



# Islamic Religious Education In Belgium

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## PLAN

I. State and Church relationship in Belgium : a brief outline

II. Belgium's school system and religious education

III. Islamic religious education in Belgian schools

- Organization
- Current issues

Brussels « the great mosque »

# I. STATE AND CHURCH RELATIONSHIP



Meeting with Prime Minister, 13.06.2018





Great synagogue of Europe (Brussels)

System unchanged since the Constitution of 1831

Combination of :

- Separation of Church and State
- Public financing of recognised religions (and philosophies since 1993)

Largely inherited from Napoleonic laws

Recognized by federal law :

- 6 religions :
  - Catholicism
  - Protestantism
  - Anglicanism
  - Judaism
  - Islam (1974)
  - Orthodoxy (1985)
- 1 recognized philosophy : Secular humanism (2002)

} 1830's

To be recognized soon : Buddhism

## Main financial benefits of recognition

- Payment of salaries and pensions by the federal state (imposed by the Constitution)
- Local communities (parishes etc.) supported by municipalities (organised by regional law)
- Religious education in public schools (organised by the Communities – foreseen in the Constitution)

State funded “clergy” (2020)

Organisation	ETP 2020	%
Catholic	2840	80,95
Protestant	139	3,96
Islamic	88	2,51
Orthodox	71	2,02
Jewish	33,5	0,95
Anglican	20	0,57
Secular humanism	316,65	9,03
Total	3508,15	100

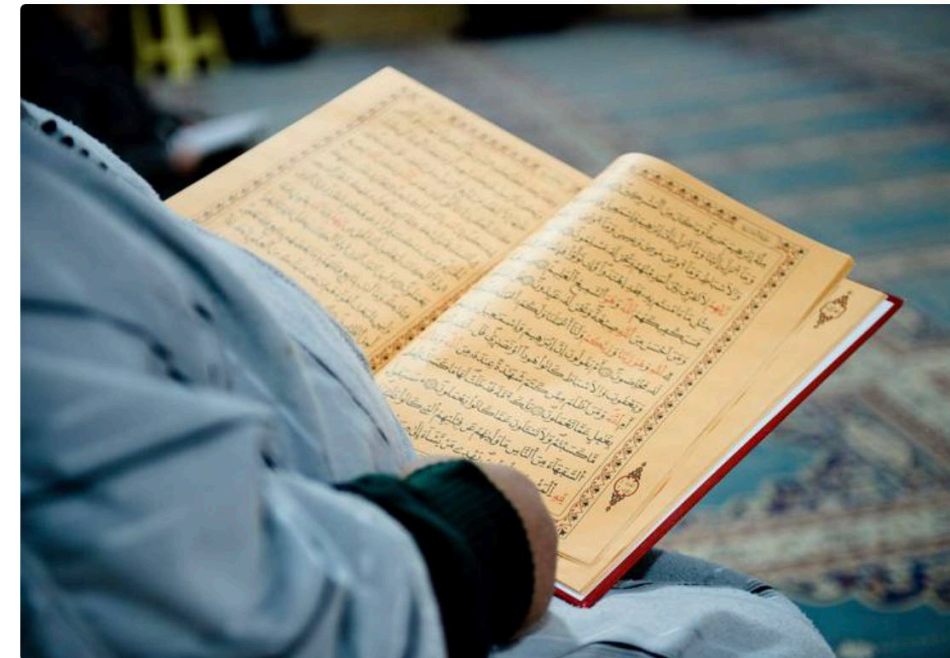
# Islam in Belgium

- Labour migration in the 1960's and 1970's (Turkey and Morocco)
- Muslim population estimated around 7-8 % of the population, mostly urban

- 1974 : recognition of Islam as 5th « official » (= state-supported) religion
- 1978 : first IRE classes
- 1999 : first elected representative body : Executive of Muslims in Belgium
- 2001 : partial de-federalization of religious policy
- 2007 : first recognition of mosques by the Regions and first payment of salaries to imams
- 2016 : new Executive of Muslims in Belgium
- 2022 : the minister of Justice announces the withdrawal of the EMB recognition

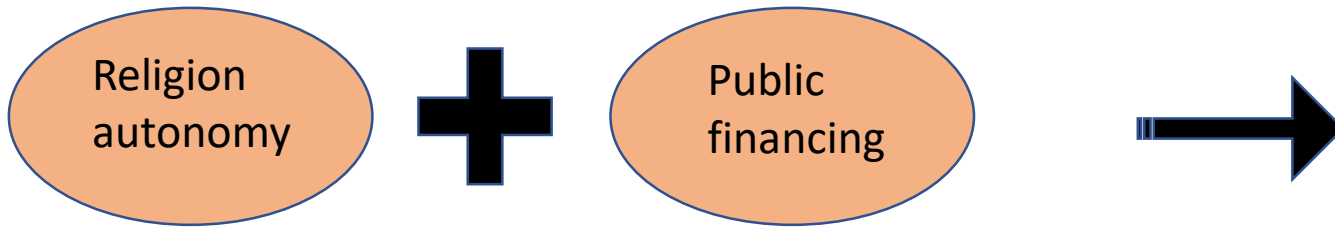
## **L** Le ministre de la Justice tire la prise de l'Exécutif des musulmans de Belgique

M. Van Quickenborne estime que l'EMB n'est pas représentatif des musulmans.



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18.02.2022



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## L'Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique

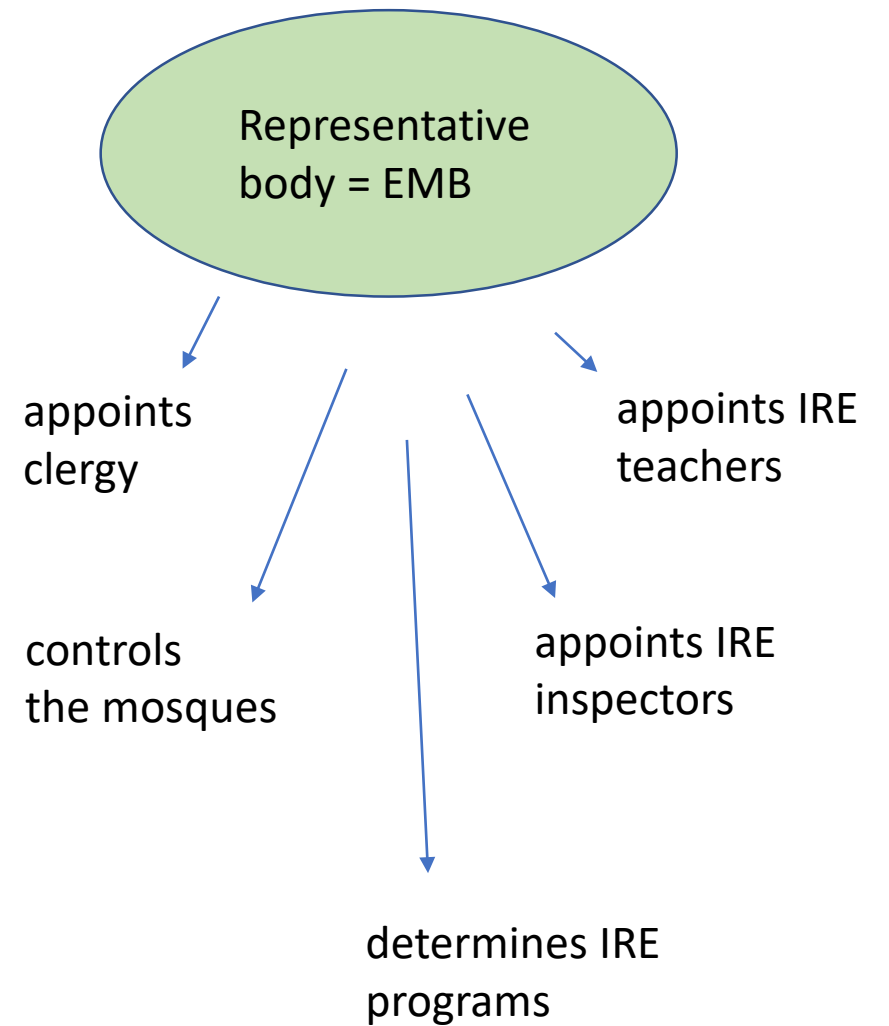
L'Organe Représentatif du Temporel du Culte Islamique de Belgique



### Le Président de l'EMB présent au dix-huitième anniversaire de la Princesse Elisabeth

Le 25 octobre 2019, le Président de l'Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique, M. Mehmet ÜSTÜN, était présent à la célébration organisée à l'occasion des 18 ans de la Princesse Élisabeth, duchesse du Brabant...

Lire l'article >





## II. BELGIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM





# Catholic schools educate a majority of students

## ENSEIGNEMENT



**56,82 %**

fréquentent une école primaire catholique  
413.088 élèves

**72,48 %**

fréquentent une école secondaire catholique  
338.665 élèves

**98.473 étudiants**

dans l'enseignement catholique pour adultes

**88.909 étudiants**

dans l'enseignement supérieur catholique (Hautes-Ecoles)

**KU LEUVEN**

**60.602 étudiants**

Faculté de Théologie : **760 étudiants**  
et de Sciences religieuses

Faculté de Droit canonique: **127 étudiants**

Communauté française et germanophone



**41,58 %**

fréquentent une école primaire catholique  
138.587 élèves

**59,98 %**

fréquentent une école secondaire catholique  
226.447 élèves

**19.366 étudiants**

dans l'enseignement catholique pour adultes

**46.471 étudiants**

l'enseignement supérieur catholique (Hautes-Ecoles)

**UCLouvain**

**31.882 étudiants**

Faculté de Théologie: **429 étudiants**

Cours de Droit canonique: **environ 60 étudiants**

**A few confessional schools are Protestant, Jewish or Islamic**

**4 Islamic schools, all in Brussels  
and recognised / financed by the French Community**

French Community :  
5 Protestant schools and 2 Jewish schools

Flemish Community :  
10 Protestant schools (*Scholen met de Bijbel*)  
9 Jewish schools (Antwerp)





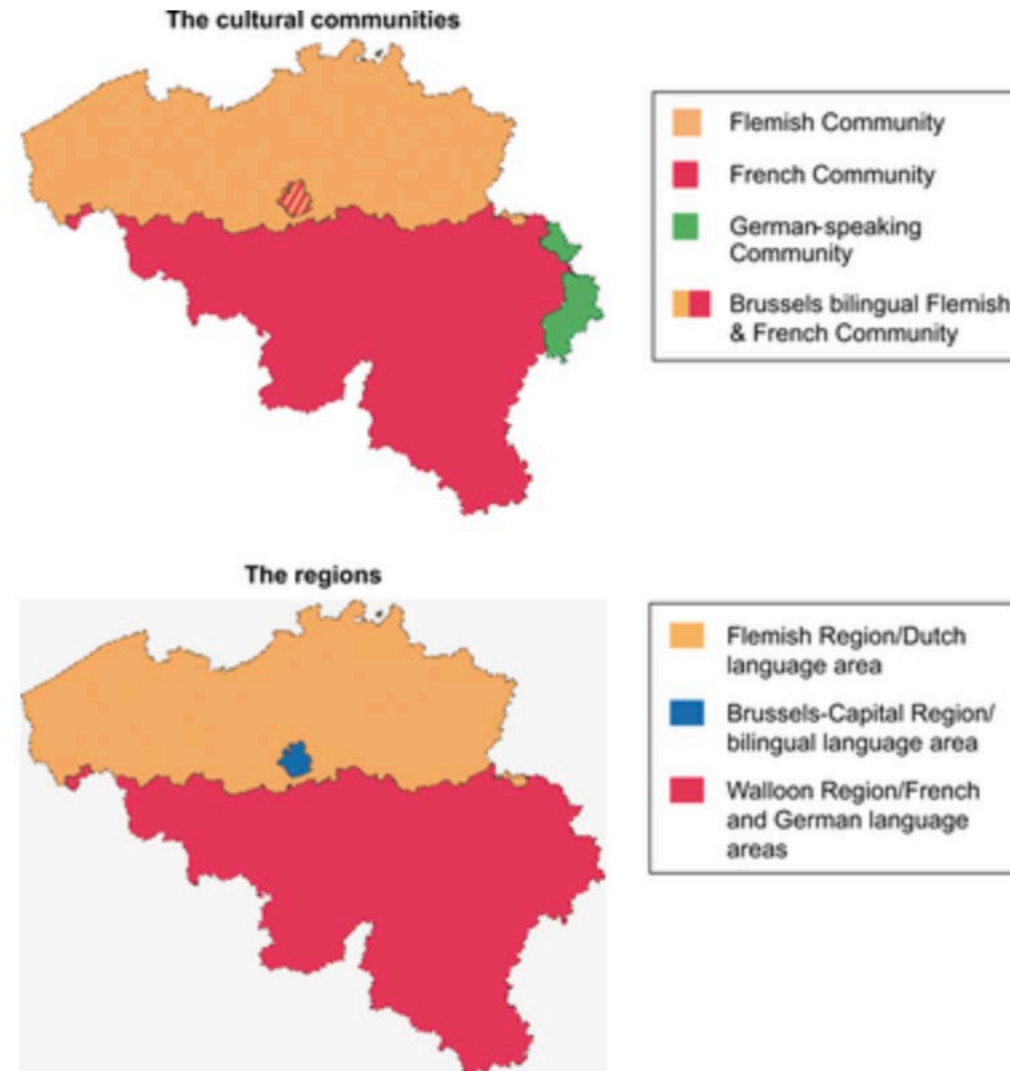
# Education is a competence of the Communities

Belgium is a (very) complex federal state

a federalism

- Of dissociation
- Asymmetric
- Centripetal

1970-2014 : 6 major institutional reforms



## Belgian Constitution (article 24)

§ 1. Education is free; any preventive measure is forbidden; the punishment of offences is regulated only by the law or federate law.

The community offers free choice to parents.

The community organizes non-denominational education. This implies in particular the respect of the philosophical, ideological or religious beliefs of parents and pupils.

Schools run by the public authorities offer, until the end of compulsory education, the choice between the teaching of one of the recognized religions and non-denominational ethics teaching.

(...)

§ 3. Everyone has the right to education with the respect of fundamental rights and freedoms. Access to education is free until the end of compulsory education. All pupils of school age have the right to moral or religious education at the community's expense.

§ 4. All pupils or students, parents, teaching staff or institutions are equal before the law or federate law. The law and federate law take into account objective differences, in particular the characteristics of each organizing authority that warrant appropriate treatment.

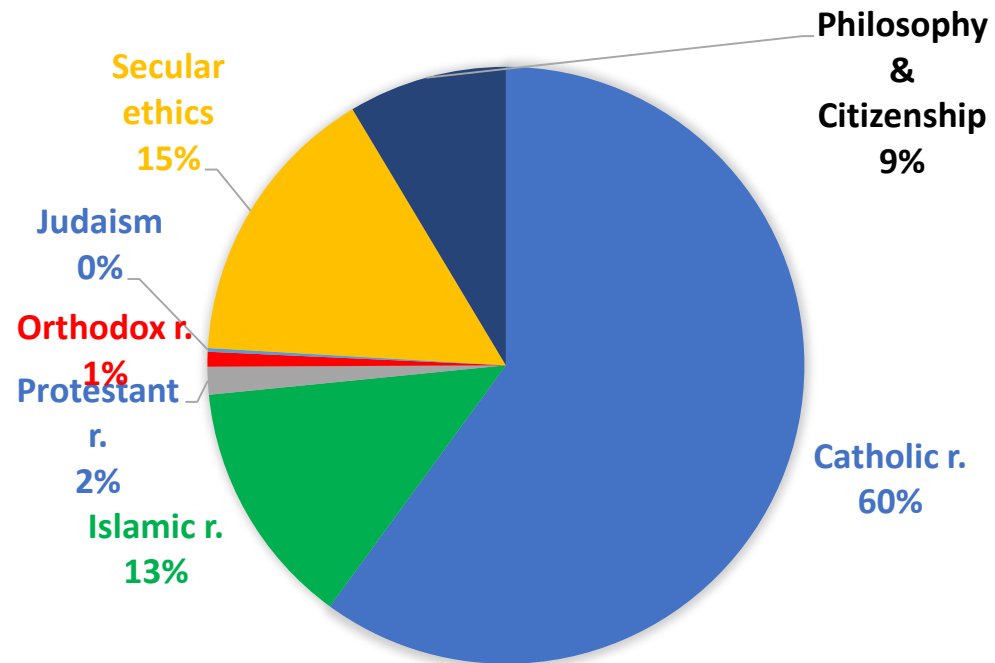
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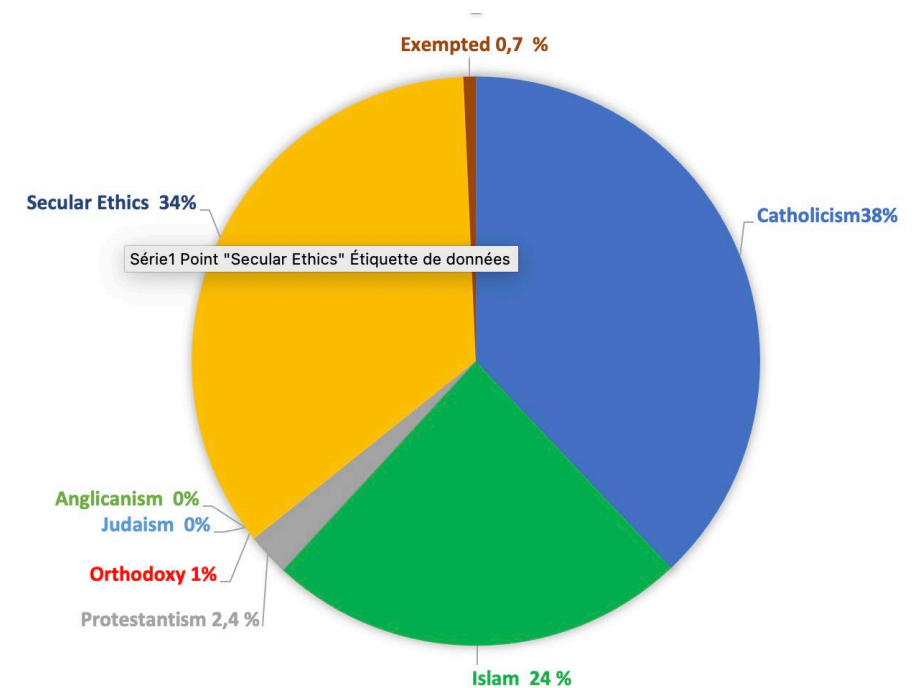
## Religious education received by students :

- a vast majority of them receive Catholic RE
- In public schools, where a choice between 7 subjects is offered, Catholicism, Secular Ethics and Islam are the most frequent choices


French Community, all networks,  
primary education (2020-21)



Flemish Community, public networks,  
primary education (2020-21)



# III. ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION




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EXECUTIEF  
VAN DE MOSLIMS  
VAN BELGIË

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VERNIEUWING 2022COVID-19EMBONZE DIENSTENINFORMATIEMEDIAf



Islamleerkracht worden in België

**ADMINISTRATIEF**

- > een sollicitatiebrief verwijzend naar het ambt
- > een origineel attest van goed gedrag en zeden (model2) (niet ouder dan drie maanden)
- > 1 pasfoto
- > een kopie van identiteitskaart / verblijfsvergunning - (recto/verso)
- > een 'tazkiyya' van een moskee (attest van geloofspraktijk)
- > een cv
- > een kopie van diploma('s) (in geval van buitenlandse diploma's ook gelijkwaardigheidsattest en vertaling diploma bijvoegen)



## Students enrolled in Islamic Religious Education

### Flemish Community

Public schools	2008-09	2020-21
Primary	12,5 %	23,9 %
Secondary	12,8 %	23,3 %

### French Community

Public schools	2010-11	2020-21
Primary	15,2 %	22,5 %
Secondary	15,6 %	23,1 %

### Flemish Community in Brussels

Public schools	2020-21
Primary	61,2 %
Secondary	55,8 %

### French Community in Brussels

Public schools	2020-21
Primary	52,1 %
Secondary	53,7 %

- Key role of EMB : selects teachers and inspectors, supervises programs
    - Currently EMB is in jeopardy
  - First curricula and programmes introduced very late (2001 in the Flemish C., 2013 in the French C.)
  - Programmes are largely outdated and insufficient
  - Lack of textbooks produced in Belgium by Belgian Muslims
  - Education background of teachers is often insufficient
  - Teachers training is not adequate
  - Inspection is not frequent enough / not done by public authorities
  - Schools directions are sometimes not interested
  - The future of IRE is not secured (French Community)
- 
- Note : Other minority RE classes have similar problems





## Recent reforms and initiatives

- Renewed programmes
- Language tests for teachers
- Training by EMB – agreement EMB / Flemish ministry of Education (2016)
- Teachers training provided in universities / university colleges in both Communities
- New generation of IRE teachers, highly motivated
- Renewed interest in the matter

But

- Lots remained to be done
- The future of EMB is uncertain
- The future of IRE (in the French Community) is uncertain



Pour le développement des  
savoirs et des compétences des  
professeurs de religion islamique

VOTRE FORMATION CONTINUE À L'UCLOUVAIN

# Arguments for and against confessionnal RE

- In favour :
  - Acknowledge student's identity
  - Present a modern version of his/her faith
  - Respect equality between the different religions
- Against :
  - End segregation of students
  - Open to other faiths and cultures
  - Present a factual / scientific approach of religion
  - Save money and simplifies organization
  - Respect privacy

## The future of IRE in Belgium ?

- IRE may disappear along with all religious classes in public schools  
Already 1 hour/week instead of 2 in the French C.  
Resolution adopted by the French C. Parliament on Dec 1, 2021
- A multifaith religious education may be introduced – As the number of recognized worldviews rise
- The number of Islamic schools may rise (as a response ?)
- All matters regarding religion could be transferred to the Communities / Regions allowing each entity to develop its own project (if Art 24 of the Constitution is amended)
- Or IRE may survive as it is for some time, with minor improvements / changes