



Joint Statement on Religious Discrimination in Higher Education

Student unions oppose ban on wearing of religious symbols

On 4th June 2020, with the arrêt 81/2020, the Constitutional Court of Belgium has concluded that the Article 3 of the Decree of the French Community of 31st March 1994 on the “neutrality of education” does not violate the Belgian Constitution nor the European Convention of Human Rights, which guarantees the freedom of religion. The Court has thus validated the decision of the educational institute Haute École Francisco Ferrer in Brussels to ban students from wearing religious symbols.

The undersigned organisations including the European Students’ Union (ESU), the Federation for French speaking Students (FEF), the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO) and the European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS) express strong concern over measures that discriminate against students professing certain religious beliefs. As outlined in ESU’s [Anti-Discrimination Statement](#), educational institutions must ensure that campuses remain discrimination-free zones. Measures such as the ban on wearing of religious symbols that infringe upon the right of students to practice their religion is one of many ways that discrimination and, consequentially inequality manifests.

The undersigned student unions stress the responsibility of educational institutions to combat discrimination and eliminate discriminative structures, particularly at a time when society becomes increasingly polarised as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic aggravates socioeconomic inequalities. Now more than ever, higher education institutions must truly be accessible, safe and welcoming environments for all. In order to fulfil their role as core powerhouses of social mobility, civic culture and social inclusion, the undersigned organisations strongly advocate for higher education institutions to respect the rights to religious and spiritual expression, as well as to mainstream and promote diversity, equity and inclusion in learning and teaching methods, in institutional culture and policies.

The undersigned student unions urge the Haute École Francisco Ferrer in Brussels to recognise that the ban imposed on students from wearing religious symbols goes against the aforementioned values as it instigates exclusion and religion-based discrimination and bigotry. Furthermore, the signatories emphasize that the appeal to establish a “totally neutral environment” is fallacious, and shows a chauvinistic and ignorant attitude towards people for whom wearing certain clothing items is an important part of religious and cultural expression and practice. This compromises the culture of inclusion on campus that in consequence profoundly affects an institution’s



continued diversity and can impact the confidence of current and potential members of the academic community, or result in their exclusion.

The undersigned student unions therefore call upon the Belgian government and the respective higher education institutions including the Haute École Francisco Ferrer to cancel the ban on wearing of religious symbols that would impede the respect of diversity in higher education. Finally, the signatories express their solidarity and support to all students and student leaders working and campaigning to reduce discriminatory barriers in our higher education systems.

Co-signed by:

European Students' Union (ESU)

www.esu-online.org

Mundo-Madou, Avenue des Arts 7/8
1210 Brussels, Belgium

Fédération des Etudiant.e.s Francophones (FEF)

www.fef.be

Rue de la Borne, 14 bte 17
1080 Brussels, Belgium

European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS)

www.eujs.org

Antoine Depage 3
1000 Brussels, Belgium

Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO)

www.femyso.org

Rue Archimede 50,
1000 Brussels, Belgium