ON RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA
OBSERVATOIRE EUROPÉEN DES PHÉNOMÈNES RACISTES ET XÉNOPHOBES
EUROPÄISCHE STELLE ZUR BEOBACHTUNG VON RASSISMUS UND FREMDENFEINDLICHKEIT



Anti-Islamic reactions in the EU
after the terrorist acts against the USA

A collection of country reports from RAXEN
National Focal Points (NFPs)

12th September to 31st December 2001

BELGIUM

Centre pour l'égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme –
Centrum voor gelijkheid van kansen en voor racismebestijding
(Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism) (CEOOR)

Following the terror attacks in the USA on 11th September the EUMC found that there was a pressing need to closely follow the possible negative repercussions on racial and xenophobic attitudes and events in civil societies in Europe. On the basis of national reports drafted by its RAXEN network of National Focal Points (NFPs), the EUMC produced a first short-term report on anti-Islamic reactions in all countries of the European Union on 9th October 2001.

In order to have a longer term and regular monitoring on attitudes/incidents towards Muslim/Islamic communities and other vulnerable groups, the EUMC decided to follow up the first report and continue to closely monitor the situation at least until the end of the year 2001.

It therefore asked the RAXEN NFPs to produce additional reports, monitoring the situation on a monthly basis until the end of the year; in addition, it asked for a final report analysing the overall developments from 11th September to 31st December 2001.

According to the EUMC request, the reports have addressed in particular the following issues:

- acts of violence or aggression and changes in the attitude of the EU population towards ethnic, cultural or religious minorities (especially Muslim/Islamic communities but also other vulnerable groups or new types of victims), related to the recent terrorist attacks in the USA;
- good practices and positive case studies established in order to reduce prejudice and violence;
- reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders including initiatives to reduce polarization and counteract negative national trends.

In addition to the summary report written on behalf of the EUMC by Prof. Nielsen and Mr. Allen of the University of Birmingham, the following pages contain the original reports submitted by each NFP for the whole period.

Not all reports have been made available from all countries, but the coverage is however complete. The reports are quite varying in size. It should be considered that the Member States have different systems in collecting data: some have implemented a rather elaborated and comprehensive approach, while others have done what they could to get information about the situation in the Member State.

The task of the RAXEN network is to collect reliable and comparable data (including examples of and models for “good practices”) at the European level on the phenomena of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism in order to help the EU and its Member States to take measures or formulate courses of action. For further information please visit the EUMC homepage <http://eumc.eu.int>

Vienna, 23 May 2002

First short-term report

In the direct aftermath of the attack in the US, there were no major attacks on the Muslim/Islamic community. This can be explained by the shock effect of the attacks. However since September 17th the tone has become harsher against the Muslim community. The verbal attacks were registered mostly in the Brussels area, and less so in other cities like Antwerp or regions such as Limburg.

Verbal attacks

In schools, Muslim youngsters become the target of different forms of verbal attacks. The incidence of verbal attacks is especially high in Brussels. Teachers and fellow students are responsible for these attacks. These verbal attacks include:

- Muslims being scolded or insulted in the streets,
- removal of the veil of Muslim females by a third person
- false bomb alarm
- sheer aggression towards Muslims
- racist graffiti targeting Muslims

A pamphlet, written in French, was distributed a pamphlet in the centre of Brussels. It appears at first sight the work of Islamic extremists, picturing the Saint Mary Church in Schaerbeek, a large Brussels commune as a mosque. There are firm grounds to believe that this pamphlet is false and fabricated with the purpose of discrediting the Muslim community and to manipulate and 'poison' the public opinion.

Physical attacks

As of now the NFP Belgium does not have any registered case of physical attacks. However, as there seems to be a growing intolerance in certain parts of Belgium, this might unfortunately change in the near future.

Attitudes

It seems fair to state that the above mentioned verbal attacks and otherwise are the result of the recent attacks in the US. These attacks are specifically targeting the Muslim community.

Note:

prior to the attack in the US, there were also already some complaints of the Jewish community of anti-Semitism, including graffiti's and verbal attacks from Muslim youngsters (in Brussels and Antwerp).

19th September 2001

Report on anti-Islamic and anti-Arabic reactions after the terrorist acts in the USA – Reactions from 25th September to 19th October

Introduction

In the direct aftermath of the US attack on September 11, 2001, no major assaults on the Muslim/Islamic communities have been reported in the press or registered within the department of the racism complaints at the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism, hereafter called CEOOR. This might be explained by the extreme shock and general disbelief the attack has generated in the Belgian society, as elsewhere.

However, starting from Monday September 17, different forms of attacks, mostly situated at the verbal level and mostly targeting the Muslim/Islamic communities, in various forms have been reported in the press.

The period September 11-24 has been analyzed in the preliminary report. The data included in this report starts from September 25/01 until October 19/01. Concurrently to the reports of anti-Islamic attacks in the media, complaints relating to changing attitudes towards ethnic, cultural and religious minorities, especially the Muslim/Islamic communities have also been registered at the department of the racism complaints of CEOOR. The data in the report are based on these two sources, namely reports in the media and the complaints the CEOOR has been receiving since September 25. Although it is not our intention to provide an exhaustive list of anti-Islamic acts, it seems fair to state that these two sources are solid, reliable and representative since they cover a broad area of public life and thus representative of the main trends of anti-Islamic reactions in the Belgian society.

The report is divided in three parts:

- 1) acts of violence or changing attitudes towards ethnic, cultural and religious groups, with specific attention for the Muslim/Islamic communities;
- 2) good practices and positive case studies established in order to reduce prejudice and violence; and finally
- 3) reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders and their initiatives to reduce polarization and countering the increase of racism in society.

1. Acts of violence (verbal attacks, racist discrimination and physical assaults) and changing attitudes of intolerance towards ethnic, cultural and religious groups, especially the Muslim/Islamic communities

1.a. Verbal attacks and racial discrimination

On the Internet several instances of verbal attacks and racial discrimination have been registered.

Internet

- A text has been available on Internet, inciting racism and hatred since it portrays immigrants as criminals and people unwilling to work for a living while benefiting from social welfare. Furthermore it extends an invitation to Bin Laden to come to Belgium to benefit from the generosity of the Belgian welfare state.

- On October 10/01 the department of racism complaints was notified that there were many chat forums on Internet using racist and violent language.

- Rumors were spread on the Internet that in fact it was the Mossad that is the master brain behind the US attack. The evidence given for this assumption was that not one Jewish person working at the WTC was killed by the attack on September 11.

Racial discrimination

- On October 8/01 a second round of violent language appeared on the discussion forum of the popular TV program Big Brother, targeting a participant of this program, who is of Moroccan descent. The first racist statements on this forum appeared in September. In these racist statements a direct link is made between the events in Afghanistan and the presence of the Muslims in Belgium.

- In general Planet Internet noticed a significant increase of racist statements and reactions on the Internet since September 11. Planet Internet contacted the CEOOR for a proper treatment of these racist statement, conform the antiracism law.

In the media and other communication means (such as SMS messages through portable phones, snail mail, etc.)

Verbal attacks

- Television channels receive many calls charged with racism from viewers, who do not seem to make a clear distinction between Islam and Islamism, calling the Muslim/Islamic communities the 5th column, thereby substituting the communists as 'the bad guys', etc.

- On October 9,01 an elected female MP of the Brussels Region of Moroccan descent has received a letter containing insults and threats.

- On October 9, 01 one person found a SMS message saying: 'You have killed an Arab.'

Publications circulating in the public sphere

Verbal attacks

- On September 26/01 a letter was sent to political parties containing strong anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic statements. It also contains the menace that in case political parties do not take actions against the September 11 attack they would take justice in their own hands. There is no explicit indication of the exact source of this letter in the form of names of people or addresses. However there is founded assumption that the letter originated from a Belgo-American group.

- On September 26/01 a document issued by the Blok Wallon was found in a cafeteria in Louvain-la-neuve, a city in the Province Brabant Wallon. In this document the term 'terrorists' was employed to refer to the so-called gangs of delinquents, who are threatening the order in the Province of Brabant Wallon.

- On October 2/01 an anonymous document was circulated in the University Library of the Facultés Universitaires de Namur. The document with a pro-Christian preference, strongly condemns Islam.

- A small poster of 35 by 25 cm, issued by the 'Ligue anti-impérialiste' with the message 'Israel assassin! Palestine vaincra!' (Israel murderer. Palestine will win) has been put for sale. Such a poster has been found posted on a window of a center for youth in Molenbeek, a commune in Brussels.

In schools, directors as well as parents and students have noticed an increase of racism

Verbal attacks

- In a school in Watermael-Boitsfort (Watermaal-Bosvoorde), commune in Brussels, a mother states that her child, a pupil in the second year of middle school has been scolded for 'terrorist' since he was critical about the moment of silence for the victims of the September 11 attack. He asked the teacher why these victims were given the public attention and not for the Palestinian or Rwandan victims? His teacher refused to enter in a discussion.

- In one school drawings of bombs are found on the notebooks of the pupils. This school refuses to observe the moment of silence for the victims of the September 11 attack.

- An anonymous complaint originating from Vilvoorde (Vilvorde), a town at the outskirts of Brussels, informs us that racist statements and insults were addressed at Muslim pupils.

Racial discrimination

- One unidentified school has issued a sanction against Muslim children who refused to observe the moment of silence. The pupils were prohibited from attending the school during one month.

- On October 5 in a school in Mouscron, a town in Wallonia immigrant pupils were set apart by their teachers during the moment of silence, dedicated to the victims of the US attack. The argument of the teacher was that these youngsters might disturb this act. This case is currently being examined within the department of antiracism complaints. The outcome of this case is not available at this moment.

- On October 5 a teacher complained to the CEOOR that there is a letter going around the school, written to Oussama Bin Laden, containing statements that all foreigners are thieves, lazy and good for nothing misfits, etc. Although the letter is meant to be a 'joke' she fails to see the humor in it.

In the larger society, different forms of verbal attacks and racial discrimination have been registered

Verbal attacks

- A police officer blamed Moroccan youngsters for siding with the attackers. His reaction was that 'They are all the same. They are also part of the attack'.

Racial discrimination

- On October 1/01 a Belgian citizen of Moroccan descent was not allowed to board a plane of American Airlines, allegedly following the request of the pilot. The airport authorities did not give him any reason or other explanation for this refusal.
- On October 9/01 a person of Moroccan descent was scolded for 'terrorist' when he consulted an interim-office. He said that he was discriminated against. The director of this company denied the incident. This case is under investigation.
- On October 11/01 an employer of the Office National du Ducroire has put a poster of the portrait of Moussad. For this he has nearly lost his job.
- On October 18/01 50 passengers of a Sabena flight Brussels-Tel Aviv demanded to prohibit 4 passengers with 'Arab' phenotypical traits from boarding. In spite of the reassurance by Sabena that all security procedures have been followed up, the 50 passengers refused to board and decided to take the following flight. The 5 targeted passengers, however, flew with the original flight.

1.b. Physical assault

- On October 2-3/01 youngsters of Moroccan descent in Forest, a commune in Brussels, have launched verbal insults towards traditional Jewish family (a rabbi and his family) who either was on their way to or on the return from the synagogue. Besides verbal attacks, these youngsters threw chestnuts to this family.
- An important incident in terms of physical attack is the assault on the mosque in Turnhout, a town in the Province of Antwerp. It has attracted nation-wide attention. It was broadly covered in the major national newspapers and in the news of the main Belgian television channels. The factual account is as follows: On the night of Thursday of October 11-12 four rifle shots were directed towards the mosque. This is the first assault on this mosque since the US attack. As of October 21/01 two white Belgian men have been identified as the main suspects of the attack. On October 11/01 the two men were talking about the war in Afghanistan. After some drinks and a heated discussion, they decided to kidnap Osama bin Laden. One man had two rifles at his house. They went there to fetch the weapons and then drove off to the mosque. They each fired two shots. One man has already confessed, whereas the other denies his share in the attack. They are accused of 'destroying buildings'.
- On October 13/01 two asylum seekers were punched in their face during a Saturday night party. The two asylum seekers, originating from Djibouti and Bulgaria, were staying in the asylum reception center in Arendonk, Antwerp. They were in the company of four other asylum seekers and a voluntary worker from the already mentioned reception center. They were sitting in a circle with other Belgian youngsters, chatting and having a good time when four Belgian men forced in the group and hit the two asylum seekers, who happen to have a darker skin than the rest.

According to the report of the director of the reception center, the attackers were extreme rightist people, uttering racist remarks, while the apparent leader made a Hitler salutation prior to leaving the premises. According to one newspaper, the police officer, in charge of this attack has said: 'They are to blame. Arendonk is not ready for an asylum reception center'. The mayor is of the opinion that the director of the reception center is exaggerating this case.

2. Good practices and positive case studies established in order to reduce prejudice and violence

In the aftermath of the US attack the CEOOR has immediately launched a platform, which regroups 13 umbrella organizations so far, to fight increased racism. These organizations and their actions to fight racism and promote a peaceful multicultural society can be consulted on the website of the CEOOR, www.antiracisme.be/educatie. More organizations will join this platform in the near future. If necessary the different organizations agree to act as one front speaking with one voice in case of blatant eruptions of racism in the future.

Actions at the level of the Flemish and the French community.

- The CEOOR distributes, with the help of the Minister of Education of the Flemish Community, an overview of pedagogical tools against racism, see Website of the Centre. The CEOOR also starts a campaign "racism sucks".
- The CEOOR participates in a campaign sponsored by the French Community for the repartition of pedagogical tools. The campaign tries to mobilize the whole "Société civile". Name of this campaign: "La haine? Je dis non".

3. Reactions by politicians and other opinion makers including initiatives to reduce polarization and counteract negative national trends

- The CEOOR

It has launched a first small-scale campaign on September 18/01 one week after the US attack. It prepared a statement supporting a democratic, peaceful and open society targeting labor unions, NGO's, immigrant organizations, foundations, integration centers, etc. at the **local** level. In total 53 organizations have signed this statement.

Two weeks after the September 11 attack on October 4/01 the Center again launched a campaign, this time targeting the chairpersons of **political parties**. The campaign consists of a common declaration of 'mutual respect'. The chair, who sign this declaration on behalf of his/her political party, subscribes to the following values:

- equality;
- condemnation, of course, of terrorism
- the commitment not to confuse/equate terrorists with ordinary people from whatever group of the society
- avoiding simplistic theories in the media and schools, following whatever event in society.
- an open society, which respects everyone regardless of national, religious descent

- prominent alertness towards the fight against discrimination

The chairpersons of all democratic parties (excluding Vlaams Blok) have signed the declaration.

One month after the September 18/01 attack, the chairpersons of political parties and representatives of the different officially recognized religions, notably the Islamic, Jewish and Christian religious communities, met at the Brussels Hotel de Ville to reiterate publicly their unwavering support to 'mutual respect'.

- Political figures

The Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt has declared shortly after the US attack that the war is launched against terrorist and not against the Muslim communities

- Academics

One University Professor, an expert in Islam states that 90% of the Muslim community in Belgium are working class. They are more concerned with their day-to-day problems instead of with religious.

Other University Professors try to explain the difference between muslims in Belgium and international terrorism.

- Muslim Leaders

More than once Muslim leaders have called their community not to respond violence with violence. This statement was reiterated when the mosque in Turnhout was attacked with rifle shots.

- Individuals

Many calls from individuals have been made to the CEOOR asking for more support and liaison work in youth centers.

An adolescent girl e.g. called the CEOOR for organizing a march countering the growing intolerance and racism towards Muslim communities.

SUMMARY REPORT **12th September – 31st December 2001**

A. Introduction

The objective of the final report on Islamophobia is to give an overview of increased racism and xenophobia towards migrants, more specifically the Muslim communities and possibly other groups like the Jewish as a result of the September 11 attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York, USA. Besides looking at specific cases displaying different forms of racism and xenophobia and good practices, this report also allocates much attention to the impact and momentum of September 11 on Islamophobia and other forms of racism and xenophobia. Here we can ask the question: ‘At what point are we able to determine that racist incidences are specifically caused by the 11 September U.S. attack?’ In other words after two months or so, it is hard to establish the direct link of the racist act with the September 11 attack. For the period mid-October until the end of the year 2001 there were no additional recordings of racism complaints, which can be firmly and directly linked to September 11. Concurrent to the wave of Islamophobia as a direct outcome of the September 11 attack, anti-Semitism has increased, too at the other side of the spectrum. Therefore, we need to carefully look at the data and make sure to place them in a proper context. Furthermore, some new trends, such as the increase of fight and discordance or more generally community problems at the local level might indirectly be linked to September 11. Of course, we hasten to add that this is an assumption since we do not have the final findings, based on the annual report of the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism, which is now in the making. Finally, the relative low incidence of Islamophobia, especially in terms of physical assault, in Belgium will be analysed, too.

B. Acts of Violence and Changing Attitudes of Intolerance towards Ethnic, Cultural and Religious Groups in the post-September 11 area until the end of 2001

In the direct aftermath of the US attack on September 11, 2001, no major assaults on the Muslim/Islamic communities have been reported in the press or registered within the department of the racism complaints at the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism, hereafter called CEOOR. This might be explained by the extreme shock and general disbelief the attack has generated in the Belgian society, as elsewhere. However, starting from Monday September 17, different forms of attacks, mostly situated at the verbal level and mostly targeting the Muslim/Islamic communities, in various forms have been reported in the press.

Concurrently to the reports of anti-Islamic attacks in the media, complaints relating to changing attitudes towards ethnic, cultural and religious minorities, especially the Muslim/Islamic communities have also been registered at the department of the racism complaints of CEOOR. The data in the report are based on these two sources, namely reports in the media and the complaints the CEOOR has been receiving after September 11, 2001. Instead of providing an exhaustive list of anti-Islamic acts, the main trends will be given. This is deemed possible since these two sources are solid, reliable and representative. They cover a broad area of public life and thus representative of the main trends of anti-Islamic reactions in the Belgian society.

This section is divided into three parts:

- 1) acts of violence or changing attitudes towards ethnic, cultural and religious groups, with specific attention for the Muslim/Islamic communities;
- 2) good practices and positive case studies established in order to reduce prejudice and violence; and finally
- 3) reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders and their initiatives to reduce polarisation and to counter the increase of racism in society.

1. Acts of violence or aggression and changes in the attitude of the EU population towards ethnic, cultural, religious minorities, especially Muslim/Islamic communities but also other vulnerable groups or new types of victims, related to the recent terrorist attacks in the USA

1.1 Acts of violence (verbal attacks, racist discrimination and physical assaults)

As a general trend, one can clearly indicate the increase of violent acts after September 11, 2001 towards immigrants and more specifically the Muslim communities in Belgium. Said differently, Islamophobia increased as a direct result of the September 11 attack. It should be underlined that from November onwards, the augmentation has stagnated or at least it is difficult to label racist acts as Islamophobic, directly linked to the September 11 attack. This does not mean that racist acts have stopped or that henceforth the Centre did no longer receive racism complaints. Whether the September attack has other-indirect-consequences such as more racism complaints situated at the level of the community cannot be established at the moment since the Centre is currently processing the racism complaints. After the publication of the report, more findings in terms of the indirect impact of the September 11 attack will be available. What can be stated for sure is that starting from November, the racism complaints cannot be automatically categorised as the direct outcome of September 11. Prior to going into detail into the types of racial violence committed in the aftermath of the September 11, a concurrent trend of anti-Semitism has been recorded, too. Thus, the September 11 attack has, at least in the Belgian case, elicited extremism, racism and xenophobia from different groups in society, native Belgians versus Muslim immigrants but also immigrants versus the Jewish community.

With regard to the types of Islamophobia most of the violence is situated at the verbal level rather than at the physical level.

Verbal attacks have been recorded on the Internet, in the media (and other communication means such as snail mail, SMS messages through mobile phones), in publications circulating in the public space and in schools. The usage of Internet deserves special attention given its wide reach and speed. On the Internet, a text has been available, inciting racism and hatred since it portrays immigrants as criminals and people unwilling to work for a living while benefiting from social welfare. Furthermore, it extends an invitation to Bin Laden to come to Belgium to benefit from the generosity of the Belgian welfare state. Generally, many chat forums on the Internet make use of racist and violent language. Rumours were spread on the Internet that in fact it was the Mossad that is the master brain behind the US attack. The evidence given for this assumption was that there was not one Jewish victim in the September 11 attack. Planet Internet noticed a sharp increase of racist statements and reactions on the Internet since September 11.

The case of 'Big Brother'

On September 5 2001 the CEOOR received through its web site a few messages concerning postings on the forum of the web site of the popular television programme 'Big Brother'. In this programme, people are put in one house, where they are being watched by cameras during day and night. Through popular televoting and other communication means, candidates are voted out and the last one, who remains in the house, is the winner. Everyone can vote and therefore also people subscribing to racism and xenophobia. This case concerns racist statements targeting one inhabitant of the house, who happens to have an immigrant background. The man addressed this person as *'(you are) a hypocritical piece of dirt, like 101% of your kind, hard to steal if the cameras are on you, isn't...the fact that he hasn't yet stolen anything of raped anyone is, I think, highly unusual, but that's because of the cameras, and because it is a smart 'makak', because he is a half blood'*.

The CEOOR has immediately faxed a letter to the forum moderator of the Big Brother web site with the warning that such statements are punishable as they fall under the article 1 of the antiracism law, forbidding incitement to discrimination, hatred and violence or the publication thereof. The editorial team of the Big Brother programme immediately reacted to this message by deleting these statements and by preventing incoming messages containing similar racist language. On 8 and 9 October the CEOOR once again received complaints about racist statements in the same forum of the Big Brother web site. The presence of new immigrant inhabitants was the direct cause for the new wave of racist statements with a prominent reference to the September 11 attack. To illustrate, the following statements were found, among others, on the forum

'The hell with that brown riffraff'

'Don't give that scum chance'

'Apartheid is a real possibility'

'Nice to be white'

'5,000 Americans dead, multiplier for Muslims...you can make the calculation yourself'

Moreover, symbols like the swastika were also put on the net. It mostly concerns symbols, used by the extreme-right, with as subtitle: *'KILL OLL MOSLIMS B4 THY Kill my broders'*. Once again, the CEOOR alerted the web site moderator, who reacted very rapidly. In order to control and curb racist statements, additional staff members in charge of the Forum were recruited. The team, responsible for the forum of the Big Brother web site assured the CEOOR that they exert all their efforts and take all the necessary measures to stop racist messages on the Forum of their web site.

Besides the increase of racist verbal attacks on the internet, general publications, circulating freely in the public sphere, containing racist assaults have increased, too. On September 16 a statement was sent to political parties containing strong anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic language. It referred to the infiltration of followers of Osama bin Laden in the political structures of different European countries. It also contains the menace that in case political parties do not take actions against the September 11 attack they would take justice in their own hands. The letter is signed by the Belgo-American Vigilance Committee. On October 10, 2001 the CEOOR was contacted by Jos Geysels, party secretary of the Green Party Agalev and Amina Derbaki-Sbai to alert the general public about the existence of this statement. The

content of the statement contains an incitement to discrimination, hatred, segregation and even violence.

The entire statement in the original French version:

Avis aux responsables publics belges et, par extension, européens

Il apparaît de plus en plus clairement que les partis politiques européens sont infiltrés par des embryons Thalibanais de souche Ossaman bin Laden, voire Palestinien et autres, maghrébins non exclus. Ceci a été rendu possible par la faiblesse même de nos dirigeants menant des campagnes beaucoup trop généreuses à l'immigration ce qui a eu pour résultat l'introduction d'une 5ème colonne islamo-intégriste dans nos pays.

A nom de la défense de nos valeurs, acquises chèrement au cours des siècles passés, nous vous recommandons de placer sous surveillance effective tous les musulmans de souche ayant reçus mandat politique à la faveur de notre coupable bienveillance, ceci afin de démasquer leur néfaste besogne.

Il ne faut donner aucune chance à l'Islam Intégriste, violent, agressif et aveugle de prendre un pouvoir, quelque soit, dans notre nouvelle Europe.

Espérons que votre raison l'emportera car, s'il devait en être autrement, nous nous chargerons nous mêmes de la sauvegarde des valeurs occidentales.

Le Comité de Vigilance Belgo-Américain contre l'Islamo-Intégrisme C.V.B.A. 1000 Brussels, Sept. 2001.

On September 26 a document issued by the Blok Wallon was found in a snack bar in Louvain-la-neuve, a city in the Province of Brabant Wallon. In this document the term 'terrorists' was employed to refer to the so-called gangs of delinquents, who are threatening the law and order in the Province of Brabant Wallon. On October 2 an anonymous document was circulated in the University Library of the Facultés Universitaires de Namur. The document with a pro-Christian ideology, strongly condemns Islam.

On the November 22 Fauzaya Talhaoui, a MP of the Agalev green party contacted the CEOOR with respect to flyers, distributed by the *Front National belge* (Belgian National Front) in the Brussels area. In very blunt terms, it was called for segregation of the Muslim communities because of the (alleged) threat of the Muslims. This flyer contains three parts: *L'Islam, une religion pacifique? Islam: danger? Islamophobie?*

In addition to the dissemination of racism and xenophobia through powerful communication means like the Internet, racism also increased in more traditional face-to-face community settings such as the school and the local neighbourhood. In schools, directors as well as parents and students have noticed an increase of racism in terms of verbal attacks and discriminatory acts towards Muslim minorities. Quite a few of the racism complaints revolves around the moment of silence, held in memory of the victims of the September 11 attacks in many schools. In several instances, Muslim pupils, who refuse to respect it or who were critical towards it, were either neglected or scolded. One unidentified school has issued a sanction against Muslim children, who refused to observe the moment of silence. The pupils were prohibited from attending the school during one month. In a school in Watermael-Boitsfort (Watermaal-Bosvoorde), a commune in Brussels, a mother states that her child, a pupil in the second year of middle school has been scolded for 'terrorist' since he was critical about the moment of silence for the victims of the September 11 attack. He asked the teacher

why these victims were given the public attention and not, for example, the Palestinian or Rwandan victims? His teacher refused to enter in a discussion. On October 5 in a school in Mouscron, a town in Wallonia, immigrant pupils were set apart by their teachers during the moment of silence, dedicated to the victims of the US attack. The argument of the teacher was that these youngsters might disturb this act.

There are also complaints about insults - direct or indirect - towards Muslim pupils. An anonymous complaint originating from Vilvoorde (Vilvorde), a town at the outskirts of Brussels, informs us that racist statements and insults were addressed at Muslim pupils. On October 5 a teacher complained to the CEOOR that there was a letter going around the school, written to Oussama Bin Laden, containing statements that all foreigners are thieves, lazy and good for nothing misfits, etc. Although the letter is meant to be a 'joke' the teacher, who intercepted the letter, fails to see the humour in it.

In the larger community, many Muslims were being scolded and falsely accused of siding with terrorists. It seems that some people can no longer make a distinction between Muslims and those, who are involved in the September 11 attack. The generalisation that all Muslims are (potential) terrorists, which was already strong among certain groups in society, seems to be reinforced by September 11. For instance, a police officer blamed Moroccan youngsters for choosing the side of the attackers. His reaction was that 'They are all the same. They are also part of the attack'. On October 9 a person of Moroccan descent was scolded for 'terrorist' when he consulted an interim-office. He said that he was discriminated against. The director of this company denied the incident.

Furthermore, many instances clearly demonstrate a deep-ingrained fear for Muslims, especially in airports. Many people want to avoid travelling with Muslim passengers as they see a potential terrorist in every Muslim. On October 1 a Belgian citizen of Moroccan descent was not allowed to board a plane of American Airlines, allegedly following the request of the pilot. The airport authorities did not give him any reason or other explanation for this refusal. On October 18 50 passengers of a Sabena flight Brussels-Tel Aviv demanded to prohibit 4 passengers with 'Arab' phenotypical traits from boarding. In spite of the reassurance by Sabena that all security procedures have been thoroughly taken, the 50 passengers refused to board and decided to take the following flight. The 5 targeted passengers, however, flew with the original flight.

1.2 Physical assault

In comparison with other EU member states, there have been few cases of physical assault towards Muslim migrants in the aftermath of the September 11 attack. Two major cases have been covered widely in the media and are also currently being processed by the CEOOR as a racist act. It concerns the assault targeting a mosque and asylum seekers, who were attacked by Belgians.

The first incident in terms of physical attack is the assault on the mosque in Turnhout, a town in the Province of Antwerp. It has attracted nation-wide attention. On October 12, it was broadly covered in the major national newspapers and in the news of the main Belgian television and radio channels.

On the night of October 11, a Thursday night, four rifle shots were directed towards the mosque Rahman in Turnhout. At the moment of the assault, there was nobody in the mosque. The mosque has traces of bullet indentations on the walls, the copper plate next to the door

and on the door. This mosque has already been subject to such an assault in the past. However, this is the first incident of a physical assault since the US attack. On October 11/01 the two men were talking about the war in Afghanistan in a pub. After some drinks and a heated discussion, they decided to kidnap Osama bin Laden. One man had two rifles at his house. They went to there to fetch the weapons and then drove off to the mosque. They each fired two shots. One man has already confessed, whereas the other denies his share in the attack. They are accused of 'destroying buildings'. As of October 21 two native Belgian men have been identified as the main suspects of the attack.

The second physical attack was directed to asylum seekers.

On Saturday October 13 six asylum seekers, who stayed in the reception centre for refugees in Arendonk, Antwerp went to a party in Arendonk to spend the night with some Belgian youngsters. They were accompanied by a social worker of the reception centre. When they arrived, there were already over hundred youngsters in the party tent.

They were sitting in a circle with other Belgian youngsters, chatting and having a good time when four Belgian men forced in the group and hitting the two asylum seekers, who happened to have a darker skin than the rest. The other four asylum seekers could run away before they got hit and were put in safety in a car.

Before the attackers left the scene, they made a Hitler salutation towards the youngsters, who had foreign phenotypical traits. One victim was Belgian but because of this 'foreign' looks, he received a blow, too. According to one newspaper, the police officer, in charge of this attack has said: *'They are to blame. Arendonk is not ready for an asylum reception centre'*. The mayor is of the opinion that the director of the reception centre is exaggerating this case. Judging from the context and from the facts, the racist intention of the attackers seems clear.

In order to prove the racist character of this attack, witnesses are needed. Some ten or more people were present, when the attack took place. However, out of fear the majority did not want to testify. The fact that most witnesses do not want to give a testimony is also confirmed by the local police.

It seems that this was the work of an organised group, which subscribes to an extreme right ideology, and whose files are known by the police.

Concurrent to the increase of Islamophobia in the aftermath of September 11, incidences of Anti-Semitism were recorded, too. A small poster of 35 by 25 cm was issued by the 'Ligue anti-impérialiste' containing the message 'Israel assassin! Palestine vaincra!' (Israel murderer. Palestine will win). It has been put out for sale. Such a poster has been found posted on a window of a youth centre in Molenbeek, a commune in Brussels.

On October 2-3 youngsters of Moroccan descent in Forest, a commune in Brussels have launched verbal insults towards a traditional Jewish family (a rabbi and his family) who either were on their way to or on the return from the synagogue. Besides verbal attacks, these youngsters threw chestnuts to this family.

On December 5 2001 a man called Andre Guigui, head rabbi of Brussels was not only the victim of racist insults but also of physical blows and wounds. When he left a restaurant in Anderlecht, a commune in Brussels, he was insulted by a group of four or five North African

youngsters in the vicinity of the metro station Clémenceau. He was called ‘*sale juif*’ (‘dirty Jew’). After he tried to run away by metro, one of the youngsters followed him and tried to punch him in the face.

2. Good practices and positive case studies established in order to reduce prejudice and violence

In the aftermath of the US attack the CEOOR has immediately launched a platform, which regroups 13 umbrella organisations so far, to fight increased racism. These associations and their actions to fight racism and promote a peaceful multicultural society can be consulted on the website of the CEOOR, www.antiracisme.be/educatie. The affiliated associations are:

- Liberation films and videos (*Bevrijdingsfilms & video*);
- Brussels inside out (*Brukselbinnenstebuiten*);
- Centre for World Training (*Centrum voor Mundiale Vorming*);
- The Evens Foundation (*Evens Stichting*);
- Youth and Peace (*Jeugd & vreugde*);
- Church activities Multicultural Community (*Kerkwerk Multicultureel Samenleven*);
- Children World’s workshop/Educational Centre (*Kinderwereldatelier; Educatief Centrum*)
- Confessing Colours (*Kleur bekennen*);
- Provincial Service Minorities East Flanders (*Provinciale Dienst Minderheden Oost-Vlaanderen*);
- Provincial Integration Centre Flemish-Brabant (*Provinciaal Integratiecentrum Vlaams-Brabant*);
- Provincial Databank Antwerp (*Provinciale Materialenbank*);
- Regional Integration Centre Foyer Brussels (*Regionaal Integratiecentrum Foyer Brussel*);
- Urban Integration Centre Ghent (*Stedelijke Integratiedienst Gent*);
- School without racism (*School zonder racisme*);
- Office Intercultural Education (*Steunpunt Intercultureel Onderwijs*);
- Flemish Minorities Centre (*Vlaams Minderhedencentrum*)
- World Centre for International Training (*Wereldcentrum Internationale opvoeding*)

All these organisations set up activities in the areas of education, training and workshops, which aim to fight racism and discrimination but also to disseminate information and data on and demonstrate the *de facto* multicultural and diverse society and especially its positive aspects. To illustrate, the different Integration Centres organise a training in ‘how to deal with racism’ at the work floor and in the larger community. The Centre for World Formation has developed a workshop ‘True colours’, where participants themselves experience racism, exclusion, discrimination in order to raise their awareness concerning the meaning of these experiences. The Evens Foundation issues a price to good practices concerning the promotion of good practices in diversity and multiculturalism. A few of the projects, which have received an Evens Foundation Price are: Country boxes, a Classroom of Difference and Ordinary/Extraordinary.

The project ‘country boxes’ is an initiative of the Brussels Integration Centre Foyer. It aims to demonstrate the memories and experiences of immigrants and refugees. Youngsters are confronted with the work of immigrant artists, which help them to express their personal

memories and experiences better and thus improve the exchange of these items to third people.

The second project 'A classroom of difference' and 'peer training' assists both teachers and pupils in how to deal with diversity in a positive way through a workshop and other materials. The program is run by the CEJI (European Jewish Information Centre) and is currently taking place in Belgium, Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands.

The third project 'Ordinary-Extraordinary' is organised by the Foundation Peace Education in Utrecht, the Netherlands. It is a high-quality interactive and touring exposition on prejudices and the 'scapegoat' phenomenon. This project runs in 7 different European countries, raising the consciousness of children between 10 and 12 years old. It teaches them to resist prejudices and ethnocentrism through an interactive exposition, followed by an in-depth reflection in the classroom.

Most integration centres also house a study and documentation service on the issues of multiculturalism, diversity, citizenship and other topics concerning (im)migrants. Others issue a newsletter.

More organisations are expected to join this platform in the near future. If necessary the different organisations agree to act as one front by speaking with one voice in case of blatant eruptions of racism in the future. The CEOOR also started a campaign "racism sucks".

The CEOOR participates in a campaign sponsored by the French Community for the repartition of pedagogical tools. The campaign aims to mobilise the civic society (*Société civile*). The name of this campaign is: 'No to hatred' (*La haine? Je dis non*).

3. Reactions by politicians and other opinion makers including initiatives to reduce polarisation and counteract negative national trends

The CEOOR has launched a first small-scale campaign on September 18/01 one week after the US attack. It prepared a statement supporting a democratic, peaceful and open society targeting labour unions, NGO's, immigrant organisations, foundations, integration centres, etc. at the **local** level. In total 53 organisations have signed this statement.

Two weeks after the September 11 attack on October 4/01 the Centre again launched a campaign, this time targeting the chairpersons of **political parties**. The campaign consists of a common declaration of 'mutual respect'. The chair, who sign this declaration on behalf of his/her political party, subscribes to the following values:

- equality;
- condemnation, of course, of terrorism
- the commitment not to confuse/equate terrorists with ordinary people from whatever group of the society
- avoiding simplistic theories in the media and schools, following whatever event in society.
- an open society, which respects everyone regardless of national, religious descent
- prominent alertness towards the fight against discrimination

The chairpersons of all democratic parties (excluding Vlaams Blok) have signed the declaration.

One month after the September 11 attack, the chairpersons of political parties and representatives of the different officially recognised religions, notably the Islamic, Jewish and Christian religious communities, met at the Brussels City Hall to reiterate publicly their unwavering support to 'mutual respect'.

Political figures: the Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt has declared shortly after the US attack that the war is launched against terrorists and not against the Muslim communities

Academics: one University Professor, an expert in Islam states that 90% of the Muslim community in Belgium are working class. They are more concerned with their day-to-day problems instead of with religious matters. Other academics also made great efforts to disassociate Muslims in Belgium from international terrorism.

Muslim Leaders: more than once Muslim leaders have called their community not to respond violence with violence. This statement was reiterated when the mosque in Turnhout was attacked with rifle shots.

Individuals: many calls from individuals have been made to the CEOOR asking for more support and liaison work in youth centres. An adolescent girl e.g. called the CEOOR for organising a march countering the growing intolerance and racism towards Muslim communities.

C. Conclusion

Increased racism towards immigrants and especially the Muslim communities after September 11 has been recorded. Indeed, in the first month or so after the attack, many race complaints with explicit links to September are its direct outcome. Most of these attacks are situated at the verbal rather than at the physical level. A few instances of physical assaults have occurred, which have attracted nation-wide media attention. However, starting from November onwards, the direct link between racism and September 11 attack becomes increasingly more difficult to establish. It goes without saying that racist acts continue to occur, which is noticeable in the racism complaints department and general reporting by the media.

Besides Islamophobia, there is a concurrent trend of increase of incidences of Anti-Semitism.

It seems hard to label racism complaints after November as racist acts, which are the direct outcome of September 11.

In the aftermath of September 11 many actors in the society initiated good practices in order to stem increased racism and xenophobia.

In looking at the place where the incidents occur, Antwerp, traditionally the power basis of the *Vlaams Blok*, has not registered a higher rate than elsewhere else. Though puzzling, this phenomenon perhaps can be explained by the fact that people did not feel the urge for ventilating their racist ideas as they already do so with the existing established structures of

the extreme right. At the other side of the spectrum, we can also speculate that perhaps the many initiatives and organisations, dealing with racism, equal opportunities etc, might have had a tolerant effect on certain segments of the population.

There has been a very low incidence of physical assaults. This might be the result of underreporting. Despite the plausibility of underreporting, we should bear in mind that given the highly sensitive nature and the media relevance of such an assault it seems very unlikely that the press would not cover such an incident. Furthermore, given the established reputation of the CEOOR most people, who are themselves victims of racist acts or who report on behalf of others, who are at the receiving end of racism, are inclined to report to CEOOR such an attack rather than silence it. To end, we do not have a final explanation for the low occurrence of physical attacks towards Muslims. Meanwhile we take a practical stance in rejoicing the absence of physical assault and in working out strategies to curb racial violence of any kind, be it verbal or physical.