



FIRST

CONFERENCE  
*Of* EUROPEAN

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LADY IMAMS

BRUSSELS 27th February 2024

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# Rationale

Over the last decade, an increasing number of Muslim women have taken it upon themselves to step into the field of Muslim religious leadership by publicly assuming the role of imam, a function long-time considered in the imaginaries of Muslims and non-Muslims alike as being exclusively reserved to men.

In Denmark, France, the UK, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany and Switzerland, lady imams decided to step in, out of disillusion about the failure of some male imams and Muslim religious authorities to take responsibility to address recurring concerns in European Muslim communities (*patriarchy, marginalisation of women; dismissal of women's contribution to leadership, to knowledge development and transmission inside and outside Muslim communities; confinement of Muslim women in stereotypical gendered roles and positions; lack of understanding of the diversity and complexities of European Muslim communities today...*).

Taking stock that the best way to contribute to solving one's issues is to take the lead in developing and implementing solutions rather than wait for the goodwill of those who have precisely a vested interest in keeping the status quo, **European lady imams** have gone through complex and various processes of self-empowerment which brought them gradually to gather like-minded communities around them, start leading prayers, offer spiritual guidance and step into pastoral work and care. This further led them to open "online" or physical mosques – offering at the same time safe(r) spaces for Muslims in the quest for alternative discourses and practices about God, their religion & spirituality, their place in life and their societies.

However, the work, challenges, and dynamism instilled by these **European lady imams**, often at smaller (*but significant*) scales due to

material constraints, are frequently unknown or misunderstood. Their specific concerns, similar to broader concerns about the training of male imams and other Muslim religious leaders, are unfortunately blurred into political and societal conversations about security concerns. This is particularly detrimental to the work of lady imams as they end up being perceived within Muslim communities as part of the securitisation apparatus or, worse, "Western" agents acting to "destroy Islam from within". Whereas their actual concerns are about reinforcing Muslim communities' resilience, strength and dynamism, by embracing and valuing their internal diversity and complexity, starting with gender equality and mutual, deep, respect about who Muslims are as individuals in their multifaceted diversity and beauty.

Another important characteristic of their situation is that they are all trailblazers, often alone in their city/country, with few opportunities to interact with their peers, again due to material constraints. This situation hinders the development of support networks, the sharing of best practices, the pooling of resources, and the ability to learn from both successes and failures.





## THIS FIRST CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN LADY IMAMS AIMED THEREFORE AT:

Providing a safe and secure networking space for lady imams, with the view to build and reinforce the bonds of sorority and mutual care;

Providing a platform to share a vivid representation of their key concerns, engage in a conversation with European decision-makers on the eve of the European elections;

Offering a chance to examine future steps to strengthen transnational cooperation and support among lady imams and other female Muslim leaders.

As the meeting was particularly rich in terms of content and the variety of issues and perspectives brought to the fore by the panellists, the present report is articulated around two questions summing up key concerns that were expressed during the conference:

**A) WHAT ARE THE KEY CHALLENGES FOR EUROPEAN LADY IMAMS AND FEMALE MUSLIM LEADERS?**

**B) WHAT ARE POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LADY IMAMS, STARTING FROM YOUR OWN COUNTRIES?**

## COMMONLY EXPRESSED CONCERNS

- Muslim female leaders and lady imams face safety concerns due to threats coming from extremist segments both from inside and outside Muslim communities.
- Muslim female leaders and lady imams face deep-seated prejudices and gender biases about their roles inside and outside Muslim communities leading to a lack of acknowledgement of their contribution, impor-

tance and role, leading them to have to struggle substantively more to have their voice heard. Loneliness and lack of support networks also have an impact on their development.

- The lack of resources compels lady imams to work mostly on a volunteer basis, impacting their capacities to reconcile their family and professional life, and their community engagement as spiritual leaders.
- They lack sufficient resources to establish and secure their own physical spaces, where they could welcome those interested in their approach, and provide spiritual care, education, and support, while also remaining independent from the interference of institutional or private donors.



# Participating

## LADY IMAMS

THE FOLLOWING LADY IMAMS HONoured  
THE CONFERENCE OF THEIR PRESENCE:



### DENMARK

**Sherin Khankan**, *Mariam Mosque*

**Shaneela Khan**, *Mariam Mosque*

**Stefanie Vester Klint**, *Mariam Mosque*

**Dlove Moustafa**, *Mariam Mosque*



### FRANCE

**Anne-Sophie Monsinay**, *Simorgh Mosque*

**Kahina Bahloul**, *Fatima Mosque*



### GERMANY

**Seyran Ateş**, *Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque*



### ITALY

**Sveva Basira Balzini**, *Al-Kawthar Mosque*

**Maryan Ismail**, *Somalian community*



### SWITZERLAND

**Tuğba Kara**, *Al-Rahman Association*



### THE NETHERLANDS

**Salima El Musalima**, *Avant-garde imam*



### USA

**Ani Zonneveld**, *Founder of Muslim for Progressive Values*

*A few more lady imams were invited but could not participate.*

The organisers dedicate this report to Prof. Dr. Rabeha Müller, who journeyed back to her Lord a few days before the conference and could unfortunately not be part of this endeavour. May her contribution to the advancement of the cause of an inclusive Islam and lady imams be acknowledged and further developed as a legacy of this 1st Conference of European lady imams.

Unfortunately, Prof. Amina Wadud could not travel to join the conference, but she sent her heartfelt support to this brave endeavour.

# Contribution of LADY IMAMS

## I/ WHAT ARE THE KEY CHALLENGES FOR EUROPEAN LADY IMAMS AND FEMALE MUSLIM LEADERS?



### DENMARK

#### LACK OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FROM MUSLIM CORELIGIONISTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Female Muslim leaders in Europe face numerous challenges, including lack of recognition, safety concerns, and cultural barriers. Despite these challenges, they show resilience in their efforts to make their voices heard and have their contributions recognised.

Female Muslim leaders around the world often struggle with a lack of acknowledgment both within Muslim communities and the broader society. Traditional interpretations of Islam, steeped in patriarchal norms, undermine the authority of female Muslim leaders and hinder their effectiveness. Compared to e.g. Muslim imams that are male, female Muslim leaders often encounter additional obstacles such as gender biases and cultural stereotypes that can impede their progress and

effectiveness in their leadership roles. Despite facing similar challenges in terms of navigating community dynamics and addressing societal issues, female Muslim leaders tend to have to work harder to gain acceptance and recognition for their skills and abilities.

#### SAFETY ISSUES AND THREATS STEMMING FROM MUSLIM AS WELL AS NON-MUSLIM GROUPS

Moreover, female Muslim leaders encounter substantial safety concerns and threats on their path to leadership. Balancing the duties that come along with being a female Muslim leader with personal safety requires a delicate balance, calling for both vigilance and resilience in equal parts. Female leaders have generally encountered significantly greater safety challenges on their path to authority. These risks emanate from both within and outside their communities as well as from extremist groups, regardless of their background. There is no difference for female Muslim leaders. Such safety issues play a decisive role in terms of why female Muslim leaders often face isolation as they lack the crucial networks needed for support and collaboration nationally/internationally, leaving them to struggle with many challenges alone.

Building bridges and networking among themselves (e.g., in the form of the Lady Imam Conference) is crucial as it allows for the sharing of experiences and the formation of collective strategies to overcome common hurdles.

As evident from discussions at the Lady Imam Conference, female Muslim leaders are somehow faced with a dual struggle: facing internal challenges stemming from within their communities and facing external pressures of Is-





Islamophobia and discrimination. Female Muslim Leaders per se reveal and display the prejudices and biases in myriad forms ranging from institutional barriers and social stigma to outright hate crimes that exist within our communities – be they Muslim communities or not. To face and overcome these hurdles means challenging deep-seated attitudes and promoting more inclusive interpretations of Islamic teachings. This combined process cannot be accomplished overnight.



At the moment, the main challenge in France is to **integrate women imams into the representative bodies of French Muslim communities**. As lady imams, they were contacted by the Prefecture to help launch FORIF (*Forum de l'Islam de France*), which is the current official representative body for Muslims in France. The Prefecture asked them to provide an argumentation on the role and specific characteristics of the position of imam. They submitted their proposals, which were studied by the FORIF working groups. However, they were not included in the plenary meeting of religious leaders.

A leader of a French mosque also asked them to take part in a working group to produce a work aiming at popularising various Islamic theological concepts. However, they are not part of the “*group of imams*”, but of a body whose purpose is to interview other people to gather their opinions on the various issues to be addressed. In other words, **their specific theological positions are not considered at all in this work**.

They would like to **emphasise the positive evolution of these bodies over the last few years**, as the organisers of FORIF and certain mosque leaders have been careful to solicit their participation and not to exclude them completely from these various projects. Nevertheless, they are not yet really integrated into these projects, and, above all, they are not integrated as active, officiating imams. These requests are based on the goodwill of certain stakeholders, and they thank them for

that, but they are themselves faced with the reluctance of the majority of members present in these bodies (*generally other imams*). A body or project can only be representative if it includes representatives of the different branches of Islam in France, without having to obtain the approval of those who belong to other schools of thought. They are also not aware of any representative bodies for Muslims in Europe.

The other major challenge for the development of the female imamate and progressive mosques would be to **obtain substantial funding to buy premises (which they are currently renting) and to pay female imams**. In their communities, lady imams manage most of the aspects/activities of the mosque and its association: activities linked to the imam's role (*sermons, prayers, marriage ceremonies and conversion to Islam, answering questions and requests from the faithful, contributing to conferences to which they are invited*) but also the administration needed for the smooth running of the association and the organisation of services. For all these activities, **they work entirely voluntarily**. They do not get paid for their work as imams. They operate solely on their funds, which are based on donations from the faithful. They use this funding mainly to pay for the rooms they hire for religious services. Volunteering is a major obstacle to their development, as it limits the time that they can devote to their work, given that they also have another professional activity to support themselves.



They also mention the **difficulty of ensuring the safety of their places of worship and lady imams**. They were forced to choose between media exposure and keeping their mosque open, following death threats. To keep their mosque open and ensure the safety of their worshippers, they have opted for discretion, foregoing media exposure and publication projects. The result has been a real brake on the development of their activities, with more difficult access to their place of worship and their work.



## ITALY

It is not easy to define a general European framework, since despite a relative geographical proximity, national contexts can differ profoundly.

One challenge that they can highlight concerns **the lack of resources and autonomy**. Muslim women leaders often do not have access to the resources needed to set up their community work and build/buy (*or even rent*) a physical place, where they can anchor their work. They need resources, but also to maintain independence from compromises with donors, so that their existence is not dangerously linked to donors interested in maintaining a specific bond for religious and/or political reasons.

**BEING RECOGNISED BY THE BROADER COMMUNITY AND INSTITUTIONS IS ALSO FUNDAMENTAL.**

The identities of women Muslim leaders, their stories and their theological and political positions are not codified, understood, or valued. Even the most privileged people among them are perceived as too strange by their communities or even outside of their communities. Often many of them must move away from their respective communities, including for security reasons, and have to learn more “*languages*” and cultural codes to address more segments of their communities. Being trusted by members of their communities and having the opportunity to choose which community they want/can take care of (*when it's possible*) is very important to be able to reach as many people as possible and deal with all sensitivities.

Mental health is also a very important challenge. Working on the mental health of community members, with appropriate tools to share with others, is an innovative and necessary task. Indeed, their **communities are devastated by mental and spiritual suffering**, which becomes a closed bottle from which people cannot easily escape on their own. Lady imams and women Muslim leaders must **create communities that are characterized by active solidarity and mutual help**, also to prevent power dynamics in our spaces.



## THE NETHERLANDS

This question can only be answered from the personal experiences of the Dutch lady imam as an artist-imam, an avant-garde imam. Other lady imams and female Muslim leaders have their own goals and experiences.

At the start of her specific female imam journey, her goal was to work for the advent of an Enlightened Islam. For her, values like free speech and equality between men and women were important. **She thought that Dutch society would be very supportive of a female imam who fights for the values of Enlightenment. Sadly, in practice, this was not so.** Media and politics were very traditionally inclined and were more connected to their age-old relationships with Muslim brotherhood-affiliated organisations than with a lady





imam. In practice, it was less about shared ideals and more about Machiavellian power structures. She realised that she lacked the power within the Muslim community that the Muslim Brotherhood has, to the extent that her contributions were not being picked up. On top of that, being an artist didn't help her being "*taken seriously*". Most people, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, think that art and Islam are far-fetched, especially if the artist is a woman and an imam. Her project was too eccentric in their eyes to fit any box. As a consequence, she was mostly ignored by leftist/feminist opinion makers/politicians. The only ones who didn't ignore her were Muslims themselves. The first international newspaper to interview her was the Moroccan Hesspres, while Dutch newspapers ignored her. After that, **the first international newspaper to publish one of her sermons was a conservative Saudi magazine (!)** All her prejudices were put upside down.

She also volunteered to help a Dutch Muslim LGBT organisation, but this same organisation attacked her online when she volunteered to mediate between a gay couple and a Moroccan youth. She found out the hard way that there is an underlining "Machiavellian structure" of insiders and outsiders. She was an outsider apparently and this LGBTQ organisation did not want her to mediate, preferring to leave the conflict as is to probably reach some other goals. Slowly it dawned on her that as an artist-imam, she has a different path to follow than pursuing the "Enlightenment of Islam".

As a consequence, she decided to give it a different turn: to go directly to the source, to seek Allah (*God*), the Light of the universe itself. Her quest for Allah can be seen as mystical. She has been seeking Allah for years and in all kinds of ways (*among the poor in Paris...*). Currently, she is seeking Allah in romantic love. Her quest for Allah has solved the struggles she had with complex human relationships that were holding her back from spreading Enlightened Islam. She does not care anymore if a Dutch TV lied about the fact that the Netherlands has no female imams while they had a topic about female imams (*after inviting*

*her and cancelling the day before the interview because they perceived her as not radical enough*).

In her mystical journey, part and parcel of the spiritual care she provides to her community, Allah has freed her from seeking validation from humans. In her journey, to respond to the next question, the solution to her challenges was God Itself. She went directly to the Source of the Enlightenment...



## SWITZERLAND

Because women are still largely preoccupied with issues relating to bringing up children, care work and low-paid jobs and most importantly because they are still fighting for gender equality, they lose out on a lot of knowledge and innovations, are excluded, or are involved far too late in their development. It is therefore a mixture of a lack of resources and difficult access that makes it impossible or rather rare for women to engage with the innovative technologies of our time, including when it comes to Muslim leaders and lady imams. Yet it is precisely new technologies that offer a multitude of opportunities that could help women to participate, enter into dialogue with others discuss religious issues with each other and contribute to fostering gender balance in traditionally male-dominated spaces.



## THE RANGE OF OPTIONS IS BROAD:

- **CHATBOTS** that can answer individual questions from home and thus provide an initial insight into the topic.
- **ROBOTS/ANIMATED VIDEOS** that could lead the prayer (*instead of a man - gender-neutral prayer guidance*).
- **APPLE/GOOGLE GLASSES** that offer for example virtual tours of mosques for men (from a female perspective) to take the perspective of women and thus highlight spatial discrimination.
- **CHATBOTS** that can answer individual questions and thus provide an initial insight into the topic.
- **VIRTUAL PRAYERS WITH GENDER-NEUTRAL AVATARS/VOICES**
  - (e.g. Zoom for Friday prayer)
  - and much more that is possible today with technology and innovation.



## WITHIN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES, THE MAIN CHALLENGES ARE:

1. Legitimacy as lady imams are not trained in traditional institutions such as al-Azhar University etc.
2. The misinformed belief that “Allah doesn’t permit women imams”.
3. Threats from all sides towards lady imams and their communities.
4. Funding so that lady imams can do their work full time rather than as volunteers.
5. Lady Imams are excluded in panel discussions with male Imams etc. as a way of invisibilising them. At the moment, they are excluded from Muslim events.

## WITHOUT MUSLIM COMMUNITIES, THE KEY CHALLENGES ARE THE FOLLOWING:

1. Establishing themselves, as lady imams, as legitimate representatives of their communities. This is the result of #5 above.
2. Being recognised and supported by progressive or “feminist” European/USA governments and authorities. The lack of support also has to do with the underlying preconceived idea that lady imams prove that Islam is egalitarian and that contradicts the anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant narrative. Several authorities unfortunately prefer to have Muslims and Islam identified as a problem.
3. Progressive institutions/governments are sometimes anti-theists and don’t support work that uses the language of religion even when lady imams are advocating for the same shared values.

# Contribution of LADY IMAMS

## 2/ WHAT ARE POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LADY IMAMS, STARTING FROM THEIR OWN COUNTRIES?



### DENMARK

It is crucial to acknowledge that cultural and religious barriers frequently constrain the leadership opportunities for female Muslim leaders. To address these challenges effectively, it is imperative for both Muslim communities and the broader society to actively support and empower female Muslim leaders. Such support not only promotes gender equality but also enhances European societies by embracing diversity and fostering inclusivity.

#### AWARENESS RAISING CAMPAIGNS

Awareness-raising campaigns are essential for supporting female Muslim leaders. By educating the public about the specific challenges they face such as cultural and religious barriers, discrimination, and lack of support fosters empathy and

understanding within their respective communities. Through increased awareness, there is greater recognition of the unique obstacles encountered by female Muslim leaders as well as inclusive Islamic teachings in general. This heightened understanding shall pave the way for more inclusive and supportive environments where these leaders can thrive in their roles.

#### ENHANCED COOPERATION WITH DECISION-MAKERS, ORGANISATIONS AND MOSQUES

Enhancing collaboration with decision-makers, organisations, mosques, and other stakeholders can be an important factor in empowering female Muslim leaders to access resources, advocate for policy changes, and gain recognition for their contributions. This cooperation fosters inclusivity, promotes gender equality and diversity, and enables female Muslim leaders to thrive and contribute meaningfully.

#### ENCOURAGING FORA AND EVENTS FOR DISCUSSIONS WITHIN AND BEYOND MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

Promoting fora and events for discussions among leaders of various backgrounds and scholars can be paramount in promoting the work that female Muslim leaders are engaged in as well as network-building in general. These gatherings hold the potential to serve as invaluable platforms for cross-disciplinary dialogue and knowledge exchange. Bringing together diverse perspectives not only enriches our collective understanding but also fuels progress and innovation.

As female Imams of the Mariam Mosque, they are





convinced that it is through the empowerment of female Muslim leaders, fortified by collaborative efforts, that they can navigate towards a future characterised by inclusivity and prosperity for generations to come. This emphasises the importance of Muslim women coming together now more than ever, as their collective strength and leadership are instrumental in shaping a brighter future for all.



## FRANCE

Regarding the funding of mosques and the remuneration of imams, one of the solutions, already thought of and proposed by the AMIF (*Association Musulmane pour l'Islam de France*) and the FORIF (*Forum de l'Islam de France*), would be to **reorganise the distribution of the money collected through taxes on the “halal” label or the great pilgrimage to Mecca, to distribute this money to the various Islamic religious associations based on representativeness.**

Because of the specific French law of 1905, the State cannot provide (*lady*) imams with financial support. **They hope that European subsidies will support the development of progressive Islamic religious associations.** The more funds they raise regularly, the more projects they could develop to open other mosques, starting with the training of other lady imams. There are probably two reasons why there are so few female candidates: the lack of security and the need to operate as volunteers, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile the imamate's work with a family and professional life. **Financial resources would also make it possible to obtain substantial security arrangements to protect the place of worship.**

In addition, the activities of FORIF focus on the technical aspects of organising French Muslim structures and not on the theological aspects. It would be a good idea to **set up a separate structure to exchange and share the various theological positions of French imams and theologians,** to move away from the idea of uniformity in Muslim religious discourse and instead highlight and disseminate the diversity of positions adopted according to the Islamic current to which each person belongs.



## ITALY

One of the possible solutions to the **dilemma of autonomy is the on-the-ground community work and project development.** Promoting the establishment of a network and the circulation of money and resources in one's territory can contribute to slowly building the autonomy of lady imams and their congregations. Some of these businesses are built with start-up capital, which is why their network must be extended to anyone who wants to genuinely and selflessly use their economic privilege to help.

Reaching out to **their communities means being part of them,** i.e. understanding people and having compassion in the face of pushback. For this reason, lady imams should offer concrete, material services for Muslim/racialised/marginalised people (*ranging from help with homework, and psychological help, to supporting survivors of abuse, violence, etc.*).



**Networking with other religious and non-religious territorial entities** is also very helpful in addressing the challenges and solutions identified above. Having a strong network can ensure safety and mutual support for lady imams and female Muslim leaders, as well as facilitate collaboration in various services. For example, if a Muslim person seeks assistance at a centre working on violence prevention, they can receive help from perspectives that non-Muslim white people may not fully understand.



## SWITZERLAND

First, it must be said that Switzerland often comes across as Islamophobic, especially when anti-Islamic votes and laws are passed, such as the ban on minarets in 2009 or the ban on burqas in 2021. This means that internationally, Switzerland tends to come off badly when it comes to fundamental values such as freedom of religion and freedom of assembly for Muslims.

Switzerland is also facing social inequality when it comes to the gender debate (*especially in terms of salary levels between men and women*), but there are still more opportunities for women than in many other countries. Women have the privilege of trying out all technical innovations and subjecting them to an initial review.

This is also the case with the examples cited above: these ideas not only require expertise but also a certain budget (*e.g. for Apple glasses*), a well-functioning and stable internet and knowledge about these innovations.

In other words, **Switzerland is a good test country for trying out new technologies aiming at bridging the gap between women and men in Muslim religious spaces** and then recommending them to a wider audience. In Switzerland, Muslims also have the means and opportunities to drive forward and even finance their own innovations should they wish so. This includes for example the chatbot “*IslamChat*” (*powered by TransEducation*), which is currently still in the test phase, but will be made available internationally and to everyone from September 2024 at the latest.

### THEREFORE:

1. **Switzerland can play a major role in Europe as a pioneer, helping to develop and test technical innovations that will contribute to fostering female leadership within Muslim communities.** This will not only benefit Muslims in the country (*approx. 10% of the total population*) but also other religious communities that have similar problems. For example, the Catholic Church could also benefit from such innovations, as it remains difficult for women to gain access when it comes to leading positions in the Church. New technical innovations can therefore help to close gaps here and open new paths - with or without men.
2. Some of these topics were explored during the conference in Brussels, but need to be discussed more broadly. A first step was taken by networking among us so that all participants could benefit from each other's knowledge in the long term.
3. Overall, however, lady imams and other women Muslim leaders must be open to innovations and also take into account the needs of the younger generations, who are more familiar with them.







1. **Traditional mosques should share their space to lead prayer and organise community activities with lady imams.** E.g. After the traditional Friday prayer led by the male imam, the mosque can turn over the space for a lady imam for those who want to participate, especially for women, and for families to pray together. Churches in the U.S. have several services in one day, 10-11 is in English, and 11:30-12:30 is in Spanish. Mosques could maximize the utility of their space and bring in new constituencies by sharing their underutilized spaces in the same way.
2. **Re-education of Muslim children.** The children's curriculum does not teach the many excellent values about Islam and focuses too much on rituals, hell, and haram. In other words, it is a very negative framing. Love for humanity needs to start from a young age. Muslims for Progressive Values have developed such a curriculum in English.
3. **Re-education of the Muslim**
4. **public.** This is equally important. Most of the progressive scholars and thinkers of Islam write and speak in academic circles, and it is not trickling down to the general public. For example, most Muslims believe that sharia law is God's law, when it is not, but a human construct. It is 100% man-made jurisprudence (*fiqh*). The Muslim public is ill-informed about the teachings of the Quran and the list of things they are uninformed about is long and is the responsibility of the religious teachers/leaders. This has to change.
5. **Create a European-Muslim cultural identity:** it is important to create a cultural identity so that the Muslim youth have something they can relate to/be proud of, and Europeans regardless of faith can also

participate in it. Mrs Zonneveld is in the process of developing a musical theatre production under the “*Muslim Musical Mosaic Project*” initiative. Muslims have nothing in their current European or American culture that is celebrative, and that can be staged for Eid (*Muslim festivals*).

6. **New immigrants need to be taught the theology of Inclusive Islam.** This will go far to inculcate a culture of human rights in Muslim communities and also match with the “*EU values*” (*The word is put in quotes by the author because as with Gaza, the hypocrisy of the said values is noticed by many*).
7. In the 16+ years of the author's work, she has successfully moved American Muslims to be progressive, which are now the majority. European lady imams can do the same within 10 years.
8. Instead of establishing another mosque, it is recommended to **establish a cultural centre in Brussels as the capital of the EU.** Or, turn one of the mosques into a cultural centre with diverse programming that can sustain itself. Creating a cultural centre has been a dream of the author, but she is far from achieving this.





# Preliminary

## CONCLUSIONS

The first Conference of European Lady Imams gathered in Brussels to address the challenges Muslim communities are facing within Europe, was vital, innovative and relevant, showing how much it is necessary to continue such important endeavours by creating spaces and opportunities for lady imams and other Muslim women leaders to exchange and build networks of support.

The speeches of 9 lady imams (*out of 14 present*) coming from Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany Switzerland and even the USA made it possible for them, as female leaders within their faith communities, to exchange views and experiences about different topics addressing recurring problematic issues and challenges within European Muslim communities. They also took stock of the progress done and of the need to keep mapping and reaching out to other lady imams and women Muslim leaders in Europe to set up a robust community of peers.

Participating lady imams have decided to continue collaborating and meeting regularly online to keep sharing knowledge and exchanging best practices to enable transnational cooperation to define their functioning and future activities.

The group dynamic expressed the eagerness and willingness to converge into a mutual initiative empowering each member's efforts to establish robust international cooperation between their respective initiatives and communities.





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