

February 2006

CARTOON CARICATURES : DEBATES AND DEMONSTRATIONS

➤ ***Have the cartoons caricaturing Mahomet been published in mainstream newspapers in France?***

On February 1st 2006, the national newspaper France Soir published the twelve cartoons caricatures. The decision was taken by Serge Faubert, editor, and Eric Fauveau, general manager, without informing Raymond Lakah the owner of the newspaper. The newspaper was censured in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. The following day, the director of publication, Jaques Lefranc, is dismissed by Raymond Lakah. The newspaper is assailed by abusive phone calls and death threats.

On February 3rd 2006, another national newspaper, Libération, decided to publish the two most problematic cartoons, while dissociating itself from their contents.

On television, all the channels showed the cartoons, in their original versions in the Danish newspaper or their reproduction in France Soir.

On February 8th 2006, the satirical weekly magazine Charlie Hebdo published a special edition with the reproduction of the twelve cartoons but also with caricatures made by its own caricaturists (appearing Mahomet but also the representatives of other religions) and several texts of analysis and debates. On the cover page, there was a big cartoon of Mahomet saying *"It is hard to be loved by idiots"* and entitled *"Mahomet overflowed by integrists"*. Gérard Biard, editor, explained the step of the newspaper: *"One should not hurt the faith of believing people say reasonable people and yoghourt trader who fear boycott. We are opened with the debate. But, in order the debate to take place, it would be necessary before that some believing people stop wounding those which do not share the same convictions as them. And cease answering to the pencil and the feather with the dagger and the belt of explosives."* Gérard Biard puts on the same plan the integrism of all religions: *"If the faith raises mountains, they are mountains of corpses."* He questions himself: *"How much books and newspapers we will have to burn so that the thirst of the religious fanatics is finally sealed?"* *"Charlie tries to analyze the polemic and its consequences in order to show that freedom of expression must be stronger than the intimidation"*. The newspaper also published on page 2 a text entitled *"For freedom of expression!"* signed by Tewfik Allal for the Association of proclamation of freedoms, an association which, according to Charlie Hebdo, *"gathers men and women of Moslem culture which carry values of secularity and share"*.¹ Like, France Soir, the newspaper is assailed by abusive phone calls and death threats, it is monitored by police forces.

¹ Gérard Biard, Editorial – Charlie Hebdo, 08.02.2006, page 2.

➤ ***Have Muslim community representatives or other Muslim opinion leaders commented publicly regarding the cartoons and their effects on social integration?***

On Monday 6th February, the CFCM (Conseil français du culte musulman) published a communiqué in which it condemned the caricatures, which defame the prophet; and also appealed for calm.

The UOIF (Union des Organisations Islamiques de France) and the FOIE (Fédération des Organisations Islamiques en Europe) also published a communiqué to condemn the publication in French newspapers of the caricatures; they consider them as islamophobic acts and worried about the increase of intolerance in France².

Before the publication of Charlie Hebdo, the lawyer of the Mosque of Paris, M. Chems-Eddine Hafiz, deposited a summary procedure, on February 7th, in the name of the CFCM and several other Muslim organisations (the Mosques of Paris and Lyon, UOIF and FNMF (Fédération Nationale des Musulmans de France)) in order to prevent the publication of the magazine, as the CFCM considers that the cartoons are racial and religious insults. The complaint had been rejected for legal flaw.

On Friday 10th, the CFCM decided to take action in justice against the French newspapers which published the caricatures.³ The parts committed in this legal action are the Mosques of Paris and Lyon, UOIF, FNMF and the World Islamic League. On the other hand, no member federation of CFCM joined the demonstrations against the caricatures, which was held in Paris and Strasbourg on Saturday February 11th. The UOIF chose another way to protest, it launched a national petition, addressed to the President of the Republic, expressing the “*worry of Muslims facing the rise of islamophobia*” and requesting the “*intervention of Jacques Chirac in order to guarantee the defence of the dignity of Muslim citizens.*”⁴

The Paris demonstrations was led by UAM 93 (Union des Associations Musulmanes de Seine-Saint-Denis), which had already organised a demonstration on Sunday February 5th which gathered 1.000 people in Paris. The UAM 93 federates nine mosques among the most important one of Seine-Saint-Denis (Aulnay-sous-Bois, Aubervilliers, le Pré-Saint-Gervais, Bobigny, Gagny, Villemomble, Neuilly-sur-Marne, Noisy-le-Sec) and fourteen associations. It is generally defined as “anti-Paris”, a way to say that it refuses to be aligned on the directives of the great national federations: UOIF, FNMF and Mosque of Paris Its leaders denounce the inaction of the CFCM. The demonstrations gathered 7.200 people in Paris and 2.000 in Strasbourg.⁵

² UOIF communiqué is available on <http://www.uoif-online.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=430&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0>
FOIE communiqué is available on <http://www.uoif-online.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=436&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0>

³ You can find an interview of M. Chems-Eddine Hafiz, lawyer of the CFCM, on <http://www.saphirnews.com>

⁴ The petition is available on <http://www.uoif-online.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=435&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0>

⁵Xavier Ternisien « Le sentiment d'« humiliation » de musulmans français qui déplorent la « paralysie » du CFCM » in Le Monde, 07.02.06

Xavier Ternisien, « Le CFCM va porter plainte contre des journaux ayant publié les dessins », in Le Monde 11.02.06

« Manifestations a Paris et Strasbourg contre la publication des caricatures de Mahomet », in Le Monde 11.02.06

➤ *Has the government made any official comment regarding the effects of the publication on social integration?*

The government, French political men in their great majority did not condemn the publication of the caricatures in France Soir. In fact, the French political world oscillated between its will to defend the freedom of expression and the respect due to the religion.

Several ministers also expressed themselves, such as Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres: "*As a Minister of Culture and Communication , I am guaranteeing the respect of the press freedom which cannot, in no case, be threatened or ridiculed because it is one of the pillars of our democracy*". Pascal Clement, Minister of Justice, was more moderated, while declaring that a democracy had "*to accept*" the caricatures but also had "*to be careful not to wound the Muslims, less accustomed to the caricature than the countries of Christian culture*". Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister of Interior had affirmed that he preferred "*the excess of caricature to the excess of censure*". He also declared: "*When the caricature goes beyond reasonable, the courts have to judge, not the religious authorities and not the governments of the Muslim countries*".⁶

On the other hand, during the Ministers Council of February 8th, the President of Republic, Jacques Chirac, condemned "*the obvious provocations which dangerously poke passions [...]. All that can hurt the convictions of others, in particular the religious convictions, must be avoided. The freedom of expression must be exerted in a spirit of responsibility*".

NOTA BENE:

The MRAP (Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les Peuples) condemned the publication of the cartoons and decided to take action in justice against the newspaper France Soir. For more information you can consult the MRAP website: <http://www.mrap.asso.fr/communiqués/>

The newspaper La Croix published on Friday February 10th the results of a public opinion survey, which reveals that 54% of the French people condemned the publication of the caricatures in French newspapers. The CEDRA could provide EUMC with all the results of the survey if necessary.

The European National Human Rights Institutions wrote a statement regarding freedom of expression and respect for religion during its meeting in Copenhagen on February 2nd 2006. The text is available on: <http://www.humanrights.dk/news/statement/>

⁶ Béatrice Gurrey, « Embarras et inquiétude chez les responsables politiques français », in Le Monde, 04.02.06