

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Name
2020		98	France	Political murder of Samuel Paty

### Announcement

The murder of history and geography teacher **Samuel Paty** has shocked everyone in the historical profession.

EuroClio, the European Association of History Educators, has issued a statement, which you can read :

- at the [EuroClio website](#)
- in pdf-format [here](#) and [here](#)
- or below this message where it is preceded by a NCH summary of the case.

2020 is a dark year because over the last eight months four historians and one singer of historical songs have become victims of political murder (or comparable death):

- On 2 April 2020, historian *Sergei Koltyrin* (1953–2020) died in a prison hospital because of untreated cancer in **Russia**; the family was not allowed to attend his funeral.
- On 29 June 2020, *Hachalu Hundessa* (1986–2020), an Oromo musician known for his songs inspired by Ethiopian history, was shot dead in **Ethiopia**.
- On 6 July 2020, *Hisham al-Hashimi* (1973–2020), a historian and leading expert on terrorist groups and extremist militias, was shot dead in **Iraq**.
- Between 27 and 30 September 2020, *Campo Elías Galindo Álvarez* (1951–2020), a retired historian and left-wing political activist, was killed with a knife in **Colombia**.
- On 16 October 2020, *Samuel Paty* (1973–2020), a history and geography teacher, was beheaded in **France**.

The [NCH Annual Report 2020](#) describes the Koltyrin, Hundessa and al-Hashimi cases. The NCH Annual Report 2021, to appear in the summer of 2021, will contain summaries of the Galindo and Paty cases.

Please read EuroClio's statement.

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## NCH SUMMARY OF THE CASE

On 16 October 2020, **Samuel Paty** ([1973]–2020), a history and geography teacher, was attacked with a knife and beheaded near his school in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, near Paris. Witnesses heard attacker Abdullakh Anzorov, an 18-year-old man of Chechen origin, shout “Allahu Akbar,” or “God is Greatest.” Anzorov then posted a picture of the beheaded Paty to a Twitter account, along with insults to President Emmanuel Macron and French “infidels” and “dogs.” He later fired at police with an air gun before being shot dead in Éragny-sur-Oise, being hit nine times in all. On 5 and 6 October 2020, Paty had taught one or two classes of Enseignement morale et civique (EMS; moral and civic education) about freedom of expression to the fourth year (13- and 14-year-olds) and shown the controversial cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad while talking about *Charlie Hebdo* (the satirical magazine that had republished the cartoons in 2015 and suffered a deadly attack for it). He had advised Muslim students to look away or leave the room if they thought they might be offended. The class caused an uproar among some Muslim parents with a few posting videos asking for Paty’s resignation and one lodging a formal complaint. Paty had also received a number of unspecified threats in the days following the class. Sixteen people were arrested for interrogation, including four school students (who may have helped identify Paty to Anzorov in exchange for payment), relatives of the attacker, the father of a pupil at Paty’s school and radical Islamist preacher Abdelhakim Sefrioui (who was accused of having issued a “*fatwa*” against Paty). Seven of them would appear before an anti-terrorism judge. Three of them, two minors (suspected of having taken money in exchange for information on Paty) and the pupil’s father, reportedly exchanged text messages with Anzorov killer prior to the attack. President Macron called the beheading an “Islamist terrorist attack.” In the National Assembly, deputies stood up to honor the teacher and condemn the “atrocious terror attack.” On 18 October 2020, rallies with tens of thousands of people were held in Paris and several other cities in support of Paty. In the wake of the murder, police raided the homes of dozens of suspected Islamic radicals and Muslim associations, including the Collectif contre l’Islamophobie en France (CCIF; Collective Against Islamophobia) and the Sheikh Yassin Collective (an Islamist group named after the founder of the Palestinian militant group Hamas). Some of those questioned had reportedly posted messages of support for Anzorov. The Pantin mosque near Paris was closed for sharing videos on Facebook calling for action against Paty and sharing his school’s address in the days before his murder.

Jean-Michel Décugis, Jérémie Pham-Lê & Ronan Folgoas, “[Yvelines-Val-d’Oise: un professeur retrouvé décapité, un suspect abattu](#),” *LeParisien* (16 October 2020); Elise Vincent & Nicolas Chapuis, “[Attentat de Conflans: neuf personnes en garde à vue, dont des parents d’élèves et des proches du meurtrier](#),” *Le Monde* (17 October 2020); “[Macron Calls Paris Beheading ‘Islamist Terrorist Attack’](#),” *BBC News* (17 October 2020); “[France Teacher Attack: Suspect ‘Asked Pupils to](#)

[Point Samuel Paty Out’](#),” *BBC News* (17 October 2020); Kim Willsher, “[Macron Speaks of ‘Existential’ Fight against Terrorism after Teacher Killed in France](#),” *Guardian* (17 October 2020); Kim Willsher, “[Teacher decapitated in Paris named as Samuel Paty, 47](#),” *Guardian* (17 October 2020); Gert van Langendonck, “[‘Er is een Frankrijk voor en een na de onthoofding’](#),” *NRC Handelsblad* (18 October 2020); “[France Teacher Attack: Police Raid Homes of Suspected Islamic Radicals](#),” *BBC News* (19 October 2020); “[France Teacher Attack: Four Pupils Held over Beheading](#),” *BBC News* (20 October 2020); Lucy Williamson, “[Samuel Paty: Beheading of Teacher Deepens Divisions over France’s Secular Identity](#),” *BBC News* (20 October 2020); “[France Teacher Attack: Pupil’s Father ‘Exchanged Texts with Killer’](#),” *BBC News* (20 October 2020); “[France Teacher Attack: Seven People to Attend Court over Samuel Paty’s Death](#),” *BBC News* (21 October 2020).

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## **EUROCLIO**

The Hague, 21 October 2020

### **STATEMENT ON THE MURDER OF OUR FRENCH COLLEAGUE SAMUEL PATY**

The assassination of French history and geography teacher Samuel Paty on 16 October in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine leaves us with feelings of sadness and revulsion. We first and foremost express our sincerest condolences to his family, his students and his colleagues. We strongly condemn this murder. Our thoughts and solidarity also go to our friends at the *APHG - Association des Professeurs d'histoire-géographie*, our French Member Association.

Samuel Paty sought to educate his students on matters of human rights and the freedom of expression. Freedom of expression, in part, is about being able to address sensitive and controversial topics, difficult as this may be. Samuel Paty used his pedagogical freedom to grant his students the tools and values needed for open debate based on mutual respect and peaceful dialogue. His approach to teaching was both brave and enlightened, and there is a bitter and tragic irony to the fact that his murder came at the hand of an extremist so young that he could have been a student benefiting from the kinds of lessons that Paty gave.

While the murder of our colleague in France stands out for its hideousness and horror, it is sadly illustrative of how dangerous our profession as history educators can be. Historians and history teachers are increasingly subjected to violence, censorship and threats. It pains us that Samuel Paty became the fifth historian to lose their life this year alone. The Network of Concerned Historians

documents such instances and the reading of the Network's annual reports is becoming increasingly painful.

Confronted with these atrocities, we applaud our French colleagues' calls for defiance in the face of terror. Now more than ever we need to stand together as a community to assert with the utmost firmness our unwavering commitment to an education that opens students to critical thinking and multiperspectivity, and allows them to deal with controversial issues with understanding and mutual respect. It is clear that this is an absolute prerequisite if we are to remain democratic, open, pluralistic and peaceful societies.

Steven Stegers

Executive Director

EuroClio – European Association of History Educators

**Sources:**

<https://www.euroclio.eu/2020/10/21/statement-on-the-murder-of-samuel-paty/>

or

<https://www.euroclio.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Statement-on-the-murder-of-Samuel-Paty.pdf>