

Netherlands briefing: January - February 2024

Reporting period: 1st January – 29th February 2024

City of Almere under investigation for secret surveillance of its Muslim population

- The Ombudsman of Metropolitan Amsterdam is investigating the city of Almere and the NTA research agency for potentially conducting secret surveillance of Muslim groups under the guise of monitoring extremism.
- This action comes after revelations of covert mosque investigations by Dutch municipalities, including Almere, sparked significant unrest among the Islamic community.

The Islamic community in Almere has expressed feelings of betrayal and a profound loss of trust in the local government.

- Results of the investigation are expected before the summer of 2024.

Geert Wilders reverts to strident anti-Islam rhetoric after brief effort at moderation

- In the latest Dutch parliamentary elections, the far-right "Party for Freedom" (PVV), led by Geert Wilders, secured the highest number of seats.

Attempting to attract centrist voters, Wilders moderated his typically harsh rhetoric towards Islam, no longer labeling it a "totalitarian religion."

However, this change in tone proved short-lived, as he soon reverted to describing Islam as "a religion of hate" against which he vowed to continue fighting.

- This apparent flip-flop did not deceive the Muslim community, who have always seen through Wilders' attempts to appear moderate. With the PVV now as the dominant party in

the Netherlands, their apprehension is greater than ever.

Ombudsman investigation ongoing into opaque terror registration system

- Citizens on the Netherlands' terrorism or extremism registration list are often unaware of their status, leading to unexpected travel issues and questions about why and by whom they were registered.
- The National Ombudsman is investigating the transparency and accessibility of information regarding these registrations, following a complaint by Muslim Rights Watch Nederland (MRWN) about the CTER (Counterterrorism, Extremism, and Radicalisation) system's handling of personal data.

There are concerns over data being shared across multiple systems without individuals' knowledge, complicating the removal of incorrect registrations.