



## The second webinar of Digital Autumn: Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO)

YEN hosted the second episode of Think United! webinar series on December 17, 2020. In this episode, **Hiba Latreche** from [the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations \(FEMYSO\)](#) shared the experiences of how to empower the communities that they work with and also the common challenges that they face at their work. FEMYSO is a non-profit NGO which has become de facto the voice of the Muslim Youth in Europe and is regularly consulted on issues pertaining to Muslim Youth. FEMYSO works to be the leading voice for European Muslim youth, developing and empowering them, and working to build a diverse, cohesive and vibrant Europe. Hiba highlighted the importance of collaborating with different minority groups in order to establish resilient and inclusive societies, through examples from her work:

Hiba accentuated that one of the major challenges that they face is Islamophobia. Islamophobia should be recognized as a form of racism and should therefore be appropriately criminalized. Islamophobia touches not only Muslims but also all the communities perceived as Muslims, such as Sikhs. In order to build a diverse and cohesive Europe Islamophobia should be addressed structurally. **As Hiba especially underlined, “Struggle of a minority is a struggle of the whole society”.**

Muslim youth face structural discrimination especially at access to employment and access to education. Statistically, women wearing hijab have less chance of being employed in European countries. Moreover, European Court of Justice (ECJ) announced that the EU workplace headscarf ban “can be legal”. The ECJ’s ruling was prompted by the case of a receptionist fired for wearing a headscarf to work at the security company in Belgium. Such structural approaches open backdoors to prejudice and intensifies the structural discrimination.

Another challenge shared is that young muslim women face discrimination while accessing education. Wearing hijab is banned in several countries until high school. Furthermore, it is even banned at certain universities in Belgium. In France, one cannot be a public servant if the person wears a hijab. The law makers claim that these bans are for all the religious signs but the laws are tailored in a way that they affect mainly the Muslim community.

There are several laws that passed in countries such as Belgium, France and Austria which promotes Muslim communities as potential threats to be “dealt with”. This approach from the states increases the daily harassments towards Muslim youth. Profiling Muslim youth and harassing them for their belief becomes a trend especially at schools. The recent law in France gives the state the authority to ban the civil society organizations working with Muslim community. The state is easily suspicious towards Muslim communities because usually there are no direct communication. Miscommunication intensifies the negative stereotyping and profiling. Recently, France banned CCIF (Collective Against Islamophobia in France), an organization which has been providing legal support to the victims of islamophobia. Historically, banning civil society is not a good sign for the sustainability of democracy, hence this approach is rather alarming.



The government does not ask questions to understand but chooses to close civil society organizations. This bears a toll on muslim youth. Muslim youth is forced to apply a censorship which causes a tearing apart of identity. This aspect has also major psychological impacts where no structural support is provided.

What we can do is we can deconstruct our stereotypes and reeducate ourselves. We can act against tokenism. Most of the time minority groups are used as tokens just for the visuals and just for taking nice pictures. We have to be present at the tables not just as tokens, not just for talking but we have to also make sure that our voice is heard. We have to relearn through communicating with the people who are affected by the discrimination.

**We have to demand states to face the unspoken history. Unaddressed traumas of the colonial pasts fuels Islamophobia and encourages neo-colonialism. As minorities, we should not stay silent thinking that we would be safer if we are invisible, “staying silent never means that you will be protected”.**

We have to challenge academia to accept research from external sources. Especially in France, academia is not accepting research which is done externally and shouting back to you “ don't get into our business”. We have to challenge and deconstruct the narratives because “if we do not challenge the narratives they become the norms”.

All the aspects which are emphasized above by Hiba had similarities with the challenges that the national minorities are facing. For example, the participants have indicated that the approach of French government towards national minorities is very similar that the lawmakers publish and sustain discriminatory law with the false pretense of being equal to all citizens.

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