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## **HOLLANDE UNDER FIRE OVER NOMINEE TO RUN NEW ISLAM FOUNDATION**

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EurActiv

François Hollande has come under fire for picking a 77-year-old former district head of occupied Algeria to bridge divisions in French society between Muslims and Christians, as the French president struggles to heal rifts caused by recent terror attacks.

Those divisions are reflected in President Hollandes own differences in opinion with Prime Minister Manuel Valls over how to stop mosques from receiving funding from foreign countries.

Hollande has floated the idea of nominating Jean-Pierre Chevènement to head up the Foundation of French Islam. But the choice of Chevènement, a politician with no specific link to Islam, has drawn criticism.

Nathalie Goulet, a senator from the centre-right Union of Independent Democrats, asked on Twitter why Hollande could not find a French Muslim for the job. Green Party Senator Esther Benbassa suggested that French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve might be a better choice.

Chevènement was district head of the city of Oran during the 1962 massacre in the Algerian War of Independence, when more than 700 Europeans were killed by Algerian armed forces.

The Foundation of French Islam is a cultural organisation that finances research on Islam and supports better understanding of the religion.

The group also monitors transparency regarding foreign financial aid and supports the training of French imams. Only 20% to 30% of imams in the country are French.

French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve reportedly proposed a legal affiliation for Islam. This proposition goes against a fundamental law of the French Republic that guarantees the separation of church and state.

This law forbids a legal association between the French state and any religion.

Supporters of the plan argue that an association with Islam could mean better organisation of Islam in the country, and also boost state control over religion and prevent radicalisation.

The French are very attached to the century-old law guaranteeing the separation of church and state. President Hollande quickly attempted to put an end to the controversy.

This is where the French president and prime minister diverge. Valls wants to put a temporary stop

to foreign financing of mosques and imam training. In an opinion piece in the Journal du Dimanche, the prime minister declared that the country must rebuild a French funding capacity to help build and preserve mosques.

Valls stated that he wants to conceive a new relationship between France and Islam to fight against radicalisation.

As the fathers of the law of 9 December, 1905 [on the separation of the church and state], we must invent a balance with Islam in France under which the Republic offers a guarantee of free exercise of religion. If Islam is not helping the Republic to fight against those who undermine public freedoms, it will be increasingly hard for the Republic to guarantee this freedom of worship, Valls wrote.

[View image on Twitter](#)

France has been on edge for months after a string of deadly attacks claimed by the Islamic State, including bombings in Paris and Brussels and the truck crash at a Bastille Day celebration in Nice.

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