

Islamic veils still a source of conflict in France

Posted: Tue, 26th Mar 2013

Last week we reported on the [case of a Muslim woman in France](#) who won a court ruling that she had been unfairly dismissed from her job in a private nursery school after she refused to remove a headscarf.

The case seems to have sparked a backlash according to a poll in *Le Parisien* newspaper on Monday.

More than 80% of respondents favour toughening up the country's 2004 law, which bans religious dress and insignia in schools, nurseries, and anywhere that involves the care and education of children. Another 83% are in favour of extending the ban to the private sector, with 16% against.

A group of socialists, intellectuals, politicians and humanitarian NGOs launched an online petition in the *Marianne* weekly, calling on the government to enact a new, tougher law in defence of secularism, one that will explain with "pedagogy and clarity" where and when the principle of secularism is to be applied.

Prominent signatories include philosophers Elisabeth Badinter, Alain Finkielkraut and Jean-Pierre Le Goff, Socialist Party secretary Harlem Desir, and several former ministers.

However, the influential think tank Institut Montaigne said that the existing law does not need reforming.

The Interior Minister, Manuel Valls, strongly criticized the court ruling, which he said "brings secularism into question".

Since 2004, French law bans ostentatious wear of all "religious insignia" in public schools. A law banning women from wearing the full-body Islamic veil (burka and niqab) in all public places, including the street, was enacted in 2011. Women defying the ban risk fines of 150 euros, although the law is proving almost impossible to enforce.

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