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French Laïcité, Freedom of Speech and the Return of the Islamist Threat

The terrorist murder of French professor Samuel Paty in the Paris suburb of Conflans-Sainte-Honorine in autumn 2020 has re-opened a heated debate concerning the liberty of teaching, freedom of expression, and the role of secularism in a pluralist society. What is the specific nature of French *laïcité*, and how has it changed over time since its juridical establishment in 1905? How does it compare with other Western approaches to *secularism* and, most critically, with Muslim perspectives on the matter? Why has this provoked a diplomatic dispute between France and Turkey, and more broadly the boycott of French products in many Muslim countries?

Reflecting on and answering such questions is crucial in order to fully understand the local and international stakes, to outline effective political and normative strategies, and advance mutual cross-cultural understanding while sidelining and fighting fundamentalism in a united way.

This dossier seeks to serve precisely that effort with the compelling analyses of five renowned scholars.

Cover Photo: Three feminist activists placard posters of a drawing by French cartoonist Charb to read “Laïcité” – Montreuil, October 20, 2020 (AFP).

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