

FRANCE BRIEFING

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New anti-separatism law

In the midst of the final preparations for the annual gathering of the Muslim community organised in the Paris suburb of Le Bourget, Minister of the Interior Laurent Nunez announced, on 3 April 2026, the cancellation of the event and the forthcoming introduction of a new anti-separatism law, five years after the adoption of the initial framework under the law of 24 August 2021 “confortant le respect des principes de la République.” Nunez justified this initiative by outlining several legislative innovations under preparation. Implicitly referring to the “systematic obstruction” policy targeting Muslim organisations since February 2018, the proposed bill would expand executive powers, enhancing the administration’s capacity to monitor, regulate and ultimately discipline Muslim structures that have so far evaded existing control mechanisms.

Senator Bruno Retailleau, who served as Minister of the Interior before Nunez and a central figure of the right-wing opposition as president of the Senate’s Les Républicains group since 2014, introduced in the Senate a bill only days after this announcement (registered on 9 April 2025). This initiative operates primarily as a form of institutional pressure. Its stated objective — “combating Islamist entryism” — closely mirrors that of the government, it aims to compel the executive to accelerate its own legislative process ahead of the 2027 presidential election. Nevertheless, the content of this parliamentary proposal remains analytically significant. It likely reflects earlier stages of policy formulation, possibly developed during Retailleau’s tenure. As such, examining this draft offers insight into the conceptual architecture of the forthcoming law, notably the potential juridical elevation of the notion of “national cohesion.”

Retailleau’s proposal introduces a series of far-reaching measures:

1. It establishes a new criminal offence targeting organised actions aimed at substituting national law with religious or community-based norms, thereby extending the scope of repression to collective ideological practices.

2. Broadens the legal grounds for dissolving associations, particularly where organisations are deemed to undermine the legal order or contribute to forms of social fragmentation; this is coupled with an expanded use of intelligence-gathering techniques.
3. Authorises the prohibition of activities conducted in France by foreign organisations considered to threaten public order or fundamental principles.
4. Modifies procedural law by extending limitation periods for prosecuting certain forms of ideological influence, especially those directed at minors.
5. Reinforces administrative oversight of places of worship, subjecting certain construction or development projects to stricter authorisation regimes.
6. Strengthens financial surveillance, enabling asset freezes, withdrawal of public subsidies, and enhanced scrutiny of funding networks associated with so-called “separatist agendas.”
7. Under the stated objective of protecting minors, it subjects youth organisations to prior authorisation and heightened regulatory supervision.

In practical terms, these provisions signal a consolidation of administrative power, reinforcing a preventive and anticipatory logic of governance. The law would not merely sanction unlawful acts but seek to pre-empt the emergence of an autonomous Muslim civil society, thereby extending the reach of state control into the organisational and ideological dimensions of Muslim collective life.

The concept of “national cohesion” underpinning these developments can be traced to French strategic and military discourse. Notably, the 2022 and 2025 Strategic reviews, published under the authority of the Ministère des Armées, emphasised the need to strengthen societal resiliency in response to perceived geopolitical decline, descriptive as “strategic downgrade”. Within this framework, societal resilience is predicated upon the reinforcement of republican values and their transmission across generations, as well as the consolidation of national cohesion against internal threats. Should this concept be formally incorporated into statutory law, it would mark a significant shift: “National cohesion” would become a legal benchmark, potentially justifying a wide array of administrative intrusive interventions into Muslims’ lives.

Such a development also raises broader questions regarding the circulation of security doctrines across institutional fields. It would not constitute an isolated case. Earlier policy frameworks targeting “communautarisme,” were similarly shaped by domestic intelligence agencies and subsequently integrated into public policy, serving to legitimise increased surveillance of Muslims.

In this perspective, “societal resilience” and “national cohesion” function as productive political concepts. They enable the articulation of governance strategies centred on monitoring, regulating and constraining forms of political expression associated with Muslim communities. By framing such interventions as necessary to preserve the integrity of the Republic, these concepts contribute to redefining the boundaries of legitimate political participation.

At present, the government's bill is under examination by the Conseil d'État, a prerequisite for its formal introduction in Parliament. The precise timetable for parliamentary debate remains uncertain. Given an already congested legislative agenda and the proximity of the 2027 elections, the prospects for adoption remain difficult to assess.

Yadan law

The emergence of the so-called “Yadan bill” in France must be understood against the backdrop of the political climate that followed the escalation of the Zionist genocidal process after October 2023. In this context, European governments, including France, adopted increasingly restrictive approaches toward pro-Palestinian mobilisations, often justified on grounds of public order and the fight against terrorism. Demonstrations were banned in several cities, and administrative measures targeting organisations and activists intensified. This environment also shaped the treatment of political figures such as Rima Hassan, whose pro-Palestinian positions triggered sustained political and media attacks. Hassan became emblematic of a broader dynamic in which expressions of solidarity with Palestine were reframed as politically suspect, if not dangerous.

Domestically, this evolution intersects with a longer trajectory of policies targeting Muslim organisations and racialised forms of political mobilisation, particularly since 2018. The convergence of anti-terrorism, foreign policy considerations, and internal security logics has progressively blurred the line between dissent and threat. The introduction of the Yadan bill must therefore be situated within this broader attempt to redefine the boundaries of acceptable political expression in a context marked by geopolitical polarisation.

The Bill suggested the creation of a new criminal offence penalising the public provocation to deny the right to exist of a State or to call for its destruction. It broadens the offence of apology or justification of terrorism, extending it to indirect forms of expression. This lowers the threshold for criminal liability and increases prosecutorial discretion over pro-Palestinian political speech, refusing to contextualise political violence as a legitimate response to a colonial and genocidal State. It expands State oversight over places of worship. The bill allows for stricter administrative controls, including easier closure of religious venues where speech or activities are considered to fall within the broadened offences. This extends existing police powers into the religious sphere.

From a critical analytical perspective, the Yadan bill can be understood as part of a broader political effort to reshape the boundaries of legitimate expression in France. Formally grounded in a language inspired by the War on Terror, its underlying logic aligns with a political context marked by strong support for Israel at the state level.

In this sense, the bill contributes to the promotion of a political environment in which pro-Palestinian positions are increasingly delegitimised. By broadening the definition of what constitutes problematic speech, it creates the conditions for the criminalisation of forms of expression that were previously protected under principles of free speech.

As prosecutions and condemnations based on terrorism charges would significantly increment, the indirect consequence of the bill would be the facilitation of association dissolutions. It provides the executive with a powerful tool to dismantle organisational structures that sustain pro-Palestinian mobilisation. More broadly, the bill reinforces preventive governance. Rather than responding to clearly established offences, it seeks to anticipate and neutralise potential threats by acting on intentions, affiliations, or perceived ideological alignments. This expansion of anticipatory logic increases the discretionary power of the administration.

The overall impact is a contraction of the space for political expression. By introducing legal uncertainty and the risk of sanctions, the bill contributes to a chilling effect on activism. In doing so, it reinforces asymmetries in the public sphere and facilitates the marginalisation of pro-Palestinian voices within the French political landscape.

Although not adopted, the Yadan bill proposes a set of measures aimed at reinforcing the state's capacity to regulate political expression and collective organisation in relation to the genocide in Palestine.

The Bill was not adopted because it was withdrawn from the parliamentary agenda on 16 April 2026, before debate in the Assemblée Nationale. This withdrawal resulted from a combination of strong political opposition (notably from France Unbowed — LFI), procedural obstruction, and significant public mobilisation, including a petition gathering over 700,000 signatures.

Despite this setback, the government has indicated that a new version of the bill is expected to be introduced in late June 2026, likely maintaining similar objectives but in a revised form to secure broader political support.

Rima Hassan's case

Rima Hassan, a Franco-Palestinian jurist and political figure, became the subject of a legal and administrative investigation in France following public statements and activism related to Palestine. Authorities examined whether her remarks could be construed as endorsing or legitimising proscribed organisations, a charge often mobilised under counterterrorism frameworks. The investigation unfolded in a broader climate of heightened scrutiny toward pro-Palestinian voices.

The investigation targeting Rima Hassan can be understood not as an isolated legal episode but as the product of a long-standing surveillance architecture consolidated since the “War on Terror.” Over the past two decades, France — like many Western states — has expanded its legal and institutional apparatus to monitor, regulate, and pre-emptively discipline Muslims. In this context, pro-Palestinian advocacy is frequently subsumed under suspicion, blurring the line between political speech and security threat. Hassan's case illustrates how counterterrorism tools, initially justified as exceptional, have become normalised instruments of governance, enabling forms of political repression without requiring explicit criminalisation.

This surveillance architecture is not merely technical or institutional; it is underpinned by a coherent ideological infrastructure. Central to this is what scholar Hatem Bazian conceptualises as “anti-Palestinian racism,” defined as a form of Islamophobia that erases Palestinian identity, delegitimises Palestinian narratives, and frames any articulation of Palestinian rights as inherently suspect or violent. Within this framework, Palestinians are denied the status of legitimate political subjects, and their allies are rendered complicit by association. The investigation cannot be disentangled from a broader epistemic regime that constructs Muslim and Palestinian political expression as deviant, thereby justifying heightened scrutiny.

More broadly, Hassan’s situation exemplifies how Islamophobia operates as a structuring principle of the national body politic. By targeting a Muslim, pro-Palestinian public figure through counterterrorism mechanisms, the state effectively delineates the boundaries of acceptable political speech. This has chilling effects not only on those directly concerned but also on wider communities, reinforcing self-censorship and political marginalisation.

Another important dimension is the role of media amplification in consolidating this process. The publicising of investigations — often before any legal conclusion — is instrumental in producing reputational damage and legitimising suspicion in the eyes of the broader public. This dynamic transforms legal scrutiny into a performative act of governance, where the mere fact of being investigated becomes evidence of deviance. In this sense, surveillance, ideology, and media converge to produce a comprehensive system of control that extends beyond formal legal outcomes.

Racist attack covered up by the police

A 65-year-old man fired a weapon (reportedly a pellet rifle) near a group of children in a working-class neighbourhood of Espaly-Saint-Marcel (Haute-Loire) on 19 April 2026. At least one child says he was directly targeted; no physical injuries were reported, but several children were left traumatised. The suspect was arrested, placed in custody, then released and is due to face trial for “violence with a weapon.” The child’s father and other residents say the shooter shouted racist insults during the incident and had a history of such behaviour in the neighbourhood.

However, according to the prosecutor, the official signed police statements initially contained no mention of racist remarks, and at least one witness did not report them.

A Mediapart article highlights that the father alleges these racist elements were omitted from police depositions, raising concerns about how the complaint was recorded. The prosecutor has said checks are underway into a possible failure or refusal by police to properly transcribe the allegations and handle the complaint. A separate investigation has been opened to determine whether racist insults were in fact made.