



Burqa Ban Gains Momentum in Europe; Italy Latest

It relies upon a law that is already in place, which mandates that no one can wear face-covering items in public places for security reasons. The AP reports, "Women who violate the ban would face fines of €100 to €300, while third parties who force women to cover their faces in public would be fined €30,000 (\$43,000) and face up to 12 months in jail."



Current law in Italy already bans the wearing of clothes that conceal identity. The new law would simply remove the religious exceptions.

Italian polls reveal that 73 percent of the country's citizens are in support of laws restricting burqas. Nearly one-third believe burqas are degrading to women.

The [movement](#) to ban burqas began in Belgium, where the penalty for wearing a burqa is a fine of from \$19 to \$31, or a week in jail. Denis Ducarme, the co-author of the Belgium legislation, explained the need for the law:

Above all, this law was based around the question of security. We think that it is important that all people must be able to be identified when in public. But we are also concerned over women forced to wear [a burqa or niqab]. If the state doesn't say "stop," the few wearing them today might be 2,000 in 10 years.

With the largest Muslim population in Europe, approximately 7-10 percent, France became the next country to ban the wearing of burqas in public. Those who violate the ban face a fine of nearly \$200, and a citizenship-class requirement. Those who force a woman to wear a burqa in public face a significantly larger fine of nearly \$20,000, and a year in prison.

"There are extremist gurus out there and we must stop their influence and barbaric ideologies," says Communist Party lawmaker André Gerin. "Covering one's face undermines one's identity, a woman's femininity and gender equality."

A city in Spain has passed a similar measure, and a number of other nations, including Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands, are considering comparable bills. However, many are concerned by potential legal issues.

While many contend that the bans are inspired by anti-Islamic sentiments, Italy's ban was actually introduced by a Muslim — Souad Sbai, a Moroccan-born member of the Freedom People Party. Sbai asserts that she would like to see Muslim women integrate into Italian society with greater ease. She added,

Five years ago, no one wore the burqa [in Italy]. Today, there is always more. We have to help women get out of this segregation ... to get out of this submission. I want to speak for those who don't have a voice, who don't have the strength to yell and say, "I am not doing well."



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on August 4, 2011

According to Sbai, approximately 3,000 women in Italy cover their faces, many of whom are forced to do so.

"We won't stop on the road towards the liberation of women who are segregated and without rights," she said.

However, despite Sbai's intentions, some say the ban may perhaps cause more harm to Muslim women in Italy.

Roberto Hamza Piccard, spokesman for an Islamic group, said that some of the more devout Muslim women will be forced to stay indoors because they are opposed to showing their faces in public. He declared that the ban against Islamic veils is "unjust and touches individual liberty." "This topic continues to be a sort of criminalization and media dramatization," he continued. "In Italy, there aren't even 100 women who wear the niqab, and not even one who wears the burqa."

USA Today reports that the burqa bans are gaining momentum in Europe and are "igniting debate over individual religious freedom vs. broader cultural values."

The [measure](#) is on its way to the Italian parliament for a vote following the summer recess. The Freedom People Party holds a small minority in the parliament.

"Final approval will put an end to the suffering of many women who are often forced to wear the burqa or niqab, which annihilates their dignity and gets in the way of integration," said Barbara Saltamartini, vice president of the Freedom People party caucus.



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