

# *Muslims in France Boycott Sarkozy Party Meeting on Islam*

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Paris, June 5 (RHC)-- Muslim groups in France have boycotted an internal meeting on Islam held by the right-wing opposition party, which is led by former President Nicolas Sarkozy. Sarkozy's right-wing party, recently rebranded "The Republicans," on Thursday held a meeting on the "question of Islam" in France to debate "the place of religion" in secular France and more specifically "Islam in France." France is home to Europe's largest Muslim community.

The former French president said on the eve of the closed-door meeting: "One shouldn't run away from debates," adding: "A country is like a family. You have to talk, you have to work things through."

However, Muslim groups refrained from attending the gathering as they warned that holding such events amount to "stigmatizing" the religion. "We can't participate in an initiative like this that stigmatizes Muslims," said Abdallah Zekri from the French Muslim Council, known by its French acronym, CFCM.

Another top Muslim group, the Union of Islamic Organizations of France, also said it had not been invited to the meeting, adding that they would not take part in "that type of debate." Union President Amar Lasfar said: "To debate with a political group that has just been formed and that starts with Islam makes us a bit uneasy." Lasfar also criticized Sarkozy's recent call for banning the veil in universities and substitute meals, which are not forbidden to Muslims, in schools.

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