



Values of the Republic and Secularism

SECULARISM: A NATIONAL PLAN TO TRAIN FIELD ACTORS

The principle of secularism is at the heart of the priorities of the meetings of the Inter-Ministerial Committees on Equality and Citizenship held in 2015 and 2016.

In addition to measures taken to make that principle known and complied with in schools, in the civil service, and in the business world, the General Commission for Territorial Equality (CGET) has been tasked with designing and rolling out a national training plan aimed at field actors in urban policy, youth, and sport. The “Valeurs de la République et Laïcité” (“Values of the Republic and Secularism”) plan is a response to the needs expressed by those professionals working in contact with the public, especially young people. Its objective is to help place their professional practices in compliance with the legal framework, out of a wish to educate the public with whom they deal. Ten thousand people a year (facilitators, mediators, educators, trainers, etc.) will be trained over the next two years.

SECULARISM IN QUESTIONS WHY SPEAK OF SECULARISM TODAY?

For several years, questions relating to wearing the veil in schools, crèches, and public areas, to the food served in school canteens, to street prayers, to caricatures, etc., have been headlines in the media. The tragic events of 2015 offered a reminder of the need to share the basic values and principles that underpin our “indivisible, secular, democratic, and social” Republic¹.

However, those debates bear witness to a partial knowledge of secularism, focused on what it prohibits rather than what it guarantees and permits. Prejudices, misinterpretations, and misunderstandings on the subject contribute to maintaining a climate of defiance towards institutions and tensions within our society between two opposing perceptions: that of secularism threatened by greater visibility of religious fact in the public arena, and that of secularism experienced as a tool of discrimination by reason of religious affiliation.

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¹ Article 1 of the Constitution of the French Republic of 4 October 1958.
Available on line:
<http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/connaissance/constitution.asp>

In that context, much field feedback, passed on by professional networks as well as by representatives of decentralised departments of the State, show a certain discouragement on the part of community and education workers, their great isolation, and difficulty in responding to the situations that they encounter or the questions that they are asked. Thus, most actors express a significant need for training, because they are poorly equipped to deal with the increasingly complex professional situations that they face daily: religious claims, proselytising, conspiracy theories, discrimination, etc.

“THE REPUBLIC MUST BE SECULAR AND SOCIAL, BUT IT WILL REMAIN SECULAR BECAUSE IT SHALL HAVE KNOWN HOW TO REMAIN SOCIAL.” JEAN JAURÈS, 1904

The “Valeurs de la République” (“Values of the Republic”) training plan is, first and foremost, a response to that request for qualification and support made by professionals. Ten thousand people a year will be trained over the next two years. Thanks to the training given to those local workers involved in implementing public policies, the ambition of the plan is to address everyone, especially young people, using clear unambiguous language to explain what secularism is and what it is not. Therefore, to create the conditions for dialogue with all the components of our society, it is necessary to agree on what we are talking about.

² Certain particular legislative or regulatory provisions apply to several parts of national territory (Alsace-Moselle, Guyane, Mayotte, Nouvelle-Calédonie, Polynésie Française, Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, Wallis et Futuna, and Terres australes et antarctiques françaises). They relate to the organisation of certain religions, especially the remuneration of ministers of religion. Reference: decision of the Constitutional Council of 21 February 2013.

WHAT IS SECULARISM?

Secularism is a legal-political principle of separation of political and religious powers. Its legal framework comes from a set of pieces of legislation, of which the cornerstone is the act of 9 December 1905 on the separation of Church and State, which states in its first article that “the Republic guarantees freedom of conscience”, i.e. the freedom to believe or not to believe, to have a religion and the freedom to perform one’s worship, to manifest one’s faith or not, and even to change it.

In its article two, the law states that “the Republic does not acknowledge, pay or subsidise any religion”, thus establishing the State’s neutrality and independence with respect to religious power².

The secular State has no religion, but that does not mean that it is anti-religious or that it ignores religions. Neutrality requires the State not to favour – or disfavour – any religion. It is even more the case that the State cannot impose a religion on citizens. The State is required to guarantee “the free exercise of worship” with respect of religious pluralism and equality. That requirement also engages the duty of neutrality of agents and officials of the State, local authorities, public departments, and similar entities. That duty of neutrality preserves the freedom of conscience and of religion of users (to whom it does not apply, except for pupils and students in State schools, colleges, and *lycées*).

In order to maintain public order the State can restrict the right to manifest one’s religion in public. It prohibits “anyone from using her / his religious beliefs as a reason not to abide by common rules that govern relationships between public authorities and individuals” (Constitutional Council, 19 November 2004). In other words, civil law always prevails over religious law.

CHALLENGING RECEIVED WISDOM

The principle of secularism is often confused with other ideas.

Secularism does not mean atheism. Secularism is not a value, an opinion, or a belief amongst others. It is the principle that enables co-existence between various beliefs, in compliance with common civil law.

Secularism must not be confused with secularisation, i.e. the loss of influence by religion in the morals and mentalities of a society. By guaranteeing the right to manifest one’s religion in public (provided that public order is not breached), secularism

does not limit religion to the private and personal sphere. On the contrary, secularism organises a space for expression and debate between the various beliefs within the public arena.

Similarly, **discrimination on grounds of religious affiliation (real or supposed)** that breaks the principle of equality of treatment between citizens **is prohibited by law.** It is an offence that can lead to a fine of up to 75,000 euros and five years’ imprisonment if it is committed in a place that receives members of the public, or for the purpose of prohibiting access thereto. The requirement for a resolutely

anti-discriminatory approach to secularism, which articulates the principles of secularism and non-discrimination in law and in action, is not optional.

Finally, **non-diversity and sexism in the public arena** are real problems that must not be denied, but which come from a set of complex factors that are cultural, social, economic, and historical. They **cannot be reduced to a religious problem** that may find its solution in an extension to the whole of civil society of the principle of neutrality that only applies to the State, and, by extension, to the public powers.

Ultimately, secularism is defined by:

- protecting freedom of conscience and guaranteeing freedom of worship;
- equality of treatment between all citizens, regardless of their beliefs;
- the neutrality of the State, and the guarantee of religious pluralism.

Knowledge of those principles and of their practical applications constitutes the main objective of that training.

**SECULARISM AND YOU:
TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

1. Secularism prohibits people from expressing their religion in public true false
2. To be secular is to be an atheist true false
3. The prohibition on concealing one's face in the public arena arises from the principle of secularism true false
4. All public officials are bound by the duty of neutrality whether or not they are in direct with the public true false

Answers: 1. False. Freedom of expression of religious beliefs is the rule / 2. False. Secularism is not a belief, but the principle that makes it possible for all beliefs to co-exist. / 3. False. The 2010 act prohibits concealing one's face in the public arena in the name of public order and the "requirements of living together". / 4. True.

ROLLING OUT THE NATIONAL TRAINING PLAN

A NETWORK OF AUTHORISED TRAINERS

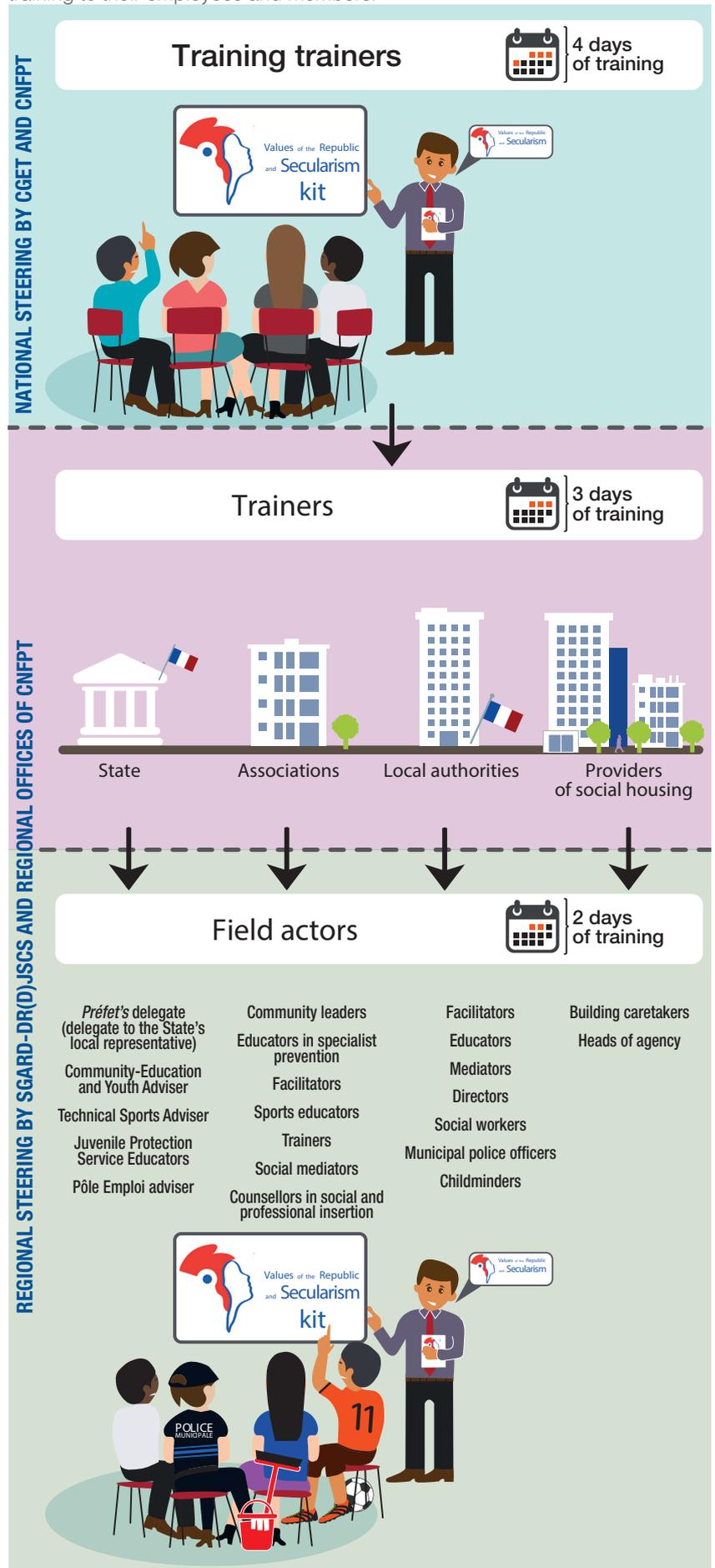
Given the size of the target populations, a leveraging system has been put in place that works on three levels:

- at national level, the CGET and the Centre National de la Fonction Publique Territoriale (CNFPT – National Centre for the Territorial Civil Service) train and authorise trainers of trainers;
- at regional level, the Regional (and *Départementale* (administrative subdivision of France) Directorates of Youth, Sport, and Social Cohesion (DR(D) JSCS) and the regional offices of the CNFPT train and authorise regional trainers;
- at local level, regional trainers train field actors, under the steerage of the CR(D)JSCSs and the CNFPT.

Trainers of trainers and trainers come from the departments of the State, local authorities, schools, and large partner networks (regional institutes of social work, community education federations, and sports federations). At regional level, they are selected on the basis of their skills as trainers and their knowledge of the profession of the actors whom they are dealing with.

In order to reach all field actors as widely as possible, the various partner networks in the areas of urban policy, youth, and sports are mobilised to disseminate

training to their employees and members.



Resource centres on urban policy are also preferred partners to amplify the roll-out of the plan, because they can identify populations of small neighbourhood associations that are not affiliated to networks. Moreover, they are mobilised to organise, in the field, actions that are complementary to the training plan: time for raising awareness and for exchanges between actors, facilitating the network of trainers, etc.

A UNIQUE EDUCATIONAL KIT FOR FIELD TRAINERS

To ensure the level of expertise as well as the consistency of the messages disseminated in the training context, a unique educational kit has been prepared by a partner working group steered by the CGET. It brings together several ministries, as well as the Observatory on Secularism, the CNFPT, and the Social Union for the Habitat. That tool is based on a pragmatic approach. Working from a historical and legal framework, the application of the principle of secularism is approached through various practical cases tailored to the professional situations of participants. Thus, trainers have a "turnkey" tool that includes content, the terms of educational facilitation, and the supports that enable them to facilitate a two-day training session.

WHO IS THE INTENDED RECIPIENT OF THE TRAINING?

The training is aimed at all professionals (public officials, employees, and community-sector volunteers) who are in direct contact with the public, with priority being given to those who are in contact with children, young people, and the inhabitants of priority urban-policy neighbourhoods. Professionals who work in the public arena and reception officers are also covered (security officers for buildings and sports facilities, reception officers in town halls, etc.).

The objective of those training sessions is to enable field actors to develop a positioning that is tailored to their intervention context, and to be able to provide answers that are in accordance with the legal framework from a perspective of dialogue and education.

The training programme will enable them to:

- acquire the basic historical and legal reference points concerning the values of the Republic and the principle of secularism;
- work on practical cases that offer answers to daily questions, e.g.: praying at the workplace, a refusal to accept diversity, a request for financing from an association with a religious activity, a request for provision of teaching, and wearing religious symbols;
- hold exchanges with other professionals concerning their professional practices.

The training course contains a common core and a specialisation module that is tailored to participants' profiles. To date, two specialisation modules have been offered:

- secularism and educational relationship;
- secularism and using public areas.

A third specialisation module, "Secularism: reception arrangements for and relationships with the public" is being finalised and it will be made available to trainers in June 2016.

The training plan has been rolled out since the beginning of 2016. By the end of this first half year of 2016, training for trainers of trainers is almost complete, and training for trainers has been generalised. Initial training sessions aimed at field actors began in April.

Find out more

Register for training

For information on training courses offered in your region, please contact:

- the Regional Directorate for Youth, Sports, and Social Cohesion (for associations and departments of the State);
- the CNFPT's regional office (for officials of the territorial civil service).

Becoming a trainer

If you wish to become a trainer, you can apply to the Regional Directorate for Youth, Sports, and Social Cohesion of your region.

Find out about the plan

For information on the "Valeurs de la République et Laïcité" training plan, you can contact the CGET at the following address:
formation.laicite@cget.gouv.fr

THE EDUCATIONAL-KIT PARTNERS

Working with the CGET to produce the educational kit were: the Ministry of the Civil Service (Directorate General of the Administration and of the Civil Service), the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education, and Research (Directorate General of School Education), the Secretariat General of Ministries for Social Affairs, the Ministry for Social Affairs and Health (Directorate General of Social Cohesion), the Ministry of Urban Affairs, Youth and Sports (Directorate of Sports, Directorate of Youth, Community Education, and Community Life) the Ministry of the Interior (Central Office of Religions), and the Observatory on Secularism, the CNFPT, and the Social Union for the Habitat.

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