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**ROBERT MENARD, FAR-RIGHT FRENCH MAYOR, 'TO BE TRIED ON HATE CHARGES'**

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23.12.2016

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BBC (22 December 2016)

A far-right French mayor is to be tried on hate charges over comments that include a claim the number of Muslim students in his city was a "problem", media and judicial sources say.

Robert Menard will face charges of incitement to hatred or discrimination. Media say the trial is set for 8 March.

He has denied that his remarks were discriminatory.

The Beziers mayor is an ally of the anti-immigrant National Front party led by Marine Le Pen.

The case is centred on two statements from the mayor, Le Monde newspaper (in French) reports.

On 1 September, France's first day back at school, he said on Twitter he was witnessing the "great replacement", a widely used term to describe the alleged eviction of the country's white and Christian population by Muslims in parts of France.

Robert Menard: France's strongest far-right mayor

[Screengrab of tweet from Robert Menard reads, in French: #ReturnoftheClasses: the most striking proof of the ongoing 'great replacement'. Just look at old class photos.] Image copyrightTWITTER - @ROBERTMENARDFR

Image captionTweet from the mayor says: "#ReturnoftheClasses: the most striking proof of the ongoing great replacement. Just look at old class photos."

Then, on 5 September, he said on French news channel LCI: "In a class in the city centre of my town, 91% of the children are Muslims. Obviously, this is a problem. There are limits to tolerance."

French law prohibits any gathering of data based on people's religious beliefs or ethnicity.

Mr Menard defended his comments, saying: "I just described the situation in my town... It is not a value judgement, it's a fact. It's what I can see."

He prompted outrage among opponents in October by putting up anti-migrant posters and calling for a local referendum ahead of the arrival of asylum-seekers in his southern French town, AFP news agency reports.

Under the headline "That's It, They're Coming", is an image of a crowd of migrants, all of them men, outside the cathedral in Beziers.

Mr Menard was for 23 years the head of the media rights group, Reporters Without Borders.

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Kaynak/Source: