

Officials Stoke Anti-Muslim Hatred Following Brussels Attack

By [Stéphane Hugues](#)

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Amid growing revelations of state foreknowledge of the March 22 attacks in Brussels, ruling circles are trying to cover up their responsibility in attacks that have now claimed 35 lives and left 340 injured. As the central role of Islamist networks developed by the NATO powers in their proxy war in Syria comes to light, Belgian and French politicians are stoking up anti-Muslim hatred.

Over the last week, it has emerged that Belgian intelligence had identified the attackers and their ties to Islamist militias fighting in Syria and had been warned of the timing and targets of their attacks. Nevertheless, police did not monitor the attackers or apprehend them as they amassed a huge bomb-making arsenal and took it to their targets. Information continues to emerge about how the backing of Islamist forces by Washington and its allies in Syria has produced a network of Islamist fighters in Europe enjoying a considerable level of complicity from the state.

“Western spy assessments for months misjudged the jihadi group’s ambition to export violence,” lamented the *Financial Times* in an article that estimated the number of fighters who have returned to Europe. With approximately 30,000 foreign fighters having travelled to Syria, there are according to the FT “well over 1,200 returnees inside the EU’s borders. Britain has about 350, France 250 (plus another 250 believed to be on their way back), Germany 270, Belgium 118, and Scandinavia about 200, according to official intelligence figures.”

The few thousand youth who do join ISIS are allowed to go to Syria by the Belgian secret services like their colleagues across Europe to fight the proxy war for regime change operations in Syria. It is these European governments that created the conditions for terrorist attacks in their own countries. As the scandal mounts in Belgium over the state’s role in the attacks, bourgeois politicians of all stripes are seeking to divert attention from the politically criminal character of their policies by instead inciting fear and hatred of Europe’s Muslim population.

In terms that could have easily been used by the neo-fascist National Front (FN), social-democratic French youth minister Patrick Kanner issued an extraordinary denunciation of Molenbeek, the immigrant area of Brussels where fugitive Paris attack suspect Salah Abdeslam was found. Though Abdeslam was supposedly “Europe’s most wanted man” for the four months he was in hiding, it has been revealed that Belgian police were aware of his exact address the entire time.

Speaking to *i>Télé*, Kanner denounced Molenbeek as “a deeply un-integrated system, a

mafia system with an underground economy, a system where the public services have almost disappeared, a system where elected officials have given up trying.”

In comments that threaten immigrants in France with a police crackdown, Kanner smeared immigrant neighbourhoods across France with the same brush: “There are today, as is well known, hundreds of neighbourhoods in France that present potential similarities to what happened in Molenbeek.”

In Belgium, leading members of the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), the Flemish-nationalist party that is the main force behind the government of Belgian prime minister Charles Michel, are also denouncing Muslims and immigrants.

N-VA leader and Antwerp mayor Bart de Wever gave an interview to *Der Spiegel* denouncing German chancellor Angela Merkel’s “historic mistake” in announcing last year that Germany would grant asylum to refugees fleeing the wars in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. He called the integration of Muslims in Belgian society a failure: “We were not in a position to offer them a Flemish version of the American dream. That is our problem.”

At the same time, reports have made it quite clear that the Belgian government played a key role in the far-right, anti-Muslim protest that took place in Brussels on Sunday.

On Saturday, the government cancelled a demonstration called “The March Against Fear” organised by the Socialist Party (PS), a francophone party that is currently Belgium’s main opposition party. Interior Minister Jan Jambon (N-VA) and Brussels mayor Yvan Mayeur (PS) jointly announced the cancellation of the protest: “Given police capacity on the ground, and because the priority goes to the judicial enquiries, we would like to ask that you not demonstrate tomorrow [Sunday].”

On Sunday, more than 400 far-right youth from the Vilvoorde area near Brussels converged on the local station to go to the square where the “March Against Fear” protest had been called. Local police did not intervene. The youth boarded a train bound for Brussels where they were met at the station by federal and local police. Police accompanied the youth to the Brussels stock exchange, where silent vigils have been held everyday since the attacks.

The youth took over the square, in front of the stock exchange, starting a vicious anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim demonstration featuring Nazi salutes. Those at the vigil were forced to take refuge on the steps of the stock exchange.

The far-right youth carried banners saying, “The Casuals against terrorism”. They belong to the Belgian wing of “Casuals United” originally formed in Britain from football hooligans on an anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim basis. The 400 or so youth had been expected, as they had organised their trip on the organisation’s Facebook page in the preceding week.

The double standard involved in the Michel government’s handling of the matter is self-evident. A far-right protest was allowed to proceed and even granted police escort, while the PS organisers of a demonstration ostensibly against fear and for multicultural understanding hurriedly called it off, bowing to official claims there was no police available to watch protests.

The government’s role in the protest points to the significance of the well-known, far-right sympathies of elements of the Belgian government, in line with moves to rehabilitate neo-fascistic sentiment in France and across Europe.

Interior Minister Jan Jambon, a top N-VA official and associate of de Wever, maintains little ambiguity on his ties to the extreme right. Asked in 2014 about his attendance at a 2001 meeting of the Saint-Maartensfonds, an association defending World War II-era Flemish volunteers who joined the Nazis' genocidal war of aggression against the USSR, he told *La Libre Belgique*: "People who collaborated with the Germans had their reasons. I was not alive at the time."

He then called Belgian collaboration with the Nazi rule in Belgium during World War II an "error," but proceeded to downplay its significance—dismissing the collaboration, which involved the formation of a fascist regime in Belgium, as a "minor news item."

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Articles by: [Stéphane Hugues](#)

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