

Press Release**Secular Democracy's New Front: Islamic Education****Following to the investigation of Nieuwsuur and NRC Handelsblad's on Islamic education**

Only a few could have failed to notice the array of articles and television broadcasts of NRC Handelsblad (Dutch newspaper) and current affairs program Nieuwsuur on Islamic education in the Netherlands. The investigation they conducted on formal as well as informal Islamic education in the Netherlands has been brought to the publicity with a lot of fuss. It started with a story on education centers that are Salafist or are being strongly influenced by Salafism. They would teach and glorify the Sharia (Islamic Law). Some politicians directly called for censorship and granting the Inspectorate of Education additional authorizations to be able to even monitor informal educational institutions.

Some even called for a ban. Also, Belgium seized this opportunity with both hands to put Islamic Education in its country under pressure.

With a sophisticated propaganda scheme formal as well as informal educational institutions were demonized. Countless false allegations, misinterpretation and misrepresented citations were the common thread through the entire campaign. However, the conclusion was obvious. Informal Islamic education (Quran schools in mosques) as well as the formal Islamic education institutions (that are under the supervision of the Inspectorate of Education) teach "unwanted" Islamic ideas. What is meant by "unwanted" Islamic ideas became rather clear when they began to problematize Quranic verses, verses in which the Muslims believe and act upon in the best of their abilities. Such as, the obligation to comply with a certain dress code, the prohibition of homosexuality, certain etiquettes between males and females, belief in the Hereafter and the like. Actually, what is being said here is that all Islamic educational institutions, without exceptions, teach "unwanted" Islamic ideas because they teach normative Islamic concepts. Thus, the claim that it is solely because of "Salafist" ideas can be dismissed. Their issue is not just Salafism but basic concepts of Islam which they deem unwanted because they do not fit within the scope of the liberal democratic paradigm. As a converted brother put it: "if the Muslims after seeing all this still do not see the attacks on Islam being made, I would not know what else to think anymore."

This investigation should therefore be assessed within the present context in which the anti-Islam policy predominates. After the recent niqab ban, the ban on halal slaughter and now the restriction of Islamic education is next in line.

The foundation to counteract Islamic education was laid earlier this year by the AIVD as the agency in their annual report warned against "radical Islamic preachers" and their influence on Muslim children who take Arabic or Quranic classes. After-school classes in mosques or community centers were called potential breeding grounds for "jihadism" and

the children, according to Dick Schoof, Director-General of the AIVD, could be raised to be potential terrorists.

As a result of this, we voiced our concerns regarding this dangerous development earlier this year in April through a press release. We said: "The language the AIVD uses here is most conspicuous as it depicts a very large group of Muslims as a danger and creates a hostile view towards Muslim children that want to learn their religion. They are being depicted as potential terrorists. The fact that they can say this unabashed is worrying and that fact that almost no one takes offence of the matter is even more worrying. More so, people allow themselves to be carried away by the anti-Islam propaganda."

Nieuwsuur and NRC Handelsblad's investigation has only contributed to the state's propaganda against Islam by magnifying the stereotypical differences and attacking normative Islamic concepts. They too have not come up with something new.

It is a fact that there are differences between Islamic teachings and the liberal democratic paradigm and this is obvious for everyone. It was unnecessary to conduct an extra investigation to conclude this. However, the fundamental question that should be asked is why being "different" poses an insurmountable problem for the liberal democratic paradigm? And why do they desire that the Muslims should trade in their Islamic norms and values for the liberal democratic paradigm? This is exactly where to they call the Muslims.

What is most striking is that Muslims are being accused of bigotry towards those who think differently, that they do not want to live together and can not cope with different ideas. Whereas the Muslims are being criminalized and their ideas problematized, because they say it does not fit within the scope of the liberal democratic paradigm!

The same Islam whom they fight to combat the supposed intolerance, had already established 1400 years ago that despite differences in color, background and thought it would include humankind into its society while preserving their identity, customs and traditions. Thus, the Muslims do not see the problem.

The ones that do see the problem are the proponents of the liberal democratic paradigm. That call to freedoms on one hand but utilize various methods to pressure Muslims to distance themselves from their religion and to embrace the liberal democratic paradigm in the other.

Is this what they call the Muslims to, a utopian ideal which they violate themselves as they oppress those who think differently and force them to believe in what they believe? We can then say that with Islam we have a better alternative. Islam forbids hypocrisy, oppression and compulsion in religion.

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