

EUROPEAN  
**ISLAMOPHOBIA**  
REPORT  
2019

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)



---

EUROPEAN  
**ISLAMOPHOBIA**  
REPORT  

---

2019

---

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

---



All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical or other means, without permission in writing from the publishers.

ISBN: 978-625-7040-52-5  
COPYRIGHT © 2020 by SETA  
First Published in 2020

Cover and Layout: Erkan Söğüt  
Proofreading: Dr. Eva Stamoulou Oral  
Printed in Turkey, Istanbul by Turkuvaz Haberleşme ve Yayıncılık A.Ş.,

**SETA | FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND  
SOCIAL RESEARCH**

Nenehatun Caddesi No: 66 GOP Çankaya 06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE  
Phone: +90 312.551 21 00 | Fax :+90 312.551 21 90  
www.setav.org | info@setav.org | @setavakfi

**SETA | İstanbul**

Defterdar Mh. Savaklar Cd. Ayvansaray Kavşağı No: 41-43  
Eyüpsultan İstanbul TÜRKİYE  
Phone: +90 212 315 11 00 | Fax: +90 212 315 11 11

**SETA | Washington D.C.**

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 1106  
Washington, D.C., 20036 USA  
Phone: 202-223-9885 | Fax: 202-223-6099  
www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org | @setadc

**SETA | Berlin**

Französische Straße 12, 10117 Berlin Germany  
Phone: +49 30 20188466

**SETA | Brussels**

Avenue des Arts 27, 1000 Bruxelles, Belgique  
Tel: +3226520486

# CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>THE STATE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE IN 2019</b> Enes Bayraklı, Farid Hafez	<b>7</b>
<b>ALBANIA</b> Nada Dosti	<b>57</b>
<b>AUSTRIA</b> Farid Hafez	<b>79</b>
<b>BELGIUM</b> Amina Easat-Daas	<b>115</b>
<b>BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA</b> Hikmet Karčić	<b>141</b>
<b>BULGARIA</b> Aziz Nazmi Şakir	<b>161</b>
<b>CROATIA</b> Nejra Kadić Meškić	<b>183</b>
<b>CZECH REPUBLIC</b> Selma Muhić Dizdarević	<b>207</b>
<b>DENMARK</b> Amani Hassani	<b>225</b>
<b>ESTONIA</b> Egert Rünne, Liina Laanpere	<b>247</b>
<b>FINLAND</b> Enrique Tessieri	<b>261</b>
<b>FRANCE</b> Léonard Faytre	<b>281</b>
<b>GERMANY</b> Enes Bayraklı	<b>327</b>
<b>GREECE</b> Ali Huseyinoglu, Alexandros Sakellariou	<b>357</b>
<b>HUNGARY</b> Nadia Jones-Gailani, Gabi Góbl	<b>385</b>
<b>IRELAND</b> James Carr	<b>409</b>
<b>ITALY</b> Antonia Roberta Siino	<b>431</b>
<b>KOSOVO</b> Adem Ferizaj	<b>455</b>
<b>LITHUANIA</b> Giedrė Blažytė	<b>481</b>
<b>MALTA</b> Sara Ezabe Malliue	<b>497</b>
<b>MONTENEGRO</b> Amina Šemsović	<b>513</b>
<b>THE NETHERLANDS</b> Amina Smits Akılma	<b>531</b>
<b>NORTH MACEDONIA</b> Orhan Ceka	<b>563</b>
<b>NORWAY</b> Vemund Aarbakke	<b>591</b>
<b>POLAND</b> Anna Piela	<b>609</b>
<b>ROMANIA</b> Bogdan Ghenea	<b>637</b>
<b>RUSSIA</b> Sofia A. Ragozina	<b>657</b>
<b>SERBIA</b> Ivan Ejub Kostić	<b>679</b>
<b>SLOVAKIA</b> Jozef Lenč	<b>703</b>
<b>SLOVENIA</b> Ana Frank	<b>721</b>
<b>SPAIN</b> Aurora Ali	<b>737</b>
<b>SWITZERLAND</b> Oliver Wäckerlig	<b>765</b>
<b>THE UNITED KINGDOM</b> Aristotle Kallis	<b>791</b>

## ABOUT EDITORS

### **Enes Bayraklı**

Mr. Bayraklı earned his BA, MA and PhD from the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna, and conducted research for his PhD thesis at the University of Nottingham in Britain between 2009 and 2010. He took office as a deputy director at Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in London in 2011-2013. Mr. Bayraklı also served as the founding director of Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers in Constanta and Bucharest during the period of August-December 2012. Mr. Bayraklı has been a faculty member in the Department of Political Science at the Turkish-German University since 2013. His fields of research include the Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy, Cultural Diplomacy, Foreign Policy Analysis, German Politics and Foreign Policy. bayrakli@tau.edu.tr

### **Farid Hafez**

Farid Hafez, PhD (Political Science, University of Vienna), is a political scientist and non-resident senior researcher at Georgetown University's "The Bridge Initiative" at the School of Foreign Service. He defended his habilitation thesis on "Islam Politics in the Second Republic of Austria" at the University of Salzburg in 2019. In 2017, he was a Fulbright visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley and in 2014, he was a visiting scholar at Columbia University, New York. Since 2010, he has been the editor of the *Islamophobia Studies Yearbook*, and since 2015 the co-editor of the *European Islamophobia Report*. Hafez has received the Bruno Kreisky Award for the "Political Book of the Year" for his anthology *Islamophobia in Austria* (co-edited with John Bunzl). He has more than 100 publications in leading journals such as *Politics and Religion*, *Patterns of Prejudice*, and *German Politics and Society*. His latest publications are *Islamophobia in Muslim Majority Societies* (Routledge, co-edited with Enes Bayraklı, 2019) and *Feindbild Islam. Über die Salonfähigkeit von Rassismus* (Islamophobia. On the Acceptance of Racism. Bohlau, 2019). Email: farid.hafez@sbg.ac.at

*For more information about the EIR:*

[www.islamophobiaeurope.com](http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com)

[islamophobia@setav.org](mailto:islamophobia@setav.org)

# FOREWORD

In 2019, the world witnessed the bloody consequences of the white supremacist ideology of the “Great Replacement” and other conspiracy theories that speculate about the imagined danger posed to white people by non-white – often Muslim – immigration. While the Islamophobic terror attack in Christchurch, New Zealand made the headlines, mosques have also been targeted in Germany, the UK, France, and Norway resulting in dozens of deaths and injured persons. Facing this rising threat, most European states insist on a Janus-faced stance. On the one hand, European governments worked hard to track far-right terror groups and dismantle them. On the other, through their discriminative declarations, bills, and security policies targeting mainly Muslim people they directly participated in the normalization of Islamophobia in Europe.

This 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the *European Islamophobia Report* draws on this fundamental contradiction. The 35 local scholars, experts, and civil society activists gathered in this book make clear that besides the liberal legacy of individualistic human rights, a darker side of European history is recovering strength and gathering supporters all around the continent. This is the passion of “dehumanizing the Other” and the systematic exclusion of Muslim people from the European “We.”

Two sides of the same coin. While the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Dunja Mijatović “expressed concern about the resurgence of nationalistic movements which fuel anti-Muslim feelings and practices in Europe” following the commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide on 11 July 2019, the Austrian novelist Peter Handke – well known for his glorification of the Serbs during the Bosnian genocide – received the Nobel Prize in Literature in October

2019. The *European Islamophobia Report 2019* discloses the depth of this “Srebrenica scar” and analyzes the daily challenges resulting from such ambiguity for millions of European Muslims.

All 32 country reports included in this report do not only analyze the phenomenon of Islamophobia but also explore pro-active solutions by civil society and propose detailed policy recommendations. We hope this compendium of useful insights and data will provide European policy-makers and institutions valuable tools to tackle anti-Muslim racism in Europe seriously.

Burhanettin Duran  
*SETA General Coordinator*

# THE STATE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE IN 2019

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ

Five years ago, the launching of the *European Islamophobia Report* responded to an urgent need to demonstrate the very presence of Islamophobia across the European continent in different fields such as media, politics, legislation, employment, and the Internet. We felt obliged to produce a European-wide solid report to unmask the key issues at hand. We are happy to present the fifth edition of the annual *European Islamophobia Report* (EIR). The *EIR 2019* includes a general assessment of Islamophobia in Europe in the year 2019 and 32 country reports that include almost all EU member states and additional countries such as Russia, Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Montenegro. The *EIR 2019* brought together 35 scholars, experts, and civil society activists from various European countries who are specialized on racism and Islamophobia studies. They cover various issues from media, politics, and the justice system to the Internet, and offer concrete policy recommendations for civil society and politics. As our audience grows to include practitioners, scholars, and the general public, our website has acquired an audience from 165 countries, and the *EIR* and its findings have been cited frequently by international organizations, politicians, NGOs, scholars, and local and international media outlets.

The year 2019 was an eventful year for Islamophobic developments both on a global and a European level. Apart from the Islamophobic terror attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand and Hanau, Germany, the most striking example of the normalization of Islamophobia in 2019 in Europe was the scandal around the Nobel Committee's decision to award Peter Handke the Nobel Prize in Literature. One cannot imagine that in the contemporary world a Holocaust denier can receive any Nobel Prize, let alone the Nobel Prize in Literature. No matter the literary faculties of an author, such an act is unimaginable. Yet the Austrian author Peter Handke was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature despite the outcry from sound intellectuals across the world. This revealed again how insensitive and ignorant important global institutions are to the long history of Islamophobic ideology, in this particular case

in the heart of Europe. Handke has a long history of genocide denial, as the author of this year's report on Kosovo, Adem Ferizaj, demonstrates. During the Kosovo War, Handke expressed his wish to be "a Serbian-Orthodox monk fighting for Kosovo."<sup>1</sup> In 2006, Handke gave a eulogy at the funeral of Slobodan Milošević, the Serbian dictator responsible for the genocides against Albanians and Bosnians in the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> As Ferizaj suggests, "Awarding the most important literary prize to such a writer not only suggests a deeply rooted Euro-Atlantic indifference towards the fate of Muslim-majority European countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina or Kosovo, it also represents a fit occasion for the normalization of Islamophobic attacks against Kosovo's right to exist by European politicians."<sup>3</sup>

## Working Definition of Islamophobia

There are numerous definitions of Islamophobia which are influenced by different theoretical approaches such as racism and prejudice studies or decolonial perspectives.<sup>4</sup> As we have outlined already in the first edition of the EIR in 2015, we use a working definition of Islamophobia that theorizes Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism. "When talking about Islamophobia, we mean anti-Muslim racism. [...] Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilizing and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat – real or invented – and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/rights/definition of a constructed 'we'. Islamophobia operates by constructing a static 'Muslim' identity, which is attributed in negative terms and generalized for all Muslims. At the same time, Islamophobic images are fluid and vary in different contexts, because Islamophobia tells us more about the Islamophobe than it tells us about the Muslims/Islam."<sup>5</sup>

## Combating Islamophobia in European and International Institutions

In 2019, European and international institutions attempted to assess anti-Muslim racism worldwide. Their surveys and reports warned world leaders about the dangers for democracy and public order posed by three main aspects of Islamophobia:

---

1. Nataly Bleuel, "Peter Handke: Mars Attacks!", *Der Spiegel*, 1 April 1999, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/peter-handke-mars-attacks-a-15537.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020). The quote has been translated from German into English by the author of this report.

2. Aleksandar Hemon, "The Bob Dylan of Genocide Apologists", *The New York Times*, 15 October 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/15/opinion/peter-handke-nobel-bosnia-genocide.html?auth=login-google>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

3. For more information see the report on Kosovo by Adem Ferizaj in this volume.

4. Farid Hafez, "Schools of Thought in Islamophobia Studies: Prejudice, Racism, and Decoloniality", *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 4, 2 (2018), pp. 210-225.

5. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, "Introduction", *European Islamophobia Report 2015*, eds. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2016), pp. 5-8.

- International far-right networks that trigger Islamophobic terror attacks.
- Institutional racism, i.e. structural forms that discriminate against Muslim citizens.
- The impact of counterterrorism policies on human rights.

The following paragraphs put forth the ways in which leading European and international institutions draw on these three dimensions of Islamophobia. Following this, their actions to combat Islamophobia will be analyzed.

### **International far-right networks and Islamophobia**

The UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racial Intolerance E. Tendayi Achiume reported on the rise of neo-Nazi movements and “other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.”<sup>6</sup> In another report, she warned readers about the rising recruiting efforts of neo-Nazi groups among young people.<sup>7</sup> Achiume also pointed out the fact that the rise of white supremacist groups leads to violent attacks such as the “Islamophobic attack in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019, and the anti-Semitic attack in Pittsburgh, United States in 2018.”<sup>8</sup> Yet, she noticed that such groups have been tolerated in Europe until today, neo-Nazi and far-right ideologies being “part of mainstream discourse” and receiving “political endorsement.” Achiume concluded, “The Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence has noted that in Europe, the main difference in status between neo-Nazi-inspired extremism and Islamist extremism is that the latter is ‘quite clearly and broadly rejected within communities.’”<sup>9</sup>

The Council of Europe, through its European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), also underlined the risk inherent in the banalization of far-right and white supremacist ideologies in Europe, and the bloody consequences that might occur as a result. In the ECRI’s annual report on 2019 activities, Marija Pejčinović Burić, secretary general of the Council of Europe, claimed, “Europe is facing a shocking reality: antisemitic, anti-Muslim and other racist hate crimes are increasing at an alarming rate, the most recent example being the extremist shooting in Hanau, Germany, in which nine people were killed and several wounded. Such heinous acts are often precipitated by poisonous words and conspiracy theories spread on social media and the internet.”<sup>10</sup>

6. “Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance”, UN General Assembly, 30 July 2019, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3826582>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

7. “Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance, Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland”, UN General Assembly, 24 June-12 July 2019.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. “Annual Report of ECRI Activities Covering the Period from 1 January to 31 December 2019”, ECRI, March 2020, <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-annual-report-2019/16809ca3e1>, (Access date: 10 May 2020).

In its *12th Report on Islamophobia* (March 2019), the Islamophobia Observatory of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation highlighted the connections between far-right movements that pave the way for the spread of hate ideologies. The report focuses particularly on the links between the UK Independence Party, Marine Le Pen's French National Rally, Geert Wilders's Dutch Freedom Party, the Italian Lega (League), the Alternative for Germany, the Hungarian Fidesz party, and also Steve Bannon, the American activist and former advisor to Donald Trump. The report notices that all those parties are on the rise according to the latest elections. All these actors share similar anti-EU, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigration ideology.<sup>11</sup>

In its report *Countering Racism and Xenophobia in the EU* (March 2019), the European Commission highlighted the connection between the normalization of Islamophobia, online far-right networks, and violent attacks against Muslims. Hence "surveys published in 2018 show that within the EU, on average 37% of the population admits to having unfavourable views of Muslims."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, "a study by the European Parliament Research Service shows that the perception of incidence of anti-Muslim hatred by the Muslim community rose from 12% in 2010 to 25% in 2016."<sup>13</sup>

The *Annual Activity Report 2019* of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Dunja Mijatović also warned against "the growing political and societal acceptance of racism" as "Antisemitism, Islamophobia and anti-Gypsyism have reached alarming levels."<sup>14</sup> Following the commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide on 11 July 2019, Mijatović published an op-ed in the *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso*<sup>15</sup> in which "she expressed concern about the resurgence of nationalistic movements which fuel anti-Muslim feelings and practices in Europe and about the hate incidents occurring against Roma and Jews."<sup>16</sup> In this piece, she claimed the Srebrenica genocide was the result of a long process of "dehumanising the Other," a process that she believes nowadays is on the rise.

## **Institutional racism**

The UN special rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and racial intolerance in a visit to the United Kingdom and Northern

---

11. "12th Report on Islamophobia", Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, March 2019, [https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/islamophobia/2019/12th\\_islamophobia\\_annual\\_report\\_2019\\_en.pdf](https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/islamophobia/2019/12th_islamophobia_annual_report_2019_en.pdf), (Access date: 10 May 2020).

12. "Countering Racism and Xenophobia in the EU: Fostering a Society Where Pluralism, Tolerance and Non-discrimination Prevail", European Commission, 15 March 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/swd\\_countering\\_racism\\_and\\_xenophobia\\_in\\_the\\_eu.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/swd_countering_racism_and_xenophobia_in_the_eu.pdf), (Access date: 10 May 2020).

13. Ibid.

14. Dunja Mijatović, "Annual Activity Report 2019", Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, 21 April 2020.

15. Dunja Mijatović, "Srebrenica: Dehumanising the Other", *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Bosnia-Herzegovina/Srebrenica-dehumanising-the-Other-195579>, (Access date: 10 May 2020)

16. Ibid.

Ireland underlined the importance of addressing “structural forms of racial discrimination and inequality” that lead “persons belonging to racial and ethnic minorities [to] have poorer outcomes in many areas of life.”<sup>17</sup> Achiume advised countries to assess “the racial impact of laws and policies on austerity measures, criminal justice, counter-terrorism and immigration.”<sup>18</sup> By “racial impact” we should understand here the discriminative impact on individuals based on race, religious identity, gender, etc. Achiume noticed that these factors are often conflated in daily discrimination. In the specific case of the United Kingdom, the rapporteur reported that the criminal justice process targets “ethnic minority communities [...] disproportionately.”<sup>19</sup> She shows for instance that “Muslims, who are about 5 per cent of the United Kingdom population, now make up about 15 per cent of the prison population. This dramatic rise is not associated with terrorism offences.”<sup>20</sup> Achiume concluded that “racial and ethnic minority offenders are overrepresented in both the adult (25 per cent) and youth (40 per cent) prison estates” and “overrepresentation is more acute among Black, Muslim and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller youth.”<sup>21</sup>

In its annual report on 2019 activities, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) showed how the normalization of xenophobic nationalism tends to structurally discriminate Muslims in Europe. “Xenophobic nationalism frequently continues to portray Islam as a religion alien to the national culture and identity of many member states. Anti-Muslim rhetoric makes Muslims wearing signs of their religion far more vulnerable, while multiple discrimination worsens the situation further, notably for Muslim women.”<sup>22</sup> The ECRI noticed that discriminating laws are not only backed by ultra-nationalist parties: “The elections to the European Parliament and to several national parliaments saw a further rise in popularity of ultra-nationalist parties in some countries. Yet, merely looking at the number of seats gained in parliamentary elections is not enough. What is remarkable is that a growing number of mainstream political parties adopted restrictive policies regarding migration and integration that were previously associated with right-wing parties.”<sup>23</sup>

In its report *Countering Racism and Xenophobia in the EU* (March 2019), the European Commission noticed that “people from ethnic or racial minorities in the EU experience higher risks of economic hardship, poor quality housing, residential segregation, unemployment and assault, whose individual impact is quantifiable in

17. “Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance, Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland”, UN General Assembly.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. “Annual Report of ECRI Activities Covering the Period from 1 January to 31 December 2019”, ECRI.

23. Ibid.

lost earnings from €1.8 billion up to €8 billion.”<sup>24</sup> The report also refers to the study of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) second *European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey* (EU MIDIS II) published in 2017<sup>25</sup> that “indicated that almost one in three Muslims felt discriminated against when looking for a job.”<sup>26</sup> The report adds that “there is evidence that candidates who openly identify as Muslim in their CV receive fewer invitations to a job interview compared to equally qualified candidates with a religiously neutral CV. Muslim women remain the most vulnerable victims in this regard.”<sup>27</sup>

The *Democracy and Human Rights in the OSCE* report published by the OSCE-ODIHR in 2019 took an intersectional perspective and focused on the multiple bias motivations (gender, religion, race, class, etc.) in structural discrimination in Europe. The report showed that racisms are most of the time gendered ideologies that first and foremost target women. This only confirms other reports and observations that institutional Islamophobia primarily impacts women.<sup>28</sup>

In her *Annual Activity Report 2019*, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Dunja Mijatović drew similar conclusions. Mijatović demonstrated how “Muslim women have been the targets of assaults for wearing face veils or headscarves.”<sup>29</sup> Yet, she also pointed out how structural discrimination negatively impacts all Muslims. “Discriminatory practices in certain contexts have made it difficult for Muslims to get a job, a house, or citizenship. Patterns revealing unspoken biases have persisted, with law enforcement officers still engaged in the illegal practice of profiling Muslims.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Impact of counterterrorism policies on human rights**

The UN special rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and racial intolerance stressed how “counter-terrorism laws and policies have vastly exacerbated Islamophobic sentiment” in the UK. Actually, the situation described by Achiume is also valid for other European countries, i.e. “national panic regarding security” and outrageous public discourse against Muslims following “terrorist attacks by individuals purporting to act in the name Islam.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, her

24. “Countering Racism and Xenophobia in the EU: Fostering a Society Where Pluralism, Tolerance and Non-discrimination Prevail”, European Commission.

25. “EU-MIDIS II: Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey”, European Commission, 3 October 2018, [https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/dataset/ds00141\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/dataset/ds00141_en), (Access date: 10 May 2020).

26. “Countering Racism and Xenophobia in the EU: Fostering a Society Where Pluralism, Tolerance and Non-discrimination Prevail”, European Commission.

27. Ibid.

28. “Democracy and Human Rights in the OSCE”, OSCE-ODHIR, (2019), <https://www.osce.org/odihr/annual-report/2019?download=true>, (Access date: 15 May 2020).

29. Dunja Mijatović, “Annual Activity Report 2019”, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe.

30. Ibid.

31. “Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related forms of Intolerance, Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland”, UN General Assembly.

concerns regarding the impact of the government's policy against extremism on human rights can be applied for everywhere else in Europe.

Leading concerns over the Prevent Strategy relate to the lack of clear, workable definitions of “extremism”, “terrorism” and “British values”, as well as the criteria used to refer individuals considered at risk of radicalization. Among other national and international stakeholders, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has expressed serious concern that the “prevent duty” creates an atmosphere of suspicion towards members of Muslim communities, that it leads to increased profiling of individuals on the basis of ethnicity and/or religion and that it adversely affects the rights to freedom of expression, education and freedom of religion (CERD/C/GBR/CO/21-23, paras. 18–19). The Special Rapporteur shares these concerns, which were reiterated during many of her consultations with civil society representatives. She is especially concerned that uncertainty and ambiguity in terminology have serious consequences for racial equality as they create a wide scope for discretionary interpretation.<sup>32</sup>

The recommendation Achiume provided to the UK government is valid for other European governments analyzed in the *EIR 2019*, namely “the Government must urgently confront the exclusionary, divisive and discriminatory environments its policies are generating.”<sup>33</sup>

Linked to counterterrorism policy is the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) by governments to control citizens. In her *Annual Activity Report 2019*, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Dunja Mijatović warned authorities about “the risks that unregulated uses of digital technologies and artificial intelligence pose to human rights, in particular privacy, equality, freedom of expression and assembly.”<sup>34</sup> She called for a “right balance between technological development and human rights protection.”<sup>35</sup>

## **Recommendations and responses to Islamophobia in European and international institutions**

The UN special rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and racial intolerance called on governments to assess the impact of their counterterrorism policies on human rights. She especially urged them not to “disproportionately target groups on the basis of religious and ethnic belonging.”<sup>36</sup>

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) calls the members states of the Council of Europe to work in cooperation with the commis-

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Dunja Mijatović, “Annual Activity Report 2019”, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe.

35. Ibid.

36. “Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance, Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland”, UN General Assembly.

sion in order to apply its recommendation against the “right-wing threat.”<sup>37</sup> Among the recommendations, we underline:

1. “A more pro-active approach and support for inclusive education are necessary.”
2. A protective and supportive approach towards grassroots NGOs and people “who advocate the interests of vulnerable groups, the national equality bodies, [who] are still lacking financial resources and staff.”
3. The acknowledgment of civil society organizations that help victims both legally and financially.
4. A careful use of artificial intelligence (AI) in security policies. AI should not lead to discrimination in societies.<sup>38</sup>

Besides these recommendations, the ECRI has also led concrete actions on the ground. Celebrating the 25th anniversary of the organization, the ECRI organized an international high-level conference entitled “On the Road to Effective Equality” in Paris under the French Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The ECRI published guidelines for the coming years and started to actualize some of its General Policy Recommendations, including General Policy Recommendation No. 5 on combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims (originally published on 27 April 2000). The ECRI also cooperated with equality bodies through numerous workshops and panels such as the 80th plenary meeting (10-13 December 2019) or the meeting with the European Court of Human Rights (10 December 2019) on combating anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred.

On 15 November 2019, the OSCE ODIHR published hate crime records for the year 2018 as reported by 42 states and 178 NGOs. This data is precious since without data there is no problem and without a problem there can be no policy to address it. Besides the publication of data, the OSCE organized a series of events such as the “Youth Activist Forum: Engaging the OSCE to Address Racism and Xenophobia” (Warsaw, 23 September 2019); the “Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting (SHDM) I - Upholding the Principles of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Including in the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief” (Vienna, Hofburg, 1-2 April 2019); or the workshop “Combatting Intolerance against Muslims through Education” (Istanbul, 15 April 2019). In all the events, the OSCE worked together with grassroots NGOs and activists in order to draw pro-active solutions to tackle racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia. Following the “Consultative Expert Meeting on Understanding Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes and Addressing the Security Needs of Muslim Communities” (Oslo, 9-10

---

37. “Annual Report of ECRI Activities Covering the Period from 1 January to 31 December 2019”, ECRI.

38. Ibid.

December 2019), the OSCE ODIHR published a guide “to aid governments in their actions on preventing and combating hate crimes including by an analysis of security risks and the necessary actions required, with the aim of improving the capacity of the police and other institutions to meet the security needs of Muslim communities and individuals.”<sup>39</sup>

The EU Commission supported the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) as it provides an “online repository of case law, reports and knowledge on cases of anti-Muslim hatred in the Member States.”<sup>40</sup> The EU Commission started to fund projects to prevent and counter anti-Muslim hatred through the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme. Furthermore, “several projects on promoting religious tolerance and inclusion have been sponsored under the Erasmus+ programme.”<sup>41</sup> In a general manner, the EU Commission focused its efforts on education, and positive narratives of tolerance and cooperation with civil society actors and national authorities.<sup>42</sup>

In February 2019, the EU Commission presented in Brussels the results of the 4th monitoring exercise on the implementation of the Code of conduct. Among the defined targets were “fighting racism and xenophobia, which requires authors of illegal hate speech offences - whether online or offline - to be effectively prosecuted.”<sup>43</sup>

Yet, one of the EU Commission’s most effective actions regarding the fight against anti-Muslim hatred has been through the actions of the Coordinator on Combating Anti-Muslim Hatred Tommaso Chiamparino. Among the different initiatives taken by Chiamparino was the organization of the “Workshop on Synergies and Good Practices on Tackling Anti-Muslim Racism and Discrimination” (Madrid, 24-25 June). More than 100 NGOs and national authorities met at this event to discuss how to make concrete progress on tackling anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination. “The program included not only keynote speeches and round tables, but workshops where civil society actors, state officials and people from bureaucracy came together to exchange experiences, ideas, and best practices examples.”<sup>44</sup> One of the main concerns expressed by the participants was that “fighting Islamophobia has not been

39. “Understanding Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes - Addressing the Security Needs of Muslim Communities: A Practical Guide”, OSCE, (2020), <https://www.osce.org/odihr/muslim-security-guide?download=true>, (Access date: 15 May 2020).

40. “Countering Racism and Xenophobia in the EU: Fostering a Society Where Pluralism, Tolerance and Non-discrimination Prevail”, European Commission.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. “How the Code of Conduct Helped Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online”, European Commission, February 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/hatespeech\\_infographic3\\_web.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/hatespeech_infographic3_web.pdf), (Access date: 10 May 2020).

44. Farid Hafez, “The Second European Commission’s Meeting on Combatting Anti-Muslim Racism”, Bridge, 31 July 2019, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/the-second-european-commissions-meeting-on-combatting-anti-muslim-racism/>, (Access date: 10 May 2020).

dealt with at the same level as fighting other forms of racism such as antisemitism or Anti-Ziganism (also known as Romaphobia or anti-Gypsyism). For example, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on combating Antisemitism on 1 June 2017 that entails specific policy recommendations for the EU level as well as national level. As well, the European Parliament passed a resolution to combat anti-Gypsyism with specific policies, but has yet to pass one for combatting Islamophobia.<sup>45</sup> During this event, dozens of civil society organizations shared their recommendations for combatting Islamophobia with member states and European institutions.

There have been other actions taken regarding anti-Muslim hatred as well. For the first time, the European Parliament acknowledged the European Day of Action against Islamophobia and Religious Intolerance on 21 September.<sup>46</sup> On the Islamic New Year, the first vice president of the commission sent a strong statement to tackle anti-Muslim hatred. On 23-26 September 2019, the European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI) organized the EU Anti-Racism and Diversity Week in the European Parliament. Finally, Equinet Europe published infographics in February 2019 on World Hijab Day (1 February).

## Anti-Muslim Attitudes High in Europe

A report published by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) in April 2019 showed that ahead of the elections for the European Parliament, while there was no single issue on voters' minds, large segments of the voters were concerned about so-called Islamic radicalism. While 15% of the voting of the EU highlighted migration as one of the top threats to Europe, 22% of the EU voting population is concerned about so-called Islamic radicalism, which ranks highest amongst all threatening images.<sup>47</sup> According to this study, so-called Islamic radicalism is a greater preoccupation for people aligned with center and center-right parties than necessarily for those aligned with far-right parties.

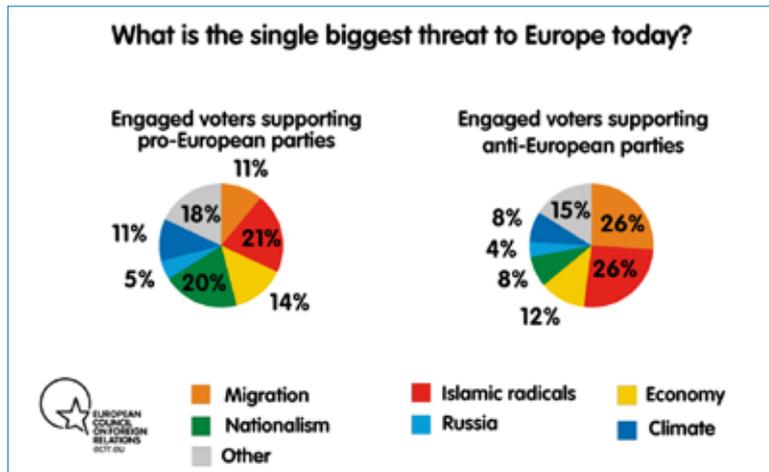
Given that "Islamic radicalism" is itself a peculiar notion that invites the amalgamation of a variety of terms that are (often misguidedly) related to Islam with no differentiation between the spheres of politics, society, and religion, this poll reveals the centrality of Islamophobic discourses in political debates all across Europe. The fact that this "fear" also exists among pro-European parties and not only among anti-EU, far-right political parties tells us something about the relative hegemony of Islamophobia.

---

45. Ibid.

46. Yusuf Hatip, "EU Parliament Holds Event on Islamophobia", Anadolu Agency, 24 September 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/eu-parliament-holds-event-on-islamophobia/1592930>, (Access date: 10 May 2020).

47. Ivan Krastev, Mark Leonard and Susi Dennison, "What Europeans Really Want: Five Myths Debunked", ECFR, April 2019, [https://www.ecfr.eu/page/ECFR\\_What\\_Europeans\\_Really\\_Want\\_Five\\_Myths\\_Debunked.pdf](https://www.ecfr.eu/page/ECFR_What_Europeans_Really_Want_Five_Myths_Debunked.pdf), (Access date: 10 May 2020).



**Figure 1:** What is the single biggest threat to Europe today?<sup>48</sup>

The Eurobarometer reveals something similar. In the latest poll published in September 2019, 71% of respondents said that they would feel comfortable working with a Muslim colleague, which simultaneously implies that 29% do not feel comfortable. Still, countries with a high rate of acceptance like the UK (93%), the Netherlands (91%), France, and Sweden (both 87%) stand in contrast to countries with a very high aversion like the Czech Republic (35%), Hungary (37%), and Lithuania (47%).<sup>49</sup> Asked about having sons or daughters in a romantic relationship with people from other religions, again Muslims were the least favored when compared to Jews, Buddhists, Christians, and atheists. Only 53% would feel comfortable if one of their children was romantically involved with a Muslim, again with the highest number in the UK (82%), followed by France (68%), Ireland, and Sweden (66%). The respondents that were least favorable to such a notion were in the Czech Republic (18%), Lithuania (22%), Cyprus, and Hungary (each 23%).<sup>50</sup> The fact that the least favorable positions vis-à-vis Muslims can be found in countries in Eastern Europe, where the least number of Muslims live, confirms the theory that racism operates with an imagined rather than a real figure of the other.

Other research reveals even stronger anti-Muslim attitudes. Political scientist and sociologist Jørgen Goul Andersen conducted a survey of over 5,900 Danes in 2019, where he found that about 28% agreed/partly agreed that Muslim immigrants should be deported.<sup>51</sup> This shows that anti-Muslim attitudes go so far as to restrict Muslims' civil rights, as the author of the Danish report Amani Hassani reveals.

48. Ibid, p. 9.

49. "Special Eurobarometer 493, Discrimination in the European Union", European Commission, October 2019, p. 18.

50. Ibid, p. 19.

51. Jens Reierman and Torben K. Andersen, "Hver fjerde dansker: Muslimer ud af Danmark", Mandag Morgen, 21 October 2019, [https://www.mm.dk/artikel/hver-fjerde-dansker-muslimer-skal-ud-af-danmark?utm\\_content=bufferc1d11&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](https://www.mm.dk/artikel/hver-fjerde-dansker-muslimer-skal-ud-af-danmark?utm_content=bufferc1d11&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer), (Access date: 2 February 2020).

The spread of Islamophobia, however, also generates acts of solidarity. On 10 November 2019, the historical “March against Islamophobia” took place in Paris, which gathered between 20,000 and 40,000 people (13,500 according to the Ministry of Interior).<sup>52</sup> In the Czech Republic, over 200 families volunteered to accept children and young adult immigrants from overcrowded refugee camps in Greece. Yet, as the author of the Czech report reveals, the initiative was sabotaged by the prime minister and other politicians. Up to and including 2020, the minister of interior said no children would be admitted. This shows how little compassion there is following campaigns that dehumanize Muslims.

## Hate crime

As a consequence of the spread of anti-Muslim attitudes, data on hate crime only confirms the rise of anti-Muslim attitudes in many European countries. The overwhelming majority of European states do not record Islamophobic incidents as a separate category of hate crime. The recording of anti-Muslim/Islamophobic hate crimes by the police as a separate category of hate crime is essential in uncovering the real extent of this problem and developing counterstrategies to combat it. At the same time, we all know that it is only a small minority of around only 12% of Muslims who say they have reported cases of discrimination, as the European Union’s Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) had found in a report.<sup>53</sup> In Belgium, 278 Islamophobic incidents were documented,<sup>54</sup> including physical attacks on individuals and Muslim spaces.<sup>55</sup> As the author of the report on Belgium shows, these hate crimes include acts such as vandalism of mosques,<sup>56</sup> leaving pig heads at Muslim residences,<sup>57</sup> and leaving excrement and urine at a Muslim home accompanied by swastikas being graffitied onto the Muslim family’s car.<sup>58</sup> What has already become

52. “Marche contre l’islamophobie: 13 500 manifestants présents à Paris”, *Le Point*, 18 November 2019, [https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/manifestation-contre-l-islamophobie-la-marche-controversee-prevue-ce-dimanche-a-paris-10-11-2019-2346290\\_23.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/manifestation-contre-l-islamophobie-la-marche-controversee-prevue-ce-dimanche-a-paris-10-11-2019-2346290_23.php), (Access date: 2 February 2020).

53. “Press Release: Muslims in the EU: High Levels of Trust Despite Pervasive Discrimination”, FRA, 21 September 2017, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/news/2017/muslims-eu-high-levels-trust-despite-pervasive-discrimination>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

54. “Rapport des Chiffres 2018”, Collectif contre l’Islamophobie en Belgique, (CCIB, Brussels: 2019), [http://ccib-ctib.be/wp-content/uploads/CCIB\\_PUBLIC\\_PDF\\_RapportChiffresCCIB/RAPPORT\\_CHIFFRES\\_CCIB\\_2018\\_Septembre2019.pdf](http://ccib-ctib.be/wp-content/uploads/CCIB_PUBLIC_PDF_RapportChiffresCCIB/RAPPORT_CHIFFRES_CCIB_2018_Septembre2019.pdf), (Access date: 12 January 2020).

55. Ibid.

56. “Une mosquée vandalisée à Louvain: Il n’y a pas encore de suspects”, *Le Soir*, 1 January 2020. <https://www.lesoir.be/270228/article/2020-01-01/une-mosquee-vandalisee-louvain>, (Access date: 12 January 2020).

57. “Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en Belgique”, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/islamophobia.ccib.be/>, (Access date: 12 January 2020).

58. “Hayat, mère de trois enfants se dit victime de racism: ‘On a eu de la diarrhée sur la porte’”, RTL Info, 16 September 2019, [https://www.rtl.be/info/belgique/societe/victime-de-racisme-ayat-mere-de-trois-enfants-est-a-bouton-a-eu-de-la-diarrhee-sur-la-porte-video--1157531.aspx?dt=14%3A39&fbclid=IwAR2SjbQ-kHU76kTn86NZo-WtxZc5fnoybWD2oKIdJP9uCE5r\\_z9igkonW2qU](https://www.rtl.be/info/belgique/societe/victime-de-racisme-ayat-mere-de-trois-enfants-est-a-bouton-a-eu-de-la-diarrhee-sur-la-porte-video--1157531.aspx?dt=14%3A39&fbclid=IwAR2SjbQ-kHU76kTn86NZo-WtxZc5fnoybWD2oKIdJP9uCE5r_z9igkonW2qU), (Access date: 23 December 2019).

obvious in many ways is that anti-Muslim hate crimes have continued to increase steadily and that they are distinctly gendered in nature. As the report on Belgium reveals, stabbings of Muslim women, the forced removal of Muslim women's hijabs, Muslim women being pushed onto metro tracks, and being denied employment and education are largely part of the documented cases.<sup>59</sup> Examples of direct discrimination are also revealed in the report on North Macedonia by Orhan Ceka. Ceka shows that Muslims are rejected service in restaurants, face petitions to lower the volume of adhan, and are attacked when wearing a hijab.<sup>60</sup>

## Media

The media alongside politics are the most influential spaces where Islamophobia can be either challenged or disseminated and further strengthened. While in some countries, the media challenge power structures to some extent, in most countries, the media are very much connected to power structures and represent different camps along ideological lines.

The year 2019 was no exception in terms of the central role of certain journalists in spreading Islamophobia. On Albanian television channel Ora News, a journalist suggested undertaking similar action in Albania to the Christchurch terrorist attacks. In Bosnia, the newspaper *Novosti RS* falsely claimed, "Hundreds of Jihadists Are Arriving to B&H." On Finnish television, sexual assaults were connected to the "too many asylum seekers."

The yellow press continue to produce headlines such as that of the German *Bild* "Out of Respect for the 'Salvation' Day-Care Centre Takes Pork from the Menu," which suggests a subversive Islamization of German society. Meanwhile far-right newspapers openly foster fearmongering with headlines such as "Islam Invaded Athens. Fears about a Terrorist Attack during Christmas," while nothing of the like happened. When certain press outlets construe false ideas about Muslims or Islamic institutions, politicians act accordingly. In the Netherlands, a report falsely claimed that a newly established Muslim school had ties with Salafism, which led the prime minister to declared in public that he "wouldn't send his child there."<sup>61</sup>

The opinion section is often the place where the most blatant anti-Muslim positions can be read. In Austria, opinion pieces were published where authors denied the existence of anti-Muslim racism<sup>62</sup> or framed the "Islamic tradition" as a "unique anti-Jewish tradition." In Croatia, a theologian argued that Islam is masculine to the

59. For more information see the report on Belgium by Amina Easat-Daas in this volume.

60. For more information see the report on North Macedonia by Orhan Ceka in this volume.

61. For more information see the report on the Netherlands by Amina Smits Akilma in this volume.

62. Christian Ultsch, "Die nützlichen Idioten des Attentäters von Christchurch", *Die Presse*, 15 March 2019, <https://diepresse.com/home/meinung/kommentare/leitartikel/5596641/Die-nuetzlichen-Idioten-des-Attentaeters-von-Christchurch>, (Access date: 15 May 2020).

point of being brutal (as opposed to the feminized Europe), and that it takes advantage of the surrounding commotion to sneak up on the “woman” Europe.

Established newspapers such as the Spanish *El País* published an op-ed where the right of self-determination of Muslim women was questioned. The article stated, “The importance of a piece of cloth: [t]hose who want to convince us of the innocuousness of the hijab are precisely those who do not understand that the dignity of women is above all consideration and, if necessary, of any divine text.”<sup>63</sup>

## Online Islamophobia

In most European countries, a great proportion of Islamophobic attacks against individuals takes place on the Internet. In France, around 20% of Islamophobic incidents reported by the *Collectif contre l’islamophobie en France* (CCIF) referred to online harassment or threat. Besides attacks on individuals, online Islamophobia also spreads conspiracy theories about the so-called Islamization of Europe. One of the most striking examples, is the online activity of the European network Generation Identity (GI), which is present in several countries such as France, the UK, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, and Hungary. “GI openly promotes the belief that Muslims are being brought into Europe illegally by liberal politicians to ‘replace’ Europeans in Western countries (referred to within the group as the ‘Great Replacement’).”<sup>64</sup> Other groups spread this white supremacist ideology, such as “the youth branch of the FPÖ, the RFJ, that posted an ad on its social media channels stating, ‘Mohammed most popular name for newborns in three Viennese districts.’”<sup>65</sup> In France, websites such as “FDeSouche, Resistance Républicaine, Riposte Laïque, Boulevard Voltaire, TVLibertés, Breizh-info, or Observatoire de l’Islamisation openly claim being Islamophobic and base their discourse upon the ‘clash of civilization’, ‘Great Replacement’, and ‘reverse colonialism’ theories.”<sup>66</sup> In Germany, “the right-wing extremist blog ‘Politically Incorrect’, founded by the former teacher and right-wing extremist Stefan Herre in 2004, is directed against the feared ‘Islamisation of Europe.’”<sup>67</sup>

Yet, it is not easy to analyze the extent of online Islamophobia with the rise of social media and the darknet. “According to the [Dutch] General Intelligence and Security Service’s report extreme-right groups such as Pegida, Identair Verzet, Rechts in Verzet, NVU, Erkenbrand, and Voorpost are usually active on the large platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The growth of right-extremist content is said to have stagnated on their own websites, as is the short-lived boost in their followers. However,

---

63. For more information see the report on Spain by Aurora Ali in this volume.

64. For more information see the report on Hungary by Nadia Jones-Gailani and Gabi Göbl in this volume.

65. For more information see the report on Austria by Farid Hafez in this volume.

66. For more information see the report on France by Léonard Faytre in this volume.

67. For more information see the report on Germany by Enes Bayraklı in this volume.

the focus seems to be shifting to international alternative forums, platforms, and chat apps such as 4Chan, 8kun, and EndChan, where a lot of right-extremist content is being shared, creating an international community. They use Gab (instead of Twitter), Minds and VKontakte (instead of Facebook), Telegram (instead of WhatsApp) and Bitchute (instead of YouTube) as these are less restrictive in their policy when it comes to violent or extremist content than Facebook, Twitter, or Google.”<sup>68</sup>

However, online Islamophobia also comes from so-called mainstream media or political parties. In the UK, “the Conservative Party was repeatedly put in the spotlight for the anti-Muslim [online] content made by a number of its MP candidates, councillors, and ordinary members.”<sup>69</sup> In France, “online activities of NGOs such as Printemps républicain (Republican Spring) and Comité Laïcité République (Laïcité – Republic Committee) do not attack Muslim people straightforwardly but hide their anti-Muslim racism under the veil of secularism, women’s rights, and Jacobin ideology.”<sup>70</sup>

## Politics

Islamophobia is also normalized by a discourse used by those in power. In Romania, the former president Traian Basescu, who was elected to the European Parliament for the center-right party PMP, argued on a live show on the television channel Digi24 that his motivation for going to Brussels is to protect Europe’s border of the “Muslim invasion.”<sup>71</sup> In November 2019, the French minister of interior stigmatized Muslim people by using a rhetoric that stems from the far-right ideology of the Great Replacement, which is central to Islamophobic terror today. He said, “As Minister of the Interior, and in charge of relations with religions, it is not the debate around the headscarf that concerns me, but rampant Islamism, in certain neighbourhoods, which wants to be a political system competing with the Republic.”<sup>72</sup> He thus invoked the phantasm of an “Islamist parallel society.” He also announced that he had closed 12 places of worship, four private schools, nine associations, and nearly 130 pubs because of radicalization and political Islam,<sup>73</sup> claiming the “Re-

68. For more information see the report on the Netherlands by Amina Smits Akılma in this volume.

69. For more information see the report on the UK by Aristotle Kallis in this volume.

70. For more information see the report on France by Léonard Faytre in this volume.

71. “Why Is Traian Basescu Going to Bruxelles? There Are Some Battles to Be Fought. EU Is Almost Telling Us That We Also Need to Live with the Muslim Invasion”, (De ce se duce Traian Basescu la Bruxelles? ,Sunt de dat niște bătălii. UE parcă ne spune că trebuie să trăim și cu invazia musulmană”), Digi 24, 18 June 2019, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/traian-basescu-imigranti-refugiati-flota-militara-mafie-politica-externa-ue-1148177>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

72. Christophe Castaner, Twitter, 7 November 2019, <https://twitter.com/CCastaner/status/1192409525829218304>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

73. “Municipales 2020: Emmanuel Macron se prononce contre l’interdiction des listes communautaires”, 20 Minutes, 19 November 2019, <https://www.20minutes.fr/politique/2655251-20191119-municipales-emmanuel-macron-prononce-contre-interdiction-listes-communautaires>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

publican Reconquest of Suburbs” (*Quartiers de la Reconquete Republicaine*)<sup>74</sup> which also fits into this racist discourse.

It is of little surprise that this discourse is still very much fed by far-right political parties and their representatives such as Karla Maříková, an MP for the Czech Freedom and Direct Democracy party (SDP), who invoked an openly racist argument by saying, “It is forbidden to import invasive, non-indigenous species of plants and animals to the European Union. Muslim immigrants are also non-indigenous inhabitants in Europe and the same way as other invasive species they represent the unexpected expansion and gradual supplanting of the indigenous inhabitants of Europe. Therefore, they should be forbidden from entering the EU.”<sup>75</sup> Certain far-right political parties also made huge gains, such as the far-right Vlaams Belang in Belgium. This translated into more anti-Muslim legislation. The Flemish governmental agreement set out controls of “outward signs of ... personal conviction” including the hijab in Flemish governance and education. The agreement states, “External symbols of philosophical, religious, political or other beliefs are therefore not worn with direct customer contact... We also guarantee neutrality in education. In provincial and community education, we ensure the philosophical neutrality for teachers and students.”<sup>76</sup> Far-right parties drawing on anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim mobilization also grew in parts of Europe with little to no immigrants and Muslims, thus following an Eastern European trend.<sup>77</sup> In the 2019 elections in Estonia, the far-right nationalist Conservative People’s Party of Estonia (EKRE) became part of the ruling coalition.

The European Parliament held elections in 2019. Currently, the European Parliament has seven groups and while the far-right group Identity and Democracy (formerly Europe of Nations and Freedom group) did not become the third-strongest to destabilize the old establishment parties in the parliament, it now does not come in last either. Ranking after the traditionally strong Christian Democratic European People’s Party (EPP), the Social Democrats (S&D), the liberal Renew Europe, and the Greens, Identity and Democracy now has 73 MEPs – only one less MEP than the Greens. The far-right group has thus overtaken the European Con-

---

74. “For each ‘Republican Reconquest of Suburbs’ the French government plans to assign 10 to 35 additional police or gendarmerie personnel. These additional personnel will be immediately operational and will go into the field. Each of these districts also has an anti-trafficking unit (CLT) adapted to each territory and local situation. By the end of the five-year period, 60 Republican Reconquest districts will be set up. By 2018, 15 neighborhoods have been set up and 326 staff members have been assigned to them.” For more information see “Effectifs de juin 2019 dans les quartiers de reconquête républicaine”, [interieur.gouv.fr](https://www.interieur.gouv.fr), 21 June 2019, <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/fr/Le-ministre/Dossiers-de-presse/Effectifs-de-juin-2019-dans-les-quartiers-de-reconquete-republicaine>, (Access date: 26 March 2020).

75. For more information see the report on Czech Republic by Selma Muhic Dizdarevic in this volume.

76. *Vlaamse regering 2019-2024: Regeerakkoord*, <http://docs.vlaamsparlement.be/docs/varia/regeerakkoord-2019-2024.pdf>, (Access date: 15 January 2020).

77. Farid Hafez, “Street-Level and Government-Level Islamophobia in the Visegrád Four Countries”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 52, 5 (2018), pp. 436-447.

servatives and Reformists (ECR) as well as the Left (GUE/NGL).<sup>78</sup> This is already a remarkable success for the radical right parties, who have come together with their new focus on Islamophobia.<sup>79</sup> They have not only overcome the split within the right-wing and Eurosceptical/anti-EU camp (which is primarily due to the external factor of Brexit anyway), but, and more importantly, they were able to get close to the fourth rank in the European Parliament. It therefore seems that for the first time in the history of the European Parliament, radical right-wing parties have succeeded in forming a strong group that will be able to draw on more financial and human resources than ever before.

## Justice System

The spread of anti-Muslim attitudes and the rise of anti-Muslim forces in politics also translate into legislation and administration. At the same time, examples show that the rule of law can still defend basic liberties such as the freedom of religion and belief.

In Greece, an NGO visited the Foreigners' Administration of Attica on Petrou Ralli Avenue in Athens where an official public complaint was made by refugee women being held there. A Muslim woman mentioned that "they forbade us to wear our headscarves and they told us 'outside of this place you can be Muslims, but not in here! Here you are Christians...'" and another Muslim woman complained that police officers took off a Syrian woman's hijab.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, in Lithuania, Muslim immigrants staying in a Foreigners Registration Center in Pabradė were not offered an alternative to pork dishes; the Seimas Ombudsman protested against this.<sup>81</sup>

In Flanders, in January 2019, and in Wallonia, Belgium, in September 2019, a ban of halal and kosher slaughter was implemented. In Denmark, legislation was introduced to deprive dual citizens of their Danish citizenship easily by political means. The author of the Danish report sees a problematic precedence for how the government deals with dual citizens in general, particularly Muslim dual citizens. While in the past, judicial procedures would determine citizenship rights, now the possibility of depriving citizenship in the case of dual citizenship goes through the immigration

78. Farid Hafez, "What Has Changed for the Far-Right After the European Elections?", *The Maydan*, 25 September 2019, <https://themaydan.com/2019/09/what-has-changed-for-the-far-right-after-the-european-elections/>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

79. Farid Hafez, "Shifting Borders: Islamophobia as Common Ground for Building Pan-European Right-Wing Unity", *Patterns of Prejudice*, 48, 5 (2014), pp. 479-499.

80. "Terrifying Testimonies of Women from Petrou Ralli", *Efimerida ton Syntakton*, 5 January 2020, [https://www.ef-syn.gr/ellada/dikaiomata/225643\\_frikiastikes-martyries-gynaikon-apo-tin-petroy-ralli](https://www.ef-syn.gr/ellada/dikaiomata/225643_frikiastikes-martyries-gynaikon-apo-tin-petroy-ralli), (Access date: 31 January 2020).

81. "Seimo kontrolierius: Užsieniečių registracijos centre užsieniečių teisės nėra tinkamai užtikrinamos", The Seimas Ombudsmen's Office of the Republic of Lithuania, 19 September 2019, <http://www.lrski.lt/naujienos/729-uzsienieci-registracijos-centre-darbuotojai-nemoka-uzsienio-kalb-o-sulaikytos-uzsienieci-seimos-su-mazameciais-vaikais-talpinamos-uz-grot.html>, (Access date: 13 January 2019).

and integration minister.<sup>82</sup> While the United Nations criticized Denmark's "ghetto" policies, it was revealed that a category named "non-Western immigrants and descendants" is used in the national register on unemployed Danish citizens, without the consent or knowledge of the citizens identified as such. This category can only be withdrawn, if the person affected contacts the respective governing bodies.

On the contrary, in Italy, the Constitutional Court rejected a provision adopted by the region of Lombardy which was designed to hinder the construction of new mosques. Most important in this case is the fact that the Constitutional Court explicitly referred to the principle of religious freedom that is enshrined in the Italian Constitution.<sup>83</sup> In Switzerland, the Federal Supreme Court confirmed again that wearing the hijab was protected by the freedom of religious belief which is enshrined in the constitution. The verdict came after an appeal by the initiators of a hijab ban at schools in the canton of Valais.<sup>84</sup>

As these few examples show, the fight against Islamophobia should be continued on a legal basis through the courts as well. At the same time, the struggle against anti-Muslim discrimination with legal means has to be understood as a way of protecting the constitutions which include legislation on anti-discrimination and freedom of religion or belief.

## The Rise of Islamophobic Terror

The editors of this report have already warned in the *European Islamophobia Report 2018* that Islamophobic ideology plays a central role in white supremacist terrorist groups.<sup>85</sup> On 15 March 2019, in Christchurch, New Zealand, the world witnessed what this means. The Christchurch terrorist attacks that left 51 people dead in two mosques revealed the strong connection to European white supremacist and especially anti-Muslim groups and ideology. The terrorist's actions were part of a transnational subculture of anti-Muslim white supremacist groups, especially online forums from Europe. Certain circles in Europe even openly praised these attacks.

In 2019, several attacks took place on German soil, from the synagogue attack in Halle to the murder of Walter Lübcke. The suspect in the Walter Lübcke attack,<sup>86</sup> who

---

82. Jeppe Sahlholdt, "Omstridt lov om fremmedkrigere er vedtaget med stemmer fra V og DF", *Altinget*, 24 October 2019, <https://www.alinget.dk/artikel/omstridt-lov-om-fremmedkrigere-er-vedtaget-med-stemmer-fra-v-og-df>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

83. "Islam. Stop della Consulta alla legge lombarda anti-moschee, furia della Lega", *Dire Agenzia di Stampa Nazionale*, 5 December 2019, <https://www.dire.it/05-12-2019/399443-islam-stop-della-consulta-alla-legge-lombarda-anti-moschee-furia-della-legal/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

84. "SVP-Initiative für Kopftuchverbot an Schulen ist ungültig", *Tages-Anzeiger*, 7 September 2018, <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/schweiz/standard/svpinitiative-fuer-kopftuchverbot-an-schulen-ist-unguelteig/story/23958254>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

85. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, "The State of Islamophobia in Europe" in *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, eds. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2019), pp. 20-26.

86. Farid Hafez, "The Silent Murder of Walter Lübcke", *Daily Sabah*, 19 June 2019, <https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2019/06/19/the-silent-murder-of-walter-lubcke>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

is believed to have had connections with a number of far-right organizations including the militant Combat 18, the National Democratic Party (NPD), and the neo-Nazi group *Autonome Nationalisten* (Autonomous Nationalists), admitted to killing the famous pro-immigrant politician. More importantly, the German public was only recently informed about the existence of white supremacist groups that are operating underground. Network Hannibal, which operates in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, is a network that was founded in 2015 and recruits former and active security service agents, soldiers, and police officers along with right-wing individuals to prepare them for a “Day X,” i.e. a military coup d’état. While only the German daily *TAZ* published a long piece on this issue early on, the case has since been handed over to the federal prosecutor and several people were taken into custody. The police investigation has revealed that the network had created a “kill list” including more than 20,000 names with high-ranking politicians who are seen as having “pro-immigration” stances.

In Poland, far-right activists expressed their praise and admiration for the Christchurch terrorist Brenton Tarrant. As the author for the report on Poland Anna Piela shows, nationalist websites and their Facebook profiles enthusiastically encouraged their audiences to download and read the terrorist’s manifesto. One famous far-right activist published a YouTube video praising the terrorist and high school pupils staged an execution with a replica of a gun used by the killer at the Christchurch mosque in March, which bore the Islamophobic statements written on the gun used in the actual terrorist attack.

The author of the Czech Republic report Selma Muhič Dizdarevič reports that in the Czech Republic following the terrorist attacks, there was a flood of comments on social media, which approved of killing worshipers.<sup>87</sup> Many claimed it was a justified revenge for terrorist attacks committed by Muslims in the West. One person commented on the Facebook page of the far-right leader Tomio Okamura: “I do not condemn this!!! At least he showed them we are not afraid of these cripples!!!!”<sup>88</sup>

In Norway, 21-year-old far-right terrorist Philip Manshaus had planned an armed assault on the Al-Noor Islamic Centre Mosque in Bærum near Oslo. Before going to the mosque, he shot his sister, who had been adopted from China as an infant, in a racially motivated murder. Manshaus was equipped with a shotgun, two rifles, a nail gun, a bulletproof vest, and a GoPro camera intended for live streaming on social media mimicking Tarrant, whom he had lauded in an online forum shortly before the assault.<sup>89</sup>

87. For more information see the report on the Czech Republic by Selma Muhič Dizdarevič in this volume.

88. “Desítky komentářů, ve kterých pisatelé schvalují neonacistický útok na Novém Zélandu. Policie prý už koná”, ROMEA, 16 March 2019, <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/domaci/desitky-komentaru-kde-pisatele-schvaluji-neonacisticky-utok-na-novem-zelandu.policie-pry-uz-kona>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

89. For more information see the report on Norway by Vemund Aarbakke in this volume. Also see, for example, Andreas Økland, “Kommentar: Moskéangrepet i Bærum. Vi må ta et nådeløst oppgjør med hater”, *Dagbladet*, 11 August 2019.

In the UK, the first physical attacks occurred within only a few hours after the Christchurch terrorist attack and the second-highest spike in anti-Muslim hate crimes across the UK was recorded since 2012.<sup>90</sup> As a response, then home secretary Sajid Javid announced the increase of funding for the security at UK mosques.<sup>91</sup> While this was welcome news, the author of our UK report Aristotle Kallis contends that this financial support still remains limited in comparison to a separate government scheme protecting synagogues and Jewish schools - £14 million versus £2 million for all other faiths combined.

Following the terrorist attack in Christchurch, French Minister of Interior Christophe Castaner was heard by the commission of inquiry on the fight against far-right groups in May 2019. He confirmed that the rhetoric of these groups “is particularly marked by Islamophobia and evokes the ‘Muslim invasion’ and the ‘Great Replacement’ with violent intentions.” Following the question, whether an attack similar to the one in Christchurch might occur in France, the Minister replied, “You want to know if people carrying this far-right ideology are still likely to carry out attacks against a mosque: yes, it is possible.”<sup>92</sup> As the author for the French report Léonard Faytre<sup>93</sup> tells us, in June 2019, French intelligence announced that they had dismantled far-right terrorist groups that had planned attacks against Muslims and Jews.<sup>94</sup>

Following the Christchurch terrorist attacks, the Organization of Islamic Conferences (OIC) held an emergency meeting and called on the United Nations and other international and regional organizations to adopt 15 March as the International Day of Solidarity against Islamophobia. Also, the organization demanded the UN secretary-general “to convene a special session of the UN General Assembly to declare Islamophobia as a form of racism and to assign a special rapporteur for monitoring and combatting Islamophobia.”<sup>95</sup>

At the same time, the anti-Muslim genocide in Srebrenica is still being denied not only by the Nobel Prize winner Peter Handke, but also by leading politicians.

---

90. Vikram Dodd, “Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes Soar in UK after Christchurch Shooting”, *The Guardian*, 22 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/mar/22/anti-muslim-hate-crimes-soar-in-uk-after-christchurch-shootings>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

91. “Places of Worship: Security Funding”, Hansard, 659 (7 May 2019), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-05-07/debates/21C4190A-5CAB-43DA-8360-AA944753E549/PlacesOfWorshipSecurityFunding>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

92. “Compte rendu, Commission d’enquête sur la lutte contre les groupuscules d’extrême droite en France”, Assemblée Nationale, 9 May 2019, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/15/cr-celgroued/18-19/c1819031.asp>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

93. For more information see the report on France by Léonard Faytre in this volume.

94. “Démantèlement d’un groupe d’ultradroite qui visait les musulmans et juifs”, *Le Point*, 11 June 2019, [https://www.lepoint.fr/faits-divers/demantelement-d-un-groupe-d-ultradroite-qui-visait-les-musulmans-et-juifs-11-06-2019-2318161\\_2627.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/faits-divers/demantelement-d-un-groupe-d-ultradroite-qui-visait-les-musulmans-et-juifs-11-06-2019-2318161_2627.php), (Access date: 5 January 2020).

95. Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Final Communique of the 14<sup>th</sup> Islamic Summit Conference (Session of hand toward the future), Makkah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 31 May 2019, <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=4496&refID=1251>, (Access date: 5 January 2020).

The strategy of belittlement is part of this denial. During the Jahorina Economic Summit on 9 July, Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic referred to the Srebrenica genocide as a “misunderstanding.”<sup>96</sup> Such rhetoric is not rare among Serbia’s highest officials.<sup>97</sup> At the same time, certain European politicians reframe the past and/or present of Muslims’ realities in Europe and make today’s Bosnia the problem. The most outstanding example of this was a remark by French President Emmanuel Macron who said in an interview with the *Economist*: “If you’re concerned about this region, the first question is neither Macedonia, nor Albania, it’s Bosnia-Herzegovina. The time-bomb that’s ticking right next to Croatia, and which faces the problem of returning jihadists, is Bosnia-Herzegovina.”<sup>98</sup> Macron neglected to mention the white supremacist ideology that is not only represented by far-right groups, but also by some of the top European leadership.

## White Supremacist Movements and Ideology

Clearly, the ideas of terrorists such as Breivik or Tarrant have been revealed to stem from white supremacist ideological movements such as the Identitarian movement. Ideas such as the “Great Replacement” are by no means only part of the far right, as has been shown before. In a subtle way, as mentioned above, these ideas are also present in much higher political circles that are widely regarded as nominally “mainstream.” Key to this strategy is to see the attack on Muslims and their political infringement as a natural defence, an act of defending freedom and so-called Western values.

A prominent example therefore would be the French polemist Eric Zemmour. In September 2019, he gave a public speech at the Convention of the Right where he stated, “Today, we are experiencing a demographic inversion that is leading to a reversal of migratory flows, which is leading to a reversal of colonization. I’ll let you guess who will be their ‘Indians’ and their ‘African slaves’. It will be you. [...] The question we have to ask ourselves is will young French people accept to live in a minority on the land of their ancestors? If so, they deserve to be colonized. If not, they will have to fight for their liberation. But how do we fight? Where to fight? What to fight for?”<sup>99</sup>

96. Hikmet Karčić, “For Serbia the Srebrenica Genocide ‘Misunderstanding’ Paid Off”, TRT World, 12 July 2019, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/for-serbia-the-srebrenica-genocide-misunderstanding-paid-off-28190>, (Access date: 5 January 2019).

97. In July 2019, nine NGOs issued a statement condemning as “shameful and disgraceful” the fact that no Serbian official has characterized the events at Srebrenica as a genocide. For more information see “NVO iz Srbije: Sramna i porazna činjenica da zvaničnici Srbije negiraju genocid u Srebrenici”, *Autonomija*, 9 July 2019, <https://www.autonomija.info/nvo-iz-srbije-sramna-i-porazna-cinjenica-da-zvanicnici-srbije-negiraju-genocid-u-srebrenici.html>, (Access date: 10 January 2020).

98. “French President Calls Bosnia a ‘Ticking Time-Bomb’”, *Al Jazeera*, 8 November 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/french-president-calls-bosnia-ticking-time-bomb-191108053518237.html>, (Access date: 5 January 2019).

99. “Rapport CCIF 2020, Rapport sur l’Islamophobie pendant l’année 2019”, Collectif contre l’islamophobie en France.

Another aspect at the intersection of white supremacist armed struggle and state administrations is the relationship between white supremacists and terrorists, on the one hand, and their infiltration of the state system, on the other. In France, a 54-year-old member of the far-right, anti-Muslim Identitarian movement was fined EUR 30,000 and convicted to seven years imprisonment in 2017 for buying more than 500 weapons, out of which six were used by the Jihadist Amedy Coulibaly. According to the police, the member of the Identitarian movement was a confidential informant for the French secret service.<sup>100</sup>

The author of the North Macedonian report Orhan Ceka mentions a case of a member of the army of the North Macedonian Republic. A professional soldier called the Nobel Prize in Literature to be given to the Christchurch terrorist. While the army proposed the termination of her engagement,<sup>101</sup> no concrete measure was taken thereafter.<sup>102</sup> This instance poses a question concerning the spread of white supremacist ideology within the ranks of important state institutions.

## Education

Education is still a central space for the practice and dissemination of Islamophobia. The French NGO monitoring body CCIF report published in 2019 reveals that 22.5% of its cases pertained to Islamophobia in education.<sup>103</sup> In Albania, the minister of education, sport and youth close three private schools including one religious Islamic school claiming that “minor girls have to wear the hijab during the class.”<sup>104</sup> The school decided to sue the minister.<sup>105</sup> Also centrist-left parties mobilize against Muslims in the education sector. In 2019, the Danish Social Democrats campaigned in the general elections with the promise to remove public funding of Muslim independent schools because of a suspicion they are not sufficiently promoting so-called Danish values of freedom, democracy, and gender equality.<sup>106</sup> After winning the elections, the government implemented an audit of 17 independent schools, out of which seven were Islamic schools. Also, Muslim pupils beyond a 9th grade level

---

100. “Lille. 7 ans de prison pour une figure de l’extrême droite identitaire”, *Quest France*, 9 October 2017, <https://www.ouest-france.fr/societe/justice/lille-7-ans-de-prison-pour-une-figure-de-l-extreme-droite-identitaire-5301457>, (Access date: 5 January 2020).

101. “Плусинфо:Поради говор на омраза Татјана Лазаровска ќе лета од АРМ”, *Македонски Медиа Сервис (ММС)*, 26 March 2019, <https://mms.mk/63408> (Access date: 20 May 2020).

102. “Застрашувачки говор на омраза”, *Радио Слободна Европа*, 26 March 2019, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a> (Access date: 20 May 2020).

103. “Rapport des Chiffres 2018”, *Collectif contre l’Islamophobie en Belgique*.

104. Sulejman Rustemi, Facebook, 19 June 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/SulejmanRustemi/videos/10216838970639072/>, (Access date: 26 December 2019).

105. *Ibid.*

106. Anders Redder, “Nye tal bekymrer: Muslimske friskoler står foran skærpet tilsyn”, *Kristligt Dagblad*, 25 November 2019 <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/danmark/nye-tal-bekymrer-saerligt-muslimske-friskoler-testes-demokratisk-sindslag>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

whose parents are not fluent in the Danish language are forced to attend mandatory day-care for at least 25 hours per week.<sup>107</sup>

In Catalonia, Spain, PRODERAEV<sup>108</sup> (Detection, Prevention and Intervention in Processes of Radicalization and Violent Extremism) was introduced in 2016, following the British PREVENT structure.<sup>109</sup> Part of the program is that Catalan police officers and civil servants from the departments of Internal Affairs and Education train schoolteachers in so-called “radicalization detection” tools. A leaked document by the newspaper *LaDirecta*<sup>110</sup> shows that radicalization indicators were, among others, to be “born in a family from a Muslim-majority country,” hijab-wearing, asking for halal food at school, neighbourhood of residence, and not drinking Coca Cola. Also in the French University of Cergy-Pontoise, an email was sent to the teaching staff asking them to list students and teachers who show “weak signals of radicalization” such as they “stopped drinking alcohol”, “suddenly stopped eating pork”, “recent consumption of halal food”, “behavior changes towards women”, “prayers in the buildings of the university”, “sudden interest in national politics and international relations”, and “sudden interest in religion.”

## Step Forward and Policy Recommendations

As the Islamophobic terror attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand and Hanau, Germany demonstrated, the physical security of Muslims and their institutions have become an urgent issue in Europe. The spread and increasing activity of Islamophobic terror groups and networks in Europe are alarming and should be taken seriously by the EU, the European states, and their security institutions. All the signs indicate that an Islamophobic terror wave is about to hit Europe. Christchurch and Hanau are not isolated incidents but a strong wake-up call for Europe and beyond. Therefore, as the editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* we feel the need to warn that this kind of attacks might happen anywhere, anytime in Europe if the necessary measures are not taken.

In the report “Understanding Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes - Addressing the Security Needs of Muslim Communities: A Practical Guide Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe” (May 2020), the OSCE-ODIHR calls on European

107. “Obligatorisk læringstilbud til 1-årige i udsatte boligområder og skærpet straf til ledere for pligtforsømmelser”, Ministry of Children and Education, <https://www.uvm.dk/dagtilbud/love-og-regler--formaal-og-aftaler/aftalen-om-parallelsamfund/om-aftalen>, (Access date: 4 February 2020).

108. “Prevençió, detecció e intervenció de processos de radicalització als Centres Educatius”, The Department of Education of the Generalitat, <http://cgtense.pangea.org/IMG/pdf/proderai-ce.pdf>, (Access date 22 February 2019).

109. “Factsheet: PREVENT”, The Bridge Initiative Team, 25 March 2019, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/prevent/>, (Access date: 4 February 2020).

110. Ainhoa Douhaibi and Vicent Almela, “No beure Coca-Cola, no celebrar Sant Jordi o esborrar-se els tatuatges són indicadors de ‘radicalització islamista’, segons els Mossos”, *LaDirecta*, 18 December 2018, <https://directa.cat/no-beure-coca-cola-no-celebrar-sant-jordi-o-esborrar-se-els-tatuatges-son-indicadors-de-radicalitzacio-islamista-segons-els-mossos/>, (Access date: 4 February 2020).

governments to take strong measures to guarantee the security of all citizens, including Muslims. The report provides ten recommendations, which we strongly support.

- Acknowledge the problem [of anti-Muslim hatred].
- Raise awareness.
- Recognize and record bias motivation of anti-Muslim hate crime.
- Work with Muslim communities to identify security needs.
- Build trust between national authorities and Muslim communities.
- Identify security gaps to assess risks and prevent attacks.
- Provide extra protection to Muslim communities when necessary.
- Set up crisis response systems.
- Reassure the community if an attack takes place.
- Provide targeted support to victims.<sup>111</sup>

Apart from the above measures, it is urgent to fight Islamophobia on the discursive level. Measures should be taken against politicians and media organs that spread Islamophobic rhetoric and/or even explicitly trigger hatred against Muslims. This can be achieved through stricter legislation against hate speech and the application of penalties and sanctions in case of offense, while at the same time protecting freedom of speech. Yet, we are aware that Islamophobia in the form of structural racism shapes European societies and embraces the entire political scope. As a result, without far reaching that incorporate all spheres of society such as employment, education, and the justice system, there cannot be effective action against Islamophobia. In other words, it is important to challenge the white supremacist narrative of the Great Replacement that paves the way to Islamophobic attacks. Unfortunately, the 32 reports compiled here indicate that such narratives are becoming popular in Europe. Especially given the rise of violent activities perpetuated by white supremacist against minorities such as Jews, Muslims, and Roma as well as against politicians who represent the humanitarian politics of welcoming refugees and celebrating diversity, there is a need to reassess the work of security agencies in general and secret services in particular with regard to their focus on societal threats.

As stated in previous reports there exists a need to tackle Islamophobia systematically on a European level. We are happy that some of the recommendations have been put into practice like setting up a European-level conference on Islamophobia with the support of at least one EU member state or the European Parliament. Also, we welcome the latest steps towards creating a working definition of Islamophobia. This should lead, as we stated in the introduction to the *European Islamophobia Report 2017*, to the adoption of a resolution towards combatting Islamophobia with

---

111. "Understanding Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes - Addressing the Security Needs of Muslim Communities: A Practical Guide", OSCE.

concrete policy recommendations and ways forward as witnessed in the European Parliament's efforts to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Gypsyism.<sup>112</sup>

We also welcome the fact that certain European governments such as Germany have included the fight against Islamophobia in their National Action Plans against Racism, as we recommended in *EIR 2017*.<sup>113</sup> Still, many more countries should follow this example and these action plans have to be developed further and backed by resources.

It is very much true that Europe needs courageous leaders and activists in all spheres of life who are willing to confront the Islamophobic discourses and narratives, and especially to stand up to the exclusion of Muslim women from access to employment.

---

112. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, "The State of Islamophobia in Europe", *European Islamophobia Report 2017*, eds. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2018), p. 26.

113. Ibid.

# ISLAMOPHOBIA IN NUMBERS

- “The overwhelming majority of European states do not record Islamophobic incidents as a separate category of hate crime. The recording of anti-Muslim/Islamophobic crimes by the police as a separate category of hate crime is essential to uncover the real extent of this problem and to develop counter-strategies to combat it.
- In the EU, only 12% of Muslims who have been discriminated against report their cases to the authorities. The non-exhaustive list that follows hints at the extent of underreporting of anti-Muslim hate crimes in Europe by states and NGOs, which has serious implications regarding the awareness of Muslims and the bureaucracy to tackle these issues. The diverging numbers in the countries hint to a different degree of awareness and organization.” (EIR 2018)

## BELGIUM

- **According to** the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities (UNIA), there were **278 cases of Islamophobia** in 2018.
- **The CCIB** registered **80 cases of Islamophobia** in 2018.

## AUSTRIA

- **The NGO Dokustelle** documented **1,051 cases of anti-Muslim hate crime**, which is nearly twice as many compared to 2018 (540 cases). The majority consists of **the spread of hate (757 cases)**, followed by **118 cases of insult, and 43 cases of discrimination.** (Source: Dokustelle)
- **The NGO ZARA** documented **1,950 racist acts.** According to the organization, 385 of the 1,950 documented acts were anti-Muslim. (Source: ZARA)

## BOSNIA

- **Thirteen Islamophobic incidents** were documented in 2019. (Source: Commission for Free-dom of Religion – Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

## FRANCE

- **The Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France (CCIF)** received 789 report forms referring to **1,043 Islamophobic incidents**. Among them, 68 concern **physical attacks (6.5%)**; 618 concern **discrimination (59.3%)**; 210 concern hate speech and incitement to **racial hatred (20.1%)**; 93 concern **defamation (8.9%)**; 22 concern **degradation of sacred places (2.1%)**; and 32 are linked to **the fight against terrorism (3.1%)**. (Source: Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France [CCIF])

## GERMANY

- **In 2019, 871 hate crimes** against Muslims were reported to the police. **Fifty-eight of them** were crimes against Muslim religious sites and **in 46 crimes Muslims were physically injured** by anti-Muslim racists.

(Source: German Federal Government)

## ITALY

- **According to a social research** project on the condition of Islam in Italy, **65% of people interviewed declared to have suffered violence**, prejudice or discrimination because of being Muslim; the percentage rises to **70% among women while wearing a veil** represents the trigger for verbal or physical assault both at work and in daily life.

(Source: Fabrizio Cioc-ca, *L'Islam italiano. Un'indagine tra religione, identità e islamofobia*)

## SLOVENIA

- **In 2018, there were 15 reported cases of discrimination** based on **disability (9.62%)**, followed by **ethnicity**, race, and ethnic background (14 cases or 8.24% of which 8 cases are related to race and 4 cases are related to race or ethnic background). **Gender-based discrimination occurred in 8 cases (4.71%)**, followed by **religion or belief (7 cases or 4.12%)**; **age and sexual orientation (5 cases or 2.94% each)**; **social status, financial situation, and place of residence (2 cases or 1.18% each)**.

(Source: Report of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality for 2018).

## NORWAY

- **In a report about attitudes** towards hate speech and discrimination from 2019, **44% of those asked** consider that **Muslims are targets of hate speech**. (Source: Guri Tyldum, *Holdninger til diskriminering, likestilling og hatprat i Norge 2. Ut-gave. Fafo-rapport [2019]: 26*)

## DENMARK

- **A survey of over 5,900 Danes** concluded that **about 28% agreed/partly agreed** that Muslim immigrants **should be deported**. (Source: *Mandag Morgen*)

## FINLAND

- **Hate crimes retreated in 2018 by 22% to 910 cases** from the previous year, according to the latest figures. The lion's share was **due to ethnic or national origin (69.7%) and religion (17%)**. **Sixty-seven percent of hate crimes** due to ethnic or national background were reported by men and **33% by women**. The most effected group by nationality were Iraqis. **After rising by 58% in 2017**, hate crimes due to religious background **fell by 34% and the most affected were Muslims**. (Source: *Police University College [Poliisiammattikorkeakoulu]*)

## BULGARIA

- **According to the Chief Mufti's Office**, **2 Islamophobic incidents were documented in 2019**. Both of them concern physical attacks on buildings (**a mosque and a mufti office**) related to the Muslim community. Acts concerning discrimination, and **hate speech are not part of any official statistics**.

## LITHUANIA

- **In the period of** January-November 2019, **a total of 31 criminal offenses** were registered on the grounds foreseen **under Chapter XXV of the Criminal Code** “Crimes and Misdemeanours against a Person’s Equal Rights and Freedom of Conscience.”
- **Twenty-eight were on the grounds** foreseen **under Article 170** “Incitement against Any National, Racial, Ethnic, Religious or Other Group of Persons.” Three were based on incitement against religion and two on the grounds foreseen **under Article 171** “Disturbance of Religious Ceremonies or Religious Celebrations.”
- **There were no registered criminal offenses** based on **Article 169** “Discrimination on Grounds of Nationality, Race, Sex, Descent, Religion or Belonging to Other Groups” during the reported period. (Source: Data on criminal offences committed in the Republic of Lithuania)
- **Sixteen complaints of discrimination** on the grounds of religion, belief, convictions and views were **received in 2019, eight of them** on the grounds of religion. (Source: Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson)

## THE NETHERLANDS

- **According to Nieuwwij’s report, 99% of the articles on terrorism in the newspaper De Telegraaf** related to “Muslim terror,” while articles on Islamophobia made up **only 0.7% of all articles related to Muslims.** (Source: Nieuwwij.nl)

## UNITED KINGDOM

- **The upward trend in Islamophobic incidents** in the UK continued in the figures for 2018-19, with the number of cases recorded in official statistics **rising by 10%, religion-specific cases by 3%**, and those recorded under the racial flag **up by 11%. There were 3,530 recorded cases** of Islamophobic **hate crime, representing 47% of all recorded** religiously motivated hate crime offences.
- **The percentage of Muslim adults** (16 or over) who were victims of religiously motivated **crime in 2017-18** was nearly double that recorded **for any other religious group (0.8%). In the London metropolitan area, Islamophobic hate crimes fell by 10% in 2019** (average of 100 incidents per month), albeit against the backdrop of a larger-than-usual rise in 2018. **Still, ‘racist and religious hate crime’ overall figures grew by 11% in 2019.** (Source: Metropolitan Police, Hate Crime Dashboard)

## POLAND

- **According to the data** provided by the **Ministry of Interior and Administration**, the number of hate crimes against Muslims investigated in **2019 in Poland was 32, down from 53 in 2018**. These statistics are likely to be grossly underestimated – according to the **Polish Om-budsman’s Office**, **only 5% of hate crime** is reported to the police in Poland. (Source: *The Ombudsman’s Office and the Ministry of Interior and Administration*)

## IRELAND

- **According to official police data**, as published by the Office for **Democratic Institutions and Human Rights** of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, **15 anti-Muslim hate crimes were recorded for the 2018 period**. (Source: *OSCE ODIHR*)

## SPAIN

- **There was an overall 11.6% increase in hate crime: out of 1,598 complaints, 69 related to religion (33% less than in 2017) and 524 to racism and xenophobia (1.3% more than in 2017)**. No segregated statistics for **anti-Muslim bias are available**. (Source: *The National Office for Hate Crimes 2018 Report*)

## ROMANIA

- **Survey results by the National Council** for Combatting Discrimination reveal that **68% of Romanians have a lack of trust in relation to people of Muslim faith**, while **62% of those interviewed think that Muslims are potentially dangerous**. Around **39% of the respondents would not accept having a Muslim relative**, **28% would not accept having a Muslim friend**, and **19% would not accept a Muslim co-worker**. (Source: National Council for Combatting Discrimination [NCCD])

## SWITZERLAND

- **The KONID Survey 2019**, a representative survey on the role of religious and social identities, **revealed that one in two Muslims stated that they had been discriminated against based on their religious identity**. (Source: KONID Survey 2019)

## CZECH REPUBLIC

- **According to the Ministry of Interior** in the first half of 2019 there were **90 hate-motivated crimes**. (Source: Ministerstvo vnitra)

# VIOLENT ACTS AGAINST MUSLIMS IN EUROPE

Violent acts are an outcome of the violent ideology of racist dehumanization. Muslims are increasingly becoming victims of physical attacks solely because of their faith.

## BELGIUM

- Muslim woman stabbed by her mother because she converted to Islam *(Source: DH Net)*
- Muslim woman stabbed in front of her three young children in Anderlecht. *(Source: SudInfo)*

## BOSNIA

- In Rogatica, Elvir Bahto, a Bosniak returnee, was attacked by his neighbor with a shovel. *(Source: AFP)*

## DENMARK

- Violent attack against a hijab-wearing 17-year-old girl. Her hijab was ripped off, she was verbally assaulted with racist slurs and physically assaulted with kicks to her head and punches to her body. The attack happened in the afternoon and perpetrator was a Danish man in his 30s or 40s. *(Source: TV2)*

## ESTONIA

- Woman wearing a hijab was spat on in Tartu. *(Source: Johannes Mihkelson Centre)*

## FINLAND

- Left Alliance candidate for parliament, Suldaan Said Ahmed, was physically attacked and harassed verbally while waiting for the metro. *(Source: Yle)*

## FRANCE

- A supporter of the National Rally (far right) attempted to set fire to the mosque of Bayonne and shot two individuals in front of the mosque, wounding one severely. The attacker was then arrested in his home

and charged with attempted murder and destruction of property committed for reasons of race or religion by dangerous means to persons.

(Source: France Info)

## GERMANY

- CDU politician Walter Lübcke who campaigned for the admission of refugees was murdered by a right-wing extremist.

## GREECE

- In May, an attack took place in the Muslim cemetery of the city of Alexandroupolis. Nazi symbols were written on tombs and leaflets with the slogan "Greece belongs to the Greeks" were thrown throughout the cemetery. The act was perpetrated by Golden Dawn supporters as was clear from the leaflets. (Source: Efimerida ton Syntakton)

## HUNGARY

- Four young people were severely beaten at a summer music festival in Hungary for being considered "migrants."

## IRELAND

- Two Muslim men were attacked in a seemingly premeditated attack while on their way home from a mosque in the city. (Source: The Irish Examiner)

## KOSOVO

- A historical mosque (*xhamia e Namazgjahut*) was vandalized in Prizren. (Source: inFokus)

## MALTA

- Ivorian migrant Lassana Cisse was murdered in a racially motivated attack. (Source: UNHCR Malta)

## THE NETHERLANDS

- A banner stating insulting phrases was placed on a window frame of the As-Sunnah Mosque in The Hague. In front of the banner a mannequin dressed in "Arab clothes" was placed, half uncovered and with a beard and a baby doll attached to his crotch. (Source: Republiek Allochtonie)

## NORTH MACEDONIA

- Police with inspectors appeared at the mosque in Strumica to lower the volume of the *adhan*. (Source: *Ina Online*)

## NORWAY

- An Islamophobic terror attack took place on the Al-Noor Islamic Centre – Mosque outside Oslo by the right-wing extremist Philip Manshaus on 10 August. He was disarmed by senior Muslims before he could inflict much damage, but one person was injured. (Source: *All News Media in Norway*)

## POLAND

- In January, Paweł Adamowicz, the mayor of Gdańsk and a vocal advocate for receiving refugees, was fatally stabbed during an open-air event celebrating a nationwide charitable collection “in aid of paediatric hospitals.” (Source: *AFP*)

## RUSSIA

- In May, a prayer house built on private territory was demolished in the village of Svoboda in the Kaliningrad region. (Source: *Radio Svoboda*)

## SERBIA

- In April, a series of attacks took place targeting an Albanian bakery in the Belgrade neighbourhood of Borča. (Source: *N1*)

## SPAIN

- In December, at least 7 individuals brutally beat an unaccompanied migrant minor in Zaragoza, sinking his skull and then fleeing, leaving the 17-year-old boy lying on the street. (Source: *Heraldo*)

## SWITZERLAND

- In Lausanne, a 14-year-old schoolgirl wearing a headscarf in the metro was described by an elderly man as a “slut” and “Muslim filth.” He told her that she should “return to her country.” (Source: *GRA Chronology*)

## UK

- On 21 March, five mosques are attacked and vandalized in Birmingham. *(Source: Euronews)*
- Hours after the massacre in Christchurch, New Zealand, a worshipper sustained head injuries outside Ashaadibi Centre Mosque in Whitechapel, London. *(Source: Aljazeera)*
- On 28 August, two women in traditional Islamic dress were viciously attacked and sustained serious injuries in South Ealing Underground Station in London. *(Source: The Independent)*
- In June, two security staff of the Dar Ul-Isra Mosque in Cardiff, Wales suffered minor injuries following an attack by two men armed with knives *(Source: Wales Online)*
- On 11 November, an arson attack occurred against a place of worship in Havenhill. *(Source: Haverhill Echo)*

# ISLAMOPHOBIC STATEMENTS BY POLITICIANS

Islamophobic language by high-ranking politicians, mostly from the far right, normalizes a dehumanizing and racist language when it comes to the portrayal of Muslims. This reduces the threshold of what is considered utterable and overall acceptable in public discourse and legitimizes discrimination of Muslims as human beings and as citizens.

## AUSTRIA

- FPÖ Viennese chairman Dominik Nepp published a press release, in which he spoke about “Muslim sexual delinquents, who see our daughters and women as unprotected game from their misanthropic perception of women.” According to Nepp, Shariah would rule in schools, where Muslims make up the majority in Vienna.
- Chancellor Sebastian Kurz stated, “Politicians are urgently required to protect our free society from political Islam and its excesses, such as anti-Semitism.” (Source: *Kleine Zeitung*)
- During Austria’s most important weekly political debate on TV following the murder of four women within one week, State Secretary Karoline Edtstadler (ÖVP) argued that there was no patriarchy in Austria. Rather, this was due to “imported patriarchy” (from Muslim immigrants).

## BELGIUM

- Local Koekelberg town councillor, Lucas Ducarme stated, “I don’t want Koekelberg to become Molenbeek.” (Source: *La Capitale*)

## BOSNIA

- President of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović referred to B&H as “very unstable, and [...] in some respects [has] been taken over by people who have connections with Iran and terrorist organizations. The country is now controlled by militant Islam.” (Source: *Le Monde*)

## BULGARIA

- Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, and leader of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO) Krassimir Karakachanov stated, "Gypsies in Bulgaria have become extremely arrogant... It's a fact that since the last year or two they have started adopting Islam." (Source: *Deutsche Welle*)
- Member of the European Parliament and vice-chairman of IMRO Angel Dzhambazki stated, "We have always insisted that the (Roma) ghetto should be demolished. And we will demolish it. Because the ghetto is an ulcer. Because the ghetto is the soil in which the poisonous weeds of Islamic radicalism grow." (Source: *Angel Dzhambazki's blog*)

## CROATIA

- In July 2019, President of the Republic of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, who won the 2014 presidential elections as a candidate of the right-wing Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), visited Israel on the occasion of the Holocaust commemoration. One of the most influential Israeli newspapers, *The Jerusalem Post*, published an article claiming that during the meeting of Croatia's president with Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, Grabar-Kitarovic stated, "Bosnia and Herzegovina is a very unstable country and under the control of militant Islam; in some aspects it has been taken over by people associated with Iran and terrorists." The president of the Republic of Croatia denied having said what was published in the *Jerusalem Post*. (Source: *Jutarnji.hr*)
- Presidential candidate Anto Djapic from the political party Right accused Muslims in Bosnia of cooperating with Serbs in the Islamization of Croatian territory. (Source: *Dnevno.hr*)

## CZECH REPUBLIC

- MP for the Freedom and Direct Democracy party (SDP) Karla Maříková stated, "It is forbidden to import invasive, non-indigenous species of plants and animals to the European Union. Muslim immigrants are also non-indigenous inhabitants in Europe and the same way as other invasive species they represent unexpected expansion and gradual supplanting of indigenous inhabitants of Europe. Therefore, they should be forbidden from entering the EU." (Source: *iRozhlas*)

## DENMARK

- Referring to a survey that showed that 28% of Danes want to deport Muslims, Inger Støjberg (former integration minister and MP for *Venstre*) said, "When the survey shows this, it is probably because there are a lot of people who feel the way I do; I am so tired of hearing about Islam here

and there as a justification or poor excuse for everything from the craziest terrorist acts to so-called honor-related violence, the demand to curb freedom of speech and right to criticize religion, the lack of equality, the demand for special treatment in the workplace, the school, or the swimming pool." (Source: B.T.)

## ESTONIA

- Helle-Moonika Helme, the wife of the chair of the Far Right Party, stated the following: "They are Muslims, they carry another culture that is dangerous to us. They have already done their evil deeds." (Source: Eesti Päevaleht)
- Member of the European Parliament Jaak Madison (EKRE) shared his opinion that the Notre-Dame de Paris fire could be an accident, but could also be the work of Muslims. He added that many Muslims were happy about the fire. (Source: Facebook)

## FINLAND

- Petteri Orpo, chairperson of the National Coalition Party, stated, "One must have the ability and will to adapt to Finnish society. We do not have to change our own society because different people come here. We have to be tolerant of difference, tolerant of [people's] background, but in Finland we live under Finnish laws." (Source: Verkkouutiset)

## FRANCE

- The Minister of Interior Christophe Castaner is heard by the French National Assembly about the attack on the Paris Police Headquarter. Following Macron's speech, he calls on the French people to report to the police any "weak signals of radicalization," i.e. "having a beard; an exaggerated practice of religion especially during Ramadan; ostentatious prayer; not kissing the opposite gender; not wanting to work with women." A few days later, in the French Senate, he said that this was just a list of "signs that could help to identify a radicalization towards radical Islam, political Islam, and terrorism." (Source: BFM TV)

## GERMANY

- Thilo Sarrazin, former senator for finances in Berlin (Social Democratic Party) and author of Islamophobic books, stated, "In addition to the measures that we have to take in Germany and in European countries, we must make a very clear decision to prevent immigration from Muslim countries as completely as possible for many decades to come." (Source: YouTube)

## GREECE

- Kyriakos Velopoulos, leader of Elliniki Lyssi (Hellenic Solution) stated in parliament, “[Islam] is not a religion; it is a politico-religious ideology. It is a judicial system since the mufti is also a judge. As a consequence, it is a political-judicial system. Islam is incompatible with the legal culture and the morals of western societies. If you [i.e. the government] from the love you have for Ibrahim and Hassan [i.e. Muslim migrants] and not for Giorgos, Nikos, Stavros [i.e. Greeks] think that you can close your eyes, you are wrong. Don’t you know, gentlemen, what Islam says about homosexuals? You close your eyes? Don’t you know? They murder them. Don’t you know that? Don’t you know what Islam says about women? That they have to wear a burqa and that they have to accept clitoridectomy. You didn’t know that either?” (Source: Kathimerini)

## HUNGARY

- PM Viktor Orban campaign speech for the European Election contained the following: “Our Christian civilization is at stake in the upcoming European parliamentary election.” (Source: Hungary Today)

## IRELAND

- In August, video footage emerged on social media wherein member of Anti-Corruption Ireland Gemma O’Doherty stated that hijabs “should be burned.” (Source: Twitter)

## ITALY

- The Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini stated, “We do not want to end up like Sweden, this is not integration! NO to the EURABIA. Oriana, look at us from heaven. SWEDEN ATTACKED. STOP EURABIA!” (Source: Twitter)

## MALTA

- Maurice Mizzi, chairman of Guardian for Future Generations, which is a government-appointed commission intended to promote sustainable development in policymaking, stated, “We are living in a Catholic country, and when I die, I want to die in a Catholic country. At the moment, there are so many Muslims coming – they’re all having nine babies, next to our two – and they will take over eventually.” (Source: Times of Malta)

## MONTENEGRO

- Andrija Mandic, MP (Democratic Front), strongly “advised” Muslims not to vote for the proposed Law on Freedom of Religion or Beliefs, other-

wise they will suffer horrific consequences. He concluded, "There are more hidden weapons in Montenegro than anywhere else; the weapons that will be unburied as soon as the first drop of blood falls. We will not seek justice through the legal system, but rather personally knock on the doors of those who did us injustice. That is the message you have to understand." (Source: *n1info.com*)

## THE NETHERLANDS

- Prime Minister Mark Rutte stated throughout the debate on the Cornelius Haga school that "he wouldn't send his children there." (Source: *Het Parool*)

## NORTH MACEDONIA

- Dimitar Apasiev, a politician from the Left (*Levica*) stated, "There is no left-wing government in the world that has not banned wearing the headscarf/hijab! A right-wing feminist throws the headscarf with indignation, as a victory over patriarchal morality, and does not wear it. Only our NGO Sorospi 'feminists' are defending this religious seduction of women." (Source: *Republika Online*)

## NORWAY

- Progress Party leader Siv Jensen published a feature article on the "covert Islamization" of Norway. (Source: *VG [Verdens Gang]*)

## POLAND

- Law and Justice Member of Parliament Dominik Tarczyński stated, "We don't want Poland to be taken over by Muslims, Buddhists, or anybody else... and nobody will ever force us to receive Muslims, Buddhists, and non-believers in huge numbers... For me, a multicultural society is not a worthwhile value... it is not a virtue." (Source: *Al-Jazeera*)

## ROMANIA

- Traian Basescu, the former president of Romania who was elected as a MEP in 2019, stated that he wants to get involved in protecting Europe's borders from a "Muslim invasion" and that the European Union should work on stopping migrants from reaching Europe illegally, including in international waters. (Source: *Digi 24*)
- Mihai Chirica, the current mayor of Iași, made racist statements referring to Congolese, Somalis, Syrians, and people from other nations as "[nations] that just came down from the tree." (Source: *Digi 24*)

## SERBIA

- Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić stated that political representatives of Kosovo Albanians “are people from the forest.” (Source: Primer Minister statement for the press)

## SLOVAKIA

- Former Prime Minister and Chairman of Smer-SD: “Islam has no place in Slovakia!” (Source: Nový čas)
- “I don't want a comprehensive Muslim community here. I don't. Okay. And let everybody say what they want. They have coherent communities that change the nature of our lives. We can't allow to change the character of the Slovak Republic. It is a Christian country. For God's sake, however, let us guard some of the values on which we stand, because we will also start to question this elementary fact, which holds us anyway, so this country will go in a particularly bad way.” (Source: týždeň)

## SPAIN

- Santiago Abascal, the leader of Vox party and a member of the Congress of Deputies stated, “Islamists want to destroy Europe and western society by celebrating the fire of #NotreDame. Take it into account before it's too late.” (Source: HuffPost)

## SWITZERLAND

- At the National Council, SVP National Councillor Erich von Siebenthal spoke out in favor of the initiative “No Muslim army chaplains in our army” because, according to him, the goal of Islam was “world domination.” (Source: Official Bulletin of Swiss Parliament)

## UK

- A dossier containing 110 incidents of Islamophobic content posted online by Conservative Party members is passed on to ITV.  
The comments made by people alleging to be Conservative Party members include:
  - “We are letting our children down by allowing this cult to take over our country.”
  - “We don't have a politician strong enough in the UK to lead us away from this infestation.”
  - “They cause mayhem wherever they decide to invade.” (Source: ITV)

# LEGALIZING ISLAMOPHOBIA

Governments and political parties implement or demand legislations that directly target Muslims as religious subjects, treating them differently than members of other religious communities.

## AUSTRIA

- After a hijab ban in kindergarten was already implemented in 2018, the ÖVP invited the anti-Muslim author Zana Ramadani as an expert to the education committee to expand the hijab ban up to 10 years of age. She argued, "Once you wear it [hijab, Farid Hafez] as a girl, you won't take it off." The proposed text bans "wearing ideological or religious clothing, with which a covering of the head is connected."
- In September 2019, shortly before the new national parliamentary elections, the FPÖ submitted an amendment to change to School Teaching Act to include a hijab ban for pupils up to the age of 14 as well as for teachers. "The headscarf is a symbol of political Islam and has no place in educational institutions," said FPÖ chairman Norbert Hofer. Due to considerations of fundamental rights, the initiative was postponed.

## BELGIUM

- Halal slaughter ban introduced in Flanders (1 January 2019) and Wallonia (1 September 2019).
- Flemish governmental agreement limited visible faith symbols in education and employment in Flanders.

## BULGARIA

- Prosecutor General Sotir Tsatsarov rewarded prosecutor Nedialka Popova from the Pazardzhik District Prosecutor's Office for her performance during a case regarding the alleged spread of radical Islam, a year after she delivered an Islamophobic speech and was removed from the case.

## CZECH REPUBLIC

- Repeated but unsuccessful attempts by the party Freedom and Direct Democracy to ban Islam and the hijab. The initiatives found no support in the parliament.

## DENMARK

- On 1 January 2019, it became mandatory to shake public officials' hands during citizenship ceremonies.

## FRANCE

- A bill to ensure so-called religious neutrality of persons contributing to the public service of education (i.e. banning headscarf in those services) was drafted by the Senate. The Senate, with a right-wing majority, adopted the bill on 29 October 2019 at the first reading. The National Assembly has yet to discuss the bill.

## IRELAND

- Cork-based independent local election candidate, Joe O'Callaghan, a former lord mayor of the city, called for a ban to be placed on Islamic face coverings in Ireland. O'Callaghan referred to such face coverings as "a joke in this day and age, particular in these dangerous times we live in... it's a question of security and integration."

## ITALY

- In 2019, the Court of Appeal of Milan authorized the use of illustrated signs to prohibit access to health facilities of individuals wearing a burqa.

## THE NETHERLANDS

- In May 2019, the PVV called for a ban on several Islamic expressions, such as the building of mosques and the printing of the Qur'an, informally referred to as the "Anti-Islam Law."

## SPAIN

- The Ministry of Education of the Autonomous Community of Madrid and the Ombudsman allowed schools to ban the Islamic veil.

## SWITZERLAND

- In the canton of Geneva, a referendum approved a law prohibiting "visible religious features" in the civil service and in plenary sessions of the legislature. Events on public grounds may be prohibited if "conspicuous religious features" are displayed.
- The Geneva Constitutional Court partially revised the law on secularity in November 2019. Members of parliament may continue to wear signs of religious affiliation such as headscarves.

# ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE MEDIA

The media plays a crucial role in the reproduction and normalization of anti-Muslim racism.

## ALBANIA

On Ora News, Kastriot Myftaraj, a well-known Islamophobe, commented on the terrorist attack in Christchurch and indirectly suggested undertaking similar action in Albania. A visual analysis of the still image from the TV show, shows Scanderbeg, the Albanian national hero, pointing to a minaret with his sword, a clear indication of what the host of the show wanted to communicate to his audience.



## AUSTRIA

In an opinion piece by Christian Ultsch in *Die Presse*, the author commented on the Christchurch terrorist attacks with the following: "Anyone who draws exaggerated conclusions about a 'structural hatred of Islam' from the bloody deed of a fascist in New Zealand is wrong."



## BOSNIA

The newspaper *Novosti RS* falsely claimed in a title, "Hundreds of Jihadists Are Arriving to B&H."



## CROATIA

Ivica Sola, a Croatian theologian, professor, communicator, and journalist for *Globus* wrote columns in which he argued that Islam is masculine to the point of being brutal (as opposed to the feminized Europe), and that it takes advantage of the commotion to sneak on the “woman” Europe. (Source: Narod.hr)

## CZECH REPUBLIC

*Reflex* published an article with the title “Muslims Are Conquering Czech Judiciary; Their Women in Hijab Will Sit in Our Schools.”



## FINLAND

In January, a commentator of Iltalehti TV claimed that the Oulu sexual assault cases are the result of immigration. He stated, “We received too many asylum seekers.”

## FRANCE

On 28 September 2019, the polemist Eric Zemmour’s public speech was broadcasted by the right-wing news channel LCI. He stated, “In the street, women in hijab and men in djellaba are propaganda in fact, an Islamization of the street. [They wear] uniforms of an occupying army [that] reminds the defeated of his submission. The old expression ‘Immigration, Integration, Assimilation’ has been replaced by ‘Invasion, Colonization, Occupation.’”



## GERMANY

The newspaper *Bild* reported on a daycare center which does not want to serve pork anymore with the title “Out of Respect the ‘Salvation’ Daycare Centre Takes Pork off the Menu.” The headline was on the front page of the print and online versions.

## GREECE

The front page of the extreme-right newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos* (Free World) states “Islam Invaded Athens. Fears about a Terrorist Attack during Christmas.”



## HUNGARY

The article on news portal Origo features a conspiracy theory about the Hungarian Islam Advocacy Association (MIJE) teaming up with human rights organizations Helsinki Committee and the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, which the article refers to as the Hungarian lawyers of George Soros, to settle migrants in Hungary.

ORIGO ITTHON NAGYVILÁG GAZDASÁG SPORT TÉVÉ FILM

### Magyarországi muszlim áljogvédők a jobboldaliakat terrorizálják

ITTHON 2019.04.30, 19:37

A magyarországi muszlimok integrációjaért lobbizik a Magyar Iszlám Jogvédők Egyesülete (MIJE), amit nem meglepő módon a migrációs válság csúcsán, 2016-ban alapítottak. A létrehozásuk időpontja sem véletlen, a csoport, mint több más NGO, a szervezett bevándorlás (bevándoroltatás) támogatására alakult meg, együttműködésben a Soros György által is finanszírozott Helsinki Bizottsággal és a TASZ-szal. Az egyesület feleskődött a magyarországi muszlimok jogainak védelmére, és ami még fontosabb, a migráció melletti lobbizásra. Ennek egyébként kiválóan eleget is tesznek: Facebook-oldalukon rendszeresen lázítják követői közösségüket a kormánypárti ...

CÍMKÉK: Soros György · iszlám · migráció · jogvédelem · migráns · laka news · Társaság a Szabadságjogokért · Helsinki Bizottság · Magyar Iszlám Jogvédők Egyesülete · Címkefelő ...

Насловна / Политика / Комадант Унпрофора у Босни: У Сребреници није било геноцида!

## Комадант Унпрофора у Босни: У Сребреници није било геноцида!

Махензи је навео и да су због деловања лобиста и ГПР агенција Срби означени као једини кривци у ратовима на простору бивше СФРЈ, иако је, подјелно је, савезника српска војска имала керијоу улогу у Првом и Другом светском рату.

Са ИНАС 25/10/2019 13:20 Последња измена: 25/10/2019 13:36 3



Сребреница

## MONTENEGRO

The web portal in4s.net ran the headline "UN's Says There Was No Genocide in Srebrenica."

< **Het Parool**

**Rutte over Haga Lyceum: 'Ik zou m'n kind er niet heen sturen'**

Premier Mark Rutte raadt ouders aan hun kinderen van het omstreden islamitische Cornelius Haga Lyceum te halen. "Als ik kinderen had, zou ik ze er niet heen laten gaan," zei hij vrijdagmiddag.

**Tobias den Hartog** 8 maart 2019, 16:07



BEELD ANP

## THE NETHERLANDS

The AIVD published its report on the newly founded Islamic school Cornelius Haga, falsely claiming it had ties with Salafism. It led to extensive debates and media coverage for the rest of the year. The premier Mark Rutte declared that he "wouldn't send his child there."

## NORWAY

In September, Human Right Service published an article with the title: "Will Erna and Company Stop the Extremists' Plan for a New Big Mosque and Proselyting Centre for Young People?"

### Vil Erna og co stoppe ekstremisters plan om ny stormoské og misjonscenter for unge?



Salafistene i Islam Net hever penger internasjonalt for å bygge en ny stormoské med tilhørende misjonscenter rettet mot unge i Norge. Islam Net sier de allerede har samlet inn 1 million dollar. I en video på engelsk, går Islam Net til fullt angrep på vår kultur og vårt syn på jenter og kvinners frihet. Kan vi forvente at Regjeringen stopper dette?



## SERBIA

*Informer* published a story on an alleged Muslim invasion of Bosnia. The title read, "It Smells Like the Nineties! Americans Insert Jihadists into BiH and Prepare 'Alija's Scenario': Terrorism Expert Reveals What Lies Behind Muslim Invasion."

## ROMANIA

After a handball match between Romanian teams, *Pagina de Media* website stated that "AHC Olimpia Braila, a tiny Christian team had a match with the Muslim conglomerate of HC Dunarea Braila, who absorbs money from the Quran." Comparing the game to a crusade, the publication added, "Victory was obtained by the team led by [Christian] God, in detriment to the Quran, who sponsored the team that was sold by the authorities to a sheik."

## SLOVENIA

Nova 24TV published an article condemning the possibility of halal food in a public elementary school claiming that children are treated unequally because the school has offered pork-free meal options for Muslim children.



**EL PAÍS** OPINIÓN

---

OPINIONES TRIBUNA DE DEBATE VÍDEOS CÓMO COLABORAR ENFERIA LABORATORIO NUESTROS FOROS QUÉ PASA AHORA

TRIBUNA

## La importancia de un trozo de tela

Quiénes nos quieren convencer de la inocuidad del hijab son precisamente quienes no entienden que la dignidad de las mujeres está por encima de toda consideración y, si hace falta, de cualquier texto divino

[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#) [WhatsApp](#) [Email](#)

**NALAT EL HICIMBI**  
16/04/2019 - 03:07 (UTC)



Cuando era pequeña solía observar con fascinación a mi abuela cuando se vestía: desplegaba un trozo de tela larguísimo que se enrollaba alrededor de la cintura; se lo pasaba por la espalda y lo deslizaba hasta el pecho para sujetarlo con un par de fibulas de plata. En cuanto al cabello, lo recogía en trenzas brillantes de aceite de oliva y en la raíz de la cabeza se estaba una peñolite en la que lucían migajas de los trenzas. Mi abuela iba cubierta desde la barbilla hasta el pecho; llevaba grandes broches de plata y un faja de lana roja oscura. Quedaban aún, a mediados de los años ochenta del siglo...

**NEWSLETTER**  
Recibe el contenido de El País

**TE PUEDE INTERESAR**

- El hijab, una vez más en el Gobierno de España
- A mujeres con tratamientos médicos innovadores y más justicia
- El gobierno publica el informe de sus relaciones con Twitter
- Un hijo con discapacidad: cómo es la vida

## SPAIN

El País published an op-ed questioning the rights of Muslim women. “The Importance of a Piece of Cloth. Those who want to convince us of the innocuousness of the hijab are precisely those who do not understand that the dignity of women is above all consideration and, if necessary, of any divine text.”

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**ALBANIA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

NADA DOSTI



## The Author

**Nada Dosti** holds an MA in English teaching from the University of Tirana, Albania, and finished her studies (MA) in journalism at the Faculty of Media and Communication, University of Ankara, Turkey. With an experience of ten years already as a journalist and an activist trying to be a voice for Muslim women in Albania by writing articles, Dosti responds publicly to Islamophobic attacks in media - especially on the topic of the hijab - by giving interviews and participating in public debates. She is the founder of Muslimania.al, a portal dedicated to Muslim women that promotes success stories, challenges Islamophobia, and gives a voice to Muslim women to share their concerns and opinions. Email: [nada.dosti@gmail.com](mailto:nada.dosti@gmail.com)

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Nada Dosti: *Islamophobia in Albania: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

This report records and analyzes Islamophobic incidents between January and December 2019. The report notes that there is an obsession among various portals, as well as media practitioners regarding Islam and Muslims filled with negative stereotypes and anti-Muslim sentiments. Furthermore, Muslims in Albania continue to face difficulties in the job market, and often experience levels of discrimination during job interviews.

During 2019, various Islamophobic and xenophobic incidents have been reported, including physical attacks on sites, such as vandalistic attacks on the Turkish Memorial in the capital Tirana which is dedicated to the memory of martyrs of the 15 July 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. The incident follows the trend of other similar provocative incidents that have been occurring in the last few years during the celebration of Eid in Albania.

Similarly, there have been countless hate speech posts on social media from journalists, TV hosts, as well as on Islamophobic Facebook pages. Journalists such as Anila Basha, for instance, have called on Albanian people to unite under one Christian flag, quoting from a book which has been criticized for using Islamophobic language, while the author, Ben Blushi, a politician and writer, is known for his Islamophobic stances. Others, like Mustafa Nano, an Islamophobic central figure in Albanian media, have mocked Muslim public figures on TV such as Elvis Naçi, a local imam in Tirana and the president of the Firdeus Foundation, a charity foundation, for getting emotional during one of his sermons, claiming that such a reaction was hypocritical.

In the same vein, the aftermath of the devastating earthquake on 26 November 2019 in Albania, was followed by a wave of hate speech and anti-Muslim sentiment on social media after the Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama posted a number of religious quotes on his Facebook page under the heading “The Sacred Words.” Despite the identity nature of Islamophobia in Albania, the report notes that, Islamophobic incidents are mostly limited to an exclusive group of individuals, media, and politicians, who frame the Albanian identity as an exclusively European one, and see Islam and Muslims as a “foreign body” that has no place in Albanian society. Furthermore, Islamophobia and Turkophobia in Albania are strictly connected, where the latest is only a dimension of the general anti-Muslim sentiments promoted especially by a section of the intellectual elite in the country. Turks, Arabs, Iranians, and other Muslim nations are considered part of the “Islamic Orient,” which is seen as opposed to the Westernization of Albanians. The incidents included in this report represent only a small portion of the real problem of Islamophobia in Albania. Therefore, we can say that Islamophobia in Albania is far more prevalent than the data available suggests.

## Përmbledhje e shkurtër

Ky raport analizon rastet islamofobe të ndodhura midis janarit dhe dhjetorit 2019. Raporti thekson se ekziston një tendencë në mesin e disa portaleve dhe figurave mediatike në lidhje me Islamin dhe muslimanët ku mbizotërojnë stereotipet negative dhe ndjenjat anti-islame. Po ashtu, muslimanët në Shqipëri vazhdojnë të përballen me vështirësi në tregun e punës, dhe shpesh përjetojnë nivele diskriminimi gjatë intervistave për punë.

Gjatë vitit 2019 janë raportuar incidente të ndryshme islamofobe dhe ksenofobe, përfshirë sulme fizike ndaj objekteve, siç është vandalizimi i “Memorialit Turk” në Tiranë kushtuar dëshmorëve që humbën jetën në 15 korrik 2016 gjatë tentativës për grusht-shteti në Turqi. Ky incident pason incidente të ngjashme provokuese që kanë ndodhur vitet e fundit gjatë festimit të Bajramit në Shqipëri.

Ngjashëm, ka pasur postime të panumërta në mediat sociale nga gazetarë, drejtues programesh televizive, si dhe faqe islamofobe në Facebook të mbushura me gjuhë urrejtjeje. Gazetarë si Anila Basha për shembull i kanë bërë thirrje shqiptarëve të bashkohet nën një flamur të krishterë, duke cituar nga një libër që është kritikuar për përdorimin e gjuhës islamofobe, ndërsa autori i tij, Ben Blushi, një politikan dhe shkrimtar, është i njohur për qëndrimet e tij islamofobe. Ndërsa të tjerë, si Mustafa Nano, një figure e rëndësishme islamofobe në media, është tallur me figura publike muslimane si Elvis Naçi, imam në Tiranë, për shkak të një reagimi të tij emocional gjatë një prej predikimeve të tij, duke pretenduar se një reagim i tillë është hipokrizi.

Po ashtu, periudha pas tërmetit shkatërrues më 26 nëntor 2019 në Shqipëri, u pasuan nga një valë gjuhë urrejtjeje dhe ndjenjash anti-muslimane në rrjetet sociale kur Kryeministri i Shqipërisë, Edi Rama postoi një numër citatesh fetare, të quajtura “Fjalët e Shenjta”. Përkundër natyrës identitare të islamofobisë në Shqipëri, raporti vëren se, incidentet islamofobe kryesisht janë të kufizuara në një grup ekskluziv të individëve, mediave dhe politikanëve, të cilët e konsiderojnë identitetin shqiptar si të lidhur pazgjidhshmërisht me Evropën, dhe e shohin Islamin dhe muslimanët si “një trup i huaj” që nuk ka vend në shoqërinë shqiptare. Për më tepër, islamofobia dhe turkofobia në Shqipëri janë të lidhura fort, ku kjo e fundit është vetëm një dimension i ndjenjave të përgjithshme anti-muslimane të promovuara veçanërisht nga disa elita intelektuale në vend. Turqit, arabët, iranianët apo kombet e tjera myslimane konsiderohen pjesë e “Orientit Islamik”, i cili shihen në kundërshtim me perëndimorizimin e shqiptarëve. Incidentet e përfshira në këtë raport paraqesin vetëm një pjesë të problemit real të islamofobisë në Shqipëri. Prandaj, mund të themi se islamofobia në Shqipëri është shumë më e përhapur nga sa sugjerojnë të dhënat në dispozicion.

## Country Profile EIR 2019

**Country:** Albania

**Type of Regime:** Democratic Republic

**Form of Government:** Constitutional Republic

**Ruling Parties:** Socialist Party of Albania (*Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë*)

**Opposition Parties:** Democratic Party of Albania (*Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë*), Socialist Movement for Integration (*Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim*)

**Last Elections:** 2017 Parliamentary Election (Socialist Party 48.34%; Democratic Party 28.85%; Socialist Movement for Integration 14.28%).

**Total Population:** 2,862,427 million (as of January 2019, INSTAT)

**Major Languages:** Albanian

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** N/A

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** N/A

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Islam (56.7%), Catholicism (10%), Orthodoxy (6.75%), Bektashism (2.1%), Non-affiliated (5.49%), Undeclared (13.8%), Atheists (2.5%), Other Christians (0.14%) (INSTAT/Census 2011)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 1.587 million (56.7%) (INSTAT/Census 2011)

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** The Muslim Community of Albania (*Komuniteti Musliman i Shqipërisë* - KMSH); The Albanian Imam's League (*Lidhja e Hoxhallarëve të Shqipërisë* - LHSH); The Muslim Forum of Albania (*Forumi Musliman i Shqipërisë*)

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** The Muslim Forum of Albania (*Forumi Musliman i Shqipërisë*)

**Far-Right Parties:** N/A

**Far-Right Movements:** N/A

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burqa Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

In recent years, Muslims in Albania have experienced an intensification of Islamophobia in various spheres of life, including employment, education, media representation, justice system, etc., with negative opinions and stereotyping, as well as hate speech on mainstream media, social media, and other online platforms. This discrimination against Albanian Muslims has been fueled by many media pundits, journalists, and politicians in Albania.

Due to the nature of Islamophobia in Albania, which is mainly related to identity politics, as previous reports<sup>1</sup> and studies<sup>2</sup> have found, the anti-Muslim discourse has become a normalized rhetoric where various forms of Islamophobia can be observed in media, politics, social media, textbooks, etc. While many politicians and media -especially online media- have been quick to report and condemn any kind of criminal act committed by alleged Muslims around the world, they have failed to condemn any act of Islamophobia against the Muslim population in any part of the world. Similarly, the mainstream media has failed more than once to acknowledge and correct fake news reported about certain Albanian Muslims and their alleged plans for terrorist attacks.

Furthermore, for many people, the phenomenon of Islamophobia seems unlikely to exist in a Muslim-majority country like Albania. Therefore, the existence of Islamophobia in Albania has often been denied as a phenomenon, particularly in relation to main Islamophobic figures. For instance, the Albanian (Kosovar) journalist Arbana Xharra, known for her Islamophobic stances, has stated various times in the media that “there is no such things as Islamophobia, but there is Albanophobia.”<sup>3</sup> Others have claimed that Islam is a political ideology and that it is normal to have prejudice and phobia towards such an ideology. At the same time, these individuals totally ignore the relationship between the discrimination experienced by Albanian Muslims and Islamophobia as a phenomenon.<sup>4</sup>

1 Besnik Sinani and Elton Hatibi, “Islamophobia in Albania National Report 2017”, *European Islamophobia Report 2017*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez (Ankara: SETA, 2018).

2 Rezart Beka, “Islamophobia in the Contemporary Albanian Public Discourse”, *Islamophobia in Muslim Majority Societies*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez (Routledge, New York: 2019), p. 45

3 “A i paragjykojmë muslimanët”, TV Klan, Youtube, 5 October 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZF0QV\\_DENY&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZF0QV_DENY&feature=emb_title), (Access date: 30 December 2019).

4 “Bashkëjetesa me islamofobinë në Shqipëri”, E-zani.com, 4 August 2019, <http://www.e-zani.com/2019/04/08/bashkëjetesa-me-islamofobine/>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

In March 2019, during two days of protests from the opposition in front of the Albanian Parliament, the police special forces occupied the premises of the Great Mosque in Tirana, which is under the administration of the Muslim Community of Albania and currently under construction, and used it as an observation point to monitor the protesters. Following this incident, the Muslim Forum of Albania (FMSH) issued a press release where the stated that they considered this as an act that violates the sanctity of the mosque.<sup>5</sup>

On 11 August 2019, on the first day of Eid Al Adha, the Turkish Monument in Tirana dedicated to the martyrs of the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey was vandalized<sup>6</sup> by unknown assailants using paper towels. Although the memorial was installed a few days earlier, it was only on the day of Eid that the incident occurred. In recent years, the celebration of Eid has been accompanied by several provocative incidents, fueled by Islamophobia, nationalism, and xenophobic feelings, and particularly by anti-Turkish feelings.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the installation of the monument was followed by a wave of negative comments in the media, especially those close to the opposition. They claimed that the memorial was part of the efforts by Prime Minister Edi Rama to curate the image of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan after the failed coup attempt in 2016. They accused Rama of being a vassal of Erdogan and also claimed that such behavior is not in line with the aspiration of Albania to become a member of the EU.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 1:** On 10 August 2019, Don Agustin Bardhi, a self-proclaimed Catholic priest called on the Albanian people to eradicate the Turkish Memorial saying, "I can tell you that if you eradicate the memorial in Tirana, it wouldn't be a sin, same as it was not a sin when people eradicated the statue of Enver [Hoxha]."<sup>9</sup>

5. "Cenimi i shenjtërisë së xhamisë nga forcat e rendit", Forumi Musliman i Shqipërisë, 6 March 2019, <http://www.fmsh-al.org/new/2019/03/06/cenimi-i-shenjterise-se-xhamise-nga-forcat-e-rendit/>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

6. "Letra higjenike dhe një shënim/ Përdhoret memoriali turk në Tiranë", Shqiptarja.com, 11 August 2019, <https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/letra-higjenike-dhe-nje-shenim-perdhoret-memoriali-turk-ne-tirane>, (Access date: 1 March 2020).

7. "Mbulimi i monumentit të Skënderbeut, Myftiu i Tiranës: Histeri mesazhesh kërcënuese", Youtube, 2 September 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L03PQ\\_GV2oo&sns=em](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L03PQ_GV2oo&sns=em), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

8. "Çfarë fshihet pas Memorialit turk për nder të Erdogan", Mapo, 11 August 2019, <https://gazetamapo.al/cfare-fshihet-pas-memorialit-turk-per-nder-te-erdogan/>, (Access date: 1 March 2020).

9. DomAgustinBardhi, Twitter, 10August2019, <https://twitter.com/AgustinBardhi/status/1160175395276230656?s=20>, (Access date: 1 March 2020).

One day before the attack on the Turkish Memorial, on 10 August 2019, a self-declared Catholic priest named “Don Agustin Bardhi” posted on his Twitter account asking people “to eradicate” the memorial like the Albanian people did to the statue of the Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha in 1991.<sup>10</sup>

The monument that was built with the contribution of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) was desecrated again on 30 August 2019. According to reports by the Albanian police, the assailants used a heavy object to damage part of the monument that carried the names of the people killed in the 2016 coup attempt and the signs of the Turkish flag.<sup>11</sup>

## Employment

Discrimination in the workplace and employment is not something new to Albanian Muslims.<sup>12</sup> Despite the constitutional rights to practice their religion freely<sup>13</sup> anywhere, including the workplace, Muslims in Albania still continue to face difficulties.<sup>14</sup> Muslims, particularly women with a hijab, face difficulties and limitations in the job market.<sup>15</sup> Muslims often experience various levels of discrimination at their jobs. Similarly, they face difficulties in their daily prayer practice in the workplace. In fact, workplaces still lack special areas dedicated to prayer. Muslims face difficulties in acquiring permission from their jobs for Jummah prayer. For instance, according to the Muslim Forum of Albania (FMSH), the military personnel in Albania not only lack the conditions to practice their religion freely during working hours, but have been threatened by their superiors to be fired if they choose to do so. The FMSH notes that this is a consistent concern that has not found a solution yet.

According to the report by the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, published in 2019, the total number of complaints in the field of employment, which were dealt with during the first half of 2019, was 71. Among the various reasons of discrimination in employment, none of them was reported as being religious.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, the report notes that in some cases people are not able to recognize the real reasons of discrimination.

10. Ibid.

11. “Turkish Monument in Albania Vandalized”, Daily Sabah, 31 August 2019, <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/2019/08/31/turkish-monument-in-albania-vandalized>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

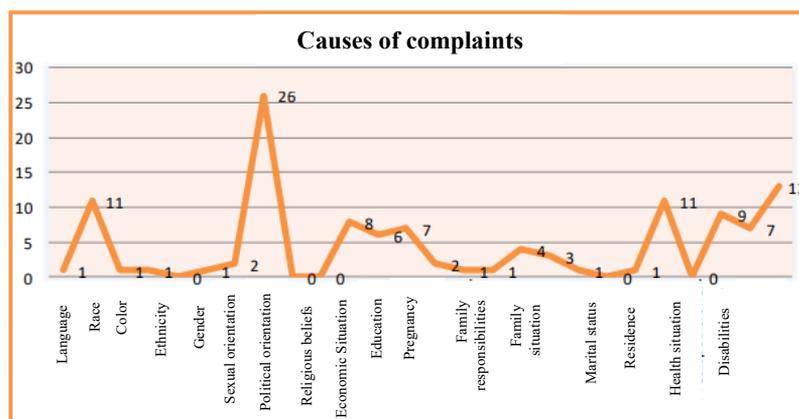
12. Olsi Jazexhi, “Islamophobia in Albania National Report 2018”, *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez (Ankara: SETA, 2019), p. 66.

13. “Kushtetuta e Shqipërisë”, President.al, <http://president.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/kushtetuta-perditesuar-1.pdf>, (Access date: 1 March 2020).

14. “Islamophobia in Albania: Annual Report 2018”, Muslim Forum of Albania (FMSH).

15. Ibid.

16. “Raporti 6 mujor”, Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, Janar – Qershor 2019, <https://www.kmd.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Raport-KMD-Janar-Qershor-2019-perfundimtar.pdf>, (Access Date: 1 March 2020).



**Figure 2:** Causes of complaints recorded during the first half of 2019 by the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, there are many cases of men and women who have faced various forms of discrimination during their job interviews; however, they refused to make their stories public due to fear of repercussions.<sup>18</sup>

## Education

On 30 May 2019, the Minister of Education, Sports, and Youth of Albania Besa Shahini gave the order to close three private schools, among which was a religious Islamic school<sup>19</sup> owned by Imam Sulejman Rustemi. According to Rustemi, the closure of his school was based on false claims and was discriminatory.<sup>20</sup> On a Facebook post on 19 June 2019, Rustemi wrote that the inspectors falsely claimed that his institution forces “underage girls to wear the hijab during the class.”<sup>21</sup> According to him, his school has been rigorously implementing the law of the pre-education system. According to the testimony of Rustemi, during the control, the inspection team exerted pressure and started behaving like in an investigation process interviewing students on religious knowledge and reasons for practicing religion at the school. Imam Rustemi declared that he did not receive any official notification and that he was informed about the decision by the media.

17. Ibid.

18. Olsi Jazexhi, “Islamophobia in Albania National Report 2018”, *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez (Ankara: SETA, 2019), p. 67.

19. Official Communicate from Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth of Albania, 3 June 2019, <https://arsimi.gov.al/urdher-nr-307-date-30-05-2019-per-mbylljen-e-veprimtarise-institucionit-arsimor-parauniversitar-privat-shkolla-9-vjecre-visare-kavaje/>, (Access date: 26 December 2019). See also the official document signed by Minister Besa Shahini on 30 May 2019: <https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/urdher-nr.-307-date-30.05.2019.pdf>, (Access date: 26 December 2019).

20. “Vajza të vogla me shami në kokë, ministria e Arsimit mbyll shkollën në Kavajë”, *Newsbomb.al*, 19 June 2019, <https://www.newsbomb.al/vajza-te-vogla-me-shami-ne-koke-ministria-e-arsimit-mbyll-shkollen-ne-kavaje-168845>, (Access date: 26 December 2019).

21. Suleman Rustemi, Facebook, 19 June 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/SulejmanRustemi/videos/10216838970639072/>, (Access date: 26 December 2019).

## Politics

The anti-Muslim sentiments in Albania are rooted in the psychology and cultural identity of many cultural and political elites. This is influenced by various factors, including politics, their views on religion, individual interests, etc. The heritage of the communist period and the social engineering and identity-making of the last three decades have created a political elite which is either Islamophobic or insensitive toward religion and the rights of the Muslim community.

A few weeks after the devastating earthquake on 26 November 2019 in Albania, the Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama traveled to Istanbul to participate as a speaker in the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) High-Level Public and Private Investment Conference hosted by Turkey on 8-9 December 2019 in Istanbul. The conference called on the OIC member countries to assist Albania after the earthquake of 26 November. At the conference, Edi Rama also met with President Erdogan. During his speech, Rama quoted a few verses from the Holy Quran, which faced many negative comments from the media and social media users<sup>22</sup>

On 18 October 2019, after long discussions, the leaders of the European Union couldn't reach an agreement on opening the accession process with Albania and North Macedonia, postponing the process for the upcoming year. This was followed by a wave of negative comments by many anti-Islamic hatemongers, who rushed to blame Muslims and the Islamic identity of the majority of the population for the rejection by the EU. For instance, Gani Mehmetaj, a Kosovar author and publicist known for his Islamophobic stances, blamed the Islamic identity of Albania, claiming that the EU could never accept a country "full of mosques built with Turkish money."<sup>23</sup> In an article published on 19 October 2019,<sup>24</sup> he claims that Europe is alarmed by the construction of the Great Mosque in the capital Tirana. Furthermore, he said that that Muslims should not be allowed to pray in the main streets (square) of the capital (during Eid prayer). He went on to say that Albania is flirting with Turkey and is losing its sovereignty. He called on the opposition parties to take note and see how Europe rejected "Edi Rama's Islamized Albania."<sup>25</sup> "The rejection of Edi Rama's Islamized Albania by the EU should be an example to the Albanian opposition on how politics and diplomacy should not be done. Albania should be removed from the Turkish vassalage and subordination of the Gulf states to Islamism."<sup>26</sup>

22. For more information, see: Edi Rama, Facebook, 8 December 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/edirama.al/videos/2360442754267870/>, (Access date: 3 January 2020).

23. Gani Mehmetaj, "Shqipërinë e islamizuar të Edi Ramës nuk e duan në Evropë", *Bota Sot*, 19 October 2019, <https://www.botasot.info/opinion/1173192/shqiperine-e-islamizuar-te-edi-rames-nuk-e-duan-ne-evrope/>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

## Media

There is an obsession among various media and media practitioners pertaining to Islam and Muslims, tinged with negative stereotypes and continuous negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims in particular.

The Albanian National Observatory Against Islamophobia,<sup>27</sup> an online watchdog platform dedicated to countering Islamophobia, in cooperation with the Muslim Forum of Albania (FMSH),<sup>28</sup> a Tirana-based Muslim NGO, have identified a list of online<sup>29</sup> media and media practitioners<sup>30</sup> that continuously incite Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments among Albanians. The report includes a list of Albanian media from Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. These media continuously promote anti-Muslim rhetoric by posting Islamophobic, racist, and hate-motivated articles and comments. In their writings they attack Islam, Albanian Muslims, and their religious heritage. Their publications contain insults, blasphemies, slander, and untruths about the Islamic religion, the Prophet Muhammed, Albanian Muslim personalities, and ordinary Muslim believers. They question the patriotism of Muslim Albanians, labeling them “Turks” and “Arabs,” and calling for their expulsion from the country. It is worth noting that after the publication of the “Black List” on Observer.al, all the articles listed in the report were removed.<sup>31</sup> However, the media identified in the above report continue to remain on the list due to the many other Islamophobic articles that are still available on their websites.

In April, the Audio-visual Media Authority (AMA) decided to fine<sup>32</sup> the radio and television broadcaster “Ora News” for the hate speech used by Kastriot Myftaraj, a well-known Islamophobe, during his TV show “Moscow Is Speaking.” On the official website of Ora News, there are not many details available regarding the said TV show.<sup>33</sup> The TV show, hosted by Myftaraj, was broadcasted on 18 March 2019 on Ora News and was dedicated to the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in two mosques

27. Albanian National Observatory Against Islamophobia, <https://observer.al/>, (Access date: 25 December 2019).

28. Muslim Forum of Albania, <http://www.fmsh-al.org/al/>, (Access date: 25 December 2019).

29. “Raport: Lista e zezë e faqeve islamofobe shqiptare on-line”, Observer.al, 20 February 2015, <https://observer.al/raport-lista-e-zeze-e-faqeve-islamofobe-shqiptare-on-line-2/>, (Access date: 25 December 2019).

30. “Lista e analistëve islamofobë të Kosovës, Shqipërisë dhe Maqedonisë”, Observer.al, 13 September 2017, <https://observer.al/lista-e-analisteve-islamofobe-te-kosoves-shqiperise-dhe-maqedonise/>, (Access date: 23 December 2019).

31. For more information, see: “Raport: Lista e zezë e faqeve islamofobe shqiptare on-line”. The report includes a list of Albanian media from Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. We separated the media into two categories: Black List and Grey List. In a recent control of the articles included in both categories, we noticed that all articles listed have been removed. However, the list is not comprehensive and does not include many other media that continuously provoke Islamophobia.

32. “Goditet ‘i paprekshmi’ i medias: gjobë e AMA-s për terrorin verbal të Kastriot Myftarajt”, Observer.al, 17 April 2019, <https://observer.al/ama-gjorbit-ora-news-per-islamofobine-e-kastriot-myftarajt/>, (Access date: 23 December 2019).

33. For more information, see: “Ju flet Moska”, RTV Ora News, <https://www.oranews.tv/emisionet/ju-flet-moska>, (Access Date: 1 March 2020).

in New Zealand. It was entitled “Scanderbeg and the killings in the mosques in New Zealand” (*Skënderbeu dhe vrasjet në xhamitë e Zelandës së Re*).<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 3:** Kastriot Myftaraj during his TV show “Moscow Is Speaking”.<sup>35</sup>

During the show, Myftaraj commented on the terrorist attack and indirectly suggested undertaking similar action in Albania.<sup>36</sup> A visual analysis of the still image from the TV show, shows Scanderbeg, the Albanian national hero, pointing to the minaret with his sword, a clear indication of what the host of the show wanted to communicate to his audience. (Fig. 3) Following the broadcast of the TV show, the Muslim Forum of Albania sent a letter to Ora News complaining about the Islamophobic language used by Myftaraj.<sup>37</sup> An online petition was also signed by more than 1,000 people<sup>38</sup> condemning Myftaraj’s anti-Muslim rhetoric. The AMA fined the television 400,000 Albanian Lek (around \$3,636). In their statement, the AMA considered the language used by Myftaraj as a violation of Law No. 97/2013 on audiovisual media in the Republic of Albania. The AMA’s statement stated: “These statements promote intolerance among citizens, justify violence, and disrespect the diversity of customs, religious beliefs, culture and morality of citizens. Violation of these legal principles during this broadcast constitutes incitement to hatred on reli-

34. “Ju Flet Moska”, RTV Ora News, 18 March 2019, <https://www.oranews.tv/emisionet/ju-flet-moska/skenderbeu-dhe-vrasjet-ne-xhamite-e-zelandes-se-re?page=7>, (Access date: 27 December 2019).

35. “Ju Flet Moska”, RTV Ora News, 18 March 2019, <https://www.oranews.tv/emisionet/ju-flet-moska/skenderbeu-dhe-vrasjet-ne-xhamite-e-zelandes-se-re?page=7>, (Access date: 27 December 2019).

36. “Islamofobi Kastriot Myftaraj mbron dhe justifikon terroristin kristjan të frymëzuar nga Skënderbeu”, Gazeta Impakt, March 2019, <https://gazetaimpakt.com/islamofobi-kastriot-myftaraj-mbron-dhe-justifikon-terroristin-kristjan-te-frymezuar-nga-skenderbeu/>, (Access date: 27 December 2019)

37. Complain sent to Ora News by the Muslim Forum of Albania (FMSH) on 20 March 2019 regarding the Islamophobic language used by the host of the TV show “Moscow Is Speaking” Kastriot Myftaraj, aired on 18 March 2019 (The video is no longer available online).

38. Vehap Kola, Facebook, 19 March 2019, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=2197658760485320&id=100007236527045](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2197658760485320&id=100007236527045), (Access date: 3 January 2020).

gious grounds and, as such, is punishable by the law.”<sup>39</sup> This is the first time a television channel is fined for using hate speech against Muslims.

However, on 14 October 2019, the Administrative Court abolished the decision<sup>40</sup> of the Audio-visual Media Authority concerning the show aired on 18 March 2019. Myftaraj reacted on his Facebook page, considering the court’s decision as a victory against the AMA and “the radical Islamic NGOs,”<sup>41</sup> referring to the Muslim Forum of Albania. In his Facebook post he claimed that this was an operation based on the “Shariah, not secular laws of Albania” aimed to damage the laïcité in Albania and the image of Scanderbeg as a national value.<sup>42</sup> (Fig. 4)



**Figure 4:** Kastriot Myftaraj reacts on his Facebook page after the decision of the court to abolish the decision of the AMA: “This day, 14 October, is an important day regarding the freedom of speech, Laicite (Secularism) and the preservation of national values, especially concerning the constitution...”<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, as reported in various online media, Kastriot Myftaraj called for the destruction of the Great Mosque of Tirana with explosives,<sup>44</sup> claiming that the construction of the mosque is illegal. Myftaraj made a similar call in 2015 following the visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Albania. In a Facebook post on 16 May 2015, he called on the people to destroy the Great Mosque of

39. “Njoftim për shtyp”, Autoriteti i Mediave Audiovizive, 17 April 2019, <http://ama.gov.al/2019/04/17/njoftim-per-shtyp/>, (Access date: 3 January 2020).

40. “RTV Ora fiton betejën ligjore me AMA-n, Administrativja shfuqizon dënimin me gjobë”, Oranews.com, 14 October 2019, <https://www.oranews.tv/article/rtv-ora-fiton-betejen-ligjore-me-ama-n-administrativja-shfuqizon-denimin-me-gjobe>, (Access date: 27 December 2019).

41. Kastriot Myftaraj, Facebook, 14 October 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/kastriotmyftaraj1966/posts/2555966674462121>, (Access date: 17 December 2019).

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. “Kastriot Myftaraj, thotë që Xhamia me katër minare në Tiranë duhet të shembet me dinamit”, Facebook, 1 December 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=external&v=459832738243815>, (Access date: 27 December 2019).

Tirana, considering it a “military barrack,” and described Muslims who would pray there as “Mujahideens.”<sup>45</sup> At that time, he considered the visit of President Erdogan in Albania as an open call to Jihad.<sup>46</sup> He also called for the assassination of the Turkish president.<sup>47</sup>

On 22 October 2019, during a monologue on his show “Provokacija” broadcasted on ABC News, Mustafa Nano, a central Islamophobic figure in Albanian media, mocked Elvis Naçi, a local imam in Tirana and the president of the charity Firdeus Foundation, for getting emotional during one of his sermons<sup>48</sup> in his mosque in Tirana. Nano considered the imam’s emotional reaction a “theater” and a “comedy.” In the conclusion of his monologue, Nano simulated an emotional scene, similar to that of Imam Naçi.<sup>49</sup>



**Figure 5:** Mustafa Nano during his TV show “Provokacija.” He mocks the imam Elvis Naçi for his emotional reaction during one of his sermons at his mosque.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, during the same show, he ridiculed the modern way of dressing of the imam, saying that even Ronaldo, the football player, looked more Muslim than him. “Even Ronaldo seems much more Muslim when talking about his dressing style

45. Kastriot Myftaraj, Facebook, 16 May 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/kastriotmyftaraj1966/posts/886283331430472>, (Access date: 27 December 2019).

46. Kastriot Myftaraj, “thirrje për gjenocid ndaj muslimanëve shqiptarë”, *Observer.al* 18 May 2015, <https://observer.al/kastriot-myftaraj-thirrje-per-gjenocid-ndaj-muslimaneve-shqiptare/>, (Access date: 17 December 2019).

47. Besnik Sinani, Elton Hatibi, “Islamophobia in Albania National Report 2017” in *European Islamophobia Report 2017*, eds. Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez (Ankara: SETA, 2018), p. 43.

48. “Përlotet Elvis Naçi gjatë ligjëratës! Çfarë e emocionoi atë?!” YouTube, 25 March 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJIEzqRWCpA&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJIEzqRWCpA&feature=emb_title), (Access date: 17 December 2019).

49. “Provokacija – Monologu”, ABC News Albania, 22 October 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VAz-jROz-h0&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VAz-jROz-h0&feature=emb_title), (Access date: 17 December 2019).

50. Ibid.

compared to the imam. The only extreme thing about him is that moment when he cries. He cries with tears.”<sup>51</sup>

In November 2019, Imam Elvis Naçi was attacked again publicly by various journalists and social media users, after he bought a private clinic in the name of the Foundation Firdeus. Despite the fact that the imam had announced this indirectly a few months earlier during his TV show “Albanians for Albanians,” this did not stop them from speculating and accusing him of using charity funds to buy the hospital. However, Naçi later announced the purchase of the hospital on his Facebook page. He informed the public<sup>52</sup> that the hospital will provide free visits to all the people in need, especially orphans, who cannot afford to pay.<sup>53</sup> In recent years, Imam Naçi has gained fame with his charity foundation for helping people in need and with his TV show “Shqiptarët për Shqiptarët” (Albanians for Albanians). He has gained a great number of followers on social media with almost two million followers across his social media platforms, ranking him amongst the most followed Albanian public figures online. His videos have been viewed millions of times. For this reason, he has been attacked and accused for using his popularity to gain ground for future political purposes.<sup>54</sup> Despite the fact that Imam Naçi has openly denied many times that he has any intention of entering politics, this did not stop journalists and media pundits from speculating.

## Justice System

On 4 December 2019, the Prosecution for Serious Crimes dropped the case against four Albanian Muslim citizens who were arrested in 2016 on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack during the football match between Albania and Israel.<sup>55</sup> After three years of investigation, the Prosecutor’s Office declared that it was not possible to prove that they intended to carry out a terrorist attack. According to the media accounts, the prosecutor who followed their case was expelled from the

---

51. “Edhe Ronaldo më mysliman se Elvis Naçi”, çfarë e bëri Mustafa Nanon të “qajë” në studio (Video), ABC News, 22 October 2019, <http://abcnews.al/edhe-ronaldo-me-myslman-se-elvis-naci-çfare-e-beri-mustafa-nanon-te-qaje-ne-studio-video/>, (Access date: 23 December 2019).

52. “U akuzua për blerjen e një spitali privat, Elvis Naçi sqaron të vërtetën (FOTO)”, Gazeta Shqip, 25 November 2019, <https://www.gazeta-shqip.com/2019/11/25/u-akuzua-per-blerjen-e-nje-spitali-privat-elvis-naci-sqaron-te-verteten-foto/>, (Access date: 27 December 2019).

53. Elvis Naçi, Facebook, 25 November 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/ElvisNaci/posts/2559141104169889>, (Access date: 27 December 2019).

54. “Rudina Xhunga: Kosova gjeti Albin Kurtin, Shqipëria mund të presë Elvis Naçin”, ABC News, 22 October 2019, <http://abcnews.al/rudina-xhunga-kosova-gjeti-albin-kurtin-shqiperia-mund-te-prese-elvis-nacin/>, (Access date: 27 December 2019).

55. “AkteterroristenëShqipëri-Izrael?Japërseuarrestuan4besimtarët nëShkodër”, GazetaPanorama, 8 November 2016, <http://www.panorama.com.al/informacioni-sekret-besimtar-et-e-arrestuar-do-vendosnin-bombe-ne-ndeshjen-mezraelin/>, (Access date: 20 December 2019).

juridical system due to allegations of crime and misappropriation of property.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, their release in December 2019 was reported in the media with headlines<sup>57</sup> similar to those used in 2016.<sup>58</sup>

## Internet

Islam and Muslims are continuously attacked on social media, especially Facebook, by all sorts of people from journalists, political figures and TV hosts to random citizens, who spread hatred and use anti-Muslim rhetoric with the pretext of freedom of speech.

A few weeks after the attack on the Turkish Memorial, the well-known journalist Anila Basha posted a quote on Facebook from the author Ben Blushi calling on people to unite under a Christian flag, regardless of their ethnic background.<sup>59</sup>



**Figure 6:** The journalist Anila Basha posted on her Facebook page: “Christianity lost in front of the Turks because of its own divisions, but now we have to come together under one Christian flag whether we are Albanian or Serbian or Greeks. The Byzantine Empire was the brightest because it managed to unite under one power three elements: a Greek spirit, a Roman mind, and a Muslim body. This is the most perfect balance that history has ever seen... *Living on an Island* by Ben Blushi”<sup>60</sup>

56. “Sulmi terrorist në ndeshjen Shqipëri-Izrael një “fake news”, lirohet nga akuzat shkodrani”, Ora News, 19 December 2019, <https://www.oranews.tv/article/sulmi-terrorist-ne-ndeshjen-shqiperi-izrael-nje-fake-news-lirohet-nga-akuzat-shkodrani>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

57. “FOTO+EMRI/ Planifikuan sulm me eksploziv në “Loro Boriçi”? Pas 3 vitesh hetime, Krimet e Rënda zbulojnë se të akuzuarit ishin të pafajshëm”, Panorama Newspaper, 19 December 2019, <http://www.panorama.com.al/foto-emri-planifikuan-sulm-me-eksploziv-ne-loro-borici-pas-3-vitesh-hetime-krimet-e-renda-zbulojne-se-te-akuzuarit-ishtin-te-pafajshem/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

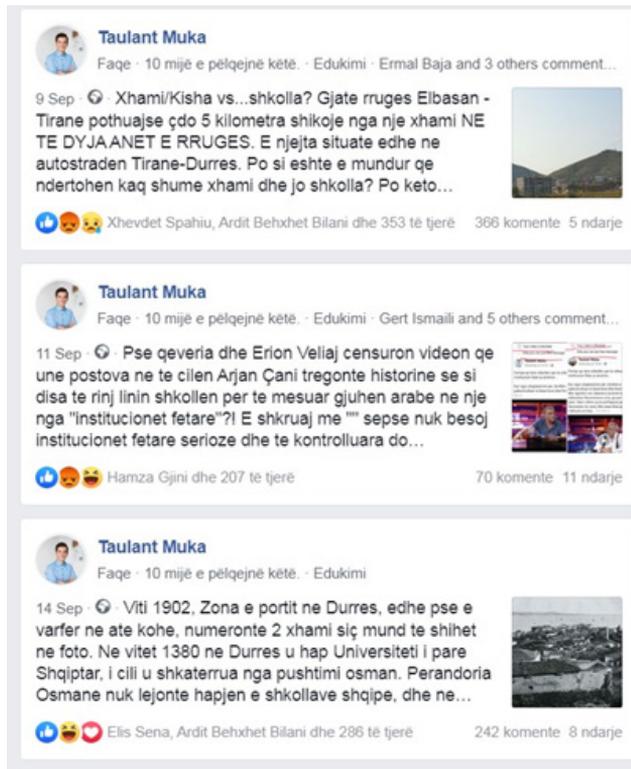
58. “Akte terroriste në Shqipëri- Izrael? Ja përse u arrestuan 4 besimtarët në Shkodër”, Gazeta Panorama, 8 November 2016, <http://www.panorama.com.al/informacioni-sekret-besimtarët-e-arrestuar-do-vendosnin-bombe-ne-ndeshjen-me-izraelin/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

59. Anila Basha, Facebook, 14 September 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/anila.basha.1/posts/10158630827568765>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

60. Ibid.

The book which Basha quoted, namely *Living on an Island*, has been criticized for using Islamophobic language, offending Prophet Muhammed, comparing Muslims to animals,<sup>61</sup> etc. The author, Ben Blushi, is also known for his Islamophobic stances.

In September 2019, the Former Deputy Minister of Education, Sports, and Youth Taulant Muka made a series of posts on his Facebook page complaining about the number of mosques in the two major Albanian cities, the capital Tirana and the coastal city of Durres. He also claimed that most of the people who serve in these “mosques or religious institutions” don’t have the minimum religious education required.<sup>62</sup> He further suggested that instead of building mosques, the money should go towards building schools. His comments provoked reactions from Muslims, and were followed by racist and anti-Muslim comments on his Facebook page.



**Figure 7:** The former Deputy Minister of Education, Sports, and Youth Taulant Muka wrote a series of Facebook posts during September 2019 complaining about the number of mosques and claiming that many of the people who work in these mosques/religious institutions don't have the appropriate religious education.<sup>63</sup>

61. Justinian, Topulli, “Arti pezhishkë i Blushit”, academia.edu, January 2013, [https://www.academia.edu/6138198/Arti\\_pezhishk%C3%AB\\_i\\_Blushit](https://www.academia.edu/6138198/Arti_pezhishk%C3%AB_i_Blushit), (Access date: 31 December 2019).

62. Taulant Muka, Facebook, 9 September 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/Taulant.Muka/posts/10215750693536144>, (Access date: 2 January 2020).

63. Ibid.

In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Albania on 26 November 2019, which killed 51 people, left thousands injured, and hundreds homeless, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama posted several religious quotes on his Facebook page, including Islamic,<sup>64</sup> Christian, and even polytheistic quotes. He was criticized for doing this by both Muslims and non-Muslims. He was accused of using religion in a difficult moment for Albania. Furthermore, the journalist Ylli Rakipi mocked the prime minister for his clothing in one of his public appearances and ironically compared him with the Prophet Muhammed.<sup>65</sup>



**Figure 8:** Prime Minister Edi Rama was mocked in the media and compared to Prophet Muhammed for wearing a black coat in one of his public appearances in the aftermath of the Albanian earthquake.<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, during 2019, Facebook restricted or closed many Islamic pages and personal accounts of Muslim activists in Albania, with the justification of using hate speech, but has failed to do the same for countless Islamophobic pages and individ-

64. Edi Rama, Facebook, 14 December 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/edirama.al/posts/10157246830286523>, (Access date: 1 January 2020).

65. "Gazetari: Kënaqeni kur Rama vishet si profeti Muhamed", Syri.net, 11 December 2019, <https://www.syri.net/politike/300667/gazetari-kenaqeni-kur-rama-vishet-si-profeti-muhamed/>, (Access date: 25 December 2019).

66. Observatori Kombëtar Kundër Islamofobisë, Facebook, 11 December 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/ObservatoriOKI/posts/2454444041488398>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

ual accounts that use social media to spread hate speech against Islam and Muslims, Turks, Arabs, etc.<sup>67</sup> In December 2019, Facebook closed the official page of the Albanian National Observatory Against Islamophobia<sup>68</sup> for three days for posting a pro-Palestinian post. Since then, despite the high number of followers, the page has suffered significant losses in its audience reach, going from tens of thousands to several dozen.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

There are no formal organizations focusing on the spread of Islamophobia<sup>69</sup> in Albania, but there are several media pundits, journalists, TV hosts, bloggers, politicians, etc. who continuously promote hate speech against Islam and Muslims in the mainstream media or social media platforms. In 2017, the Albanian National Observatory Against Islamophobia and the Muslim Forum of Albania prepared a list of well-known public figures who usually promote Islamophobia in their writings and media appearances. The list, although not comprehensive, includes names such as Kastriot Myftaraj, Mustafa Nano, Maks Velo, Arbana Xharra, Berat Buzhala, Gani Mehmetaj, Sadri Ramabaja, etc.<sup>70</sup>

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

There are several NGOs in Albania focused on human rights, but none of them focus on Islamophobia in particular. Nevertheless, certain Muslim NGOs such as the Muslim Forum of Albania (FMSH) have tried to tackle the issue of Islamophobia in various ways. The FMSH prepares an annual report on the situation of Islamophobia in Albania. It also provides legal advice to victims of Islamophobia.

Furthermore, the Albanian National Observatory Against Islamophobia (OKI), an online platform established in 2015 that is fully dedicated to countering Islamophobia in Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia, has been regularly addressing the phenomenon of Islamophobia. The platform continuously monitors hate speech, anti-Muslim, and Islamophobic rhetoric in the mainstream media, internet, politics, etc. It also collects information on various Islamophobic incidents in Albania,

---

67. See for instance the Islamophobic pages on Facebook such as Nje Komb.com, <https://www.facebook.com/1komb/>; and Feja e Shqiptari Eshte Europa, <https://www.facebook.com/ILLYROPIANO/>, (Access date: 31 December 2019).

68. Observatori Kombëtar Kundër Islamofobisë, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/ObservatoriOKI>, (Access date: 31 December 2019).

69. Besnik Sinani and Elton Hatibi, "Islamophobia in Albania National Report 2017", *European Islamophobia Report 2017*, ed. Enes Bayraktli and Farid Hafez (Ankara: SETA, 2018), p. 45.

70. For more information, see: "Lista e analistëve islamofobë të Kosovës, Shqipërisë dhe Maqedonisë", Observer, 13 September 2017, <https://observer.al/lista-e-analisteve-islamofobe-te-kosoves-shqiperise-dhe-maqedonise/>, (Access date: 23 December 2019).

Kosovo, and North Macedonia. Among others, the platform aims to raise awareness about the negative impact of Islamophobia on society; to provide guides and opinions on how to counter Islamophobia; to present a more positive view of Muslims in the media; and to enhance the Muslim voice. Since its establishment, the platform has denounced many Islamophobic incidents, including hate speech in the media,<sup>71</sup> politics,<sup>72</sup> textbooks,<sup>73</sup> etc. The platform is a repository of over 250 articles exclusively dedicated to countering Islamophobia, and continues to grow.

In the same vein, other online media such as e-zani.com,<sup>74</sup> tesheshi.com,<sup>75</sup> Muslimania.al,<sup>76</sup> and other online portals, mainly managed by Muslims, have dedicated a significant space and attention to the issue of Islamophobia in recent years, with many articles denouncing the anti-Muslim rhetoric.

Yet, these initiatives are not coordinated, which makes it difficult for them to have the desired impact on countering Islamophobia. A common action plan could direct these energies and efforts in the right direction.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Islamophobia in Albania is real and is affecting the everyday life of Muslim practitioners. Islam and Muslims are being attacked and demonized in the media in the name of freedom of speech. This form of racism should be addressed on a governmental level as well as among NGOs working in the area of human rights. In fact, anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobic hate speech negatively affects not only Muslims, but seriously harms the country's social cohesion, especially considering that Muslims represent the religious majority in Albania. As shown in the report, Islam in Albania is racialized along with the Turkish and Arab identity as foreign to the Albanian identity. This rhetoric is focused on presenting Islam as something imported from Arab countries or inherited from the Ottoman Empire. The nature of Islamophobia in Albania facilitates the use of anti-Muslim stereotypes by politicians from all sides of the political spectrum who often weaponize such stereotypes to criticize their opponents, media, social media users, etc., contributing to the normalization of Islamophobic rhetoric in Albanian society. In conclusion, we suggest the following recommendations:

71. "Analiza dhe Hulumtime", Observer.al, <https://observer.al/category/analize/>, (Access date: 26 December 2019).

72. "Metafora e gabuar e Kryeministrit Rama", Observer.al, 24 November 2015, <https://observer.al/metafora-e-gabuar-e-kryeministrit-rama/>, (Access date: 26 December 2019).

73. "Çfarë fshihet pas trajnimit të mësuesve në luftën kundër ekstremizmit të dhunshëm?", Observer.al, 21 January 2018, <https://observer.al/cfare-fshihet-pas-trajnimit-te-mesuesve-ne-luften-kunder-ekstremizmit-te-dhunshem/>, (Access date: 26 December 2019).

74. E-Zani i Nalte, <http://www.e-zani.com/>, (Access date: 26 December 2019).

75. Tesheshi.com, <http://tesheshi.com/>, (Access date: 26 December 2019).

76. Muslimania.al, <https://muslimania.al/category/te-tjera/islamofobia/>, (Access date: 26 December 2019).

- Muslim NGOs and other civil society organizations should cooperate more closely to address the issue of Islamophobia.
- Muslim NGOs, in particular, should cooperate more closely and come up with a common action plan to address the issue of Islamophobia in various fields.
- Media should avoid the use of anti-Muslim stereotypes to the maximum extent possible. They should also avoid reporting unverified news on Muslims and should correct any fake news in this regard.
- The authorities in Albania should investigate any hate crime against people or sites. They should also monitor the continuous hate speech incidents in the media and social media, especially when the perpetrators are major public figures.
- Local governments in Albania should take into consideration complaints coming from the Muslim community regarding any obstacle or concern to perform their Jummah prayer in order to secure the freedom to practice one's religion.
- The government of Albania should prepare a draft law to regulate the constitutional rights of Muslims to perform their daily prayer in the workplace, especially regarding the necessary permission to take time off work to perform the Jummah prayer.

## Chronology

- **18.03.2019:** Anti-Muslim hate speech used during the TV show “Moscow Is Speaking” in the aftermath of the terrorist attack at Christchurch, New Zealand. The show was aired on 18 March 2019 on Ora News (now RTV Ora).
- **30.05.2019:** The closure of the Muslim school Visare by the Ministry of Education.
- **22.10.2019:** Journalist Mustafa Nano mocked Imam Elvis Naçi during his show “Provokacija” aired on ABC News.
- **25.11.2019:** Imam Elvis Naçi was publicly attacked after he bought a private clinic in the name of the Firdeus Foundation, over which he presides.
- **19.12.2019:** Four Albanian citizens accused 3 years ago of an attempted terrorist attacks were acquitted. The media did not only not retract the fake news reported at the time, but some outlets continued with similar headlines even after their release.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**AUSTRIA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

FARID HAFEZ



**Farid Hafez**, PhD (Political Science, University of Vienna), is a political scientist and non-resident senior researcher at Georgetown University’s “The Bridge Initiative” at the School of Foreign Service. He defended his habilitation thesis on “Islam Politics in the Second Republic of Austria” at the University of Salzburg in 2019. In 2017, he was a Fulbright visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley and in 2014, he was a visiting scholar at Columbia University, New York. Since 2010, he has been the editor of the *Islamophobia Studies Yearbook*, and since 2015 the co-editor of the *European Islamophobia Report*. Hafez has received the Bruno Kreisky Award for the “Political Book of the Year” for his anthology *Islamophobia in Austria* (co-edited with John Bunzl). He has more than 100 publications in leading journals such as *Politics and Religion*, *Patterns of Prejudice*, and *German Politics and Society*. His latest publications are *Islamophobia in Muslim Majority Societies* (Routledge, co-edited with Enes Bayrakli, 2019) and *Feindbild Islam. Über die Salonfähigkeit von Rassismus* (Islamophobia. On the Acceptance of Racism. Böhlau, 2019). Email: farid.hafez@sbg.ac.at

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Farid Hafez: *Islamophobia in Austria: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayrakli & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

The NGO *Dokustelle* documented 1,051 cases of anti-Muslim hate crime, which is nearly twice as many compared to 2018 (540 cases). The far-right government coalition of the ÖVP and FPÖ lasted only to 28 May following the Ibiza gate scandal that led to the dismissal of the longtime FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache. This created a public climate that focused primarily on the Ibiza gate and its repercussions. Also, the subsequent government of experts that took power until the upcoming elections in October 2019 gave a pause to the strong wave of anti-Muslim legislation. Nevertheless, the lasting impact of new personnel appointed by the far-right government in the state bureaucracy was evident. For example, the Interior Ministry's Secret Service (BVT) published a report that for the first time named the Islamic Religious Community (IGGÖ) not as a partner in the fight against Jihadism, but as a problem of extremism. This marks a radical shift in the BVT's Islam-related politics. The European Parliament elections that took place on 26 May did not target Muslims as much as in previous years' elections given the focus on the Ibiza gate. The impact of this was that many of the political projects that affected Muslims were put on the waiting list. The destabilization of the far-right coalition thus had a positive impact, creating a breathing pause in the country. Nevertheless, the ÖVP and the FPÖ both repeated their standard anti-Muslim policy claims in the elections campaign in 2019. The implementation of Islamophobic legislation went hand in hand with other far-reaching authoritarian and repressive legislations. Following the implementation of anti-Muslim legislation in 2018, some further restrictions of Muslim religious practice were implemented such as the hijab ban up to an age of 10 years. Also, no political party to date has really positioned itself against those anti-Muslim claims, suggesting that Islamophobia still enjoys a hegemonic power across the political spectrum. At the same time, more anti-racist initiatives could be observed compared to 2018. With the negotiations for a new government that culminated in a coalition of the ÖVP and the Greens beginning in January 2020, one looks to the year 2020 with cautious optimism.

## Zusammenfassung

Die *Dokustelle* dokumentierte 1051 antimuslimische Vorfälle, was im Vergleich zu 2018 (540 Fälle) fast doppelt so viel ist. Die rechte Regierungskoalition von ÖVP und FPÖ dauerte nur bis zum 28. Mai, nachdem der Ibiza-Skandal zum Rücktritt des langjährigen FPÖ-Vorsitzenden Heinz-Christian Strache sowie einer Auflösung der Regierung führte. Dies schuf ein öffentliches Klima, das sich hauptsächlich auf das Ibiza-Gate und seine Auswirkungen sowie auf die anschließende Expertenregierung konzentrierte, die bis zu den Wahlen im Oktober 2019 die Regierungsgeschäfte inne hatte. Gleichzeitig war der Einfluss der Umfärbung auf die Staatsbürokratie offensichtlich. Beispielsweise veröffentlichte der das BVT einen Bericht, in dem die Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft (IGGÖ) erstmals nicht als Partnerin im Kampf gegen den Dschihadismus, sondern als Problem des Extremismus genannt wurde. Dies markiert eine radikale Veränderung in der Islam-bezogenen Politik des BVT. Im Schatten des Ibiza-Gate fokussierten die Wahlen zum Europäischen Parlament am 26. Mai weniger auf MuslimInnen als zuvor. Die Auswirkungen auf die Entwicklung von Islamophobie waren positiv, da viele politische Projekte gegen Muslim\*innen auf die Warteliste kamen. Trotzdem wiederholten sowohl die ÖVP als auch die FPÖ im Wahlkampf 2019 ihre üblichen anti-muslimischen Forderungen. Die Destabilisierung der rechtsextremen Koalition wirkte sich somit positiv aus und schuf eine Atempause. Die Umsetzung der anti-muslimischen Gesetzgebung ging Hand in Hand mit anderen weitreichenden autoritären und repressiven Gesetzen einher. Nach der Umsetzung der anti-muslimischen Gesetzgebung im Jahr 2018 wurden einige weitere Einschränkungen der muslimischen Religionsausübung eingeführt, wie beispielsweise das Hijab-Verbot bis zu einem Alter von bis zu 10 Jahren. Gleichzeitig konnten mehr antirassistische Initiativen beobachtet werden. Mit den Verhandlungen für eine neue Regierung, die im Jänner 2020 in einer Koalition von ÖVP und Grünen gipfelte, blickt man vorsichtig optimistisch auf das Jahr 2020.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Republic of Austria

**Type of Regime:** Representative democracy

**Form of Government:** Semi-presidential federal parliamentary republic

**Ruling Parties:** Austrian People's Party (ÖVP, centrist-right) and Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ, right-wing)

**Opposition Parties:** Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), The Greens, NEOS, Liste Pilz/Liste Jetzt!

**Last Elections:** October 2019, Parliamentary Elections (ÖVP 71 seats [37.5%]; SPÖ, 40 seats [21.2%]; FPÖ, 30 seats [16.2%]; Greens, 26 seats [13.9%]; NEOS, 15 seats [8.1%]).

Governments in 2019: ÖVP and FPÖ (right-wing) until 28 May, expert government from 3 June to 7 January 2020.

**Total Population:** 8.9 million

**Major Languages:** German

**Official Religion:** No official religion. Federal constitution recognizes 13 churches and religious communities. Islam has been legally recognized since 1912.

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** 1,051 cases documented by Dokustelle Muslime; 385 of 1,950 documented cases by ZARA.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** The NGO ZARA documented 1,950 cases.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Catholics 57.24%, Protestants 3.3%, Muslims 8%

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 700,000 (8%) according to estimations made by the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF)

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Islamic Religious Authority in Austria (*Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich*, IGGÖ). With the new Islam Act of 2015, all major Muslim organizations are part of the IGGÖ.

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** *SOS Mitmensch*, *Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit und antimuslimischer Rassismus*, ZARA, *Gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft*

**Far-Right Parties:** FPÖ

**Far-Right Movements:** Identitarian Movement, Info Direkt

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** In kindergartens since 2018. Since 2109, in primary school up to 10 years of age.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** Partly banned
- **Minaret Ban:** In the counties of Carinthia and Vorarlberg.
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** Yes, since 2017.
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

The far-right government coalition of the ÖVP and FPÖ lasted only until 28 May following the Ibiza gate scandal<sup>1</sup> that led to the dismissal of the longtime FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache. This also created a public climate that focused primarily on the Ibiza gate and its repercussions. Also, the subsequent government of experts presented itself as an ‘unpolitical’ one, thus leaving little space for debating Islam and Muslims. The impact of this was that many of the political projects that affected Muslims were put on the waiting list. The destabilizing of the far-right coalition thus had a positive impact, creating a breathing pause in the country. The implementation of Islamophobic legislation went hand in hand with other far-reaching authoritarian and repressive legislations. The far-right government had implemented several restrictive legislations such as the amendment of the “law of aliens” (*Fremdenrechtsnovelle*) in July 2018 that included the possibility to analyze data from mobile phones. Asylum seekers who have committed a criminal offense can be placed in so-called detention pending deportation after serving their prison terms. Individuals officially registered as refugees can now apply for Austrian citizenship after a minimum of ten years of residency and work. Civil society aid organizations for refugees were planned to be replaced by state agencies.<sup>2</sup> Other limitations of religious freedom such as the abolishment of the legal recognition of the previously established Protestant holiday of Good Friday (which is the most important one for Protestants in Austria) revealed that the shrinking of human rights and religious freedom will subsequently affect other minorities.<sup>3</sup>

According to a survey conducted by Salzburg University-based sociologist Wolfgang Aschauer, 79 percent of 1,200 respondents believe that Islamic institutions should be increasingly surveilled. Seventy percent believe that Islam is not compatible with the Western world, 60% fear that there are terrorists among Muslims, while 87% supported the statement that Muslims have to adopt to the Austrian culture. This shows the deep-seated and widely shared anti-Muslim prejudice which Aschauer traces back to a political climate that allowed for these views to become normal.<sup>4</sup>

1. The Ibiza-gate was triggered on 17 May 2019 by the publication of a secretly recorded video of a meeting in Ibiza, Spain, in July 2017, held by Strache and FPÖ-Gudenus discussing their party’s underhanded practices and intentions. Both politicians intend to sell government contracts to an alleged niece of a Russian businessman and hinted at corrupt political practices involving other wealthy donors to the FPÖ. As a consequence, the scandal caused the collapse of the governing coalition on 18 May 2019. Elections were set for 29 September.

2. Lucian Mayringer, “Anschlusshaft bis Kopftuchverbot: Ein Regierungsprogramm gegen Ausländer”, Nachrichten, 26 March 2019, <https://www.nachrichten.at/politik/innenpolitik/anschlusshaft-bis-kopftuchverbot-ein-regierungsprogramm-fuer-auslaender;art385,3113918>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

3. “Strache: ‘Bin gegen muslimischen Feiertag’ Vizekanzler zu Karfreitag, Opernball & Sicherungshaft”, OE24, 2 March 2019, <https://www.oe24.at/oesterreich/politik/Strache-Bin-gegen-muslimischen-Feiertag/370187741>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

4. “Mehrheit der Österreicher sieht Islam kritisch”, Der Standard, 26 September 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.at/privacywall/story/2000109103695/mehrheit-der-oesterreicher-sehen-islam-kritisch>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

The NGO ZARA documented 1,950 racist acts. The civil society organization Dokustelle Muslime documented 1,051 cases of anti-Muslim incidents in 2019. The majority consists of the spread of hate (757 cases), followed by 118 cases of insult, discrimination (43 cases), and others.<sup>5</sup> According to ZARA, 385 of 1,950 documented racist acts were anti-Muslim.<sup>6</sup>

In April, Muslims notified the police that they had heard gunshots in front of the Islamic Center in Vienna. The police found cartridges of a blank gun in front of the entrance of the largest mosque in Vienna. According to the police, the gunshots were the result of a quarrel between two car drivers.<sup>7</sup>

A sticker with the intimidation “RAPEFUGEES NOT WELCOME” was seen on a bench in the fifth district of Vienna. (Fig. 1) Refugees are often equated with being Muslim, especially after the influx in 2015.



**Figure 1:** Sticker with the words “RAPEFUGEES NOT WELCOME” on a bench in the fifth district of Vienna, 1050.<sup>8</sup>

### Employment

The Dokustelle and ZARA document discrimination in the labor market. For further data, their reports should be consulted. The presentation of the 2019 report was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The idea that women cannot wear a hijab as attorneys, judges, and police officers, as discussed in 2017 alongside

5. Personal correspondence with Dokustelle prior to the release of their annual report.

6. Personal correspondence with ZARA prior to the release of their annual report.

7. Josef Galley, “Polizei-Einsatz unter Wiens Minarett. Panik nach Schüssen vor größter Moschee Österreichs”, OE24, 8 April 2019, <https://www.oe24.at/oesterreich/chronik/wien/Panik-nach-Schuessen-vor-groesster-Moschee-Oesterreichs/375267972>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

8. Email to the author, December 2019.

the implementation of the full-face veil ban in the Integration Act 2017, was further expanded. A Muslim legal intern was not allowed to sit on the judge's bench. The Linz Higher Regional Court (OLG) ruled that the young woman could not represent the state and the judiciary if she wore the hijab. According to the president of the OLG, Katharina Lehmayr, the “tricky issue was not yet regulated by the legislator.”<sup>9</sup>

## Education

In March 2019, ÖVP Minister of Education Heinz Faßmann informed the public that a survey will be conducted on social climate and integration in schools. One question in the survey involved the increase/decrease of the number of girls wearing the hijab. Kenan Güngör, who was also a member of the expert council on integration of the Foreign Ministry, was in charge of the survey that claims to engage with teachers.<sup>10</sup> The results have not been published yet.

Minister of Education Faßmann (ÖVP) replaced eleven executive personnel in his ministry. Many pedagogues were forced to leave and were replaced by loyal party members such as Markus Benesch who has been working for Sebastian Kurz in various leading positions.<sup>11</sup> This has the potential that anti-Muslim legislation will be further entrenched in the field of education.

A male student appeared armed with a weapon for lectures at the Faculty of Physics of the University of Vienna in October. On social media, he had made remarks and expressed violent fantasies about Islam. After another knife was discovered, he was banned from the university as a first reaction. On his Twitter account he stated, “I would like to die in a fight against Islam and kill as many of them as possible.”<sup>12</sup>

A highly problematic aspect is the Secret Service's (BVT) new approach to dealing with the Muslim community. While in the past, the Islamic Religious Community (IGGÖ) was seen as a partner in the fight against Jihadism, now major aspects of the IGGÖ's activities from religious education in public schools to the training of teachers in college are seen with suspicion.<sup>13</sup>

9. “Gerichtspraktikantin mit Kopftuch nur Zuschauerin”, ORF, 3 December 2019, <https://oe.orf.at/stories/3024477/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

10. “Start für Schulstudie zu sozialem Klima und Integration”, ORF, 27 March 2019, <https://orf.at/stories/3116613/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

11. Lisa Nimmervoll, “Heinz Faßmanns Ministeriumsumbau sorgt für Aufruhr”, Der Standard, 2 May 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.at/privacywall/story/2000102344996/fassmanns-ministeriumsumbau-sorgt-fuer-aufruhr>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

12. Thomas Hoisl, “Uni Wien: Student mit Waffe im Hörsaal”, Profil, 21 October 2019, <https://www.profil.at/oesterreich/uni-wien-student-waffe-hoersaal-11181987>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

13. Farid Hafez, “Perspective: Official Islam as a Threat? The Paradigm Shift in Austria's Security Politics”, SETA Perspective, 27 September 2019, <https://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2019/09/P56En.pdf>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

## Politics

On 11 January 2019, the weekly *Profil* reported that the federal far-right government wants to create a monitoring center that tracks religious extremism, conducts research, and archives and documents it.<sup>14</sup> Freedom Party whip Johann Gudenus said there would be a “law against political Islam modelled on the Prohibition Act of 1947.”<sup>15</sup> The law was planned to be published in the second half of 2019 and was not implemented because the government resigned. The exclusive focus on Islam was overruled by the constitutional committee as unconstitutional. According to the Freedom Party, there are two foci: “religious laws that are put above state law and the unequal treatment of women due to religious reasons.”<sup>16</sup> Independent MP Efgani Dönmez supported this initiative to monitor movements such as “the Muslim Brotherhood and the Turkish Milli Görüs.”<sup>17</sup> Vice chancellor and party leader Heinz-Christian Strache emphasized the need to “ban political Islam on a legal basis.”<sup>18</sup>

Following Strache’s launch of his think tank debating “Islamic Anti-Semitism” and the presentation of a study on anti-Semitism according to which Arab and Turkish immigrants were more anti-Semitic than others, the government demanded that a “Monitoring Center for political Islam, Rule of Law, and Prevention” (*Dokumentationsstelle für politischen Islam, Rechtsstaatlichkeit und Prävention*) be established in 2020.<sup>19</sup> Certain journalists uttered their suspicion of these consecutive happenings.<sup>20</sup> Chancellor Kurz said, “Politicians are urgently required to protect our free society from political Islam and its excesses, such as anti-Semitism.”<sup>21</sup> Kurz explained that this means to monitor Islamist associations, Islamist ideology on social media, and segregation in the realm of education. The law was planned to be debated in parliament in the summer of 2019.<sup>22</sup>

---

14. “Offenbar Beobachtungsstelle gegen Extremismus geplant”, ORF, 12 January 2019.

15. Clemens Neuhold, “Türkis-Blaues Islamisten-Watch”, *Profil*, 11 January 2019, <https://www.profil.at/oesterreich/tuerkis-blaues-islamisten-watch-10586605>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. “EU-Wahl: FPÖ brutal gegen Karas”, *OE24*, 19 January 2019, <https://www.oe24.at/oesterreich/politik/EU-Wahl-FPOe-brutal-gegen-Karas/364549446>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

19. “Regierungsplan. 2020 kommt Stelle gegen Islamismus”, *OE24*, 2 March 2019, <https://www.oe24.at/oesterreich/politik/2020-kommt-Stelle-gegen-Islamismus/370186720>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

20. Georg Renner, “Beobachtungsstelle neu. Ein DÖW für Islamisten! Oder: Wie die Regierung schnell zurück zu ihrem Lieblingsthema kommt”, *Kleine Zeitung*, 3 March 2019, [https://www.kleinezeitung.at/meinung/5588894/Beobachtungsstelle-neu\\_Ein-DOeW-fuer-Islamisten-Oder\\_Wie-die](https://www.kleinezeitung.at/meinung/5588894/Beobachtungsstelle-neu_Ein-DOeW-fuer-Islamisten-Oder_Wie-die), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

21. *Ibid.*

22. “Präventivarbeit. Regierung verstärkt den Kampf gegen Antisemitismus”, *Kronen Zeitung*, 3 March 2019, <https://www.krone.at/1875035>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

Peter Pilz, leader of the small parliamentary party Liste Jetzt, argued that Austria's political system was infiltrated by political Islam. Specifically, he stated "Milli Görüs, the Turkish Muslim Brotherhood... [a]long with Erdogan's ATIB [Turkish Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Cooperation, FH], both have taken over the Islamic Religious Community (IGGÖ)."<sup>23</sup> According to him, with the new president Ümit Vural, the "power of political Islam" was set in cement. Pilz further argued, "We have to look at whether individual representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood have not had an impact on the law. We have to be careful that Milli Görüs does not exploit parts of domestic politics."<sup>24</sup> He warned that the ÖVP and SPÖ could be infiltrated by them. Pilz claimed that Sebastian Kurz had given the Muslim Brotherhood the possibility to use the law for its own purpose, especially in terms of financial aid from foreign countries.<sup>25</sup> The ATIB protested against these allegations by Pilz and argued that the ATIB would be "one of the strongest proponents in the fight against extremist religious tendencies," thus again reproducing anti-Muslim stereotypes.<sup>26</sup> According to the ATIB, Pilz is a populist who engages in conspiracies because of his own insignificance, and it accused him of dividing society.<sup>27</sup> Also, the former party member and independent MP Martha Bißmann criticized her former party leader for being as populist as the far right.<sup>28</sup> Following a visit to a meeting in Cologne by the president of the Islamic Religious Community, FPÖ party whip Johann Gudenus asked him to step down. President Vural participated in a conference organized by the Turkish department of religious affairs, Diyanet. Gudenus saw this as a proof that Vural was a "radical Islamist" participating in a "secret meeting"<sup>29</sup> – it should be noted that the meeting was never secret.

Following the coverage of a "Turkish-nationalist Milli Görüs movement" by the daily *Krone*, ÖVP minister and party leader of the Viennese branch, Gernot Blümel, argued, "Years of looking away paved the way for the emergence of parallel societies

23. "Pilz sieht Parteien durch politischen Islam unterwandert", ORF, 3 March 2019, <https://orf.at/stories/3113756/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. "Türkischer Moscheeverein ATIB: Pilz-Attacken 'schamlos' und 'an den Haaren herbeigezogen', Kleine Zeitung, 5 March 2019, [https://www.kleinezeitung.at/politik/innenpolitik/5590179/Tuerkischer-Moscheeverein\\_ATIB\\_Pilz-Attacken-schamlos-und-an-den-](https://www.kleinezeitung.at/politik/innenpolitik/5590179/Tuerkischer-Moscheeverein_ATIB_Pilz-Attacken-schamlos-und-an-den-), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

27. "ATIB: ATIB empört über haltlose Anschuldigungen durch Peter Pilz", OTS, 5 March 2019, [https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20190305\\_OTS0121/atib-empoert-ueber-haltlose-anschuldigungen-durch-peter-pilz](https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20190305_OTS0121/atib-empoert-ueber-haltlose-anschuldigungen-durch-peter-pilz), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

28. "Bißmann reagiert auf Angriff von Peter Pilz auf Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft und warnt vor gefährlichem Populismus", OTS, 5 March 2019, [https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20190305\\_OTS0170/bissmann-reagiert-auf-angriff-von-peter-pilz-auf-islamische-glaubensgemeinschaft-und-warnt-vor-gefaehrlichem-populismus](https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20190305_OTS0170/bissmann-reagiert-auf-angriff-von-peter-pilz-auf-islamische-glaubensgemeinschaft-und-warnt-vor-gefaehrlichem-populismus), (Access date: 20 December 2019).

29. "FPÖ-Gudenus: IGGÖ-Präsident Vural muss nach Teilnahme an islamistischem Vernetzungstreffen sofort abberufen werden", OTS, 8 April 2019, [https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20190408\\_OTS0115/fpoe-gudenus-iggoe-praesident-vural-muss-nach-teilnahme-an-islamistischem-vernetzungstreffen-sofort-abberufen-werden](https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20190408_OTS0115/fpoe-gudenus-iggoe-praesident-vural-muss-nach-teilnahme-an-islamistischem-vernetzungstreffen-sofort-abberufen-werden), (Access date: 20 December 2019).

in Vienna.”<sup>30</sup> He stated that the city must not become the “center of political Islam [...] What has been sown by the red-green government for decades is now bearing fruit in the form of organized Islamic associations. In this way, our society does not ask for integration but segregation.”<sup>31</sup> Rather than counteracting this discourse, the social democratic government argued that the federal government was in charge of this issue. According to them, they had already filed a petition to the interior minister to “closely monitor associations who spread authoritarian or Islamic-nationalist ideologies and to regulate the states on a regular basis.”<sup>32</sup>

A discussion on the Christchurch terrorist attack took place in national parliament. According to the information from the Ministry of Interior, the terrorist Tarrant came to Vienna via Budapest and had left Austria on his way to Estonia. With a group of other people, Tarrant had visited North Korea. Two of them were Austrians. The Interior Ministry said that there were no relations to persons or right-wing extremist organizations. MP Walter Rosenkranz (FPÖ) criticized the opposition by claiming that it did not act on the danger of right-wing extremism and argued that the opposition parties were blind in one eye, refusing to see left-wing extremist and Islamist terror. FPÖ party whip Johann Gudenus even argued that the “daily persecution of Christians” would be uncommented by political leaders and thus criticized the lack of empathy with all victims of terrorist attacks. He then argued that the ban of political Islam would be the right answer to fight radical Islamist terrorist movements “who want to destroy our culture.”<sup>33</sup> Peter Weidinger from the governing ÖVP also stated, “We are not blind on the left, nor on the right eye,” thus equating the threat of right-wing extremism with leftist groups. Previously, ÖVP MP Efgani Dönmez also argued that right-wing extremism and Islamist extremism both share the same goals: the destruction of society and the state. Alma Zadić (Jetzt) criticized FPÖ politicians for using the same language as the Identitarians. Prominent politicians of the FPÖ spoke of combatting “invaders.” She identified parallels with the beginning of the Yugoslavian war, where the society was divided and people took to arms. Social democratic MP Peter Wittmann argued that one could not deny the strong links between Interior Minister Herbert Kickl (FPÖ) and the Identitarian movement. A resolution from the government was adopted by all parties to re-implement a strategy against right-wing extremism. Also, the government argued that the permanent investigation

---

30. “Debatte um Milli-Görüs-Jugendzentrum”, ORE, 7 February 2019, <https://wien.orf.at/v2/news/stories/2963305/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. “Anschlag in Neuseeland: Kickl will sämtliche Hinweise und Spuren mit Österreich-Bezug überprüfen”, OTS, 28 March 2019, [https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20190328\\_OTS0233/anschlag-in-neuseeland-kickl-will-saemtliche-hinweise-und-spuren-mit-oesterreich-bezug-ueberpruefen](https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20190328_OTS0233/anschlag-in-neuseeland-kickl-will-saemtliche-hinweise-und-spuren-mit-oesterreich-bezug-ueberpruefen), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

committee and the National Security Council would allow for more detailed information about Tarrant's relation to Austria.<sup>34</sup>

Following the dissolution of the far-right government, Viennese FPÖ Chairman Dominik Nepp said that the Islamic Community (IGGÖ), which is a legally recognized corporative institution, should be investigated regarding its legal status because its president Ümit Vural asked to build a visible mosque in every state of Austria. He stated, "The IGGÖ is ... by legalist Islamists, whose goal is to create an Islamic theocratic state with peaceful means."<sup>35</sup> Karl Nehammer, general secretary of the ÖVP, responded to Vural saying that integration was more important than the construction of a mosque in every state of Austria. "The IGGÖ must not bring Muslims further away from our society, but must help to improve their integration. This requires joint efforts and a commitment to our catalog of values instead of false fantasies with mosques. We are of course not against mosques per se, but I see the outlined path from a large mosque per federal state as critical because it does not contribute to the integration of Muslims, but does the opposite."<sup>36</sup>

In 2017, members of a chat group of the student union AG, which is ideologically linked to the governing ÖVP, had spread anti-Semitic and white supremacist content. While a member was excluded from the ÖVP youth organization and a local MP was removed from the ÖVP in Lower Austria, the public came to know that a member of this very chat group was working in the Foreign Ministry. He had worked for the ministry and the Austrian Integration Fund ÖIF.<sup>37</sup>

Political scientist Bassam Tibi warned of a "new anti-Semitism" emerging in Iran that is rooted in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. He was invited to speak at an official commemoration of the Holocaust and said that he "adored him [Sebastian Kurz, FH] very much."<sup>38</sup> Tibi stated, "If a new systematic pogrom of Jews is repeated, then it will be in the Near East."<sup>39</sup> In contrast to Tibi and his narrative of anti-Semitic Muslims, the president of the Austrian Federal Council (SPÖ), the second chamber of the parliament, did not focus on the "new anti-Semitism" but on human rights and democracy.

34. Ibid.

35. "Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft: Wiener FPÖ-Chef will Auflösung", *Kurier*, 19 November 2019, <https://kurier.at/chronik/wien/islamische-glaubensgemeinschaft-wiener-fpoe-chef-will-aufloesung/400679021>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

36. Die neue Volkspartei, "Nehammer: Integration wichtiger als der Bau von einer Moschee pro Bundesland", *OTS*, 18 November 2019, [https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20191118\\_OT50125/nehammer-integration-wichtiger-als-der-bau-von-einer-moschee-pro-bundesland](https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20191118_OT50125/nehammer-integration-wichtiger-als-der-bau-von-einer-moschee-pro-bundesland), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

37. "Antisemitische Chats: Mitglied arbeitet im Außenministerium", *ORF*, 18 January 2019, <https://orf.at/stories/3108171/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

38. "Wenn sich Holocaust wiederholt, wird es im Nahen Osten sein", *Die Presse*, 3 May 2019, <https://www.diepresse.com/5622059/wenn-sich-holocaust-wiederholt-wird-es-im-nahen-osten-sein>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

39. Ibid.

In an interview with the daily *Österreich*, Vice-Chancellor Strache said that the deletion of the legal recognition of the established Protestant holiday Good Friday was necessary in order not to let Muslims claim a separate legally recognized holiday. He said, “We definitely do not want a Muslim holiday.”<sup>40</sup> Norbert Hofer (FPÖ) reiterated this.<sup>41</sup> This also had an effect on the Jewish holiday Yom Kippur, forcing Protestants and Jews to take an extra day off on their religious holidays.<sup>42</sup> The Protestant Church prepared a lawsuit against the removal of its holiday from the official list of national holidays.

During a parliamentary debate in the Viennese Council on 27 February 2019, an FPÖ MP argued that Rami Ali, an anti-racist political activist, is presumably a Muslim Brother. The FPÖ argued that he was linked to the Social Democratic Party and Green MP Faika El-Nagashi.<sup>43</sup> Because of parliamentary privilege, the MP cannot be sued.

Thomas Bulant of the Social Democratic labor union FSG criticized the federal government for not allocating enough money to teaching staff. Naming the problems, he argued, “Part of this, of course, is the creeping Islamization in our society, violence or crime.”<sup>44</sup>

According to the head of the SPÖ in Lower Austria, Franz Schnabl, the ÖVP’s strategy in the election campaign to discuss Islam as a security threat was a distraction from internal scandals. He stated, “Creating fear is not the job of responsible politicians.”<sup>45</sup>

During the convention of the European Peoples Party (EPP) in May 2019 in Zagreb, Sebastian Kurz declared that Europe had to “defend Europe’s Christian-Jewish identity.”<sup>46</sup> He further stated that “it should not accept more people, whom it is not able to integrate.”<sup>47</sup> The original proposal for a department of the European Commission was “Commissioner on the Protection of European Way of Life,” which was

40. Isabell Daniel, “Strache: ‚Bin gegen muslimischen Feiertag“, OE24, 2 March 2019.

41. “Karfreitag-Kompromiss sorgt für schlechte Stimmung”, Der Standard, 20 February 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.at/privacywall/story/2000098264338/hofer-ueberlegt-fuer-handel-am-karfreitag-8-dezember-regelung>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

42. “Karfreitag: Regierung streicht auch Jom Kippur”, Heute, 26 February 2019, <https://www.heute.at/s/karfreitag-regierung-streicht-auch-jom-kippur-49071858>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

43. Gemeinderat, 48. Sitzung vom 27.02.2019, Wörtliches Protokoll - Seite 86 von 100, <https://www.wien.gv.at/mdb/gr/2019/gr-048-w-2019-02-27-086.html>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

44. “SPÖ-Gewerkschafter warnt vor Islamisierung”, Heute.at, 28 January 2019.

45. SPÖ Niederösterreich, “Schnabl/Kocevar zu ÖVP-Extremismuspapier: ‘Durchschaubares Ablenkungsmanöver!“, OTS, 17 August 2019, [https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20190817\\_OTS0009/schnablkocevar-zu-oevp-extremismuspapier-durchschaubares-ablenkungsmanoever](https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20190817_OTS0009/schnablkocevar-zu-oevp-extremismuspapier-durchschaubares-ablenkungsmanoever), (20 December 2019).

46. Daniel Kittner, “Kurz will, dass die EU die ‚christlich-jüdische Identität schützt“, Kurier, 21 November 2019.

47. Ibid.

regarded as populist by the Social Democrats and the Greens. The term “protection” was later changed to “Promotion,” which was not welcomed by Sebastian Kurz.<sup>48</sup>

During the election campaign, the ÖVP demanded that marriages can only be contracted with a minimum age of 18 years. A request by the Austrian Press Agency APA made clear that this initiative targeted Muslims, claiming that with immigration, people came to Austria who think that Islamic values were more important than Austrian ones.<sup>49</sup>

In a response to the ÖVP’s attempt to ban the Identitarian movement, the FPÖ reiterated its will to ban political Islam.<sup>50</sup> When the ÖVP called for a ban of political Islam in its election program, the FPÖ argued that it was the justice minister of the ‘ÖVP who had not put such a law into practice.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Legislation***

After a hijab ban in kindergarten was already implemented in 2018, the ÖVP invited the anti-Muslim author Zana Ramadani as an expert to the education committee to expand the hijab ban up to 10 years of age. She argued, “Once you wear it [hijab, FH] as a girl, you won’t take it off.”<sup>52</sup> The proposed text bans “wearing ideological or religious clothing, with which a covering of the head is connected.” An explicit naming of the hijab would be problematic while this description allows the kippah and dastar (turban worn by Sikhs) not to be affected. Minister of Education Heinz Faßmann argued that this would be done for secularity and the equal treatment of men and women. Another expert, Ebrahim Afsah, called the hijab a “modern, political symbol” and argued that the ban was not problematic since it was not obligatory at this young age. NEOS and SPÖ did not support the proposal, though they declared that they would not support young girls being forced to wear the hijab. In addition to the hijab ban, they called for a more comprehensive policy to support social workers and language skills. Minister Faßmann also argued that he envisions a space for public servants that is ideology and religion-free specifically mentioning policewomen, judges, and teachers (except teachers of religion classes). Minister

48. Ibid.

49. “ÖVP will Ehe künftig erst ab 18 Jahren erlauben”, ORF, 28 August 2019, <https://orf.at/stories/3135209/>, (Access date: 21 December 2019).

50. “Freiheitlicher Parlamentsklub – FPÖ, FPÖ-Jenewein zu Nehammer: ‚Gerichte und Behörden sind für Vereinsverbote zuständig‘”, OTS, 26 August 2019, [https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20190826\\_OTS0112/fpoe-jenewein-zu-nehammer-gerichte-und-behoerden-sind-fuer-vereinsverbote-zustaendig](https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20190826_OTS0112/fpoe-jenewein-zu-nehammer-gerichte-und-behoerden-sind-fuer-vereinsverbote-zustaendig), (Access date: 21 December 2019).

51. “Freiheitlicher Parlamentsklub – FPÖ, FPÖ-Kickl: „ÖVP hat Gesetz gegen den politischen Islam blockiert und damit verhindert“, OTS, 16 August 2019, [https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20190816\\_OTS0012/fpoe-kickl-oevp-hat-gesetz-gegen-den-politischen-islam-blockiert-und-damit-verhindert](https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20190816_OTS0012/fpoe-kickl-oevp-hat-gesetz-gegen-den-politischen-islam-blockiert-und-damit-verhindert), (Access date: 21 December 2019).

52. Julia Neuhauser, “Die Ausdehnung des Kopftuchverbots”, Die Presse, 20 March 2019, <https://www.diepresse.com/5598480/die-ausdehnung-des-kopftuchverbots>, (Access date: 20 December 2019).

Faßmann said that the ban is only up to 10 years of age because this is less risky to be against religious freedom. He added, “I am nobody that fights with the machete.” To this, his expert, Zana Ramadani, added, “I am here for using the machete.”<sup>53</sup>

President of the Islamic Community Vural had proclaimed that he would litigate against the hijab ban, which was introduced by the ÖVP and FPÖ in 2018. At the same time, the ÖVP called for a broadening of the hijab ban to include pupils up to 14 years as well as Muslim teachers because they “implicitly undermine the neutrality of the state and promote a social system in which women do not have the same position as in our Western, enlightened society.”<sup>54</sup>

During the election campaign in late 2019, the FPÖ called for an expansion of the hijab ban to up to 14 years of age in school. This stance was also taken by the ÖVP. The FPÖ also called for a hijab ban for teachers. According to MP Hermann Brückl, the hijab supports an early social and gender segregation.<sup>55</sup> In September 2019, shortly before the new national parliamentary elections, the FPÖ submitted an amendment to change to School Teaching Act to include a hijab ban for pupils up to the age of 14 as well as for teachers. “The headscarf is a symbol of political Islam and has no place in educational institutions,” said FPÖ chairman Norbert Hofer.<sup>56</sup> The motion was not accepted by the rest of the parties. MP Christoph Matznetter (SPÖ) argued that the only teachers wearing a headscarf would be nuns and MP Michaela Steinacker (ÖVP) agreed that such a ban would also threaten Catholic teachers of religious education. Due to considerations of fundamental rights, the initiative was postponed.<sup>57</sup>

FPÖ Viennese chairman Dominik Nepp published a press release, in which he spoke about “Muslim sexual delinquents, who see our daughters and women as unprotected game from their misanthropic perception of women.” According to him, Shariah would rule in schools, where Muslims make up the majority in Vienna.<sup>58</sup>

53. Ibid.

54. “ÖVP will Kopftuchverbot ausweiten”, Kurier, 23 August 2018, <https://kurier.at/politik/inland/oevp-will-kopftuchverbot-ausweiten/400585082>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

55. Pressedienst der Parlamentsdirektion – Parlamentskorrespondenz, “Betrug mit EU-Geldern: Abgeordnete geben grünes Licht für neue Tatbestände im StGB”, OTS, 3 December 2019, [https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20191203\\_OTS0202/betrug-mit-eu-geldern-abgeordnete-geben-gruenes-licht-fuer-neue-tatbestaende-im-stgb](https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20191203_OTS0202/betrug-mit-eu-geldern-abgeordnete-geben-gruenes-licht-fuer-neue-tatbestaende-im-stgb), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

56. “FPÖ-Antrag für erweitertes Kopftuch-Verbot in Schulen”, FPÖ, 19 September 2019, <https://www.fpoe.at/artikel/fpoe-antrag-fuer-erweitertes-kopftuch-verbot-in-schulen/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

57. Pressedienst der Parlamentsdirektion – Parlamentskorrespondenz, “Betrug mit EU-Geldern: Abgeordnete geben grünes Licht für neue Tatbestände im StGB”.

58. Dominik Nepp, “Unsere Wiener Kultur steht auf dem Spiel!”, OE24, 7 August 2019, <https://www.dominiknepp.at/unsere-wiener-kultur-steht-auf-dem-spiel/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

## Media

On 17 January, three female ministers presented their measures to fight violence against women.

Minister of Women Juliane Bogner-Strauß (ÖVP) headed the initiative. The argument was that anti-Semitism, radical Islamism, and a different perception of women was “imported” with the “migration wave.” According to Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl, violence against women increased with the “migration crisis.”<sup>59</sup> During Austria’s most important weekly political debate on TV following the murder of four women within one week, State Secretary Karoline Edtstadler (ÖVP)<sup>60</sup> argued that there was no patriarchy in Austria. Rather, this was due to “imported patriarchy” (from Muslim immigrants).<sup>61</sup>

A theologian was interviewed on the ban of the headscarf and gave different answers to critical questions. On the one hand, she criticized the government that puts pressure on Muslim girls and their parents. On the other, she argued that one has to be cautious and look at which ideology is spread by religious teachers, thus reproducing a general suspicion against a religious community.<sup>62</sup> Some figures such as the self-proclaimed “moderate Muslim” Abulwafa Mohammed supported the notion of the government’s European Islam without uttering one word of critique towards the government’s policies vis-à-vis Muslims.<sup>63</sup> In another op-ed, the same author argued that the spirit of the Islam Act of 2015, which was widely criticized as being discriminatory in many respects, “aimed at the independence and responsibility of Muslims in Austria.”<sup>64</sup> He further argued that some Muslim associations and organizations – without naming them and thus creating a suspicion around many – “are not open about their ideological and political goals.”<sup>65</sup> He concluded his op-ed with the words: “Out of love for Austria and Islam, I urge for more transparency in Muslim communities.”<sup>66</sup>

59. “Gewalt an Frauen: Regierung präsentiert Gegenmaßnahmen”, ORF, 17 January 2019, <https://orf.at/stories/3108033/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

60. “Im Visier: Karoline Edtstadler”, Linkswende, 4 February 2019, <http://linkswende.org/im-visier-karoline-edtstadler/?fbclid=IwAR3QvYigrjdbtY7aqq3wt2FfM66eL7M7g0vov9mmqB-QgZ37UIAGexISSE> (Access date: 19 December 2019).

61. Olivera Stajčić, “Staatssekretärin Edtstadler bei „Im Zentrum“: Es gibt kein Patriarchat”, Der Standard, 21 January 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.at/privacywall/story/2000096748287/staatssekretaerin-edtstadler-bei-im-zentrum-es-gibt-kein-patriarchat>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

62. “Dann gehen sie bis zur Schule mit dem Kopftuch und nehmen es davor ab”, Die Presse, 11 January 2019, <https://www.diepresse.com/5559173/dann-gehen-sie-bis-zur-schule-mit-dem-kopftuch-und-nehmen-es-davor-ab>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

63. Abulwafa Mohammed, “Österreich und seine Muslime. Man vermisst ein vollständiges Konzept für einen europäischen Islam”, Wiener Zeitung, 11 January 2019, <https://www.wienerzeitung.at/meinung/gastkommentare/1012048-Oesterreich-und-seine-Muslime.html>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

64. Abdulwafa Mohammed, “Die islamische Transparenzfrage”, Wiener Zeitung, 21 August 2019, <https://www.wienerzeitung.at/meinung/gastkommentare/2023685-Die-islamische-Transparenzfrage.html>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

Activist Rami Ali published one of the most comprehensive critical op-eds in *Der Standard* on Susanne Wiesinger's book dealing with the alleged threat of Islam in school.<sup>67</sup> Philosopher of law Stefan Hammer argued in an interview in *Die Presse* that a hijab ban in school and universities would be an unlawful interference in religious freedom.<sup>68</sup>

A panel was held at the University of Vienna to discuss the ban of the hijab. While all panelists supported the claim that young girls should not wear a hijab, Heiko Heinisch called for a general ban in school. Policy advisor Kenan Güngör criticized the language used by parts of the government in the legitimization of the ban and feared that this language would counteract the goal of weakening conservative Islam. Michael Kramer represented the Islamic Community (IGGÖ) and argued that the initiative was "right and important, but the implementation via a law was wrong."<sup>69</sup> NEOS party whip Christoph Wiederkehr argued that this ban would be used against one particular religious group, while supporting a "religion-neutral school up to 14 years."<sup>70</sup> Martin Kienl from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the law.

While the Islamic Community criticized the hijab ban as an interference in the parents' right to education, according to the head of the education department of the Islamic Community, Amina Baghajati, they had a "good practice" when dealing with kids who wear the hijab, be it forced or not.<sup>71</sup> In the weekly *Falter* journalist and cultural studies scholar Judith Kohlenberger discussed a study conducted by two political scientists from Stanford University who assess the impact of the headscarf ban on Muslim societal integration in France. Kohlenberg takes the evidence to counteract the government's proclamation that a headscarf ban would enhance societal integration.<sup>72</sup>

In an interview with the Upper Austrian Federation of Austrian Industry, its CEO said that the canon of values would be violated when Santa Claus is not allowed to enter kindergarten anymore because of migration, thus reiterating a false idea of Muslim immigrants changing the culture of the country.<sup>73</sup>

The daily *Krone* published a story on the "Turkish-nationalist Milli Görüs movement," which had established a European youth headquarter in the 15<sup>th</sup> Vien-

67. "Wiesinger-Buch 'Kulturkampf im Klassenzimmer': Zum 'Problem' Islam in Schulen", *Der Standard*, 24 January 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.at/privacywall/story/2000096200072/wiesinger-buch-kulturkampf-im-klassenzimmer-zum-problem-islam-in-schulen>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

68. Erich Kocina, "Kopftuchverbot an Unis ist zu großer Eingriff", *Die Presse*, 17 January 2019, <https://www.diepresse.com/5563399/bdquokopftuchverbot-an-unis-ist-zu-grosser-eingriffldquo>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

69. "Geteilte Meinungen beim Kopftuchverbot für Kinder", *ORF*, 13 January 2019, <https://orf.at/stories/3107496/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

70. *Ibid.*

71. Clara Akinyosoye, "IGGÖ zu Kopftuch in Schulen: 'Haben bewährte Praxis'", *Religion ORF*, 16 January 2019, <https://religion.orf.at/stories/2958832/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

72. Judith Kohlenberger, "Fördert das Kopftuch die Integration", *Falter*, 2 December 2019, <https://cms.falter.at/blogs/thinktank/2019/12/02/foerdert-das-kopftuchverbot-die-integration/> (Access date: 19 December 2019).

73. Josef Ertl, "Migrationspolitik der letzten Jahrzehnte hat versagt", *Kurier*, 27 January 2019, <https://kurier.at/chronik/oberoesterreich/migrationspolitik-der-letzten-jahrzehnte-hat-versagt/400387535>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

nese district. State youth attorney Nik Nafs said that he had asked the secret service for further information on the allegations that the movement stands for problematic values such as homophobia, anti-Semitism, and nationalism.<sup>74</sup>

In an opinion piece by Christian Ultsch in *Die Presse*, the author commented on the Christchurch terrorist attacks as follows, “Anyone who draws exaggerated conclusions about a ‘structural hatred of Islam’ from the bloody deed of a fascist in New Zealand is wrong.”<sup>75</sup> While Ultsch on the one hand realizes the danger that comes from white supremacist racists, he sees this ideology as an old relict that is drawn upon by a few isolated people. He argues that one has to rethink how issues like Islam and migration are discussed, but also criticizes the social democrats who linked this anti-Muslim ideology of the right-wing government with the Christchurch terrorist. Furthermore, he criticizes the SPÖ leader’s words that there was a “structural hate against Islam.”<sup>76</sup> “In doing so, it is promoting the Islamophobia debate, the function of which is not least to prevent a critical examination of Islam.”<sup>77</sup> Adelheid Wölfl from *Der Standard* informed the public of the ideological relations of the Christchurch terrorist to Serb nationalist ideology and its genocide of Muslims during the Yugoslavian civil war in the 1990s.<sup>78</sup>

Following the Christchurch attacks, the Islamic Religious Community doubted the integrity of expressions of mourning by politicians of the FPÖ, who have been a strong force of anti-Muslim discourse for decades.<sup>79</sup> The president of the Jewish Community expressed his condolences to the Muslim community.<sup>80</sup> Chancellor Kurz was not willing to name the ideology behind the terrorist attack, but gave a general statement saying: “Our position on this is very clear, no kind of extremism whatsoever – whether it’s radical Islamists or right-wing extremist fanatics – has any place in our society.”<sup>81</sup>

74. “Debatte um Milli-Görüs-Jugendzentrum”, Wien ORF, 7 February 2019, <https://wien.orf.at/v2/news/stories/2963305/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

75. Christian Ultsch, “Die nützlichen Idioten des Attentäters von Christchurch”, *Die Presse*, 15 March 2019, <https://www.diepresse.com/5596641/die-nutzlichen-idioten-des-attentaters-von-christchurch>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. Adelheid Wölfl, “Christchurch-Attentäter ließ sich durch Muslimenhass auf dem Balkan ‚inspirieren‘”, *Der Standard*, 18 March 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.de/privacywall/story/2000099696495/christchurchattentaeter-von-liess-sich-durch-muslimenhass-auf-dem-balkan-inspirieren>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

79. “IGGÖ: Bundesregierung muss sich klar von anti-muslimischer Hetze distanzieren”, OTS, 15 March 2019, [https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20190315\\_OTS0230/iggoe-bundesregierung-muss-sich-klar-von-anti-muslimischer-hetze-distanzieren](https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20190315_OTS0230/iggoe-bundesregierung-muss-sich-klar-von-anti-muslimischer-hetze-distanzieren), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

80. Israelitische Kultusgemeinde, “KG verurteilt Anschlag in Neuseeland”, OTS, 15 March 2019.

81. Chris Baynes, “New Zealand terror attacker had financial links with European far-right group Generation Identity, Austrian chancellor reveals”, *Independent*, 27 March 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/new-zealand-terror-attack-generation-identity-austria-kurz-a8841841.html>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

In an op-ed in *Die Presse*, Nina Scholz discussed a survey on anti-Semitism conducted in 2016 on youngsters in youth centers.<sup>82</sup> According to this study, 47% of Muslim youth, 27% of Christian Orthodox, and 7% of Catholic youth hold anti-Semitic views. But what Scholz continues to argue is that “a look at the literary Islamic tradition would bring a unique anti-Jewish tradition to the fore”<sup>83</sup> and would question the assumption that anti-Semitism was imported to Muslim thought by Europeans. According to her, Islamic anti-Semitism has to be searched in the Islamic tradition and reappraised.

The newspaper *Österreich* falsely claimed that the Muslim organization Milli Görüs is monitored by the Secret Service (BVT).<sup>84</sup> Milli Görüs did not react.

The European delegation leader of the FPÖ Harald Vilimsky supported far-right extremist newspaper *Info Direkt*, which is close to the Identitarian Movement, as an MEP.<sup>85</sup>

In an op-ed, two academics questioned the data provided by the Dokustelle Muslime, which monitors anti-Muslim hate crime. They also questioned whether racism and religion could be conceptualized within one category, thus questioning the existence of anti-Muslim racism. They especially criticized the fact that the media had covered the rise of hate crime as reported by Dokustelle. From a Eurocentrist perspective, they argued that “religion has to be domesticated and surveilled.” Further, they claimed that one should look at racism in Arab societies and anti-Semitism among Muslims in Europe.<sup>86</sup>

In an op-ed, Ednan Aslan critically reflected on the Islam policies of the government coalition of the ÖVP and FPÖ. He argued in favor of training imams in Austria, as the Islam Act of 2015 had claimed (which is not the case). He also claimed that the government had planned to define standards for the establishment of mosques along with the Islamic Religious Community (IGGÖ). He argued that it was the government’s goal to prevent ideological indoctrination in Islamic kindergartens, check textbooks for Islamic religious education in public schools, fight the radicalization of Muslim youth, and close down mosques of rad-

82. Nina Scholz, “Woher der Antisemitismus unter Muslimen kommt”, *Die Presse*, 1 April 2019, <https://www.diepresse.com/5605562/woher-der-antisemitismus-unter-muslimen-kommt>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

83. Ibid.

84. “Nach EU-Wahl will Koalition islamistische Vereine verbieten”, *OE24*, 8 April 2019, <https://www.oe24.at/oesterreich/politik/daniel/Nach-EU-Wahl-will-Koalition-islamistische-Vereine-verbieten/375388329>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

85. “Vilimsky finanziert rechtsextreme Szene durch Inseratschaltungen”, *SOS Mitmensch*, 25 February 2019, [https://www2.sosmitmensch.at/vilimsky-finanziert-rechtsextreme-szene?fbclid=IwAR33jEAifW0BVd9prEhxIN-CuiTFp5w5qD\\_QXGRnYBMVUNjAwHJtZUi5rH8w](https://www2.sosmitmensch.at/vilimsky-finanziert-rechtsextreme-szene?fbclid=IwAR33jEAifW0BVd9prEhxIN-CuiTFp5w5qD_QXGRnYBMVUNjAwHJtZUi5rH8w), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

86. Nikolaus Dimmel and Roland Fürst, “Religionskritik als Rassismus?”, *Der Standard*, 26 April 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.at/privacywall/story/2000102055735/religionskritik-als-rassismus>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

icalization. According to Aslan, not a single one of these goals had been achieved, even more imams from abroad had entered Austria following the influx of refugees, and more schools founded by several states for the training of imams had been opened. While Aslan welcomed that the previous government was open and clear about not wanting a “radical Islam,” he argued that they did not say which form of Islam they wanted to support. He especially criticized the fact that the government did not speak out about supporting an “Islam of European imprint” (*Islam europäischer Prägung*). Aslan supports the Islam Act of 2015 and wishes that further steps are taken.<sup>87</sup>

### Justice System

The application for recognition as a religious community on behalf of the Alevi community was rejected by the Viennese High Administrative Court. The reason for this was that the statutes were in most parts identical to those of the already legally recognized community of the Islamic Alevi Community (ALEVI), which is recognized under the Islam Act of 2015. The Alevi community asserts to represent 70,000 Alevis and protested the verdict, arguing that its facilities might be closed, if they do not subordinate to the Islamic Alevi Community. Also, the Office for Cultural Affairs (*Kultusamt*) of the Austrian Republic requested the community to change its name in order to prevent a confusion with the recognized “ALEVI.”<sup>88</sup>

According to a letter by the federal department of education, the hijab ban has also implications for sports education. The letter states, “Pupils up to ten years are forbidden to wear ideological or religious garments that are related to the covering of the head, also in sports classes.”<sup>89</sup> This also explicitly includes the burkini. The president of the IGGÖ, Ümit Vural, stated that the IGGÖ will submit a lawsuit against the ban of the hijab in elementary school in December 2019.<sup>90</sup>

Vural also criticized the shortage of 65 imams in Austrian mosques following the deportation of imams and the designation of imams from ATIB as an endangerment of public safety and order.<sup>91</sup> After having been elected, Vural stressed that

87. Ednan Aslan, “Die Sichtbarkeit des Islam”, *Der Standard*, 19 December 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.at/privacywall/story/2000108050729/die-sichtbarkeit-des-islam>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

88. “Antrag der Aleviten in Österreich abgelehnt”, *Religion ORF*, 31 January 2019, <https://religion.orf.at/stories/2961904/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

89. “Kein Burkini für Schülerinnen unter zehn”, *Die Presse*, 22 October 2019, <https://www.diepresse.com/5710060/kopftuchverbot-kein-burkini-fur-schulerinnen-unter-zehn>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

90. “IGGÖ Feiert 40-Jähriges Bestehen”, *Kismetonline*, <https://www.kismetonline.at/iggoe-feiert-40-jaehriges-bestehen/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

91. “Präsident Vural klagt über Imamemangel”, *Religion ORF*, 3 February 2019, <https://religion.orf.at/stories/2962394/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

“racism should not become the normal.”<sup>92</sup> He also made clear that the number of hijab-wearing girls in elementary school is extremely low.<sup>93</sup>

Following the implementation of the Symbol Act, the Ministry of Interior published the 13 logos that are banned according to the amended act. (Fig. 2)



**Figure 2:** Banned logos of different organizations.<sup>94</sup>

The logos of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Grey Wolves, the military arm of Hizbullah, and Hamas are amongst them. The fine for showing such a logo in public is up to EUR 4,000, and repeat offences incur a fine of up to EUR 10,000.<sup>95</sup> While in the past the Symbol Act had only banned the logos of DAESH and Al-Qaeda, this move, where the logos of non-violent organizations are banned alongside violent ones, can be interpreted as a potential move towards further suppression of organizations that are allegedly related to the named organizations. The recent plans to ban so-called political Islam can be read as such a move.<sup>96</sup>

92. “Ümit Vural: ‘Rassismus darf nicht zur Normalität werden’”, *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, 2 January 2019, <https://www.tt.com/artikel/15175496/uemit-vural-rassismus-darf-nicht-zur-normalitaet-werden>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

93. Peter Mayr and Nina Weißensteiner, “Muslimenchef beklagt Übergriffe: ‘Es ist schlimmer geworden’”, *Der Standard*, 10 January 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.at/privacywall/story/2000095786269/muslimen-chef-beklagt-uebergriffe-gegen-glaebige-es-ist-schlimmer-geworden>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

94. Federal Chancellery Republic of Austria, <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/en.html>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

95. “Symbole – Anhang”, *Rechtsinformationssystem des Bundes*, [https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/Begut/BE\\_GUT\\_COO\\_2026\\_100\\_2\\_1611984/COO\\_2026\\_100\\_2\\_1612005.html](https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/Begut/BE_GUT_COO_2026_100_2_1611984/COO_2026_100_2_1612005.html), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

96. Farid Hafez, “Perspective: Banning Symbols of Extremism in Austria | Targeting Extremism or Civil Society?”, *SETA Perspective*, 10 December 2018, [https://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2018/12/49\\_Perspective.pdf](https://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2018/12/49_Perspective.pdf), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

The Arab Cultus Community, which is part of the Islamic Religious Community and is home to more than ten mosques, won a lawsuit against the government's initiative to close down the community and its mosques. In closing down the mosques and the community, the Office for Cultural Affairs (*Kultusamt*) had acted against the law according to the verdict of the Viennese Administration Court.<sup>97</sup> At the same time, the government vowed to appeal the verdict at the Federal Higher Administrative Court. Minister Gernot Blümel argued that if this means changing the law, then this had to be done by the federal government.<sup>98</sup>

Various mosques in Vienna and Lower Austria were visited by personnel of the state's Cultural Office without prior notification. The Islamic Religious Community said this was an "exceedance of one's level of competency." The officials told the community members and imams that they would "check if everything is fine."<sup>99</sup>

According to the newspaper *Addendum*, associations of the Turkish Federation in Wiener Neustadt were closed. Reasons were not made public.<sup>100</sup>

Following news that the first newborn baby of 2018 had Muslim parents with a mother wearing a hijab, a 65-year-old pensioner was given a six-month probation due to a hate posting.<sup>101</sup>

A 67-year-old pensioner was given a 15-month probation because he had fixed a sign outside of his private apartment that showed Nazi symbols and the sentence "Office Moslem-Hunter. Kill them all."<sup>102</sup>

Both Karl Nehammer (ÖVP) and Johann Gudenus (FPÖ) were delighted with the verdict of the Constitutional Court which supported the expulsion of two imams from ATIB mosques that were financed by the Diyanet.<sup>103</sup>

Sabine Matejka, president of the Austrian Lawyers Association, argued in August during the Alpbach talks that the governance of religious neutrality in the court

97. "IGGÖ gewinnt Rechtsstreit: Arabische Kultusgemeinde bleibt bestehen", OTS, 14 February 2019, [https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20190214\\_OTS0016/iggoe-gewinnt-rechtsstreit-arabische-kultusgemeinde-bleibt-bestehen](https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20190214_OTS0016/iggoe-gewinnt-rechtsstreit-arabische-kultusgemeinde-bleibt-bestehen), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

98. Bernhard Ichner, "Höchstgericht soll über Arabische Kultusgemeinde entscheiden", Kurier, 14 February 2019, <https://kurier.at/politik/inland/hoechstgericht-soll-ueber-arabische-kultusgemeinde-entscheiden/400406888>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

99. Georg Renner, "Regierung lässt Kultusamt Moscheen kontrollieren", Kleine Zeitung, 1 April 2019, [https://www.kleinezeitung.at/politik/innenpolitik/5605062/Muslime-protestieren\\_Regierung-laesst-Kultusamt-Moscheen-kontrollieren](https://www.kleinezeitung.at/politik/innenpolitik/5605062/Muslime-protestieren_Regierung-laesst-Kultusamt-Moscheen-kontrollieren), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

100. "Der Einfluss türkischer Vereine in Österreich", *Addendum*, 25 June 2019, <https://www.addendum.org/tuerken-in-oesterreich/tuerkische-vereine/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

101. "Hassposting gegen Wiener Neujahrsbaby: Weiteres Urteil", ORF, 11 March 2019, <https://orf.at/stories/3114767/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

102. Johannes Weichhart, "Die Zahl 88? Ich bin ein Fan von Hansi Hinterseer", Kurier, 13 March 2019, <https://kurier.at/chronik/niederoesterreich/die-zahl-88-ich-bin-ein-fan-von-hansi-hinterseer/400433689>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

103. Die neue Volkspartei, "Nehammer/Gudenus: Urteil stützt Linie der Regierung gegen politischen Islam", OTS, 21 March 2019, [https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20190321\\_OTS0178/nehammergusonen-urteil-stuetzt-linie-der-regierung-gegen-politischen-islam](https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20190321_OTS0178/nehammergusonen-urteil-stuetzt-linie-der-regierung-gegen-politischen-islam), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

should be dealt with in a comprehensive way. “It is not okay to ban only the hijab for lawyers. Either the ban is for everybody or for nobody.”<sup>104</sup> The president of Austrian lawyers, Rupert Wolff, argued during the debate that neutrality should be compulsory for all state authorities.<sup>105</sup>

The court in the city of Graz ruled on an attack on a mosque that was perpetrated on 6 May 2016. The head of a pig was put outside of the mosque and pig blood was spilled. Three men were convicted on the grounds of vilification of religious teachings and a woman reached an extrajudicial agreement. The court proceedings were not open to the public on the grounds of “public order and national security.” The judge argued that “the work by the secret services and the identity of the officials had to be protected” and he wanted to “prevent the dissemination of extremist propaganda.”<sup>106</sup>

In autumn of 2018, the Ummet Mosque in Feldkirch was closed because it was said that it had radicalized youth with the dissemination of the Koran. According to a study conducted by the institution “okay zusammen leben” led by Eva Grabherr, this mosque was a “political-Salafist” one and the administration of the mosque refused to give interviews to them. The report claimed that many youths that participated in the campaign ‘Read’ (Lies) would have joined Jihadist organizations and left to Syria in 2014/2015. The mosque was closed because the lease had ended.<sup>107</sup>

In December 2019, the mosque Savjet in Vienna was raided. According to the police, this was a “usual control.” According to the tabloid press, this was due to migrants without legal documents who visit the mosque.<sup>108</sup>

Following the publication of our *European Islamophobia Report* in 2019, an open letter against the publication was written by people whom I had mentioned in the national report for 2018 on Austria in the *European Islamophobia Report*. Every single Austrian newspaper published the piece, and my reply as well.<sup>109</sup> Following the publication and a media campaign against the report and myself, I also received a letter, where I was personally threatened. The letter wrote, “Are you a political scientist? No, you are a Moslem! You are dumb like nearly all Muslims! Also, Islam is no religion, but an epidemic, epidemics have to be exterminated! [...]”. (Fig. 3)

104. “Matejka will Gesetz für Religionsneutralität vor Gericht”, Religion ORF, 25 August 2019, <https://orf.at/stories/3134884/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

105. Ibid.

106. “Schuld sprüche nach Moschee-Anschlag in Graz”, Steiermark ORF, 29 March 2019, <https://steiermark.orf.at/v2/news/stories/2972874/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

107. “Aufgelöste Moschee trug in Vorarlberg zu Radikalisierung bei”, Kleine Zeitung, 28 March 2019.

108. Stefan Steinkogler and Sandra Ramsauer, “Großrazzia bei Freitagsgebet in Wiener Moschee”, Kronenzeitung, 7 December 2019, <https://www.krone.at/2057550>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

109. Farid Hafez, “Rassismus diskutieren ist demokratiepolitisch notwendig!”, Die Presse, 12 December 2019, <https://www.diepresse.com/5737631/rassismus-diskutieren-ist-demokratiepolitisch-notwendig>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

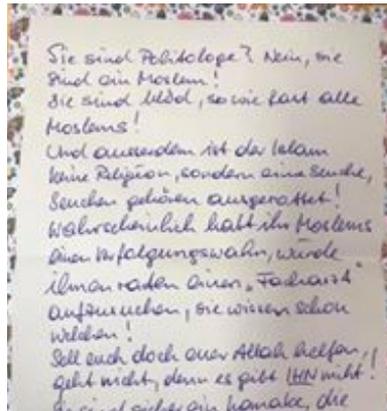


Figure 3: "Letter to the editor"<sup>110</sup>

## Internet

According to the *Guardian*, organized hate groups based in Israel were active in spreading anti-Muslim prejudices on Facebook in several countries, including the U.S., Canada, Australia, Great Britain, and Austria.<sup>111</sup>

Following the verdict of the Constitutional Court that the deportation of imams was legal, FPÖ party whip Johann Gudenus spread the message on his social media.

At the beginning of the New Year, the youth branch of the FPÖ, the RFJ, posted an ad on its social media channels stating, "Mohammed most popular name for newborns in three Viennese districts." (Fig. 4)



Figure 4: The social media post by the RFJ, the FPÖ's youth branch: "Mohammed most popular name for newborns in three Viennese districts."<sup>112</sup>

110. Personal Archive, October 2019.

111. "Hassfabriken: Facebooks Geschäft mit antimuslimischer Hetze", *Der Standard*, 6 December 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.de/privacywall/story/2000111972194/hassfabriken-facebook-geschaft-mit-antimuslimischer-hetze>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

112. "Freiheitliche Jugend", Screenshot, 29 December 2019.

The Austrian National Youth Council, a representative of more than 50 youth organizations in Austria, demonstrated against the government's hijab ban. (Fig. 5)



**Figure 5:** Austrian National Youth Council's demonstration against the hijab ban: "Politics is not to be done on the expense of Muslims. This racist discourse is poisonous for the social climate in the long term."<sup>113</sup>



**Figure 6:** FPÖ party whip Johann Gudenus posts "Deportation of imams legal."<sup>114</sup>

FPÖ party chairman Norbert Hofer posts, "The Battle against Political Islam Is Only Possible with a Strong FPÖ" during the election campaign in 2019. (Fig. 7)

113. "Politics is not to be done on the expense of Muslims. This racist discourse is poisonous for the social climate in the long term", Austrian National Youth Council, Screenshot, 2019.

114. "Deportation of imams legal", Johann Gudenus, Screenshot, 29 December 2019.



Figure 7: FPÖ party chairman Norbert Hofer posts, “The Battle against political Islam is only Possible with a strong FPÖ.”<sup>115</sup>



Figure 8: FPÖ Vienna party chairman Dominik Nepp posts, “I don’t let myself be intimidated in the battle against political Islam.”<sup>116</sup>

FPÖ Vienna party chairman Dominik Nepp also spread a post mobilizing against the hijab, showing a woman in a niqab in the background. (Fig. 9) and another post where he states not to be “intimidated in the battle against political Islam”.

115. “The Battle against political Islam is only Possible with a strong FPÖ”, Norbert Hofer, Screenshot, 2019.

116. “I don’t let myself be intimidated in the battle against political Islam”, Dominik Nepp, Screenshot, 2019.



**Figure 9:** FPÖ Vienna party chairman Dominik Nepp posts, “Hijab and Shariah have no place in Vienna.”<sup>117</sup>

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Vice-chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache (FPÖ) established the think tank *Denkwerk Zukunftsreich*. Unlike the think tank of the chancellor Sebastian Kurz Think Austria with six employees, Strache’s think tank has one employee only, the historian Thomas Grischany.<sup>118</sup> The first and only event that took place was on 13 February, where political scientist Michael Ley presented his book *Islamic Anti-Semitism (Islamischer Antisemitismus)* and shared a podium with German Jewish journalist Henryk M. Broder and anti-Muslim public figure Laila Mirzo, who has a relationship with various far-right outlets and movements. Another guest was Birol Kilic, who represents the Turkish Cultural Association, and who argued against Ley. Broder spoke of Islamic anti-Semitism as an “insolvable problem.” Ley warned of an “Islamization and blatant increase of Islamism” in Europe. He went on to say, “Europe is facing Islamization - and if you like, the final solution of Judaism.”<sup>119</sup> Michael Ley was previously interviewed by Martin Sellner, discussing their shared views, where Ley stated, “It is important that the Identitarians become stronger.”<sup>120</sup> Liste-Jetzt MP Alma Zadić asked on whose initiative Ley was invited. Vice-chancellor Strache answered, “The initiative and idea for this event and for the selection of the guests on the podium was developed by me in cooperation with the department’s own think tank and my cabinet.”<sup>121</sup> Laila Mirzo works for the far-right weekly magazine *Wochenblick*. Leaked internal documents of the Identitarian movement revealed that “Laila” was in charge of the social media

117. “Hijab and Shariah have no place in Vienna”, Dominik Nepp, Screenshot, 29 December 2019.

118. “Denkwerk Zukunftsreich: Strache bekommt Thinktank”, ORF, 12 February 2019, <https://orf.at/stories/3111247/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

119. “Straches hitzige Debatte über ‚islamischen Antisemitismus‘”, OE24, 13 February 2019, <https://www.oe24.at/oesterreich/politik/Straches-hitzige-Debatte-ueber-islamischen-Antisemitismus/367946689>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

120. Fabian Schmid and Maria Sterkl, “Strache lud Identitären-Verbündeten auf Steuerkosten ein”, Der Standard, 12 April 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.at/privacywall/story/2000101303275/strache-lud-identitaeren-verbuendeten-auf-steuerkosten-ein>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

121. Ibid.

channels of the movement. She was invited as an “Islam expert,” though the institution Stoppt die Rechten could not identify any qualifications justifying the description.<sup>122</sup> I have sued Michael Ley for his comments in his key note during the event, where he claimed that I was an Islamist and won the case in the second instance.

The Austrian Integration Fund continued organizing one-sided events. On 22 February 2019, it organized a discussion with Hamed Abdel-Samad entitled “The Secular State and Islam,” moderated by Michael Fleischhacker.<sup>123</sup>

The FPÖ’s ally in the U.S. Congress, Republican Congressman Steve King, lost his influence after being removed from all committee assignments after bipartisan condemnation of his remarks on white supremacy on 14 January 2019.<sup>124</sup> Bernhard Gaul reported this in the daily *Kurier*.<sup>125</sup>

It was revealed that an underground network of right-wing extremists with headquarters in Germany and links to Austria and Switzerland had prepared for a “Day X.” The network Hannibal (named after its leader) that consists of former policemen and personnel from the Secret Service and Defense Ministry prepared for the day when all order would collapse. The group had prepared a death list of its political opponents. The Austrian connection is the knights’ order Lazarus Union, which is officially only a charitable organization. Its headquarters is in Burg Kreuzenstein near Vienna. Hannibal was the vice president until reports of the organization made the news and his membership was revoked. The Austrian secret services kept a low profile in their investigation.<sup>126</sup>

Personnel from the Foreign Ministry’s secret service warned that armed groups of soldiers are also organizing themselves in Austria. Based on investigations in Germany, Austrian ex-soldiers were identified as participating in transnational WhatsApp chat groups. The association Milf-O, which is considered to have links to right-wing extremism, was mentioned in the chats. Two candidates for the FPÖ in the national elections have prominent positions within the armed forces and thus,

122. Fabian Schmid and Maria Sterkl, “Strache lud Identitären-Verbündeten auf Steuerkosten ein”, *Der Standard*, 12 April 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.at/privacywall/story/2000101303275/strache-lud-identitaeren-verbueendeten-auf-steuerkosten-ein>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

123. “Podiumsgespräch mit Hamed Abdel-Samad”, Austrian Integration Fund, <http://integrationsfonds.eyepin-news.com/eventview/?p=zb791bc2ccf743b765bff8ae57cb9309684eb75780f1986556fcd3384e36fc1d4>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

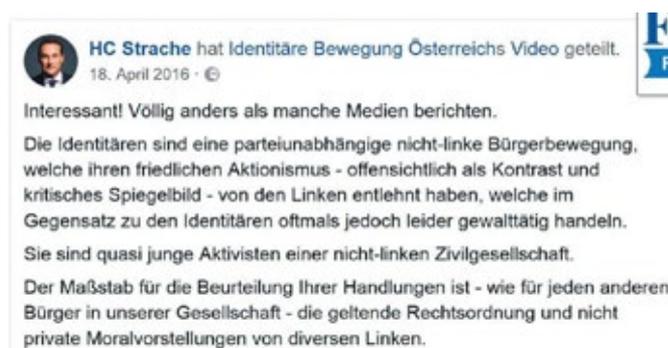
124. Trip Gabriel, Jonathan Martin and Nicholas Fandos, “Steve King Removed from Committee Assignments over White Supremacy Remark”, *The New York Times*, 14 January 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/14/us/politics/steve-king-white-supremacy.html>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

125. Bernhard Gaul, “Rassismus: Rauswurf von Steve King, Freund der FPÖ in den USA”, *Kurier*, 15 January 2019, <https://kurier.at/politik/inland/rassismus-rauswurf-von-steve-king-freund-der-fpoe-in-den-usa/400378865>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

126. Fabian Schmid and Laurin Lorenz, “Christchurch-Attentäter bezog sich auf rechte Soldaten in Bundeswehr – deren Netzwerk führt nach Österreich”, *Der Standard*, 15 March 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.de/privacywall/story/2000099600939/spuren-nach-oesterreich-bei-rechtem-netzwerk-deutscher-soldaten>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

the secret service fears that important information could have been handed over to people outside of the department of defense. At first, the new FPÖ defense minister did not express concern about the fact that Austrian soldiers were members of the Identitarian Movement.<sup>127</sup>

Prosecutors instigated a probe into the “disproportionately high donation” from Australian white supremacist Brenton Tarrant to the head of Identitarian movement’s Austrian branch.<sup>128</sup> Martin Sellner, head of the movement, received EUR 1,500 in early 2018 from the terrorist, who had murdered 50 people at two mosques in Christchurch. Sellner was blocked in 2018 from entering Great Britain before a Generation Identity conference near London. According to state authorities, the terrorist Tarrant had visited the country before the massacre and according to the *Independent*, he had met right-wing extremists in Europe two years prior to the attacks.<sup>129</sup> According to the Minister of Interior, Tarrant had visited Austria from 27 November to 4 December 2018.<sup>130</sup> Following the news about these relations, the Austrian government announced its will to close down the Identitarian movement.<sup>131</sup> The Australian terrorist had visited the cities Steyr, Vienna, and Klagenfurt. In 2016, Vice-chancellor Strache had called the Identitarian movement a non-leftist civil society movement. (Fig. 10)



**Figure 10:** Screenshot of a posting of the chairman of the FPÖ on the Identitarian movement, where he calls the Identitarian movement a “non-partisan non-leftist civic movement” that draws on “peaceful activism”<sup>132</sup>

127. Fabian Schmidt, “Abwehramt-Whistleblower warnen vor bewaffnetem Netzwerk”, *Der Standard*, 22 November 2019.

128. Chris Baynes, “New Zealand terror attacker had financial links with European far-right group Generation Identity, Austrian chancellor reveals”.

129. *Ibid.*

130. Raffaella Lindorfer, “Christchurch-Attentäter war mit Österreichern in Nordkorea”, *Kurier*, 8 March 2019, <https://kurier.at/politik/inland/christchurch-attentaeter-war-mit-oesterreichern-in-nordkorea/400449628>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

131. Werner Reisinger and Jan Michael Marchart, “Identitäre Verstrickungen”, *Wiener Zeitung*, 27 March 2019, <https://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/politik/oesterreich/2002494-Identitaere-Verstrickungen.html>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

132. “HC Strache” Facebook, 18 April 2016.

While Strache argued that he had no links to the Identitarian movement, journalists have traced the many personal ties between Identitarians and FPÖ personnel.<sup>133</sup> Following the Ibiza gate, former vice-chancellor and FPÖ chairman Heinz-Christian Strache gave his first interview to the German branch of the Russian TV channel *RT*.<sup>134</sup>

Martin Sellner, the voice of the European Identitarian movement, was given a platform on the Austrian "Breitbart" Servus-TV, where he positioned himself as a victim of the Christchurch terrorist, arguing that his name would now forever be related to the terrorist.<sup>135</sup> Anne-Catherine Simon criticized the fact that Servus TV had invited one of the leading German right-wing extremist ideologues, namely Götz Kubitschek, mainstreaming his views but not challenging his very problematic statements. Kubitschek has not been given any platform on German TV. The debate was moderated by Michael Fleischhacker and a famous Islamophobe, Henryk Broder, was also invited.<sup>136</sup>

According to political scientist Strobl, international activities by the Identitarian movement in Europe are planned in Austria. The Identitarian movement has official branches in France, Austria, Germany, and Italy, and informal representatives in Ireland, Britain, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovenia. Following a lawsuit in Austria that took four years, 17 activists were acquitted in the summer of 2018. There are around 300 Identitarian activists in Austria, between the ages of 15 and 35.<sup>137</sup>

While the Identitarian movement was not banned, there were discussions to amend the Symbol Act 2015 to include the ban of the logo of the Identitarian movement.<sup>138</sup> Since the meeting was postponed and the government dissolved, this was not implemented.<sup>139</sup> During the elections, Karl Nehammer said that the ÖVP will

133. Werner Reisinger and Jan Michael Marchart, "Identitäre Verstrickungen".

134. "Exklusiv-Interview mit Ex-Vizekanzler HC Strache: 'Die FPÖ war für die EU ein Dorn im Auge', *RT Deutsch*, 9 August 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BD6vYa2c9w>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

135. Astrid Ebenführer, "Eine Bühne für Selbstmitleid: Identitären-Chef Martin Sellner auf Servus TV", *Der Standard*, 28 March 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.de/privacywall/story/2000100395610/eine-buehne-fuer-selbstmitleid-identitaeren-chef-martin-sellner-auf-servus>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

136. Anne-Catherine Simon, "Servus TV beglückt einen radikalen Denker der Neuen Rechten", *Die Presse*, 5 April 2019, <https://www.diepresse.com/5607683/servus-tv-beglueckt-einen-radikalen-denker-der-neuen-rechten>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

137. Raffaella Lindorfer and Birgit Seiser, "Österreich, Welt-Zentrale der neuen Rechtsextremen", *Kurier*, 27 March 2019, <https://kurier.at/politik/inland/oesterreich-welt-zentrale-der-neuen-rechtsextremen/400449067>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

138. "Antrag", Republik Österreich Parlament, 25 April 2019, [https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XX-VI/A/A\\_00772/fname\\_749665.pdf](https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XX-VI/A/A_00772/fname_749665.pdf), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

139. "Rechtsinformationssystem des Bundes", Bundesrecht konsolidiert: Gesamte Rechtsvorschrift für Symbole-Gesetz, Fassung vom 29.04.2020, <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20009040>, (Access date: 29 April 2020).

ban the right-wing extremist Identitarian movement.<sup>140</sup> Consequently, the logo of the Identitarian movement was banned.

Ednan Aslan had to step down from his position as head of the research project “Islamic Theological Institute” at the University of Vienna. According to *Der Standard*, the reasons the rector made this move are not fully clear. Some insiders argue that it was due to “fundamental misconduct, not least in personnel management” ranging from mobbing to bad atmosphere within the team. Aslan rejected these allegations.<sup>141</sup>

Ilham Manea, a senior advisor<sup>142</sup> of the European Foundation for Democracy<sup>143</sup>, invited by the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) to give a talk in the city of Wels. The ÖVP-owned newspaper *Volksblatt* titled an interview with Manea “I Have No Problem with the Headscarf Ban’ Muslim Political Scientist Elham Manea Warns of the Excesses of Political Islam.” In the interview, Manea questioned why Austrian authorities are dealing with Alif (Upper Austrian Muslim organization with historical roots in the Milli Görüs movement), which she called the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired Milli Görüs movement. She stated that Milli Görüs is inspired by political Islam, that they have “totalitarian views,” and that it would be wrong for people belonging to this movement to work as religious teachers in public schools. Also, she supported the government’s hijab ban in the same interview. When confronted with the position of the IGGÖ, who think that the ban would be discriminatory, she stated, “It is not discriminatory. With all religious freedom, there must also be the possibility to prevent certain phenomena of religious excesses.” She also supported the ÖVP’s position to ban “political Islam.”<sup>144</sup>

The anti-Muslim author Michael Ley was interviewed in far-right media such as *Wochenblick*, where he argued that orthodox Islam was a political religion and similar to European fascism, representing a totalitarian ideology, and that political Islam was as anti-Semitic as Islam itself.<sup>145</sup>

A historical report commissioned by the FPÖ on the party’s relationship with Nazism, included questionable authors. One was the known anti-Muslim author Laila Mirzo, who is also aligned to the Identitarian movement. Mirzo was in charge of content for the Identitarian movement’s social media platform on Facebook. She

---

140. “Nehammer: Kampf gegen Extremismus hat oberste Priorität”, OTS, 26 August 2019, [https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20190826\\_OTS0096/nehammer-kampf-gegen-extremismus-hat-oberste-prioritaet](https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20190826_OTS0096/nehammer-kampf-gegen-extremismus-hat-oberste-prioritaet), (Access date: 19 December 2019).

141. Lisa Nimmervoll, “Aslan als Leiter des islamischen Uni-Instituts abberufen”, *Der Standard*, 20 April 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.at/privacywall/story/2000101744347/ednan-aslan-als-leiter-des-islamischen-uni-instituts-abberufen>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

142. EFD: Team Member Ilham Manea, <https://www.europeandemocracy.eu/author/dr-elham-manea/> (Access date: 29 October 2019)

143. Bridge Initiative Team. Factsheet: European Foundation for Democracy, 5 December 2019, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-european-foundation-for-democracy/> (Access date: 29 October 2019)

144. “Ich habe kein Problem mit dem Kopftuchverbot”, *Volksblatt*, 4 September 2019, <https://volksblatt.at/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

145. Julian Utz, “Neues Europa – Werte Und Nationen”, *Wochenblick*, 29 October 2019.

writes for far-right media outlets such as *Wochenblick* and *Jüdische Rundschau*, who often support AfD claims. In the same report, there were also two Israeli authors, who were chosen to support the non-anti-Semitic image of the FPÖ. According to the Israeli far-right author and former secret service agent Mordechai Kedar, Nazis were always “very friendly” to Muslims and thus, the “battle against political Islam” would not be a continuity of the Nazi past. According to the Rabin Center, Kedar is a “sick conspiracy theorist.” He had argued that the best weapon against Jihadists is to rape their mothers and sisters. The second Israeli author was 84-year-old Raphael Israeli, who in 2017 had suggested to detain Israeli Arabs in camps.<sup>146</sup>

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

Compared to 2018, there were many more initiatives taken against anti-Muslim racism in 2019. This is especially the case with NGOs that dedicate their efforts to counter-acting Islamophobia. The following is a short list of attempts to tackle Islamophobia:

- The anti-racist NGO SOS Mitmensch presented its first report on anti-Muslim racism in Austrian politics. This report presented 20 cases of anti-Muslim speech by members of the FPÖ in 2018. The report was drafted by the internationally renowned linguist Ruth Wodak. During the press conference, Wodak warned that with the FPÖ in power, anti-Muslim racism became central to the government. She criticized the ÖVP for not taking a clear position. She warned of the perils of demagoguery and reminded the audience of the national-socialist rhetoric.<sup>147</sup>
- The president of the Styrian parliament organized a memorial event on the Holocaust to discuss not only history, but what history means for today. The title of the event was “How Does Resistance Work?”<sup>148</sup>
- Muslim women of the Islamic Religious Community published the declaration “Muslim Women Speak” where they criticized the fact that many legislations discuss them, while nobody listens to them.<sup>149</sup>
- The Islamic Religious Community organized a conference to discuss the use and misuse of the term “political Islam” in order to counter the government’s attempt to criminalize Muslims.

146. Fabian Schmid, “Die dubiosen Autoren des FPÖ-Historikerberichts”, *Der Standard*, 26 December 2019, <https://apps.derstandard.at/privacywall/story/2000112677397/die-dubiosen-autoren-des-fpoe-historikerberichts>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

147. “Ruth Wodak über Rhetorik der Demagogie”, *Science ORF*, 22 January 2019, <https://science.orf.at/v2/stories/2960166/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

148. “Wie geht Widerstand?” - Holocaust-Gedenkveranstaltung im Landtag, <http://www.landtag.steiermark.at/cms/beitrag/12711771/28242427/>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

149. Bernhard Ichner, “Muslimische Frauen: ‘Misstrauen in die Politik ist groß’”, *Kurier*, 8 March 2019, <https://kurier.at/chronik/oesterreich/muslimische-frauen-wollen-sich-gehoer-verschaffen/400427207>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

- Both the Islamic Religious Community and the Jewish Community (IKG) criticized an anti-Muslim racist poster published by the Styrian youth wing of the FPÖ, the RFJ.<sup>150</sup>
- The Viennese Chamber of Labor (*Arbeiterkammer*) awarded a dissertation on anti-Muslim racism in Austria, written by Benjamin Opratko, with its Antonio Gramsci Prize for Critical Research in the Migration Society.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The hegemony of the anti-Muslim discourse is unbroken. Following the governance of the ÖVP and the FPÖ, which has fully institutionalized anti-Muslim political claims, the lack of anti-racist initiatives is most outstanding. SOS Mitmensch's report documenting anti-Muslim racism was an important attempt of intervention, although it only tackled the FPÖ's discourse and not both parties' politics. Still, civil society and a political opposition are most important. Aside from the detailed recommendations offered in the last years, this seems incredibly urgent. The political hegemony of Islamophobia, in specific, has to be contested. While the IGGÖ argued that it would challenge certain laws like the hijab ban in court, much more has to be done on a legal level. A selection of recommendations follow:

- The Islam Act has to be legally contested.
- The two hijab bans have to be litigated against.
- The organized anti-Muslim network has to be uncovered.
- Training on racism, especially Islamophobia, should be offered to journalists, lawyers, and police (security officials) by qualified personnel.
- Muslim civil society has to be empowered with tools to combat Islamophobia, especially in the creation of a consciousness towards the illegality of hate crimes.
- Educational institutions and stakeholders have to work towards creating an alternative narrative of Muslims in Austria which will work to dispel the widely accepted negative image of Islam.

## Chronology

- **January 2019:** At the beginning of the New Year, the FPÖ's youth organization RFJ published ads intending to scandalize with the slogan "Mohammed most popular name for newborns in three Viennese districts."
- **22.01.2019:** The anti-racist NGO SOS Mitmensch presented its first report on anti-Muslim racism in Austrian politics.

---

150. "Rassistisches RFJ-Plakat: IKG und IGGÖ kritisieren Darstellung", *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, 3 May 2019, <https://www.tt.com/artikel/15578217/rassistisches-rfj-plakat-ikg-und-iggoe-kritisieren-darstellung>, (Access date: 19 December 2019).

- **11.03.2019:** News media reported that following the news of 2018 that the first newborn baby had Muslim parents with a mother wearing a hijab, a 65-year-old pensioner was given a six-month probation for a hate posting.
- **20.03.2019:** The ÖVP invited Zana Ramadani as an expert for the education committee that proposed the expansion of the hijab ban up to 10 years of age following a hijab ban that was already implemented in 2018 for kindergarten. Defending the ban, Zana Ramadani said, “I am here for using the machete.”
- **21.03.2019:** The ÖVP and the FPÖ were delighted by the verdict of the Constitutional Court which supported the expulsion of two imams from ATIB mosques as an effect of the Islam Act of 2015.
- **27.03.2019:** The media made public that the Austrian Identitarian movement leader Martin Sellner had received funds from Brenton Tarrant, the white supremacist Christchurch terrorist.
- **29.03.2019:** The court in the city of Graz ruled on an attack on a mosque that was perpetrated on 6 May 2016. Three men were convicted of vilification of religious teachings and a woman reached an extrajudicial agreement.
- **14.07.2019:** The Interior Ministry’s Secret Service (BVT) published a report that for the first time named the Islamic Religious Community (IGGÖ) not as a partner in the fight against Jihadism, but as a problem of extremism.
- **21.10.2019:** The weekly *Profil* reported that a male student appeared armed for lectures at the University of Vienna. He had previously posted tweets such as “I would like to die in a firefight against Islam and kill as many of them as possible.”
- **03.12.2019:** News media reported that the Linz Higher Regional Court (OLG) ruled that a woman could not represent the state and the judiciary if she wore the hijab.
- **26.12.2019:** The FPÖ presented a historical report on its relationship with Nazism, which included a chapter by the Islamophobe Laila Mirzo, who is connected to the Identitarian movement. The report also had a chapter written by far-right author and former Israeli secret service agent Mordechai Kedar, who had argued in the past that the best weapon against Jihadists is to rape their mothers and sisters.



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**BELGIUM**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

AMINA EASAT-DAAS



## The Author

**Amina Easat-Daas** is an Early Career Academic Fellow at De Montfort University, Leicester, UK, where she lectures in politics. Her research interests include the study of Islamophobia and in particular gendered Islamophobia, the effective countering of Islamophobia, Islam in Europe, anti-racism studies, and Muslim political participation in francophone Europe. Her forthcoming manuscript is entitled *Muslim Women's Political Participation in France and Belgium* (Palgrave Macmillan). Alongside her academic scholarship, Easat-Daas has regularly worked with and presented her work, among others, at the OSCE-ODIHR, the European Parliament, and the Council of Europe. Easat-Daas also engages with media on Muslim-related current affairs. Email: [amina.easat-daas@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:amina.easat-daas@dmu.ac.uk)

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Amina Easat-Daas: *Islamophobia in Belgium: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

As with previous years, there has been a sustained and continued growth of Islamophobia in Belgium during 2019. This increase has been apparent across a variety of diverse fields including in explicit and measurable Islamophobic hate crimes. Specific examples from 2019 include vandalism of mosques, and pig heads being left at and swastikas being graffitied onto Muslim property. Manifest examples of Islamophobic hate crime were also often heavily gendered and thus distinctly impacted Muslim women, and visibly Muslim women in particular. Attacks against Muslim women in 2019 include stabbings, forced removal of the headscarf, denial of services, and exclusion from education and the workplace.

In addition, Islamophobia in Belgium during 2019 has also seen the increase in the legislated Islamophobic controls around Muslimness. Examples of this include the bans on ritual slaughter (including *halal* and *kosher* slaughter) implemented in Flanders in January 2019 and Wallonia in September 2019, and the issuing of the new Flanders Government Agreement 2019-2024, which stipulates controls on the presence of visible faith symbols (including the headscarf) in the region in schooling and employment on the grounds of neutrality. The agreement sets a precedent and signals legitimacy of gendered Islamophobia towards visibly Muslim women and was, in part, made possible by the growth of the far-right and right-wing parliamentary presence in the Flemish Belgian region.

Notwithstanding, Belgium continues to be home to strong civil society and government-supported counter-Islamophobia initiatives, including monitoring of cyber-Islamophobia by public volunteers.

The report on Belgium closes with conclusions and recommendations, including the warning against the increasing move towards French-style, secular-based argument rooted in narratives centred on neutrality, in order to limit the presence of visibly Muslim women in Belgian society and their presence in education or the workplace.

## Note de Synthèse

Comme les années précédentes, il y a eu une croissance soutenue de l'islamophobie en Belgique en 2019. Cette augmentation de l'islamophobie s'est manifestée dans une variété de domaines divers, y compris dans les crimes de haine islamophobes explicites et mesurables. Des exemples spécifiques de 2019 incluent le vandalisme des mosquées, têtes de cochons laissées et les croix gammées tagués sur la propriété musulmane. Les exemples manifestes de crimes de haine islamophobes étaient également souvent fortement sexo-spécifiques et donc ils avaient un impact distinct sur les femmes musulmanes, et les femmes musulmanes visibles en particulier. Les attaques contre les femmes musulmanes en 2019 comprennent des coups de couteau, le retrait forcé du foulard, le déni de services et l'exclusion des lieux de travail et de l'éducation.

En outre, l'islamophobie en Belgique en 2019 a également vu l'augmentation des contrôles islamophobes légiférés autour de la 'musulmanité'. Des exemples de cela incluent les interdictions d'abattage rituel (y compris l'abattage halal et kosher) mises en œuvre en Flandre en janvier 2019 et en Wallonie en septembre 2019. La publication du nouvel accord gouvernemental flamand 2019-2024, qui prévoit des contrôles sur la présence des symboles philosophiques et religieuses (y compris le foulard) dans la scolarisation et l'emploi pour des raisons de neutralité. L'accord établit un précédent et signale la légitimité de l'islamophobie genré envers les femmes visiblement musulmanes et en partie a été rendu possible par la croissance parlementaire de l'extrême droite et de la droite dans la région belge flamande.

Nonobstant, la Belgique a une société civile forte et des initiatives de lutte contre l'islamophobie soutenues par le gouvernement, y compris la surveillance de la cyber-Islamophobie par des volontaires publics.

L'édition belge du rapport se termine par des conclusions et des recommandations, y compris une mise en garde contre la tendance croissante vers une laïcité à la française - enracinée dans la neutralité afin de limiter la présence de femmes visiblement musulmanes dans la société belge et spécifiquement leur présence dans l'éducation ou le lieu de travail.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Belgium

**Type of Regime:** Federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy

**Form of Government:** Representative democratic federal bicameral parliamentary system, headed by the monarch.

**Ruling Parties:** Following May 2019, the Belgian federal government is yet to be decided.

**Opposition Parties:** Francophone parties include *Mouvement Réformateur* (MR), *Parti Socialiste* (PS), *Centre Démocrate Humaniste* (CdH), *Écolo*, and *Parti Populiste*. Flemish parties include *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (NVA), *Christen Democratische en Vlaamse* and *Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democrate*, *Socialistische Partij Anders*, *Vlaams Belang* (VB), and *Groen*.

**Last Elections:** The last elections took place in May 2019 and run on a five-yearly cycle in line with the European Parliamentary elections. The highest-ranking parties were as follows: NVA – 25 seats, PS – 20 seats, VB – 18 seats, MR – 14 seats, and *Écolo* – 13 seats.

**Total Population:** 11.4 million

**Major Languages:** Flemish in Flanders (approx. 59% of population) Wallonia and Brussels are predominantly francophone. Finally, 0.7% of the total population is German-speaking and based in francophone Liège. English is also widely spoken throughout.

**Official Religion:** There is no official state religion in Belgium. However, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are officially recognised, with much of the nation identifying as Roman Catholic.

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** The Counter Islamophobia Collective in Belgium (*Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique – CCIB/Collectief Tegen Islamofobie en België – CTIB*) documents statistics annually on Islamophobia in Belgium, based on evidence derived from the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities (UNIA), and direct reports.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** Statistics are compiled by the UNIA, under seventeen of the nineteen legal bases of discrimination, including racial discrimination (presumed race, skin colour, nationality, ancestry, and ethnic origin), disability-based discrimination, philosophical/religious discrimination, sexual orientation, age, wealth, civil status, political beliefs, trade union membership, health, physical/genetic characteristics, birth, and social background.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Although there is no official state census of religious affiliation in Belgium, estimates suggest a 60.7% Christian population (predominantly Roman Catholic but also including some Protestants and Orthodox Christians), 6% Muslims, and 0.4% Jewish.

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 6% of the Belgian population (estimated 870,000).

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** The Belgian Muslim Executive (*Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique/ Executief van de Moslims van België – EMB*) serves as the official national interlocutor on Islam and Muslim communities in the country (under the official recognition of Islam), comprising representatives from the federal regions. It oversees the registration of mosques and clergy, chaplains, Muslim/ Islamic religious education teachers in state schools, ritual slaughter certificates, and announcing religious festivals among other key details in the function of Islam in Belgium.

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** CCIB, UNIA, ENAR, among others.

**Far-Right Parties:** Flemish Interest (*Vlaams Belang – VB*)

**Far-Right Movements:** *Katholiek Vlaams Hoogstudentenverbond*, *Nationalistische Studentenvereniging*, *Schild en Vrienden*, and *Voorpost*.

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** Rather than organisations being directly designated as far-right terrorist organisations, far-right actions tend to be condemned.

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** No national ban, regional ban in Verviers and individual school-specific bans.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** Flanders since January 2019, Wallonia since September 2019.
- **Minaret Ban:** Only discussion following the Swiss calls for a ban during the early 2010s.
- **Circumcision Ban:** Only discussion.
- **Burka Ban:** A burka ban is in place since 1 June 2011. Those found wearing the burka in Belgian public spaces are subject to monetary fines of between €15 and €25, and imprisonment of up to seven days.
- **Prayer Ban:** There is no specific national or federal ban on prayer in Belgium. However, it is linked to employment discrimination cases.

## Introduction

Throughout the nation, 2019 saw a sustained and continued growth in Islamophobia. As this national report in the *EIR* details, Belgium has witnessed steadily increasing Islamophobia across a range of fields; for example, visible manifestations of Islamophobic hate crime have been ever-present throughout the year and include attacks on physical locations and spaces presumed to be linked to Muslims apparent in the dumping of pig heads or swastikas being graffitied on cars, yet this only represents the tip of the iceberg that is Islamophobia in Belgium.

Islamophobic hate crime in Belgium, as with preceding years documented in the *European Islamophobia* report, has continued to have a distinctly gendered focus, as detailed below. Beyond the apparent manifestations of Islamophobia, the phenomenon has continued to grow also in Belgian institutions. For example, the marked success of the right and the far-right in Flanders during the May 2019 Belgian federal elections and similarly the Belgian representation in the European Parliament, paved the way for increased legislated controls of Muslim women's dress in Belgian education and employment. The growing institutionalisation of Islamophobia in Belgium clearly points to the ways in which Islamophobia in the country permeates the wider Belgian political arena and its increasing banalisation.

This year, however, also marks the growth of civil society projects that attempt to counter Islamophobia in Belgium. These are detailed further in the report, but prominent examples include the *Veilleurs de l'Islamophobie* (Islamophobia Lookouts) project headed by the *Collectif contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique/Collectief Tegen Islamofobie en België* (Counter Islamophobia Collective in Belgium, henceforth CCIB), or the newly formed branch of the public body *Actiris*, dedicated to combatting workplace and labour market discrimination.

The current national report details the developments in terms of Islamophobia in Belgium during 2019: the manifestations, the institutionalisation, and the counter-Islamophobia work that is being undertaken in the country. It concludes with policy recommendations that can be garnered from Belgium during 2019 before presenting a chronology of the most prominent Islamophobic events that took place in the country in 2019.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### **Physical and Verbal Attacks**

In terms of Islamophobic physical and verbal attacks on individuals and institutions in Belgium during 2019, several principle trends are clear. First, as stated above, Islamophobia has continued to grow in the nation. The CCIB statistical report published in 2019 detailing the analysis of the Interfederal Centre for Equal

Opportunities' (UNIA) figures for the previous year indicates the growth in Islamophobic incidents to 278 during the preceding year.<sup>1</sup> Physical Islamophobic attacks include both those on individuals and those enacted on Muslim spaces, which stand at 4%,<sup>2</sup> such as the vandalism of the Al Ihssan Mosque on the very last day of the year,<sup>3</sup> the leaving of pig heads at a Muslim residence,<sup>4</sup> and the leaving of excrement and urine at a Muslim home accompanied by swastikas being graffitied on the Muslim family's car.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 1:** Pigs head left at a Muslim residence (13 October 2019)<sup>6</sup>.

1. "Rapport des Chiffres 2018", Collectif contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique, (September 2019), [http://ccib-ctib.be/wp-content/uploads/CCIB\\_PUBLIC\\_PDF\\_RapportChiffresCCIB/RAPPORT\\_CHIFFRES\\_CCIB\\_2018\\_Septembre2019.pdf](http://ccib-ctib.be/wp-content/uploads/CCIB_PUBLIC_PDF_RapportChiffresCCIB/RAPPORT_CHIFFRES_CCIB_2018_Septembre2019.pdf), (Access date: 12 January 2020).

2. Ibid.

3. D.R., "Une mosquée vandalisée à Louvain", *Le Soir*, 1 January 2020. <https://www.lesoir.be/270228/article/2020-01-01/une-mosquee-vandalisee-louvain>, (Access date: 12 January 2020).

4. Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique, Facebook, 12 January 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/islamophobia.ccib.be/>, (Access date: 12 January 2020).

5. "Hayat, mère de trois enfants se dit victime de racisme: 'On a eu de la diarrhée sur la porte'", *RTL Info*, 16 September 2019, [https://www.rtl.be/info/belgique/societe/vicime-de-racisme-ayat-mere-de-trois-enfants-est-a-bout-on-a-eu-de-la-diarrhee-sur-la-porte-video--1157531.aspx?dt=14%3A39&fbclid=IwAR2SjbQ-kHU76kTn86NZoWtx-Zc5fnoybWD2oKiJJP9uCE5r\\_z9igkonW2qU](https://www.rtl.be/info/belgique/societe/vicime-de-racisme-ayat-mere-de-trois-enfants-est-a-bout-on-a-eu-de-la-diarrhee-sur-la-porte-video--1157531.aspx?dt=14%3A39&fbclid=IwAR2SjbQ-kHU76kTn86NZoWtx-Zc5fnoybWD2oKiJJP9uCE5r_z9igkonW2qU), (Access date: 23 December 2019).

6. Collectif contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique, Facebook, 13 October 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/islamophobia.ccib.be/>, (Access date: 16 March 2020). – French text reads as follows: 'Good evening everybody. This Saturday 13/10 between 9 and 11pm, on Trichon Street in Sauvenière, a cooked pig's head was dumped at my house. I don't have the words to describe this act. Given that we are Muslims, in my opinion it is a racist act. If residents of Gembloux of Sauvenière, and especially from Trichon Street, has seen individuals who had anything to do with this act, thanks for sharing your statements with me. Good evening.'

Secondly, physical and verbal Islamophobic attacks have continued to have a distinctly gendered focus. Specifically, the CCIB statistical analysis points to 77% of reported Islamophobic attacks being perpetrated against presumed Muslim women, compared to 23% against presumed Muslim men. Examples of gendered Islamophobia include the attack on a headscarf-wearing Muslim woman in Anderlecht in January 2019.<sup>7</sup> The event triggered fear across the Belgian Muslim community. The verbal attack on two headscarf-wearing Muslim women by the driver of a public transport bus in Uccle who stated “I am a racist and I hate women who wear the headscarf” in March 2019.<sup>8</sup> A Muslim woman was stabbed in front of her three young children in Anderlecht, due to a presumed Islamophobic motive in April 2019.<sup>9</sup> Or in August 2019, the case of an inebriated woman attacking and attempting to remove the headscarf of a visibly Muslim woman. The attacker was subsequently arrested on charge of public intoxication.<sup>10</sup> Another case bares a distinct similarity: a 50-year-old drunk and homeless woman who, for the second distinct instance, pushed a headscarf-wearing Muslim woman onto the tracks of the Brussels metro.<sup>11</sup>

These attacks only represent a small subsection of the likely vast and far-reaching nature of manifested Islamophobia in Belgium; however, they too are numerous. The expansiveness of gendered Islamophobia in Belgium in 2019 also highlights the interplay between the institutionalisation of gendered Islamophobia (as detailed further under the themes of Politics and Employment) and the ways in which these often state-sanctioned Islamophobic measures targeting Muslim women seemingly ‘otherise’, banalise, and legitimise attacks and violence by members of the Belgian public sphere on Muslim women in the nation. This trend is not unique to Belgium. Rather, it is indicative of pan-European and global trends in this manner.

## Employment

As with other dimensions considered in this report, Islamophobic discrimination has continued to grow throughout the nation. As with other fields, whilst Mus-

7. “Aggression Islamophobe d’une maman à Anderlecht” CCIB, 19 January 2019, <http://ccib-ctib.be/index.php/2019/01/19/agression-islamophobe-dune-maman-a-anderlecht/?fbclid=IwAR21BP1vXh46rWnPkbV3GLSX-zu54kPqKdcuy9kbTdK1oeIl2RB4KcbKvWtk>, (Access date: 23 December 2019).

8. Marie-Noëlle Dinant and Béatrice Broutout, “Uccle : deux femmes voilées se disent victime d’une agression raciste par un conducteur”, BX1, <https://bx1.be/uccle/uccle-deux-femmes-voilees-se-disent-victime-dune-agression-raciste-par-un-conducteur/?fbclid=IwAR12mN00GmwCmLRGswlF5ddwsD2HPPHdkV2q3u7H059J5wof-ByA-tGzmqWk>, (Access date: 23 December 2019).

9. “Une femme poignardée devant ses trois enfants à Anderlecht”, SudInfo, 2 April 2019, <https://www.sudinfo.be/id110980/article/2019-04-02/une-femme-poignardee-devant-ses-trois-enfants-anderlecht>, (Access date: 24 December 2019)

10. “Dronken vrouw valt moslima aan in Deurne”, GVA, 6 July 2019, [https://www.gva.be/cnt/dmf20190706\\_04498173/dronken-vrouw-valt-moslima-aan-in-deurne?fbclid=IwAR2Ex1KC38Bens8vtnaSUYJmKThrTyNuQNh55O26XD-m6k5ZFdDBRhLrWwtM](https://www.gva.be/cnt/dmf20190706_04498173/dronken-vrouw-valt-moslima-aan-in-deurne?fbclid=IwAR2Ex1KC38Bens8vtnaSUYJmKThrTyNuQNh55O26XD-m6k5ZFdDBRhLrWwtM), (Access date: 23 December 2019)

11. “Bruxelles: Laila pousse des femmes sur les rails du métro!” La Capitale, 6 November 2019, <https://www.lacapitale.be/468490/article/2019-11-06/bruxelles-laila-pousse-des-femmes-sur-les-rails-du-metro> (Access date: 23 December 2019).

lim males have been significantly impacted by employment-based Islamophobia, Muslim women have borne the brunt of Islamophobia in the Belgian labour market and workforce.

The UNIA statistics published in 2019 point to 510 cases of employment-based discrimination and 25% of these pertain to ‘racial’ or ethnic characteristics.<sup>12</sup> The CCIB’s disaggregation of all reported Islamophobic cases, published in 2019, indicates that 6% of all dossiers it dealt with pertained to employment and Islamophobia.<sup>13</sup>

Specific examples of workplace-based Islamophobic discrimination include the example published in March 2018 which detailed the case of young, headscarf-wearing Muslim women who faced difficulties whilst on a work experience placement at a Belgian nursery. The young Muslim women intended to complete a short several-day observation at the nursery (and thus would not be in direct contact with the children at the nursery) but were asked by the nursery management to remove their headscarves. The UNIA intervened and the Muslim women were allowed to retain their headscarves on a technicality, namely that they would be present as observers rather than interacting with the children. The UNIA welcomed the discussions but indicated the growth in limitations on work experience placements. This is noteworthy since work experience students typically work on a temporary and voluntary basis, thus highlighting the reach of increasing gendered Islamophobia in the Belgian workplace.

Similarly, a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf who is a legal expert took the STIB (Brussels public transport company) to court over workplace and recruitment discrimination on the grounds of her headscarf.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to such specific examples, given the significant growth of the right and the far-right in Flanders, there have been increasing legislative controls over visible Muslim appearance under the guise of neutrality in numerous fields including the workplace.<sup>15</sup> Of course, institutionalised Islamophobia is not the preserve of the right wing of the political spectrum. Furthermore, the framing of such controls echoes the terms and frames of reference employed within the French context, thus pointing to the increasing globalisation of legislated controls of Muslimness in the workplace and beyond.

Notwithstanding, the year 2019 also saw the growth of noteworthy counter-projects in the area, including that led by the CCIB entitled #OpenJobsTesting

12. “Rapport Annuel 2018: Renouer avec les droits humains”, UNIA, (June 2019), [https://www.unia.be/files/Documenten/Jaarrapport/Unia\\_Rapport\\_egalite\\_2018\\_FR\\_AS.pdf](https://www.unia.be/files/Documenten/Jaarrapport/Unia_Rapport_egalite_2018_FR_AS.pdf), (Access date: 23 December 2019).

13. “Rapport des Chiffres 2018”, CCIB.

14. Elodie Blogie, “La Stib attaquée pour discrimination à l’embauche”, *Le Soir*, 27 September 2019 <https://plus.lesoir.be/249859/article/2019-09-27/la-stib-attaquee-pour-discrimination-lembauche> (Access date: 23 December 2019).

15. Vlaamse Overheid, “Vlaamse regering 2019-2024: Regeerakkoord”, Departement Kanselarij & Bestuur, (2019), <http://docs.vlaamsparlement.be/docs/varia/regeerakkoord-2019-2024.pdf>, (Access date: 23 December 2019).

whereby the organisation sought to understand the intersecting discriminations at play (including Islamophobia) in terms of access to the workforce. The work follows on from extensive academic work in this field, albeit in different geographical sites of study.

Additionally, in the Brussels-Capital Region, *Actiris* launched its “Actiris Inclusive” project in December 2019. The work is headed by Fatima Zibouh and seeks to combat workplace discrimination in the region<sup>16</sup> including Islamophobic discrimination.

## Education

As with previous years, 2019 continued to present cases of Islamophobia in the education system. The aforementioned CCIB statistical report reveals that 22.5% of all cases it received in the preceding year pertained to education-based Islamophobia. This category was the largest alongside Islamophobia in the provision of goods and services.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of specific cases during 2019, examples include the instance in February 2019 whereby students at the Pater Jozefieten school in Melle came to school dressed as stereotypical Arabs/Muslims. The students wore Gulf Arab-style thobes, veils, and headscarves, accompanied by explosive belts. The school students proceeded to mock Islamic prayer in the school corridors. Candidly filmed videos surfaced on social and popular media and perhaps unsurprisingly provoked outrage and strong condemnation.<sup>18</sup> The incident demonstrates the intersection of traditional racisms with Islamophobia in Belgium and also the increasingly normalised nature of Islamophobia.

Beyond Islamophobia perpetrated by pupils, in May 2019, a Brussels-based primary school issued a disclaimer refuting any responsibility of school students who were fasting for the month of Ramadan.<sup>19</sup> Not only are students unlikely to be fasting since they are predominantly too young, but the case also serves to normalise the targeting of practices related to Muslimness.

As with other areas of Belgian Islamophobia in 2019, Islamophobia in the Belgian schooling system was often distinctly gendered. For example, in August 2019,

16. Emilie Eickhoff, Thierry Dubocquet and Toine Guévert, “Un nouveau service chez Actiris pour lutter contre la discrimination à l’embauche” BX1, 4 December 2019, [https://bx1.be/news/un-nouveau-service-chez-actiris-pour-lutter-contre-la-discrimination-a-l'embauche/?theme=classic&fbclid=IwAR0e93B-JdAzTcLIEB\\_X6uZrx-brrmQZP-sOVpZ\\_IAUNZTcSdYmL2bKGer-A](https://bx1.be/news/un-nouveau-service-chez-actiris-pour-lutter-contre-la-discrimination-a-l'embauche/?theme=classic&fbclid=IwAR0e93B-JdAzTcLIEB_X6uZrx-brrmQZP-sOVpZ_IAUNZTcSdYmL2bKGer-A), (Access date: 24 December 2019).

17. Rapport des Chiffres 2018, CCIB.

18. Chloé Lauvergner, “Video of Belgian School Kids Dressed up as ‘Muslims’, Complete with Explosive Belt, Provokes Outrage” Observers, 3 April 2019, <https://observers.france24.com/en/20190304-video-belgian-school-kids-dressing-muslims-complete-explosive-belt-provokes-shock> (Access date: 24 December 2019).

19. Karim Fadoul, “Ramadan: une école primaire de Bruxelles décline toute responsabilité en cas de malaise”, RTBF, 6 April 2019, [https://www.rtf.be/info/regions/detail\\_ramadan-une-ecole-primaire-de-bruxelles-decline-toute-responsabilite-en-cas-de-malaise?id=10213165&utm\\_source=rtbfinfo&utm\\_campaign=social\\_share&utm\\_medium=fb\\_share&fbclid=IwAR37IzRp7mZRfkKTdcSV9WAXiVcDSGklT4zUyk6rcei\\_1FkIE8W1g0moHQs](https://www.rtf.be/info/regions/detail_ramadan-une-ecole-primaire-de-bruxelles-decline-toute-responsabilite-en-cas-de-malaise?id=10213165&utm_source=rtbfinfo&utm_campaign=social_share&utm_medium=fb_share&fbclid=IwAR37IzRp7mZRfkKTdcSV9WAXiVcDSGklT4zUyk6rcei_1FkIE8W1g0moHQs), (Access date: 24 December 2019).

a Leuven court ruled that a Muslim schoolgirl who wears the headscarf could continue to do so in school and that her doing so would be lawful.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, as detailed further in relation to the Belgian justice system, an Islamic studies religious education teacher who had previously faced difficulty and had been asked to remove her headscarf by her employer, reached a resolution with the help of the UNIA and continues to teach. The case is paradoxical given that the Belgian constitution allows for religious freedom, Islam is officially recognised nationally (meaning that Islamic religious education is provided and permitted), and thus in theory demonstrating one's Muslimness should not be problematic. Similarly, also as detailed under the section of this report pertaining to the Belgian justice system, eleven Muslim schoolgirls with headscarves from Maasmechelen, from the Nikola Tesla and the then Atheneum Maasland school (now GO! Maxwell school) were originally banned from their respective schools on the grounds of their headscarves in 2018. Subsequently, the schoolgirls and their parents took the case to the Tongeren Court and the school's decision was overturned, meaning that the girls could continue to attend school whilst maintaining their outward Muslim appearance. The Tongeren Court based its decision on the European Court of Human Rights' rulings on freedom of faith. Unhappy with this ruling, the school appealed the Tongeren Court's decision at the Antwerp Court of Appeal and won in December 2019, meaning that the schoolgirls are deprived of their education.

The aforementioned cases pertaining to gendered Islamophobia in the Belgian education system, distinctly recall the French headscarf affairs which have been ongoing since 1989 and notably resulted in the implementation of the 2004 *Loi Stasi* which explicitly bans the presence of 'ostentatious faith symbols' in French schooling.<sup>21</sup> However, the Belgian case appears to be following French precedent in an expedited fashion. Previously, religious dress or headscarves were not subject to a national ban; however, there are growing controls. For example, the Verviers region's wide ban implemented in 2012,<sup>22</sup> or the ban in Flanders as stipulated in the Flanders' Government Regional Governance Agreement of 2019, which foresees a region-wide limitation on religious symbols (Muslim women's dress). It is framed as follows: 'We also guarantee neutrality in education. In provincial and community education, we ensure the philosophical neutrality for teachers and

20. Hanne Decre, "Rechter beslist dat meisje uit Leuven hoofddoek tóch mag dragen op school", VRT, 27 August 2019, <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2019/08/27/rechter-beslist-dat-meisje-uit-leuven-hoofddoek-toch-mag-dragen/> (Access date: 24 December 2019).

21. "LOI n° 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics", Légifrance, (2004), <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000417977&categorieLien=id>, (Access date: 24 December 2019).

22. "Déclaration Politique Générale - Mandature Communale 2013- 2018", Verviers Conseil Communal, (Verviers, Belgium: 2013).

students.’<sup>23</sup> The agreement has the potential to send a clear signal to other areas of governance across the country.

## Politics

In May 2019, both the Belgian federal elections and European Parliamentary elections took place. Although the Belgian federal government is yet to be decided (something which is not unusual in Belgian formal federal politics in part due to its political structure which is based on proportional representation), the May 2019 elections saw distinct gains made by the Flemish far-right and right-wing parties both in Flanders and in the European Parliament, whilst in francophone Belgium the Greens and left-wing parties’ representative presence grew. Specifically, at the European Parliament the highest-ranking Dutch parties include NVA and VB who each won three seats in the European Parliament, followed by Open VLD and CD&V who each scored two seats. In francophone Belgium, the PS, *Écolo*, and MR each secured two European Parliamentary seats.<sup>24</sup>

At the federal level, VB made the biggest gains at the polls nationally, gaining a total of fifteen extra seats compared to the 2014–2019 period. Whilst in the francophone electoral college *Écolo* made the largest gains, winning a further seven seats (compared to the last voting period).<sup>25</sup>

This growth in the far-right presence paved the way for increased legislated limitations on visible Muslim appearance in education and employment. The Flemish Governmental Regional Agreement sets out controls of “outward signs of their personal conviction” (i.e. religious symbols such as the headscarf) in Flemish governance and education. It states, “External symbols of philosophical, religious, political or other beliefs are therefore not worn with direct customer contact... We also guarantee neutrality in education. In provincial and community education, we ensure the philosophical neutrality for teachers and students.”<sup>26</sup> As stated numerous times in this report, although the far right does not exclusively promote Islamophobic legislation and political discourse (for example, consider left-wing liberal Islamophobia), their presence in Belgium has given way to a rise in Islamophobic political discourse and legislation over the years. The recent move by the Flemish governance sends a clear public signal regarding the permissibility of Islamophobic discrimination both in the Belgian workplace and Belgian education, and sets a precedent for both Belgium and beyond. The terminology employed in the Flemish Governmental Regional Agreement 2019–2024

---

23. Vlaamse Overheid, “Vlaamse regering 2019–2024: Regeerakkoord”.

24. “2019 European Election Results: Belgium – All Electoral Colleges”, EuroParl, 14 June 2019, <https://europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/national-results/belgium/2019-2024/>, (Access date: 12 December 2019).

25. “Elections 2019”, IBZ Official Results, 26 May 2019, <https://elections2019.belgium.be/en/election?el=CK> (Access date: 23 December 2019).

26. Vlaamse Overheid, “Vlaamse regering 2019–2024: Regeerakkoord”.

strongly echoes French discourse,<sup>27</sup> highlighting the increasing cross-national permeability of seemingly legitimised and legislated Islamophobia.

On a local level, local town councillor from the opposition party in Koekelberg, Lucas Ducarme, stated that he doesn't want his town to become like Molenbeek.<sup>28</sup> The connotations here being linked to popular myth of Muslim demographic take-over and more specifically since Molenbeek is densely populated by Muslims and has been implicated with individuals leaving the area to become Islamic extremists in the Levant, Ducarme's comments stoke stereotypes and enforce images of Muslims as barbaric and 'other'.

In terms of noteworthy Muslim political officials, the year 2019 saw the loss of the first Western headscarf-wearing Muslim politician, Mahinur Özdemir, from the Belgian political arena as she moved on to become the Turkish ambassador to Algeria. Özdemir was a role model for many and undertook a range of political dossiers in her ten-year career as Schaerbeek MP, but regrettably was not immune to Islamophobia during her political tenure in Belgium.<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding, Belgium continues to have significant and noteworthy political representation by Muslims – something which in itself can serve to counter-Islamophobia.<sup>30</sup>

Combining consideration of the far-right growth and Muslim political representation in Belgium in 2019, *Écolo* co-president Zakia Khattabi saw her candidature for a Belgian constitutional judge post postponed in November 2019 following the NVA and VB's lobbying against her candidacy. Her campaign was defeated in January 2020.<sup>31</sup> Although the NVA and VB claimed their blocking was on the grounds of her alleged 'activist' behaviour, it is difficult to disaggregate ethnic, gendered, religious, and even age-based features from this affair.

Similarly, in 2019, the Brussels Youth Parliament circulated an advertisement showing the photograph of a youth parliamentarian, Chéïma, who wears a headscarf. The advertisement came under attack, perhaps unsurprisingly, under the frames of neutrality and secularism.

Finally, in terms of political legislation, the year 2019 saw the implementation of the ritual slaughter ban (i.e. *halal* and *kosher*) in Belgium; first in Flanders, in January 2019 and then in Wallonia, in September 2019. Journalist Fabrice Grosfilley ar-

27. See for example: "LOI n° 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics", Légifrance.

28. Isabelle Anneet, "Ducarme: 'Je ne veux pas que Koekelberg devienne Molenbeek bis'" La Capitale, 4 August 2019, [https://www.lacapitale.be/420008/article/2019-08-04/ducarme-je-ne-veux-pas-que-koekelberg-devienne-molenbeek-bis?fbclid=IwAR1C7h7OonkKIInWiK7W2cSLKJdJMd4-zF0bjX8Tlw5wHuI\\_7-2sq8lIuuiM](https://www.lacapitale.be/420008/article/2019-08-04/ducarme-je-ne-veux-pas-que-koekelberg-devienne-molenbeek-bis?fbclid=IwAR1C7h7OonkKIInWiK7W2cSLKJdJMd4-zF0bjX8Tlw5wHuI_7-2sq8lIuuiM) (Access date: 23 December 2019).

29. For more information, see: [www.islamophobiaeurope.com](http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com).

30. Isabelle Anneet, "Ducarme: 'Je ne veux pas que Koekelberg devienne Molenbeek bis'".

31. "Former Co-Leader of Francophone Greens' Candidature for Constitutional Court Job Gets Insufficient Support from Senators", VRT, 17 January 2020, <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnews/en/2020/01/17/former-co-leader-of-francophone-greens-candidature-for-constitut/> (Access date: 17 January 2020).

gued for the extension of such bans to the Brussels-Capital Region also, highlighting the spread and perceived legitimacy of Islamophobic controls over Muslim practices.

## Media

As with previous years, 2019 saw a sustained presence of media-based Islamophobia in Belgium. As before, in Belgium and beyond, the popular media serve as a mouthpiece for Islamophobic discourse, and work to silence positions that are not sympathetic to hegemonic and normative discourses in the nation. Nonetheless, from a global perspective, Belgium is recognised for its largely plural press.<sup>32</sup>

The CCIB statistics published in 2019 highlight that 10% of the eighty dossiers that they handled pertained to Islamophobia in the media and online.<sup>33</sup> However, importantly, these statistics are likely to be an underrepresentation of the real state of affairs in the nation, as the CCIB points out that Muslim citizens don't report hate crimes they face given fear of 'reprisals' or 'prejudicial media coverage'.<sup>34</sup> This highlights the power of the Belgian media in national Islamophobic discourse and in directly contributing to the underreporting of Islamophobia in Belgium.

Specific examples of media-based Islamophobic media coverage in Belgium in 2019 include providing a platform for controversial cases, such as making the videos from the Melle school viral whereby students dressed up and mocked Arabness and Muslimness.<sup>35</sup> Or, providing a platform for the call for the extension of ritual slaughter bans to the Brussels-Capital Region.

Meanwhile, Belgian media also has the potential to be a mouthpiece for the diffusion of positive counter-narratives in the country within the frame of Islamophobia. For example, the media stories that reported growing Islamophobia in the country published in August 2019.<sup>36</sup> Examples of this include the publication by DH.net noting that an Islamophobic attack takes place every two days in Belgium.<sup>37</sup>

## Justice System

As previous sections of this report have demonstrated, the Belgian justice system has the potential to stoke Islamophobia through implementation and maintenance of Islamophobic legislation. Perhaps the most noteworthy of these in 2019 in-

32. Peggy Valke, Pieter-Jan Ombelet and Ingrid Lambrecht, *Media Pluralism Monitor 2016 Monitoring Risks for Media Pluralism in the EU and Beyond – Country Report: Belgium* (Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, Brussels: 2016).

33. "Rapport des Chiffres 2018", CCIB.

34. Ibid.

35. Chloé Lauvergnier, "Video of Belgian School Kids Dressed up as 'Muslims'".

36. For more information, see: <http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/BELGIUM.pdf>.

37. Maïli Bernaerts, "Une attaque islamophobe a lieu tous les deux jours en Belgique", DH Net, 4 October 2019, <https://www.dhnet.be/actu/faits/une-attaque-islamophobe-a-lieu-tous-les-deux-jours-en-belgique-5d96290fd8ad-5841fc3ef426?fbclid=IwAR2t8zbHWIbtXKbBHIXE1SKUhfOm4zwSuRS1e-rKpuQH0JdAD47YwAzSEg>, (Access date: 24 December 2019).

cludes the implementation of the bans on *halal* and *kosher* slaughter in both Flanders and Wallonia.

Similarly, the justice system at the Belgian regional, federal, and European supranational levels has the potential to spread ambiguity surrounding potentially Islamophobic cases. For example, in December 2019, the Antwerp Court of Appeal overturned the previous ruling issued by the Court of Tongeren regarding the permissibility of young Muslim schoolgirls being allowed to wear the headscarf to their respective schools. The case is detailed further under the education section of this report. Essentially the case went from a school-imposed ban, which was appealed by parents, to a ruling issued by the Court of Tongeren that followed legal precedent and guidance from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and allowed for the young girls to wear the headscarf, to an appeal by the school and an overturning of the previous ruling by the more senior Antwerp Court of Appeal.<sup>38</sup> In face of this legal to-ing and fro-ing, the Muslim schoolgirls and their education has been compromised. In addition, the legal ambiguity has the potential to send a signal both to further instances of control of Muslim women's dress/bodies in the Belgian education system and the potential to legitimise further gendered Islamophobia, especially concerning visible gendered Muslimness.

However, the Belgian justice system also plays a distinct and significant role in the criminalisation of Islamophobia. For example, in June 2019, Belgian courts issued an €800 fine to a 65-year-old Twitter user who had been posting racist and Islamophobic tweets and harassing UNIA co-director Els Keytman.<sup>39</sup> In the same month, Belgian courts heard the case of a Schaerbeek woman who had had headscarf forcibly removed whilst in a parking lot.<sup>40</sup> Or the case of a Muslim job-hunter who took the STIB to court in September 2019.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, the Belgian legal system has a role to play in effectively countering Islamophobia. The most apparent examples of this in 2019 pertain to the work of the UNIA and the CCIB. For example, in October 2019, the UNIA was able to support a Muslim woman who wears the headscarf in a resolution with her employer. The woman, who was contracted to teach religious education in a Belgian state school, had been asked to remove her headscarf. By intervening in writing and recalling Belgian legislation (most likely that concerning the constitutionally agreed

38. Mairthe Chini, "Headscarf Ban in Public Schools Justified as Court of Appeal Overturns Previous Decision", Brussels Times, 24 December 2019, <https://www.brusselstimes.com/all-news/belgium-all-news/85728/headscarf-ban-in-public-schools-justified-as-court-of-appeal-overturns-previous-verdict-maasmechelen-atheneum-maasland-go-maxwell-nikola-tesla-echr-education/>, (Access date: 24 December 2019).

39. Belga, "Ses tweets islamophobes lui ont coûté cher", 7sur7, 5 June 2019, <https://www.7sur7.be/belgique/ses-tweets-islamophobes-lui-ont-coute-cher-ab2c99a7?fbclid=IwAR05Z7qF2Ah8WARn4eLCfbMIPc7A9Zm-3TtCYyZbE64ARLRiFLNLWAlqI&referrer=https://l.facebook.com/>, (Access date: 23 December 2019).

40. The case is detailed in last year's edition of the European Islamophobia Report in the Belgian section. For more information, see: <http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/BELGIUM.pdf>.

41. Blogie, "La Stib attaquée pour discrimination à l'embauche".

freedom of faith and also legally based acknowledgement of Islam and the subsequent scope for Islamic religious education within the Belgian education system), the UNIA was able to help the woman reach an agreement with her employer whilst maintaining her headscarf.<sup>42</sup> Similar guidance was issued following the case that received media attention of a headscarf-wearing Muslim woman driver, who was using her headscarf to hold her phone (thus creating a hands-free way of using her phone and driving). Her actions were deemed lawful, but nonetheless the case sparked controversy.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps the case, and many of the others detailed in this section, do not pertain to secularism, security, or neutrality, but rather serve to problematise Muslimness in Belgian society.

## Internet

Regarding cyber-Islamophobia, given the expansiveness of the internet it is difficult to determine the scale and extent of online Islamophobia in Belgium. The CCIB statistics published in 2019 note that 10% of the cases handled the previous year are rooted in the cyber and media world. The year 2019 has seen a sustained growth of online hate towards Muslims that often intersects with ethnicity and gender (among other features).



**Figure 2:** Still image from a video on Filip Dewinter's Facebook page<sup>44</sup>.

42. "Rapport chiffres 2018: Renouer avec les droits humains", UNIA.

43. "Téléphoner au volant en coinçant le GSM sous le foulard, c'est parfaitement legal" DH Net, 18 February 2019, <https://www.dhnet.be/actu/faits/telephoner-au-volant-en-coincant-le-gsm-sous-le-foulard-c-est-parfaitement-legal-5c6a85d97b50a60724c47487>, (Access date: 24 December 2019).

44. Filip Dewinter "Tijd voor DE-Islamisering", Facebook, 22 May 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/fdwvb/videos/2189638998033293/>, (Access date: 2 March 2020).

A key example of the use of the internet and in particular social media for furthering Islamophobic narratives (that intersect with political gain/popularity), is that of the Facebook page of Vlaams Belang politician Filip Dewinter, who, for example, on 26 May 2019, posted an arguably Islamophobic video to his Facebook page (which has over 29,000 followers). (Fig. 2) The video, entitled ‘Time for De-Islamisation’ was viewed over 13,000 times, sparked 318 Facebook reactions, 300 comments, and 53 shares, and showed Arabic script on Belgian shopfronts, with particular emphasis on *halal* signs. The video continues to show these shop signs being covered with ‘Stop Islamisation’ posters and concludes with a call to vote for Filip Dewinter and Vlaams Belang in the then upcoming elections on 26 May 2019.<sup>45</sup>



Figure 3: Examples of online hate speech on the CCIB social media (compiled by CCIB).<sup>46</sup>

In response to this, the CCIB published details of its *Veilleurs de l'Islamophobie* (Islamophobia Lookouts) project, launched the preceding year. The project is supported by the Federation of Wallonia and Brussels and consists of twenty volunteers who were trained on four themes: understanding prejudice stereotypes and discrim-

45. Ibid.

46. "Collectif contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique", Facebook, 13 October 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/islamophobia.ccib.be/>, (Access date: 16 March 2020). Selected translations from the image of comments shared by CCIB following the 2019 terror attacks on New Zealand Muslims, including: 'For once it's not a Muslim terrorist who committed an attack... I am surprised.', or 'it is not a terrorist, it is someone who rights wrongdoings, and there will be more and more', or finally 'At the same time we don't give a damn, you reap what you sow.'

ination, hate speech, (Belgian) secularism and freedom of expression, and how to react to online Islamophobia. This example demonstrates best practice in countering online Islamophobia.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

In previous years and previous editions of the Belgian national report in the *European Islamophobia Report*, there have been consistent standout figures in the Islamophobia network including key politicians as highlighted earlier in this report such as Filip Dewinter. This year in Belgium, Islamophobia has been marked by its increasing institutionalisation. In sum, the year 2019 has seen the state via its national normative mechanism at the centre of growing Islamophobia. This, in turn, has signalled the growing acceptability of Islamophobia, and in particular gendered Islamophobia, in the nation. This is borne out in the everyday attacks on Muslim practices, Muslim sites, and Muslims individuals in Belgium by a wide variety of members of the broader public. Arguably, this year suggests a change in the tone and pace of Belgian Islamophobia – no longer does the network exist through lone or marginal far-right actors, but rather it is becoming increasingly normalised.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

Like in previous years, in 2019, Belgium has continued to demonstrate a strong civil society response to the ever shifting and ever-growing Islamophobia. Examples in 2019 include the CCIB – VIB project aiming to tackle - or at least document - growing online Islamophobia in the nation.

Similarly, in 2019, the UNIA has continued to document and support those facing Islamophobia. In particular, their practices of data collection and data sharing with Belgian civil society organisations, namely the CCIB, allow for the further analysis and disaggregation of hate crime data, which is often under-reported and poorly understood.

Finally, given the growth of workplace-based Islamophobic discrimination of Muslims and Muslim women in particular, the launching of the “Actiris Inclusive” project, represents a positive move towards combatting Islamophobic discrimination in the Belgian labour market and workforce, and the widespread levels of discrimination and prejudice that exist in this field within the nation.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

By way of principle conclusions based of this year’s Belgian report of the *European Islamophobia Report*, the following principle points are clear: Islamophobia in Belgium in 2019 has continued to grow steadily and is distinctly gendered in nature. This is

evident in the numerous individual and detailed cases presented above and includes damage to mosques; swastikas being graffitied on Muslim property and pig heads being left at Muslim homes; stabbings of Muslim women; forced removal of Muslim women's headscarves; Muslim women being pushed onto the metro tracks; and Muslim women being denied employment and education. These events are only the tip of the iceberg, and show the intersectional nature of Islamophobic discrimination as it crosscuts with traditional racisms, anti-Semitism, and sexism.

Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, rather than being confined to key figures, actors and networks, Belgian Islamophobia in 2019 has distinctly been marked by its growing institutionalisation. Examples of increasingly institutionalised Belgian Islamophobia include the implementation of the ban on ritual slaughter (meaning *halal* and *kosher*) in Flanders in January 2019 and in Wallonia in September 2019, and the controls on philosophical and religious symbols (including Muslim women's headscarves) in Flemish Belgian workplaces and education thanks to the Flemish Governmental Agreement (aided in part by the 2019 right and far-right parliamentary growth) that was implemented in 2019. The latter follows on from specific local bans and is often framed around principles of neutrality. This national report highlights the remarkable similarities with French-style and secular-based limitations on Muslim women's dress in neighbouring France. Yet, while the French affairs began in 1989 and have continued since, the Belgian case appears to be an expedited track towards similar levels of control of Muslimness in the nation. The legislation of Islamophobic action in Belgium in 2019 points towards the wide-reaching scope of such controls, its potential to signal legitimacy of Islamophobic action among the wider public, and the possible growth and trajectory of the phenomenon in Belgium in coming years.

In terms of recommendations, measures must be taken across the diverse levels of Belgian society to stem the legislated growth in Islamophobia. These steps may be taken by civil society actors, media, jurists, educators, and political figures alike, and should include the documentation, contestation, and deconstruction of dominant Islamophobic narratives in the nation. For example, where the headscarf is being constructed as a threat to Belgian neutrality, measures should be taken both to normalise its presence in Belgian society and to highlight the incongruence of limiting Muslim women's dress on the grounds of neutrality in Belgian society, which guarantees religious freedom and furthermore officially recognises faiths including Islam within its state-level structure.

At the civil society level, given the already strong presence of counter-Islamophobia initiatives, work should be done to continue to support such projects and the strong track record of data and good practice-sharing across organisations in the country. On the whole, the precedents set in Belgium in 2019, point to remarkable and concerning trends that going forward should be stemmed.

## Chronology

- **01.01.2019:** Flanders bans halal slaughter.<sup>47</sup>
- **19.01.2019:** Reports emerge of a Muslim mother being attacked by a man with a taser in Anderlecht (presumably motivated by her headscarf).<sup>48</sup>
- **20.01.2019:** Muslim woman hit in Anderlecht. Attack is believed to be Islamophobic and as a result, the attack sparks concern among Muslim women in Belgium.<sup>49</sup>
- **30.01.2019:** A nineteen-year-old woman who converted to Islam is stabbed by her mother. The 54-year-old mother is sentenced to three-year imprisonment.<sup>50</sup>
- **04.02.2019:** Controversy erupts following publication of Belgian Youth Parliament advertisement campaign featuring a young Muslim woman. The campaign sparks widespread online Islamophobic hate. It also triggers a defence statement by the Belgian youth parliament, assuring its commitment to inclusivity and diversity.<sup>51</sup>
- **08.02.2019:** The University of Liège hosts the event ‘Dialogue sur la présence Musulmane en Belgique’ (Dialogue on the Muslim presence in Belgium) thus highlighting its problematised nature.
- **13.02.2019:** Brussels Parliament gives the go-ahead to a project seeking to encourage diversity and counter discrimination in the workplace (civil servant focus).<sup>52</sup>
- **18.02.2019:** Woman photographed on E411 Brussels-Namur highway using her headscarf to hold her mobile phone, sparks controversy, but deemed lawful.<sup>53</sup>

47. Milan Schruer, “Belgium Bans Religious Slaughtering Practices, Drawing Praise and Protest”, *The New York Times*, 5 January 2019, [https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/05/world/europe/belgium-ban-jewish-muslim-animal-slaughter.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur&fbclid=IwAR1Qb9KFBK8LFPl2ymRm-TII-A1CmgaZdQTUzyQrK9\\_zkERkVwdBLtvUC0s](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/05/world/europe/belgium-ban-jewish-muslim-animal-slaughter.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur&fbclid=IwAR1Qb9KFBK8LFPl2ymRm-TII-A1CmgaZdQTUzyQrK9_zkERkVwdBLtvUC0s), (Access date: 24 December 2019).

48. “Aggression Islamophobe d’une maman à Anderlecht”, CCIB.

49. Elodie Blogie, “L’agression d’Anderlecht inquiète les musulmanes”, *Le Soir*, 20 January 2019, [https://plus.le-soir.be/201728/article/2019-01-20/lagression-danderlecht-inquiete-les-musulmanes?fbclid=IwAR3JUhek3lhjkK-slQw653tyr9XhoqcU7D8CpaM111\\_-D9sWcf80VS77Weg](https://plus.le-soir.be/201728/article/2019-01-20/lagression-danderlecht-inquiete-les-musulmanes?fbclid=IwAR3JUhek3lhjkK-slQw653tyr9XhoqcU7D8CpaM111_-D9sWcf80VS77Weg), (Access date: 23 December 2019).

50. N. Ben, “Sa fille se convertit à l’islam, elle la poignarde”, *DH Net*, 30 January 2019 [https://www.dhnet.be/actu/faits/sa-fille-se-convertit-a-l-islam-elle-la-poignarde-5c507a647b50a6072425f120?fbclid=IwAR2P8nCBFU8kFfH-Fzud9ONu6SaIT489us5SxD\\_mtyvBWEf5dmyFZeSUZu0M](https://www.dhnet.be/actu/faits/sa-fille-se-convertit-a-l-islam-elle-la-poignarde-5c507a647b50a6072425f120?fbclid=IwAR2P8nCBFU8kFfH-Fzud9ONu6SaIT489us5SxD_mtyvBWEf5dmyFZeSUZu0M), (Access date: 23 December 2019).

51. “BePax”, Facebook, 4 February 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/bepaxasbl/photos/pcb.2510074889006198/2510074815672872/?type=3&theater>, (Access date: 23 December 2019).

52. Véronique Fievet, “La région bruxelloise veut favoriser la diversité dans les administrations communales”, *RTBF*, 14 February 2019, [https://www.rtbf.be/info/regions/detail\\_la-region-bruxelloise-veut-favoriser-la-diversite-dans-les-administrations-communales?id=10145856&utm\\_source=rtbfinfo&utm\\_campaign=social\\_share&utm\\_medium=fb\\_share&fbclid=IwAR14GslR5V\\_5wlpzQSuUL6NIlz7KwMulFL9aeQxySGOdknPkU08s9orew](https://www.rtbf.be/info/regions/detail_la-region-bruxelloise-veut-favoriser-la-diversite-dans-les-administrations-communales?id=10145856&utm_source=rtbfinfo&utm_campaign=social_share&utm_medium=fb_share&fbclid=IwAR14GslR5V_5wlpzQSuUL6NIlz7KwMulFL9aeQxySGOdknPkU08s9orew), (Access date: 24 December 2019).

53. “Téléphoner au volant en coinçant le GSM sous le foulard, c’est parfaitement legal”, *DH Net*.

- **28.02.2019:** School students dress up as stereotypes of Arabs/Muslims and mock Islam. The event sparks controversy.<sup>54</sup>
- **15.03.2019:** Following New Zealand attacks, the EMB issues a statement to Belgian mosques warning against gatherings outside of the mosque space, encouraging vigilance amongst worshippers, promoting calm and prayer for New Zealand victims – demonstrating the globalisation of Islamophobia and the fear it creates.<sup>55</sup>
- **16.03.2019:** *Veilleurs de l'Islamophobie en Belgique* record surge in online hate following New Zealand attacks.
- **20.03.2019:** Two women report facing Islamophobia on public transport bus in Uccle. The driver is alleged to have said 'Je suis raciste et je déteste les femmes voilées' (I am a racist and I hate women who wear the headscarf).<sup>56</sup>
- **21.03.2019:** *Rasssemblement contre l'Islamophobie* counter-Islamophobia gathering held in Brussels.
- **29.03.2019:** Controversy emerges surrounding the term Islamophobia in Schaerbeek local council. The area has high levels of Muslim political representation.<sup>57</sup>
- **02.04.2019:** Woman stabbed in front of her three children, aged between 8 and 9, whilst on the school run in Anderlecht - presumed Islamophobic motive.<sup>58</sup>
- **04.04.2019:** The UNIA recalls the lawful nature of a religious education teacher's headscarf. The woman wasn't permitted to take her teacher's certificate exam on the grounds of her visibility as Muslim.<sup>59</sup>
- **06.05.2019:** Brussels-based school issues a disclaimer of any culpability of injury or ill health of any of its students fasting during Ramadan. Disagreement within local authority and limited likelihood of young primary school-aged children fasting.<sup>60</sup>

54. Eickhoff, Dubocquet and Guévart, "Un nouveau service chez Actiris pour lutter contre la discrimination à l'embauche".

55. Mehmet Üstün, "Discours de M. Mehmet Üstün à l'ambassade de Nouvelle-Zélande à Bruxelles", Executif des Musulmans de Belgique, <https://www.embnet.be/fr/discours-de-m-mehmet-ustun-lambassade-de-nouvelle-zelande-bruxelles> (Access date: 24 December 2019).

56. Dinant and Broutout, "Uccle: deux femmes voilées se disent victime d'une agression raciste par un conducteur".

57. Erkan Ozdemir, "Schaerbeek : le mot 'islamophobie' fait débat au Conseil Communal de mars 2019", La Manchette, 28 March 2019, [http://www.lamanchette.be/main/2019/03/29/schaerbeek-le-mot-islamophobie-fait-debat-au-conseil-communal-de-mars-2019/?fbclid=IwAR3p\\_VHOvGjxFHlaAwHUzFfB68fbGmyti26SutCWnRMi632I9EGLHFz-bH8](http://www.lamanchette.be/main/2019/03/29/schaerbeek-le-mot-islamophobie-fait-debat-au-conseil-communal-de-mars-2019/?fbclid=IwAR3p_VHOvGjxFHlaAwHUzFfB68fbGmyti26SutCWnRMi632I9EGLHFz-bH8), (Access date: 23 December 2019).

58. "Une femme poignardée devant ses trois enfants à Anderlecht", SudInfo.

59. "Une future prof de religion islamique a le droit de porter le voile", UNIA, 12 March 2019 [https://www.unia.be/fr/jurisprudence-alternatives/solutions-negociees/une-future-prof-de-religion-islamique-a-le-droit-de-porter-le-voile?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Unia+News+Fr++avril+2019&utm\\_content=Unia+News+Fr++avril+2019+CID\\_b7053bc674f9f0cedf255b9aa6522690&utm\\_source=REIKO+nieuwsbrievens&utm\\_term=Une+future+prof+de+religion+islamique+a+le+droit+de+porter+le+voile&fbclid=IwAR1gT6RmCn6twCLUR-8to\\_nwGlGJuAfc0lfeBhCZoFxxbNSkPuvnctDnAvA](https://www.unia.be/fr/jurisprudence-alternatives/solutions-negociees/une-future-prof-de-religion-islamique-a-le-droit-de-porter-le-voile?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Unia+News+Fr++avril+2019&utm_content=Unia+News+Fr++avril+2019+CID_b7053bc674f9f0cedf255b9aa6522690&utm_source=REIKO+nieuwsbrievens&utm_term=Une+future+prof+de+religion+islamique+a+le+droit+de+porter+le+voile&fbclid=IwAR1gT6RmCn6twCLUR-8to_nwGlGJuAfc0lfeBhCZoFxxbNSkPuvnctDnAvA), (Access date: 23 December 2019).

60. Fadoul, "Ramadan: une école primaire de Bruxelles décline toute responsabilité en cas de malaise".

- **26.05.2019:** Belgian Federal and European Parliamentary election – strong far-right growth, particularly in Flanders.
- **05.06.2019:** A 65-year-old from Antwerp was sentenced to ten-months imprisonment and ordered to pay €800 fine for tweets inciting hatred both racist and specifically Islamophobic in nature. The man also harassed UNIA director Els Keytman.<sup>61</sup>
- **17.06.2019:** First hearing in the Brussels correctional court over case in August 2018, whereby a woman had her headscarf forcibly removed in a Schaerbeek car park.
- **06.07.2019:** An inebriated woman attacked a headscarf-wearing Muslim woman in Duerne and tried to forcibly remove her headscarf (although some reports state face veil). The attacker was arrested due to being publicly intoxicated.<sup>62</sup>
- **04.08.2019:** Local councillor Lucas Ducarme of opposition party in Koekelberg states that he doesn't want his town to become like Molenbeek.<sup>63</sup>
- **08.08.2019:** BePax report “Islamophobie: mettre fin aux discriminations” (Islamophobia: Put an End to Discrimination) is published detailing growing rates of Islamophobia and in particular, its gendered dimensions.<sup>64</sup>
- **21.08.2019:** Newspaper report published noting significant increase in Islamophobia in Belgium.<sup>65</sup>
- **27.08.2019:** Flemish judge rules that a Muslim schoolgirl from Leuven can wear her headscarf to school in spite of the school operating a ban on religious symbols. The judge deemed the school ban to be in contradiction with laws governing religious freedom.<sup>66</sup>
- **01.09.2019:** *Halal* slaughter ban comes into action in Wallonia.
- **18.09.2019:** Reports emerge of a Muslim woman and her family facing racist abuse – verbal taunts, swastikas graffitied on their car and excrement/urine left at their doorstep. Difficult to disaggregate race, ethnicity, etc.<sup>67</sup>

61. Belga, “Ses tweets islamophobes lui ont coûté cher”.

62. SaRe. “Dronken vrouw valt moslima aan in Deurne”.

63. Anneet, “Ducarme: ‘Je ne veux pas que Koekelberg devienne Molenbeek bis’”.

64. For more information, see: <http://www.bepax.org/files/files/BePax-Signes-des-Temps-08-2019-%20Islamophobie.pdf>

65. Belga, “Les actes de discrimination contre des communautés religieuses sont en hausse en Belgique”, DH Net, 21 August 2019, <https://www.dhnet.be/actu/belgique/les-actes-de-discrimination-contre-des-communautes-religieuses-sont-en-hausse-en-belgique-5d5d5b3dd8ad585935b4d77e?fbclid=IwAR0syBSBQPZL4OGSr4rAFy-sqP-P3uf9tmkjWuTY08W5t3A1oh7QB6urWT4Q#.XV2Qq3-rjn0.facebook>, (Access date: 23 December 2019).

66. Decre, “Rechter beslist dat meisje uit Leuven hoofddoek tóch mag dragen op school”.

67. RTL Info “Hayat, mère de trois enfants se dit victime de racisme: “On a eu de la diarrhée sur la porte” (vidéo). 16 September 2019.

- **01.10.2019:** Flemish governmental declaration published. Given the strong far-right gains made in May elections, the declaration curbs religious freedoms in the workplace and education.<sup>68</sup>
- **03.10.2019:** Calls for extension of *halal* slaughter ban to Brussels-Capital Region from Fabrice Grosfilley aired on BX1.
- **04.10.2019:** News reports indicate that an Islamophobic attack takes place once every two days in Belgium.<sup>69</sup>
- **05.10.2019:** Fifty-year-old inebriated homeless woman pushes headscarf-wearing woman on the tracks of the Brussels metro. This is the second time that the woman has done this.<sup>70</sup>
- **13.10.2019:** Pig head left at residential address in Wallonia (reported to the CCIB).
- **16.10.2019:** School allows for a Muslim religious education teacher to wear her headscarf to school following support by the UNIA.<sup>71</sup>
- **27.10.2019:** STIB (Belgian public transport management company) taken to court by a headscarf-wearing job applicant over discrimination based on the headscarf.<sup>72</sup>
- **27.11.2019:** At the *Université Libre de Bruxelles* (ULB) the *Cercle des Etudiants Arabo-Européens de ULB* (The Circle of Arabo-European Students at ULB), along with other students' organisations submit contestation surrounding the restriction of Muslim women's dress.
- **04.12.2019:** 'Actris Inclusive' – Belgian office for work launches its office dedicated to combatting workplace/job-hunter discrimination.<sup>73</sup>
- **24.12.2019:** The Court of Appeal in Antwerp rules that a ban on wearing headscarves in two schools in the municipality of Maasmechelen in the Limburg province is justified.<sup>74</sup>
- **31.12.2019:** Al-Ihssan Mosque in Leuven is vandalised and attacked as the year closes.<sup>75</sup>

68. Vlaamse Overheid "Vlaamse regering 2019-2024: Regeerakkoord" (Vlaamse Overheid, Flanders: 2019).

69. Maïli Bernaerts, "Une attaque islamophobe a lieu tous les deux jours en Belgique", DH Net, 4 October 2019, <https://www.dhnet.be/actu/faits/une-attaque-islamophobe-a-lieu-tous-les-deux-jours-en-belgique-5d96290fd8ad-5841fc3ef426?fbclid=IwAR2t8zbHWIbtxKbBHIXE1SKUhOfm4zwSuRS1e-rKpuQH0JdjAD47YwAzSEg> (Access date: 24 December 2019).

70. D. H., "Bruxelles: Laila pousse des femmes sur les rails du métro!".

71. UNIA, "Une future prof de religion Islamique à le droit de porter le voile".

72. Blogie, "La Stib attaquée pour discrimination à l'embauche".

73. Eickhoff, Dubocquet and Guévert, "Un nouveau service chez Actiris pour lutter contre la discrimination à l'embauche".

74. Chini, "Headscarf Ban in Public Schools".

75. D.R., "Une mosquée vandalisée à Louvain".



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**BOSNIA AND  
HERZEGOVINA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

HIKMET KARČIĆ



## The Author

**Hikmet Karčić** is a researcher at the Institute for Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks in Sarajevo. He has a BA and LL.M. from the Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo, and a PhD in Political Science and Sociology from the International University of Sarajevo. Previously, Karčić worked at the Missing Persons Institute of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Center for Advanced Studies (CNS) in Sarajevo, and was the project coordinator for “Mapping of Detention Camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992-1995” at the association *Tranzicijska pravda, odgovornost i sjećanje* (TPOS). He was also the editor of *Remembering the Bosnian Genocide: Justice, Memory and Denial* (Institute for Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks, 2016). He is the author of several research articles on the subject of war crimes and memorialization, and has produced two documentaries related to the former. Email: karcic@iitb.ba

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Hikmet Karčić: *Islamophobia in Bosnia Herzegovina: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

Anti-Muslim bigotry and negative trends towards Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina were evident mainly in the educational, political, and media sectors. As in previous years, the main generators of Islamophobic discourse and anti-Muslim bigotry are the Bosnian Serb politicians, media and academic circles. In addition, the year 2019 saw a large increase in anti-Bosnian and anti-Muslim bigotry by the Bosnian Croat and Croatian political establishment and by regional political actors. These actors continue to present Bosnia and Herzegovina as a failed state which is harboring extremists and which needs to be territorially divided in order to secure peace and security. The Bosnian Serb and Serbian authorities continued their institutional denial and revisionist activities aimed at creating their own narrative about the genocide committed against Bosniaks during the 1992-95 period.

This year also saw the continuation of the denial of genocide and war crimes by the Serb authorities. The local and regional media contributed to anti-Muslim bigotry with reports about terrorist threats and radical ideology, connecting it with the Bosniak political and religious establishment. In 2019, Islamophobic and anti-Muslim rhetoric was centered around the return of former foreign terrorist fighters from Syria and the so-called migrant crisis.

Lastly, this year saw a continuation of physical and verbal attacks on mosques and imams, mostly in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian entity Republika Srpska but also in Croat-majority areas. Additionally, anti-Muslim hatred was visible at football matches and in graffiti in Serb-dominated towns.

## Sažetak

Anti-muslimanska netrpeljivost i negativni trendovi prema muslimanima u Bosni i Hercegovini se uglavnom očituju u obrazovnom, političkom i medijskom sistemu. Kao i u prethodnim godinama, glavni generatori islamofobije i anti-muslimanske netrpeljivosti su čelnici bosanskih Srba - politički, medijski i akademski nosioci politike. U 2019. godini došlo je do porasta anti-bosanske i anti-muslimanske retorike od strane Hrvatskog političkog rukovodstva i od strane regionalnih aktera. Ovi akteri prikazuju Bosnu i Hercegovinu kao propalu državu koja je sjedište ekstremista i koja treba biti teritorijalno podijeljena kako bi se očuvao mir i sigurnost.

Ove godine se nastavilo negiranje genocida i ratnih zločina od strane srpskih zvaničnika. Domaći i regionalni mediji doprinijeli su anti-muslimanskim netrpeljivostima kroz izvještavanje o terorističkim prijetnjama i radikalnoj ideologiji, povezujući ih s bošnjačkim političkim i vjerskim zvaničnicima.

Konačno, ove godine je vidljiv nastavak fizičkih i usmenih napada na džamije i imame, većinom u bosanskohercegovačkom entitetu Republika Srpska.. Dodatna anti-muslimanska mržnja bila je vidljiva na fudbalskim utakmicama i na grafitima u pojedinim gradovima.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Type of Regime:** Parliamentary representative democracy

**Form of Government:** Three-member presidential system

**Ruling Parties:** Party for Democratic Action (SDA), Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD)

**Opposition Parties:** Social Democratic Party (SDP), Serb Democratic Party (SDS), Croatian Democratic Union 1990 (HDZ 1990)

**Last Elections:** 2018 Presidential Election (Šefik Džaferović won 36.61% of the vote; Željko Komšić 52.64% of the vote; and Milorad Dodik 53.88% of the vote); Legislative Election (SDA: 9 seats, HDZ: 5 seats, SNSD: 6 seats)

**Total Population:** 3,511,372 (in 2013)

**Major Languages:** Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** In 2019, the Commission for Freedom of Religion reported 13 anti-Muslim attacks.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** N/A

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Islam (50.11%), Serbian Orthodoxy (31%), Catholicism (15%), Others/None/Not stated (3%)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 1,769,592 (50.11%) in 2013 (Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina - 2013 Final Results)

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** Riyasat Commission for Freedom of Religion; NAHLA

**Far-Right Parties:** SNSD - *Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata* (Alliance of Independent Social Democrats); SDS - *Srpska demokratska stranka* (Serb Democratic Party); SRS - *Srpska radikalna stranka* (Serb Radical Party); HDZ - *Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* (Croatian Democratic Union)

**Far-Right Movements:** Serb Nationalists Chetnik Movement, Croat Neo-Ustasha Movement

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a specific case of Islamophobia. Anti-Muslim bigotry has been present in Bosnia and Herzegovina for a long time. This Islamophobia reached the highest peaks with mass atrocities including genocide; Islamophobia was present during World War II and during the Bosnian War (1992-1995). Although anti-Muslim bigotry has deep roots, the first contemporary Islamophobic statements appeared in the late 1980s and were made by scholars, Orientalists, and self-proclaimed Islam experts at the University of Belgrade. Slavic Muslims were represented as traitors of Orthodox Christianity, people with weak genes who converted to Islam. This is an interesting case of Islamophobia where hatred is aimed mainly at Slavic Muslims. After the Serbian aggression and genocide of 1992-95, Islamophobia has been present in the country and in the region. Islamophobia is manifested through political statements, in the media, and in physical attacks. Most of the attacks are aimed at Bosniak returnees in Republika Srpska and in Croat-majority areas. The largest concentration of Bosniaks is in the federation where there are almost no attacks other than occasional Islamophobic statements or writings. Research for this report was based on available reports, media analysis, and interviews with important stakeholders. People and institutions were contacted in order to gain relevant information on different topics that included the media, justice, education, etc.

It is generally accepted that Islam arrived in Bosnia with the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth century. Today, Bosnian Muslims are overwhelmingly Sunnis. Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) are an indigenous Slavic ethnic group. More than 55 years of communism (1945-1990) in Yugoslavia kept religion in the dark. However, after Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito's death in 1980, a rise of Serb nationalism first incited anti-Albanian and later anti-Muslim rhetoric. Centuries-old ideas of establishing a homogenous greater Serbian state were revived by the Yugoslav regime under Slobodan Milošević. During 1992-95, an international armed conflict and genocide (the aim of establishing a Greater Serbia and Greater Croatia meant dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina and getting rid of its Muslim population) caused the deaths of at least 100,000 people, 30,000 enforced disappearances, and the rape of 30,000 women and girls. The vast majority of the victims were Bosniaks whose remains were buried in hundreds of hidden mass graves throughout the country. In addition to this, an estimated 600 mosques and a variety of Islamic religious objects were deliberately destroyed by the Bosnian Serb Army and the Croatian Defence Council. A decade of communism followed by genocidal massacres of the Bosniak population resulted in today's situation where interreligious understanding and tolerance are fragile and complex. The 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement brought an end to the war entrenching the results of genocide, and cementing the divide in the country.

When it comes to the population of Muslims in B&H, according to the census conducted in 2013, 50.11% (1,769,592) of inhabitants declared themselves to

be Bosniaks (out of a total of 3,531,159). A slightly larger percentage (50.70%) stated that their religion is Islam. Since, in the case of all three constituent ethnic communities in Bosnia, the ethnic and religious identities overlap to a large extent, this figure is usually taken as indicative of the number of adherents to Islam. Due to war-related death, expulsion, and internal and external migration in the 1992-1995 aggression against B&H, the numbers and demographic distribution of ethnic groups have significantly changed.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a secular state with no state religion. In today's post-war B&H, the increased presence of religion in the public arena is evident. Some welcome the religious revival as a healthy assertion of identity after the decades-long de-Islamization process that occurred during the communist period, while others see it as a rising threat to the secular and politically fragile state.

Annex 1 of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina includes 15 main documents on human rights. The constitution states that the rights and freedoms set forth in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its Protocols shall apply directly to Bosnia and Herzegovina. A special law providing for the freedom of religion and religious non-discrimination, as well as the legal status of churches and religious communities was adopted in 2004. This is the Law on Freedom of Religion and the Legal Position of Churches and Religious Communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to this law everyone has the right to freedom of religion or belief, including the freedom to publicly profess, or not profess, a religion. Along with this, the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination was also adopted in 2009. According to this law, discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief consists of any differential treatment, including any type of exclusion, limitation or preference based on real or assumed features towards any person or group of persons on grounds of religion or belief, and every other circumstance with a purpose or a consequence that inhibits or endangers recognition, enjoyment or realization of rights and freedoms in all areas of public life (Article 2.1).

Hate crime as a specific crime is motivated by intolerance towards certain groups in society. Some of the several criminal codes in B&H contain limited provisions that allow more severe punishment to be imposed for crimes committed with a motivation of bias. Use of these provisions is inconsistent and relatively rare. For example, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FB&H) and the Brčko District Criminal Codes include aggravated forms of some criminal acts, such as murder, rape, or causing grievous bodily injury when committed with a motivation of bias. The FB&H Criminal Code also includes an aggravated form of malicious mischief. Many laws on peace and public order at the cantonal level also include minor offences, punishable with a fine, which encompass insulting behavior based on national, racial, or religious grounds. The FB&H, Republika Srpska, and Brčko

District Criminal Codes also include provisions on incitement to national, racial, or religious hatred, discord, or hostility. According to the statistics for hate crimes of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), hate crimes in B&H often target returnee communities (who are often isolated and vulnerable) and religious and sacred objects (mosques, churches, and graveyards), as well as private property belonging to returnees or members of minority communities. The OSCE B&H also records hate crimes through the Hate Monitor. More than 85% of all hate crimes registered through the Hate Monitor target are due to ethnicity/religion. Unfortunately, the statistics are not segregated by religion. When it comes to hate speech regulations, the FB&H and Republika Srpska laws do not specifically proscribe hate speech, but prohibit acts that cause ethnic, racial, or religious hatred. Nevertheless, usage of incendiary language (in the media, by politicians, and others) usually goes unpunished.

Islamophobic hate speech is particularly common online. To this date, no procedures have been initiated that would limit or sanction such activities. More information on hate speech in the media will be given in the report's Media section.

Some of the main events that sparked Islamophobic rhetoric in Bosnia and Herzegovina were related to political instability and the so-called migrant crisis. First, the state-level government could not be formed for more than a year after elections were held due to the disruptive efforts of various political parties.. This was in relation to the refusal of the Serbs to send the Annual National Programme (ANP) to NATO. Similarly to previous years, this year saw a high level of anti-Bosnian rhetoric from Croatia and Serbia. Bosnia and Herzegovina is portrayed by them as a failed state which is a safe haven for terrorists. B&H entity Republika Srpska continued its separatist policy in 2019 announcing that it is preparing the grounds for succession and for eventually joining Serbia.

The second event is the rising so-called migrant crisis which initially had not affected Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since Serbia and Hungary closed their borders, the migrants found their way through Bosnia and Herzegovina. In most cases, Serbian authorities encourage them to go to Bosnia and Herzegovina with the aim of easing the Serbian migrant issue. On the other hand, the migrants which the Croatian police capture are sent back over the border to Bosnia and Herzegovina. This influx of migrants was one of the main causes of Islamophobia and conspiracy theories pushed by the Bosnian Serb politicians and media.

Similarly to 2018, the Islamophobic rhetoric by political figures and media is on the rise. In relation to physical attacks, 2019 was a year in which attacks were slightly higher than in 2018.

The following incidents were collected through media reports, direct reporting to the commission, and personal contacts. The Commission for the Freedom of Religion and the Interreligious Council of B&H also published a report on the monitor-

ing and the responses to attacks on religious buildings and other holy sites in B&H. When this report was being written, the data for 2019 had not yet been published.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

On 6 January, the Srebrenica Genocide Memorial in Potočari was desecrated with the bag of pork intestines. Nisvet Mujanović, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Srebrenica Memorial Center stated that it was the period of Orthodox holidays, so slaughter of pigs is very common, and it is hard for those working in the Memorial Center to know that their Serb neighbors use their holidays to commit such acts.<sup>1</sup>

On 7 January, Aleksandar Mladenović, a local Orthodox priest from Srebrenica, can be seen on a video leading a group of people on Christmas Eve singing Chetnik songs. Mladenović can be seen singing songs about Kosovo and greeting Kosovo Serbs for “Serbs’ Srebrenica”. Just a month before this provocation, the priest shared a photograph of himself together with a local imam and another priest with a caption “Today in Srebrenica this photograph was made as a symbol for a better and prettier part of our everyday lives that we rarely see in media” on his Facebook profile.<sup>2</sup>

On 8 January, two Serb members of the B&H Armed Forces were seen on a video singing songs containing hate speech toward Muslims. The video was shared on their Instagram social media account. Some of the lyrics that soldiers sang stated, “I will not give three Christmas days for thousands of Ramadans...”<sup>3</sup>

On 13 January, Tomislav Zelenika, a young Bosnian Croat, updated his status on his Facebook profile, claiming that Bosniak Muslims are the biggest and most dangerous threat: “Muslims, Bosniaks, are your greatest and most dangerous threat” adding that “Bosniaks are genetically predetermined for treason, what to expect from people whose ancestors betrayed their faith.” This post was later published on a website with close ties to the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ).<sup>4</sup>

---

1. “Memorijalni centar Srebrenica: Pozivamo nadležne da reaguju”, Radio BIR, 7 January 2019, <https://www.bir.ba/index.php/vijesti/bih/item/8007-memorijalni-centar-srebrenica-pozivamo-nadlezne-da-reaguju>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

2. “Tenzije u Srebrenici Zbog Incidenta na Badnje Veče: Ovo je sveštenik iz Srebrenice koji je predvodio kolonu i s posebnim zanosom pjevao četničke pjesme”, Slobodna Bosna, 8 January 2019, [https://www.slobodnabosna.ba/vijest/102454/tenzije\\_u\\_srebrenici\\_zbog\\_incidentna\\_na\\_badnje\\_veche\\_ovo\\_je\\_svestenik\\_iz\\_srebrenice\\_koji\\_je\\_predvodio\\_kolonu\\_i\\_s\\_posebnim\\_zanosom\\_pjevao\\_chetnicke\\_pjesme.html](https://www.slobodnabosna.ba/vijest/102454/tenzije_u_srebrenici_zbog_incidentna_na_badnje_veche_ovo_je_svestenik_iz_srebrenice_koji_je_predvodio_kolonu_i_s_posebnim_zanosom_pjevao_chetnicke_pjesme.html), (Access date: 17 January 2020).

3. “Pripadnici OS BiH u Bileći vrijeđaju muslimane: Tri božićna ne dam dana, za hiljade Ramazana...”, Oslobođenje, 8 January 2019, <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/video-pripadnici-os-bih-u-bileci-vrijeđaju-muslimane-tri-bozicna-ne-dam-dana-za-hiljade-ramazana423301?fbclid=IwAR3UnP0J79E4Vo8y4eB83FqqHFN-w9Ek9skJJuqeaEnLAMAepgF55-ZVWsrq>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

4. Dragan Bursać, “Jesu li Bošnjaci labilni ljudi koji žele istrijebiti Hrvate i Srbe?”, Oslobođenje, 13 January 2019, <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/dragan-bursac-jesu-li-bosnjaci-labilni-ljudi-koji-zele-istrijebiti-hrvate-i-srbe-424701>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

On 3 March, Bosnian Croat carnivals were held in several towns in Herzegovina, where the Bosniak Muslim identity and Islamic values were ridiculed.<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 1)



**Figure 1:** Bosnian Croat carnival in Ljubuški taunting Bosniaks.<sup>6</sup>

On 3 March, the entrance to the women's section of the Čaršijska Mosque in Prijedor and the garage belonging to the mosque were vandalized with offensive Serb nationalist graffiti.<sup>7</sup> The perpetrators were not apprehended.

On 11 March, in Kozarac near Prijedor, a Bosniak returnee Azrin Hodžić, was attacked both physically and verbally by Renato Marjanović. After threats and abuse, Marjanović pulled out a phone to record the victim as he promised to remove a sticker of the B&H flag from his truck, and humiliated him.<sup>8</sup> On 13 March, Marjanović was arrested by Prijedor police and released after 24 hours.<sup>9</sup>

From 3 March to 21 September, Imam Emir Nuhić from Blagaj, Bosanski Novi received death threats from Daniel Rajković via Facebook. Imam Nuhić reported everything to the police who eventually arrested Rajković.<sup>10</sup>

5. "Zavadi Pa Vladaj: Hrvati vole ismijavati bošnjačko-muslimanske vrijednosti!", Dnevno.ba, 7 February 2019, <https://www.dnevno.ba/vijesti/zavadi-pa-vladaj-hrvati-vole-ismijavati-bosnjacko-muslimanske-vrijednosti-163192/>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

6. "Zavadi Pa Vladaj: Hrvati vole ismijavati bošnjačko-muslimanske vrijednosti!".

7. "Četiri S' na ulazu u harem Čaršijske džamije u Prijedoru", Radio Sarajevo, 6 March 2019, <https://www.radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/cetiri-s-na-ulazu-u-harem-carsijske-dzamiye-u-prijedoru/329050>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

8. "Azrin Hodžić nakon napada: Nasilnik mi je prijetio da će me zaklati ako pozovem policiju", Klix.ba, 12 March 2019, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/azrin-hodzic-nakon-napada-nasilnik-mi-je-prijetio-da-ce-me-zaklati-ako-pozovem-policiju/190312069>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

9. "Renato Marjanović, koji se izivljavao na povratniku Azrinu Hodžiću, pušten na slobodu", Klix.ba, 13 March 2019, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/renato-marjanovic-koji-se-izivljavao-na-povratniku-azrinu-hodzicu-pusten-na-slobodu/190313101>, (Access date: 18 January 2020).

10. "Imam Emir Nuhić iz Bosanskog Novog dobio ozbiljne prijetnje smrću: Šta ako uradi što je rekao?", Klix.ba, 17 March 2019, [https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/imam-emir-nuhic-iz-bosanskog-novog-dobio-ozbiljne-prijetnje-smrcu-sta-ako-uradi-sto-je-rekao/190317054](https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/imam-emir-nuhic-iz-bosanskog-novog-dobio-ozbiljne-prijetnje-smrcu-sta-ako-uradi-sto-je-rekao/), (Access date: 18 January 2020).

On 10 March, members of the Ravnagora Chetnik Movement, a neo-fascist Serb nationalist paramilitary organization, paraded through the town of Visegrad. They sang songs threatening Bosniaks with lyrics such as “It will be hell and bloody Drina, here come the Chetnik from Serb mountains.”<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 2:** Serb nationalist graffiti on reconstructed Arnaudija Mosque in Banja Luka.<sup>12</sup>

On 10 April, while still under construction, the mosque Arnaudija in Banjaluka was vandalized. The perpetrator(s) among others graffitied enormous Nazi swastikas and the Serb nationalist four S symbols.<sup>13</sup> (Fig. 2)

On 5 May, Bosniaks in a local mosque in Obradovac in Bosanska Gradiška were exposed to threats and Serb nationalist Chetnik songs on the eve of Ramadan. A column of cars circled around the mosque in broad daylight, mimicking weaponry in their hands while aiming at the mosque and shooting.<sup>14</sup>

11. Samir Huseinovic, “Četnici slave ratnog zločinca i prijete, srpske vlasti šute”, Deutsche Welle, 11 March 2019, <https://www.dw.com/hr/%C4%8Detnici-slave-ratnog-zlo%C4%8Dinca-i-prijete-srpske-vlasti-%C5%A1ute/a-47848050>, (Access date: 18 January 2020).

12. “Vandalizam u Banjoj Luci: Džamija Arnaudija išarana sa četiri ‘S’ i kukastim križevima”, Oslobođenje, 10 April 2019, <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/vandalizam-u-banjoj-luci-dzamija-arnaudija-isarana-sa-četiri-s-i-kukastim-križevima-448314>, (Access date: 18 January 2020).

13. “Vandalizam u Banjoj Luci: Džamija Arnaudija išarana sa četiri ‘S’ i kukastim križevima”, Oslobođenje.

14. “Prijetnje i četničke pjesme: Vjernici kod Bosanske Gradiške izvrijeđani uoči početka ramazana”, Klix.ba, 5 May 2019, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/prijetnje-i-četničke-pjesme-vjernici-kod-bosanske-gradiške-izvrijeđani-uoči-početka-ramazana/190505103>, (Access date: 18 January 2020).

On 13 May, unknown perpetrators destroyed the flags of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Islamic Community in front of the mosque in Nova Kasaba during Ramadan.<sup>15</sup>

On 1 June, in Rogatica, the Bosniak returnee Elvir Bahto was attacked by his neighbor with a shovel. Bahto was on his way to break his fast during Ramadan, when he was greeted outside his house by a neighbor who cursed his “Turkish” mother, and soon after vandalized his car. Bahto contacted the police immediately and the drunk abuser was arrested.<sup>16</sup>

On 8 June, several perpetrators destroyed four tombstones in the Muslim cemetery Kazanbašča in Zvornik. The police station of Zvornik condemned this criminal act and promised to bring the perpetrators to justice.<sup>17</sup>

On 6 June, several Serb nationalistic stickers referring to the Srebrenica genocide and other offensive writings were stuck on Muslim religious objects in Bijeljina.<sup>18</sup>

On 19 July, a group of young Serb nationalists, gathered in front of the Majlis building in Trebinje and sung nationalist songs.<sup>19</sup>

On 25 July, an hour after midnight, five young men (three of them underage) vandalized a fence of the mosque in Zvornik. The officials identified and apprehended the five young men.<sup>20</sup>

On 13 August, a Serb man in Nevesinje beat a Roma man cursing his “Muslim and *balija* [derogatory term for Bosniaks] mother.” The attack was filmed by bystanders and shows two RS policemen standing by and not intervening.<sup>21</sup>

On 17 August, the officials from the police station in Banja Luka arrested a man with initials “D.V.” for verbally abusing the local imam of the Islamic community in front of the mosque.<sup>22</sup>

15. “Ispred džamije u Novoj Kasabi: Potrgane zastave Islamske zajednice BiH i države Bosne i Hercegovine”, Oslobođenje, 13 May 2019, [https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/crna-hronika/ispred-dzamiye-u-novoj-kasabi-potrgane-zastave-islamske-zajednice-bih-i-drzave-bosne-i-hercegovine-456624?fb\\_comment\\_id=2312404868806507\\_2312419632138364](https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/crna-hronika/ispred-dzamiye-u-novoj-kasabi-potrgane-zastave-islamske-zajednice-bih-i-drzave-bosne-i-hercegovine-456624?fb_comment_id=2312404868806507_2312419632138364), (Access date: 18 January 2020).

16. “Rogatica: Povratnika Elvira Bahtu napao komšija, lopatom mu polupao auto”, Faktor.ba, 1 June 2019, <https://www.faktor.ba/vijest/rogatica-povratnika-elvira-bahtu-napao-komsija-lopatom-mu-polupao-auto/38716>, (Access date: 18 January 2020).

17. “Na muslimanskom groblju Kazanbašča uništeni nišani”, Zvornicki.ba, 8 June 2019, <https://zvornicki.ba/na-muslimanskom-groblju-kazanbasca-uništeni-nišani-foto/>, (Access date: 18 January 2020).

18. Albina Sorguc, “BiH: Napadi na džamije i nacionalističke pretnje”, *Balkan Insight*, 14 June 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/14/bih-napadi-na-dzamiye-i-nacionalisticke-pretnje/?lang=sr>, (Access date: 18 January 2020).

19. “Imam Mustafić: Došli su mi pod prozor i pjevali ‘Ne volim te Alija, zato što si balija’ i pjesme o Draži, četnicima, Srebrenici...”, Dnevni avaz, 19 July 2019, <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/503628/imam-mustafic-dosli-su-mi-pod-prozor-i-pjevali-%E2%80%9CNe-volim-te-alija-zato-sto-si-balija%E2%80%9D-i-pjesme-o-drazi-cetnicima-srebrenici>, (Access date: 18 January 2020).

20. “Novi napad u Zvorniku: Petorica mladića gađala ogradu džamije u centru grada”, Radio Sarajevo, 26 July 2019, <https://www.radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/novi-napad-u-zvorniku-pet-mladica-gadala-ogradu-dzamiye-u-centru-grada/345543>, (Access date: 15 January 2020).

21. “Muškarac na očigled policajca tukao Roma psujući mu majku”, Radio Sarajevo, 14 August 2019, <https://www.radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/muskarac-na-ocigled-policajca-tukao-roma-psujuci-mu-majku/347534>, (Access date: 5 January 2019).

22. “Banjalučanin uhapšen zbog vrijeđanja imama”, Nezavisne novine, 17 August 2019, <https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/hronika/Banjalucanin-uhapsen-zbog-vrijeđanja-imama/553912>, (Access date: 5 January 2019).

On 24 September, Danel Rajković was arrested for relieving himself in front of the mosque in Gacko. The Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina filed an indictment against Daniel Rajković from Gacko for sending disturbing and threatening messages to Imam Emir Nuhić from Blagaj, Bosanski Novi.<sup>23</sup>

## Employment

On another note, a worrying fact is that the number of Bosniaks living and working in Republika Srpska is decreasing. For example, in Republika Srpska institutions, out of a total of 5,066 employees, only 43 are Bosniaks.<sup>24</sup> This trend of Bosniaks leaving Republika Srpska is the result of the perpetually uncomfortable and discriminatory atmosphere against Bosniak employees.

## Education

The year 2019 saw a continuity in denying Bosniak returnees the right to learn the Bosnian language in Republika Srpska. This is a serious violation of Bosniak children's constitutional right to be taught as a "national group" in schools in the Serb-majority entity. As a result of this discrimination, in 2016, several Bosniak returnee communities refused to enroll their children in school. As a result, the Islamic Community provided temporary improvised schools where children are taught according to the national B&H curriculum and teachers are brought in from the Federation B&H. The issue of discrimination in education is also visible in Croat-dominated areas where the concept of "two schools under one roof" exists. This is an apartheid-style segregation, where in Kiseljak, for example, Bosniak and Croat children attend school separately.<sup>25</sup>

## Politics

In 2019, there was a rise in statements from local and regional political actors who used Islamophobic rhetoric to undermine Bosnia and Herzegovina, and portray it as a radical Muslim safe haven. This was spearheaded by Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat politicians as well as Serbian and Croatian politicians. However, the most dangerous rhetoric came from foreign dignitaries.

Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović during a meeting in Israel with Israeli President Reuven Rivlin claimed that Bosnia and Herzegovina "was very unstable, and had in some respects been taken over by people who have connec-

---

23. "Gačanin optužen jer je imamu slao prijeteće poruke", ATVBL, 20 December 2019, <https://www.atvbl.com/vijesti/hronika/gacandin-optuzen-je-je-imamu-slao-prijetece-poruke-20-12-2019>

24. "Diskriminacija Bošnjaka I Srba u RS I FBiH", TV1, 11 August 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ItmaBY48-hU> (Access date: 2 January 2020).

25. Vedrana Maglajlija, "Razdvajanje učenika u Kiseljaku: Školstvo kao ratni plijen", Al Jazeera Balkans, 16 September 2017, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/razdvajanje-ucenika-u-kiseljaku-skolstvo-kao-ratni-plijen>, (Access date: 5 January 2019).

tions with Iran and terrorist organizations. The country is now controlled by militant Islam.”<sup>26</sup>

French President Emmanuel Macron stated in an interview with *The Economist*: “If you’re concerned about this region, the first question is neither Macedonia, nor Albania, it’s Bosnia-Herzegovina. The time-bomb that’s ticking right next to Croatia, and which faces the problem of returning jihadists, is Bosnia-Herzegovina.”<sup>27</sup>

While attending the Jahorina Economic Forum on July 9, Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic referred to the Srebrenica genocide as a “misunderstanding.”<sup>28</sup>

One of the most worrisome events was a Croatian intelligence agency false flag operation which was uncovered by the Bosnian-Herzegovina intelligence agency in March 2019. Sarajevo web portal *Zurnal* published evidence which claims that Croatian intelligence, with the help of Croatian diplomats in Bosnia, intended to discredit Bosnia and Herzegovina as a “land of radical Islamic terrorism” by planting weapons in several mosques in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, the glorification of war criminals was also a center of some politicians in 2021. Jelena Trivić, a member of the RS Assembly with the Party for Democratic Progress (PDP), published a photo of World War II Nazi collaborator and war criminal General Draža Mihailović on her Facebook account.<sup>30</sup>

## Media

The anti-Bosnian sentiment in the media was usually followed by Islamophobic rhetoric. The statements made in the media usually associated B&H, Bosniak politicians, or former Army officers with radical extremism. These analytical statements were made by a group of already well-known self-proclaimed experts. Two main events which raised Islamophobic and anti-Muslim rhetoric in 2019 were the so-called migrant crises and the return of former fighters from Syria. Additionally, anti-Bosnian and anti-Muslim rhetoric was triggered by the Peter Handke Nobel prize affair.<sup>31</sup>

26. Hamza Karčić, “Croatian President’s Islamophobia Masks Historical Revisionism”, Jerusalem Post, 12 August 2019, <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Croatian-presidents-Islamophobia-masks-historical-revisionism-598266>, (Access date: 29 January 2020).

27. “French President Calls Bosnia a ‘Ticking Time-Bomb’”, Al Jazeera, 8 November 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/french-president-calls-bosnia-ticking-time-bomb-191108053518237.html>, (Access date: 5 January 2019).

28. Hikmet Karčić, “For Serbia the Srebrenica Genocide ‘Misunderstanding’ Paid Off”, TRT World, 12 July 2019, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/for-serbia-the-srebrenica-genocide-misunderstanding-paid-off-28190>, (Access date: 5 January 2019).

29. Aleksandar Brezar, “Croatia Looks Implicated in Serious Hybrid Warfare Against Bosnia”, *Balkan Insight*, 15 March 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/03/15/croatia-looks-implicated-in-serious-hybrid-warfare-against-bosnia/>, (Access date: 5 January 2019).

30. “Jelena Trivić: Draža Mihailović nije zločinac, to je moj stav”, N1, 25 October 2019, <http://ba.n1info.com/Vijesti/a386688/Jelena-Trivic-Draza-Mihailovic-nije-zlocinac-to-je-moj-stav.html>, (Access date: 5 January 2019).

31. See for example: “Fašisto, Fašisto! Muslimani Ii Albanci Brutalno Vredali Handkea u Oslu, a on im Odgovorio: Idite u Pakao!”, *Espresso*, 11 October 2019, <https://www.espreso.rs/svet/planeta/451779/fasisto-fasisto-muslimani-i-albanci-brutalno-vredjali-handkea-u-oslu-a-on-im-odgovorio-idite-u-pakao-video>, (Access date: 5 January 2019).

In January 2019, the newly appointed Banja Luka Mufti Nusret Abdibegović was proclaimed as a “mujahedeem” and “British spy” by Serb tabloid *Vesti*. This was then republished by several Bosnian Serb web portals including the Republika Srpska Radio and Television website.<sup>32</sup>

RS President Milorad Dodik used the event of the return of former fighters from Syria in order to heighten tensions in the country.<sup>33</sup>

In November 2019, a book by Ilija Branković, a former Yugoslav People’s Army general, was launched at a Serbian Defence Ministry venue, the Central Military Club in Belgrade, Serbia, with a large media coverage.<sup>34</sup> The book claims that the Bosnian Army shelled its own citizens in Tuzla in May 1995, in order to blame it on the Serbs. This kind of denialist rhetoric is similar to Serbian political and media attempts to deny the genocide in Srebrenica and the siege of Sarajevo.

## Justice System

Overall, hate crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina are underreported and rarely prosecuted.<sup>35</sup> Dragica Tojagic, a spokesperson for the Republika Srpska public prosecutor’s office, stated that in 2018 and 2017 there were “no upheld or confirmed indictments for hate crimes.”<sup>36</sup>

However, two judgements were issued which can be viewed as positive signs. In October 2019, the European Court of Human Rights issued a decision that the Serbian Orthodox church which was built illegally in the backyard of a house owned by Bosniak woman Fata Orlović in Konjevic Polje, near Srebrenica, must be removed within three months.<sup>37</sup>

The RS Supreme Court in December 2019 issued a decision that Bosniak children in Sveti Sava Elementary School in Vrbanjci, Kotor Varoš can learn the Bosnian language.<sup>38</sup> This was a result of a six-year legal battle by the Bosniak returnees whose children are attending the school.

32. “Prvi mudžahedin britanski agent?!” RTRS, 16 January 2019, <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=323221>, (Access date: 5 January 2019).

33. “Dodik: Povratak islamista iz Sirije je trajni problem BiH”, ATV BL, 6 August 2019, <https://www.atvbl.com/vijesti/bih/dodik-povratak-islamista-iz-sirije-je-trajni-problem-bih-6-8-2019>, (Access date: 05 January 2019).

34. Azra Husarić, “Bosnians Protest Against Serbian Book Denying War Crime”, N1, 13 November 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/11/13/bosnians-protest-against-serbian-book-denying-war-crime/>, (Access date: 5 January 2019).

35. “Hate Crimes in Bosnia: Under-Reported and Rarely Prosecuted”, *Balkan Insight*, 26 April 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/04/26/hate-crimes-in-bosnia-under-reported-and-rarely-prosecuted/>, (Access date: 5 January 2019).

36. Ibid.

37. Mladen Lakic and Albina Sorguc, “European Court Tells Bosnia to Remove Illegal Church”, *Balkan Insight*, 1 October 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/01/european-court-tells-bosnia-to-remove-illegal-church/>, (Access date: 5 January 2019).

38. Sanela Karaica, “Čekanje se isplatilo: Djeca iz Vrbanjaca se izborila za bosanski jezik!”, *Oslobodjenje*, 5 December 2019, [https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/dosjei teme/foto-cekanje-se-isplatilo-djeca-iz-vrbanjaca-se-izborila-za-bosanski-jezik-512476?fbclid=IwAR3CdXSHKan7tGP6MrMPjxPxTEq0fNIQj8JZzfQRAcSK9LXNm\\_g\\_UCpFt-zc](https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/dosjei teme/foto-cekanje-se-isplatilo-djeca-iz-vrbanjaca-se-izborila-za-bosanski-jezik-512476?fbclid=IwAR3CdXSHKan7tGP6MrMPjxPxTEq0fNIQj8JZzfQRAcSK9LXNm_g_UCpFt-zc), (Access date: 5 January 2019).

## Internet

Social media remain the main source of anti-Muslim bigotry and Islamophobic rhetoric online. Several Facebook pages, mainly representing Serb nationalistic groups, published articles which spread fear of Bosniaks and included genocide denial. One such example is “Srbija naša zemlja” (Serbia is our country) which closed down in 2019.<sup>39</sup> These social media pages remain the same as in previous years. Additionally, several Bosnian Croat web portals such as Poskok.info continued their anti-Bosniak discourse using Islamophobic rhetoric.<sup>40</sup> One of the most infamous examples is “Remove kebab,” by which “kebab” is used as a synonym for Muslims. This rhetoric is used by white extremists throughout the world.<sup>41</sup>

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The central figures in spreading Islamophobia in B&H can be divided into three categories. First, the academic and semi-academic circles in Serbia and Republika Srpska, most notably Serbian “experts” on security, terrorism, and Islam such as Predrag Ceranić, Miroljub Jevtić, Dževad Galijašević, and Darko Trifunović. Second, several high-ranking officials from the Serb Orthodox Church such as Bishops Amfilohije and Patriarch Irinej. The third category is politicians and include local Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats, as well as Croatian and Serbian politicians such as Milorad Dodik and Mario Karamatić. In the majority of cases, these are elected MPs in the parliamentary assemblies. These political subjects give statements which are anti-Muslim and Islamophobic aimed at Bosniak Muslims, and their political and religious establishments.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

The Commission on Freedom of Religion (*Komisija za slobodu vjere*) is a commission of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina which is active in helping secure religious freedoms and battling Islamophobia. Members of the commission took an active role in monitoring cases of violation of religious freedoms and have provided legal advice to several appellants.

39. Filip Rudić, “FB Page Attacking Serbian Media ‘Linked’ to Breitbart”, *Balkan Insight*, 29 March 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/03/29/fb-page-attacking-serbian-media-linked-to-breitbart/>, (Access date: 29 February 2020).

40. For example, see: “Očekivana Demonstracija Sile: Mahmuljin, šef terorista koji su rušili WTC predložen za počasnoga građanina Zenice, [“Expected Demonstration Of Power: Mahmuljin, Chief of the Terrorists Who Took down WTC, Recommended as Honorary Citizen of Zenica”], <https://poskok.info/ocekivana-demonstracija-sile-mahmuljin-sef-terorista-koji-su-rusili-wtc-predlozen-za-pocasnoga-gradanina-zenice/>, (Access date: 29 February 2020).

41. Robert Coalson, “Christchurch Attacks: Suspect Took Inspiration From Former Yugoslavia’s Ethnically Fueled Wars”, Radio Free Europe, 15 March 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/christchurch-attacks-yugoslavia-tarrant-inspiration-suspect-new-zealand/29823655.html>, (Access date: 29 February 2020).

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

In 2019, the number of Islamophobic attacks on people and property was slightly higher than in 2018. Similarly to 2018, there was an overall increase in regional political anti-Bosniak and anti-Muslim activities. Bosnia and Herzegovina was once again presented as an unstable state which harbors extremists. “

Considering the state of Islamophobia in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the following policy recommendations to combat Islamophobia effectively can be made:

- Cooperation between governments (state level, entity level, and district Brčko level), the Islamic Community, and NGOs in fighting discrimination against Muslims should be fostered.
- Public awareness of human rights and freedom of religion and belief should be raised by NGOs, media, etc. The methods of documentation of cases of violation of the rights of Muslims should be enhanced by the Islamic Community, NGOs, the police, and judiciary.
- Awareness of hate crimes against Muslims, and their proper registration and prosecution should be raised by the Islamic Community, NGOs, the police, and judiciary.
- Awareness of hate speech (online and offline) by media, politicians, etc. should be raised.
- Awareness about Islamic practice (prayer, *jumaah*, and the headscarf) and available ways to accommodate this in education and employment should be raised. Regulations should be adjusted accordingly.
- Laws that stipulate that public officers or officials “shall refrain from public manifestation of their religious beliefs” (*Zakon o policijskim službenicima Bosne i Hercegovine*), which discriminate against Muslim employees in fasting, taking a break for daily prayers, or wearing the headscarf, should be amended. The most flagrant cases should be referred to the HJPC (High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council).
- Awareness among citizens and NGOs about reporting offensive media language to the Press Council in B&H and the Communications Regulatory Agency should be raised.
- Awareness among citizens and NGOs about filing complaints related to human rights violations to the B&H Ombudsman’s office, the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, and in regular courts should be raised.
- Commitment to countering violent extremism, but not at the expense of freedom of religion and not solely focusing on Islam or Muslims, should be developed.

## Chronology

- **07.01.2019:** The Srebrenica Genocide Memorial in Potočari is desecrated with a bag of pork intestines.
- **07.01.2019:** Aleksandar Mladenović, a local orthodox priest from Srebrenica, is seen leading a group of people on Christmas Eve singing Chetnik songs.
- **08.01.2019:** Two Serb members of the Armed Forces BiH are seen on video singing songs containing hate speech toward Muslims.
- **13.01.2019:** Tomislav Zelenik uploads a dangerous and hurtful status on his Facebook profile, where he claims that Muslims/Bosniaks are the biggest and most dangerous threat.
- **14.02.2019:** Bosniak children are forced to sing songs about Saint Sava before icons in a primary school in Srebrenica.
- **05.03.2019:** The entrance to the women's section of the Čaršijska Mosque in Prijedor and the garage belonging to the mosque are vandalized with offensive Nazi graffiti.
- **07.03.2019:** A Croat carnival is held in a few cities in Herzegovina, where Bosniak-Muslim identity and Islamic values are ridiculed.
- **11.03.2019:** Azrin Hodžić, a returnee, is attacked in Prijedor.
- **13.03.2019:** Renato Marjanović is released after attacking a returnee.
- **17.03.2019:** Imam Emir Nuhić receives death threats.
- **10.04.2019:** The mosque Arnaudija in Banjaluka is vandalized.
- **04.05.2019:** Safeta and Senad Ganibegović seek protection from Slavko Pena and his son Marko, who have been harassing them physically and verbally for the last two years.
- **05.05.2019:** Muslim believers are exposed to threats and Chetnik songs on the eve of Ramadan in Obradovac in Bosanska Gradiška.
- **12.05.2019:** Unknown perpetrators destroy the flags of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Islamic Community in front of the mosque in Nova Kasaba during Ramadan.
- **01.06.2019:** A car of the Bosniak returnee in Rogatica, Elvir Bahto, is destroyed by his neighbor with a shovel.
- **12.06.2019:** Nationalistic stickers referring to the Srebrenica genocide and other offensive writings are posted on Muslim religious objects in Bijeljina.
- **25.07.2019:** Five young men (three of them underage) vandalize a fence of the mosque in Zvornik.
- **07-08.06.2019:** Unknown perpetrators destroy four tombstones in the Muslim cemetery Kazanbašča in Zvornik.

- **16.08.2019:** A citizen of Banja Luka “D.V.” is arrested for verbally attacking the imam of the Islamic community.
- **24.09.2019:** Danel Rajković is arrested for relieving himself in front of the mosque and many other offenses committed between the period of 3 March and 21 September.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**BULGARIA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

AZİZ NAZMİ ŞAKİR



## The Author

**Aziz Nazmi Şakir** (PhD, History of Sciences, Istanbul University) earned his BA and MA from the Arabic Philology and Turkic Studies Departments of St. Kliment Ohridski, University of Sofia respectively. Since 2001 he has been a faculty member at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and School of Languages at Sabanci University, Istanbul. Şakir is currently lecturing at New Bulgarian University, Sofia and Okan University, Istanbul. Besides his academic research dedicated to the Ottoman heritage in the Balkans and Bulgaria's Muslims, he is an accomplished writer and translator with more than thirty translations of poetry and prose to his credit. Email: azizshakir@yahoo.com

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Aziz Nazmi Şakir: *Islamophobia in Bulgaria: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

In 2019, Bulgaria's Pandora's box of Islamophobic and racist hate speech was opened by Deputy Prime Minister Krasimir Karakachanov, leader of the IMRO party, after an altercation between two Roma brothers and a commando of Bulgarian ethnic origin took place on 6 January in the village of Voivodinovo, near Plovdiv. The conflict was not religious in nature, but it was a source of interethnic tensions, backed by hate speech emitted by TV stations and numerous discussions on social networks. The latter targeted Roma Muslims by claiming that adopting Islam by representatives of the ghetto was a negative development catalysing the conflicts between the Roma community and the other groups within Bulgarian society. The next apple of discord was a bill proposed by the Coalition between Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) and the MRF for an amendment of the Law of Religions, submitted to parliament on 31 January and voted at the first reading on 7 March. The bill foresaw the state subsidizing of religious denominations, and the pardoning of their debts to the state up to 31 December 2018. When it became clear that the greater part of the mentioned debts belonged to the Muslim community, the Chief Mufti's Office and the party representatives who had submitted the bill became the target of multiple attacks, echoed by most media. This led to a change in the text of the amendment before its second vote on 21 March, according to which the debts were only deferred.

In May, the Prosecutor General rewarded prosecutor Nedialka Popova from the Pazardzhik District Prosecutor's Office for her performance during a case regarding the spread of radical Islam, a year after an Islamophobic speech she had given raised a serious concern among the local Muslim community. The case in question, brought in 2009, led in December 2019 to the effective sentences of 14 people for preaching religious hatred and ISIS ideas: allegations without any clear evidence. On the other hand, the Bulgarian prosecution continues to be ineffective against perpetrators of alleged Islamophobic attacks, such as the attack on the building of the Chief Mufti's Office in June, and does not impose any sanctions on anti-Muslim hate speech.

## Резюме

През 2019 г. в България пълната с ислямофобско и расистко слово кутия на Пандора, беше отворена не от кой да е, а Красимир Каракачанов – лидер на партия ВМРО, с ранг заместник министър-председател, след като на 6 януарив пловдивското. Войводиново при спречкване между двама братя от ромски и командос от български етнически произход, последният пострада сериозно. Конфликтът нямаше религиозен характер, но стана повод за генериране на междуетническо напрежение, подплатено от слово на омразата от телевизионните екрани и множеството дискусии в социалните мрежи. Въпросните атакуваха Ромите-мюсюлмани, посредством твърдението, че приемането на исляма от страна на представители на гетото, катализира конфликтите между ромската общност и останалите групи в българското общество.

Следващата ябълка на раздора, се оказа предложеният от ГЕРБ и ДПС проектозакон за изменения в закона за вероизповеданията, внесен в парламента на 31 януари и гласуван на първо четене на 7 март. Въпросният предвиждаше субсидиране на вероизповеданията, а също и опрощаване на натрупаните от тях до 31 декември 2018 г. задължения. След като се разбра, че Главно мюфтийство е най-големият длъжник, то и вносителите на проектозакона станаха мишена на множество нападки, получили отзвук по всички медийни средства, довел до нова промяна преди второ гласуване на 21 март, според която дълговете само се отсрочват.

През май Главният прокурор награди за работата ѝ по дело за разпространение на радикален ислям обвинителя Недялка Попова от Окръжната прокуратура в Пазарджик, която година по-рано с ислямофобско изказване, предизвика сериозно безпокойство сред мюсюлманската общност. Въпросното дело, образувано 2009 г., доведе през декември до налагането на ефективни присъди на 14 души за проповядване на религиозна омраза и идеи на „Ислямска държава“ – обвинения, за които липсват ясни доказателства. За сметка на това българската прокуратура продължава да е неефективна по отношение на извършителите на несъмнени ислямофобски атаки, каквато имаше през месец юни над сградата на Главното мюфтийство, и да не санкционире анти-мюсюлманското слово на омразата.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Bulgaria

**Type of Regime:** Democracy

**Form of Government:** Unitary Parliamentary Republic

**Ruling Parties:** Coalition between Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) (acronym translated in Bulgarian as “coat of arms”, a right-centrist, populist party) and United Patriots (an elective alliance formed by the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria [NFSB], the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation [IMRO], and [until 25 July 2019] Ataka [Attack], all of them conservative, ultranationalistic parties).

**Opposition Parties:** Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) (center-left, social-democratic, left-wing populism with a pro-EU stance); Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) (a centrist, liberal party); Volya (literally “Willpower”, a populist party).

**Last Elections:** 27 October/3 November 2019 (Local Elections): On the provincial level (from a total of 25), GERB won 16 mayoral positions; BSP 4; The Movement for Rights and Freedoms 1; The Union of Democratic Forces 1; Direct Democracy 1; The Bulgaria for Citizens Movement 1; Independent candidates 2.

26 May 2019 (European Parliament Elections): The list of parties, seats, and percentage of votes won is as follows: GERB (member of EPP) 6 seats (31.07%); Bulgarian Socialist Party (member of PES) 5 seats (24.26%); Movement for Rights and Freedoms (member of ALDE) 3 seats (16.55%); Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (member of ECR) 2 (7.36%); Democratic Bulgaria (member of EPP) 1 (6.06%).

26 March 2017 (Parliamentary Elections): GERB won 33.54% of the vote with 95 of 240 seats; The Bulgarian Socialist Party 27.93% and 80 seats; United Patriots 9.31% and 27 seats; Movement for Rights and Freedoms 9.24% and 26 seats; Volya party 4.26% and 12 seats. GERB formed a coalition with the United Patriots, and Boyko Borisov (leader of GERB) was elected prime minister for a 3rd subsequent time.

**Total Population:** 7,364,570 (in 2011)

**Major Languages:** Bulgarian, Turkish, Roma

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism). The constitution designates Eastern Orthodox Christianity as the “traditional religion” of the country.

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** In 2019, the Chief Mufti’s Office reported 1 Islamophobic attack and 1 attack against a place of worship. Both figures represent a decrease of 50%.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** No special statistics and database on racism and discrimination

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Eastern Orthodox Christianity (76% or 4,374,135 individuals); Islam (7.8% or 577,139); No religion (4.7% or 272,264); Protestantism (1.1% or 64,476); Catholicism (0.8% or 48,945); Judaism (0.015% or 1,162)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 7.8% or 577,139 in 2011. (2011 Population Census in Bulgaria [Final Data])

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Muslim Denomination in Bulgaria (Chief Mufti's Office).

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** There is no specific NGO dedicated to combating Islamophobia.

**Far-Right Parties:** Bulgarian National Union – New Democracy; Ataka; National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria; Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation; *Vazrazhdane* (Revival) party

**Far-Right Movements:** National Resistance, Blood and Honour, Fortress Europe Alliance (since April 2019)

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** N/A (depends on local municipality decisions)
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** The parliament adopted the so-called anti-burqa law or “Law for Prohibiting the Wearing of Clothing Concealing One’s Face in Public Spaces” (30 September 2016).
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

Bulgaria is home to the largest indigenous Muslim minority within the boundaries of the European Union. Despite the continuing rise of Islamophobic views with nationalistic and xenophobic overtones supported even by high-ranking officials, both Bulgaria's historical Muslim population (Turks, Pomaks, and Roma), and the recently formed, relatively small, Arab Muslim community,<sup>1</sup> did not face major conflicts with Bulgaria's non-Muslim majority. Nevertheless, in 2019, there were several cases in which Muslims, and Islamic symbols, were subjected to various forms of violation. These included biased representations of religious identity by the media, the refusal of public prosecutors to initiate criminal proceedings for public instigation of religious hatred, and, to a lesser degree, hate crime and vandalized places of worship.

After the parliamentary elections held in 2017, the extreme nationalist parties known for their anti-Muslim positions (namely the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria [NFSB], the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation [IMRO], and Ataka) formed the United Patriots alliance and became coalition partners with the leading center-right party, Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB). The United Patriots entered politics through the use of hate speech and aggressive stances towards vulnerable groups, such as refugees from the Middle East, ethnic Roma, and Turks belonging to local Muslim communities. Accordingly, Islamophobic hate speech not only remained a common phenomenon in the Bulgarian political and media landscape, but it also found propagators among representatives of the judiciary and the educational system.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

There is a tendency in recent years towards a decrease in the number of physical attacks against representatives of the Muslim community and Muslim shrines. Nevertheless, anti-Muslim verbal assaults undertaken even by high-level officials have become a routine. Given the fact that this type of oral discourses remains unsanctioned, and thus tolerated by the judiciary, this phenomenon comes as no surprise.

---

1. This group consists of immigrants in transit to Western Europe, and former university students who came to the country during the communist period.



**Figure 1:** Graffiti on one of the walls of Kurshum Mosque in Karlovo, which dates back to AD 1485.<sup>2</sup>

On 2 July 2019, the historical Kurshum Mosque in Karlovo, Plovdiv Province, was desecrated with graffiti. On one of the walls of the oldest architectural monuments in Karlovo, built in AD 1485, the word “pig” (Bulg. “пирале”) was written, a swastika, an “advertisement” for sexual services provided by a “married widow”, and names of heavy metal bands such as “Metallica” and “AC/DC” placed alongside other images with vague purpose. (Fig. 1) The Chief Mufti’s Office reacted with a call to the law enforcement authorities and the Municipality of Karlovo to take measures for finding the perpetrators and for preserving the centuries-old cultural monument. The announcement regarding the attack issued by the Muslim Denomination read: “We consider it outrageous and highly inappropriate to express Nazi and sexual predilections on a religious temple. This serial act of abusing a Muslim shrine is unacceptable, especially the ‘Kurshum Mosque’ which has sentimental value for the Muslims in Bulgaria.”<sup>3</sup>

2. “Muslim Denomination Strongly Condemns the Desecration of ‘Kurshum Mosque’ in Karlovo”, Muslim Denomination in Bulgaria, 4 July 2019, <https://www.grandmufti.bg/en/za-nas-3/news/7972-myusyulmansko-izpovedanie-osazhda-oskvernyavaneto-na-kurshun-dzhamiya-v-karlovo-2.html>, (Access date: 10 January 2020).

3. Ibid.



**Figure 2:** The stoned glass of the main entrance of the Chief Mufti's Office in Sofia (4 July 2019).<sup>4</sup>

Just a couple of days after the aforementioned occasion in Karlovo, on 4 July 2019, in front of dozens of witnesses, an unidentified person stoned the windows at the ground floor of the Chief Mufti's Office building on 27 Bratya Miladinovi Str. in Bulgaria's capital, Sofia. (Fig. 2) Nobody was injured during the act of vandalism, which was recorded by the security cameras. The video recordings showed that the perpetrator ran in an unknown direction. The violent act can be added to the list of such actions perpetrated over the last years against the Chief Muftiate. As usually the Muslim Denomination insisted that the case was to be investigated as a hate crime, and not just as an act of hooliganism.<sup>5</sup>

In January 2020, a 54-year-old resident of Izgrev village, Shoumen district, alerted the police about the destruction of Muslim tombstones in the local cemetery. According to him, this had happened between December 2019 and January 2020. An on-site inspection was carried out and four tombstones were found to have been destroyed. As a result of further investigations the perpetrators were identified and the police detained two 15-year-old minors from the same village. Pretrial proceedings have been instituted for the crime committed by the two young men.<sup>6</sup>

## Employment

The main law in Bulgaria banning discrimination based on race, ethnicity, belief, and religion is the Protection against Discrimination Act (PADA).<sup>7</sup> The organ established under PADA as an independent collegiate semi-judicial authority with adjudicating

4. "The Building the Grand Mufti's Office in the Capital Was Subjected to Islamophobic Attack", Republic of Bulgaria Muslim Denomination Grand Mufti's Office, 4 July 2019, <https://www.grandmufti.bg/en/za-nas-3/news/7981-sgradata-na-glavno-myuftiistvo-v-stolitzata-stana-obekt-na-islyamofobsko-napadenie-4.html>, (Access date: 10 January 2020).

5. Ibid

6. "Задържаха непълнолетни момчета, чупили надгробни паметници", Шум.Бг, 30 January 2020, <http://old.shum.bg/index.php?item=194067>, (Access date: 12 January 2020).

7. "General Provisions", Protection Against Discrimination Act, 12 July 2006, [https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/7046/file/Bulgaria\\_anti-discrimination\\_act\\_2003\\_2006\\_am.pdf](https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/7046/file/Bulgaria_anti-discrimination_act_2003_2006_am.pdf), (Access date: 4 January 2020).

powers exercising control over its implementation is the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPAD). It is worth mentioning that two of its nine current members, Baki Hyuseinov and Sabrie Sapundzhieva,<sup>8</sup> are Muslims. For 2019, there was no data issued by the CPAD or any other state equality body concerning discrimination cases in the Bulgarian job market based on being Muslim. However, even a brief survey of the matter (undergone among friends for the purposes of this report) has shown that there are cases that never make it to the official statistics. Such is the story of A.M. who wanted anonymity: “When I decided to put on a headscarf (in June 2019), I was working at a pharmacy. I, as a conscientious person, warned my employers in advance of my decision, because I was aware of the fact that in our country putting on a headscarf is considered ‘abnormal’. My boss’s first reaction was to tell me that he did not have the legal right to sack me since I had not committed any violation. He wanted to keep me, but the lady, our job superior, was not happy with my decision, and she convinced my boss to change his mind. So, the next day, he called me again and said that we should end our work relationship without any legal notice.” This type of discrimination is hard to prove, which maybe explains why the majority of Muslims in Bulgaria do not expect their rights to be defended.

## Education

Two years ago, in 2018, Nia Staykova, an ethnic Bulgarian studying in high school converted to Islam. After she started wearing a headscarf (similarly to the abovementioned case of A.M.) the attitude of her teachers and classmates towards her changed drastically. In 2018 and 2019, she was subjected to systematical pressure in class by her tutors. They openly wanted her to reject Islam, to stop wearing a headscarf, and even proposed Buddhism as an acceptable alternative. One of her teachers even blamed her by saying, “One day you will come to school and shoot us all!” Besides being marginalized, she was forced to regularly visit a psychologist. In January 2020, Nia shared her story as part of an online project titled #nooffencebut maintained by the Bulgarian Fund for Women. In support of the Muslim women wearing headscarves, Nia published a photograph of herself in which she holds a whiteboard with the most common words of intimidation she was subjected to: “Why did you put a veil, aren’t you a Bulgarian?”<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 3) The photograph caused a significant impact on social networks such as Facebook and Instagram. Many commentators blamed her for pursuing quick fame and even for discrediting Islam. The roots of the Islamophobic approach Nia was subjected to by her teachers and schoolmates are deeply implanted in the history and literature-related subjects taught in the Bulgarian schools.

8. “Членове”, Commission for Protection Against Discrimination, <http://www.kzd-nondiscrimination.com/layout/index.php/za-nas/chlenowe>, (Access date: 4 January 2020).

9. Не ми се обиждай, но, Facebook, 20 January 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/nemiseobijдай/photos/a.460161414561333/592719337972206/?type=3&theater>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).



**Figure 3:** Nia Staykova, an ethnic Bulgarian who as a high school student converted to Islam, participates in a project titled #nooffencebut in support of the Muslim women wearing headscarves.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the total revision of all school curricula after the end of the Communist era (1944-1989), history textbooks regarding the Ottoman period still preserve most of their Islamophobic characteristics. In the newest textbooks on the subject called “History and Civilizations” for the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades approved by the Ministry of Education in 2019, the notorious myth about the compulsory individual and mass conversions of Orthodox Christians to Islam is reconfirmed.<sup>11</sup> One of the crucial issues triggering the absolute negation of the Ottoman legacy is the fact that most Bulgarian politicians have never accepted the otherwise obvious fact that for almost five centuries the Bulgarian lands were a significant part of a multiethnic and multicultural texture and that Bulgarians as subjects of the Ottoman state more or less actively contributed to the formation of its common cultural environment. The students are introduced only to the nameless figures of the sultan, the janissaries, the Muslim fanatics, etc., acting in a continuum, spread over the whole Bulgarian territory for centuries-long periods. This fact results in establishing the mindset in students of a trivial collective image of Muslims as uncivilized conquerors, unjust rulers, and bloodthirsty oppressors. Subsequently, the historical vision of grinning janissaries armed with yataghans, and tax collectors forcing Christian families to pay their “blood-tax” is used as a founding milestone of Islamophobia in present-time Bulgaria.

## Politics

In April 2019, the *Vazrazhdane* party (after registering to participate in the forthcoming elections for Members of European Parliament) released a statement accusing the Ministry of Education of falsifying Bulgarian history. It read,

“Since the beginning of this year, the Ministry has been conducting an extremely aggressive campaign to completely replace the methodology used to teach

10. Ibid.

11. Веско Янков Обрешков and Красимир Сашков Кръстев, *История и цивилизации 6 клас*, (Издателство „Архимед и Диоген“, София: 2017), p.116.

Bulgarian history, with the main aim being to make Bulgarian teachers suggest to Bulgarian children that Bulgaria's main enemy is Russia, that our closest ally is Turkey, that Turkish slavery did not exist, that Bulgarians adopted Islam and gave their children to be raised as Janissaries voluntarily..."<sup>12</sup>

The leaders of *Vazrazhdane* "warned" the public, despite the fact that Islam and Muslims are still portrayed in a rather negative manner. The accusations were meant to serve electoral purposes (adequately rejected by the Ministry of Education), and were unfounded.



**Figure 4:** Deputy Prime Minister Krasimir Karakachanov in Voivodinovo: "Gypsies in Bulgaria have become extremely arrogant..."<sup>13</sup>

On 6 January, two young men from the Roma ghetto in Voivodinovo village, near Plovdiv, beat up a 33-year-old special forces corporal (Valentin Dimov). As a response, the authorities launched an operation for the demolition of the illegal constructions in the Roma neighbourhood. While commenting on the situation to the media, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Krasimir Karakachanov made the following generalisation: "Gypsies in Bulgaria have become extremely ar-

12. "Възраждане алармира: МОН обучава учители как да фалшифицират българската история", OFF-News.bg, 27 April 2019, <https://offnews.bg/politika/vazrazhdane-alarmira-mon-obuchava-uchiteli-kak-da-falshifit-cirat-balg-702121.html>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

13. "Каракачанов във Войводиново: Циганите са станали изключително нагли", Youtube, 8 January 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0seoowdi4o>, (Access date: 13 February 2020).

rogant... It's a fact that in the last year or two, they have started adopting Islam.”<sup>14</sup> (Fig. 4) The Roma community and a number of NGOs reacted to this biased statement and the demolishing of houses in the middle of winter, by organising a protest in front of the Council of Ministers.<sup>15</sup> As a guest of the TV program “Hi, Bulgaria”, and in front of the cameras broadcasting the protest, the Roma activist Lilyana Kovacheva criticised the authorities for imposing a collective responsibility on the Roma community because of a domestic crime and informed the audience that she had filed a complaint against Karakachanov with the Commission for Protection against Discrimination. She also complained that politicians like Volen Siderov and Valeri Simeonov (two months earlier he had called Roma women “bitches”) were also using hate speech at the expense of the Roma.<sup>16</sup> As a matter of fact, representatives from all levels of the IMRO, Ataka, NFSB, and Vazrazhdane parties exercise anti-Muslim discourse as a major tool of campaigning for votes from voters with nationalistic inclinations.

## Media

Figuratively speaking, if Bulgarian education is the soil, Islamophobic flora is rooted in, local media is the gardener, who takes care of its growth, its giving fruit, and its transportation to the market. Due to the progress in the field of communications fueled by the vast use of social media, the stages of this otherwise long-term process occur faster and have broadened their range.

The champions in the category “Islamophobic media” in Bulgaria for 2019 are the television channels Skat TV and Alfa TV. This comes as no surprise since these usual suspects are owned by the far-right parties NFSB and Ataka. The list of cases in which anti-Muslim discourse has been used in different programs through the year is too long, and we will confine ourselves to mentioning only a couple of striking examples. On 2 May 2019, the presenter of the TV program with the meaningful title “Unveiling” Nikolay Pankov chose the following provocative theme: “If You Are a Mufti, It Is as If You Are Minister Vladislav Goranov’s Best Man”, suggesting that the Minister of Finance tolerated the Chief Muftiate. The words of the host were full of dangerous speculations and offensive qualifications directed at the head of the Muslim Denomination. “The mufti of Turkey Mustafa Hadji threatens the country with terror if he is not paid... We are becoming the Bulgarian Trojan scarecrow of Europe, because this is where Diyanet [the Turkish Directorate of Religious

14. Emiliya Milcheva, “Как вярата променя живота на българските роми”, 10 January 2019, Deutsche Welle, <https://p.dw.com/p/3BivO>, (Access date: 13 February 2020).

15. Протест на циганите пред МС заради думите на Каракачанов за Войводиново (Protest of the Gypsies in Front of the Council of Ministers Because of the Words of Karakachanov about Voivodinovo), Youtube, 14 January 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9n9eupz8Tg0>, (Access date: 14 February 2020).

16. “Здравей, България”, Nova Tv, 11 January 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xfEOcDBPzМ>, (Access date: 14 February 2020).

Affairs] personnel expelled from Europe will be brought up... Bulgaria will become the nucleus for the jihadists returning from ISIS for their respective march towards a Balkan caliphate. We are looking after people who are a threat to our national security...”<sup>17</sup> (Fig. 5)



**Figure 5:** Nikolay Pankov, host of SKAT TV's weekly program "Unveiling": "If you are a mufti, it is as if you are Minister Vladislav Goranov's best man"<sup>18</sup>

On 29 April, Liubomir Zhelev from Skat TV, on his program "On the Bosphorus" demonstrated how the lack of basic knowledge about Islam results in misleading interpretations. "But when we say 'Allah', there comes the cruel principle of the Islamist jihad, the principle of monotheism, which forbids any understanding and tolerance of the other's faith. In Turkish it is *vahdet*, from here comes the word *tevhid*: you know well what happened in the name of this principle last Sunday (Sri Lanka Easter Bombings on 21 April)..."<sup>19</sup>

## Justice System

Islamophobia is often manifested in parliament when MPs debate laws and bills related to religious denominations. In this sense, the year 2019 was no exception. On 31 January 2019, the GERB and MRF submitted a bill for an amendment to the Law of Religions foreseeing a state subsidizing of religious denominations, as well as

17. "Мюфтия ли си, все едно си кумец на министър Владислав Горанов!?", Skat.bg, 2 May 2019, <http://www.skat.bg/products.php?type=10&genre=5145>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

18. Ibid.

19. "За лъжата, наказанието и прощката", Skat.bg, 29 April 2019, <http://www.skat.bg/products.php?type=10&genre=5050>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

the pardoning of their debts to the state up to 31 December 2018.<sup>20</sup> When it became clear that the greater part of the mentioned debts belonged to the Muslim Denomination, the Chief Mufti's Office and the party representatives who had submitted the bill (voted at first reading on 7 March) became the target of multiple verbal attacks from the microphone of the National Assembly and most media organs.<sup>21</sup> This led to a change in the text of the amendment before its second vote on 21 March, according to which the debts were only deferred.<sup>22</sup> The Turkish Foreign Minister was also involved in the scandal after his comment concerning the same draft law was interpreted as interfering in Bulgaria's internal affairs.<sup>23</sup> Prof. Stanislav Stoilov, a MP from Ataka party, commented on the case for Alfa TV claiming that Turkish President Erdogan had phoned Bulgarian PM Boyko Borisov to ask him for the debt forgiveness in question. (Fig. 6) The host of the program Magdalena Tasheva claimed that the Law of Religions was written or at least edited by the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs, the (Turkish) National Intelligence Organization, and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency. This would allow Turkish, Arab, and Saudi funding of Bulgarian Muslim communities aimed at radicalising the latter.<sup>24</sup>

On 20 May 2019, the Prosecutor General Sotir Tsatsarov rewarded prosecutor Nedialka Popova from the Pazardzhik District Prosecutor's Office for her performance during a case regarding the spread of radical Islam, a year after she delivered an Islamophobic speech which had raised a serious concern among the local Muslim community. The case in question, brought in 2009, led in December 2019 to the effective sentences of 14 people for preaching religious hatred and ISIS ideas;<sup>25</sup> the allegations were made without any clear evidence. On 7 May 2019, the Supreme Muslim Council adopted a declaration "in connection with the actions of the investigating authorities causing fear and disturbance in the ranks of the Muslim Denomination by carrying out investigating actions based on complaints and signals, which

20. "Законопроекти", Народно събрание на Република България, 31 January 2019, <https://parliament.bg/bg/bills/ID/156855/>, (Access date: 3 January 2020).

21. For example: "Ами сега? Няма време!", Skat.bg, 7 February 2019, <http://www.skat.bg/products.php?type=10&genre=4220>, [https://www.capital.bg/politika\\_i\\_ikonomika/bulgaria/2019/03/07/3401236\\_durjavata\\_oproshtava\\_zaduljeniiata\\_na/](https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2019/03/07/3401236_durjavata_oproshtava_zaduljeniiata_na/), (Access date: 27 December 2019).

22. "Комисия По Вероизповеданията И Правата На Човека", Народно събрание на Република България, 21 March 2019, <https://parliament.bg/bg/parliamentarycommittees/members/2593/reports/ID/10129>, (Access date: 14 February 2020).

23. Маргарита Колева, "Турция призна намеса в Закона за вероизповеданията", Darik News, 28 March 2019, <https://dariknews.bg/novini/bylgariia/turcii-prizna-namesa-v-zakona-za-veroizpovedaniiata-2156565>, (Access date: 15 February 2020).

24. "В око̀то на бурята", Youtube, 30 March 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CKKNehEcEg>, (Access date: 14 February 2020).

25. "Цацаров награди прокурорката Недялка Попова за работата ѝ по делото за радикалния ислям", Lex News, 20 May 2019, <https://news.lex.bg/%D1%86%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BA%D1%83%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%B4%D1%8F%D0%BB%D0%BA/>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

can be qualified as claptrap.”<sup>26</sup> In the meantime, the Bulgarian prosecution continues to be ineffective against perpetrators of alleged Islamophobic attacks, such as the attack on the building of the Chief Mufti’s Office in June, and does not impose any sanctions for anti-Muslim hate speech.



**Figure 6:** Prof. Stanislav Stanilov, MP from Ataka Party, claiming in front of the cameras of Alfa TV that Turkish President Erdogan has phoned Bulgarian PM Boyko Borisov to ask him for the debt forgiveness of the Muslim community.<sup>27</sup>

## Internet

On 9 January, Angel Dzhambazki, a member of the European Parliament and deputy-chairman of IMRO, commented on the aforementioned incident in Voivodinovo on his blog (which is part of his personal webpage). (Fig. 8) “We have always insisted that the (Roma) ghetto should be demolished. And we will demolish it. Because the ghetto is an ulcer. Because the ghetto is the soil in which the poisonous weeds of Islamic radicalism grow.”<sup>28</sup> Only in Facebook, this text entitled “Gypsy Arrogance” was shared more than 12,000 times. (Fig. 9) Nine out of ten of all 74 comments under the text praised Dzhambazki’s approach. A person by the name of Ivan Petrov even exclaimed: “Get the army into the ghetto with infantry fighting vehicles and fire, fire, fire... If there is no one to do it, just tell me, and I, as a former army officer, will come and participate for free, I will sit in the first of machines to enter the ghetto!”

26. “Ramadan Meeting of the Supreme Muslim Council”, Republic of Bulgaria Muslim Denomination Grand Mufti’s Office, 7 May 2019, <https://www.grandmufti.bg/en/za-nas-3/news/7627-ramazansko-zasedanie-na-visshiya-myusulmanski-savet-2.html>, (Access date: 28 January 2019).

27. Ibid.

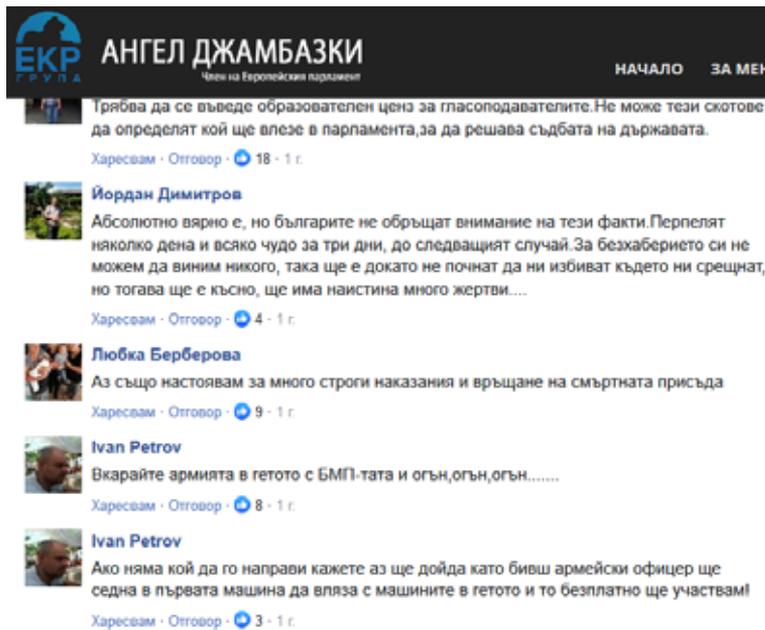
28. Angel Dzhambazki, 9 January 2019, <https://www.djambazki.org/blog/view/226/ciganskata-naglost>, (Access date: 5 January 2020).

**Цигански въпрос**



Стойци на проучване по сегрегация

**Figure 8:** Angel Dzhambazki’s webpage addressing the Roma problem: “No to the ethnic, domestic and gypsy crimes.”<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 9:** Racist commentaries under Angel Dzhambazki’s text “Gypsy Arrogance”<sup>30</sup>

As usually, state security agencies did not react to these racist, anti-Muslim statements, nor did the Commission for Protection against Discrimination. Since there are no sanctions or any measures imposed by the state authorities to combat Islamophobia, similar comments accompany almost all news related to

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

Islam and Muslims, and consequently, moderators rarely take action to remove or criticise them.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Major figures triggering Islamophobia in Bulgaria are the leaders (including MPs and EPMs) of the far-right nationalistic parties and movements: NFSB, IMRO, Ataka, *Vazrazhdane*, Bulgarian National Union – New Democracy, National Resistance, Blood and Honour, and Fortress Europe Alliance. They are backed by various channels for dissemination of anti-Muslim propaganda such as media organs, either owned by their parties or via national TV, or radio programs and daily press, whose producers evaluate the participation of “scandalous” politicians and the broadcasting of hate speech as a source of increased viewer/listener/reader interest and higher ratings, a process undisturbed by any kind of censorship or state control.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

Initiatives, both on the federal and local level, aimed at combating anti-Muslim racism are a rarity in Bulgaria. The only official event of this kind for 2019 was a discussion titled “Islamophobia: Causes and Consequences” held on 26 March by the Chief Mufti’s Office, the only institution reporting anti-Muslim incidents and rhetoric. The discussion started with an exposé of Prof. Mihail Ivanov, who traced the origins of Islamophobia back to the Bulgarian history textbooks. He stated,

“One of the elements that fuel Islamophobia is Turkophobia... Bulgarian nationalism is formed as ethno-nationalism, not as civic nationalism... What the school does is later reproduced and multiplied throughout the community. Naturally, part of the politicians, media owners, journalists, and reputable public figures become bearers of negative attitudes inherited from the school years... The influence of this public elite on public opinion is dominant and through the media, it inevitably affects the minds of the general public. The social environment “inflamed” by racist - in this case Islamophobic is Turkophobic - attitudes is nourishing for the political speculations of national populism...”<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, the “medical” treating of the listed causes should start with a discussion within the whole community and the rewriting of history in a more objective manner. Hayri Emin, an expert at the International Affairs Department of the Chief Mufti’s Office, contributed to the discussion by giving up-to-date examples of Islamophobia such as the announcement in parliament of the amendments to

31. “Дискусия - Ислямофобия причини и следствия”, Youtube, 28 March 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8kEC2s2v2s>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

the Law of Religions on the grounds of national security, and called on the state to take concrete measures.<sup>32</sup>

On 8 December, in Sofia, the Supreme Muslim Council presented the first Honorary Award of the Hodzhazade Mehmed Muhyiddin Efendi annual awards, which were established by the central collective body of the Muslim Denomination, to the Chairman of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee Krasimir Kanev. He was nominated for his long-lasting activities in the field of human rights, and especially for defending the religious rights of the Bulgarian Muslims and combating Islamophobia.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The content of this report shows that in Islamophobic terms, the year 2019 was dominated more by unpunished (both political and civilian) anti-Muslim hate speech instances than physical attacks on Muslims and mosques. Populist politicians used the momentum to unleash hatred towards Muslims by exploiting negative historical sentiments, problems within the Roma communities, and concerns mounted due to the movement of refugees from the Middle East passing through Bulgaria on their way to Europe. Despite the fact that the domestic criminal code contains articles sanctioning this type of discourses, these are rarely applied. Therefore, there is an acute need for NGOs to monitor media on a daily basis and generate pressure on the judiciary and the Commission for Protection against Discrimination to take adequate action in cases and events dictated by Islamophobia, especially those that negatively impact the Muslim community. Presumably, over time, this civilian pressure is expected to generate a preventative effect and force politicians to abstain from using hate speech publicly. The media should take the opportunity to change the negative image of Islam by broadcasting popular science and documentary films dedicated to various aspects of this religion, as well as programs discussing up-to-date Islamic issues. The lack of adequate knowledge about Islam enables the spread of false and distorted information about it in the public domain by pseudo-experts and malevolent public figures. Educational institutions also have to work towards creating an alternative narrative of Muslims. In the long list of history textbook authors, there are no Muslims. Keeping in mind that the curricula include topics related to Islam, the Bulgarian ministry should engage if not an author, at least an adviser appointed by the Chief Mufti's Office in Sofia to comment on the content from a Muslim perspective.

---

32. Ibid.

33. "Supreme Muslim Council Awards a Human Rights Defender", Republic of Bulgaria Muslim Denomination Grand Mufti's Office, 6 December 2019, <https://www.grandmufti.bg/en/za-nas-3/news/8993-visshiyat-myusyul-manski-savet-nagrazhdava-zashtitnik-na-choveshkite-prava-4.html>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

## Chronology

- **26.03.2019:** The Chief Mufti's Office held a discussion entitled "Islamophobia: Causes and Consequences".
- **20.05.2019:** Prosecutor General Sotir Tsatsarov awarded prosecutor Nedyalka Popova from the Pazardzhik District Prosecutor's Office, investigator Daniela Yaneva, and the SANS (State Agency for National Security) team who worked on the so-called notorious Case of 13 Imams for spreading radical Islam.
- **02.06.2019:** Vandalism against the historical Kurshum Mosque in Karlovo, which was desecrated with graffiti.
- **04.06.2019:** An unidentified person stoned the glass entrance on the ground floor of the Grand Mufti's Office building in Sofia.
- **01.12.2019 – 15.01.2020:** In the cemetery of Izgrev village, in the Shoumen district, four Muslim tombstones were desecrated by two 15-year-old minors from the same village.



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**CROATIA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

NEJRA KADIĆ MEŠKIĆ



## The Author

**Nejra Kadic Meskic** is the executive director at the Center for Cultural Dialogue and an associate at the Islamic Community in Croatia. She graduated from the School for Economics and Business of the University of Sarajevo. She has nine years of experience as a program and campaign leader in the fields of human rights, culture of dialogue, migrants and youth, and gender equality including the political and implementational level. She is familiar with the issues of human rights in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as she has worked in the NGO sector in both countries. In 2019, she completed the KAICIID Fellowship program in interreligious and intercultural dialogue. In 2013, Kadic Meskic received an award from the BIH Parliament for her contribution towards the achievement of gender equality. She has experience in project management, event management, as well as in public relations and marketing. She is the author and co-author of strategic documents related to the improvement in the implementation of human rights. Kadic Meskic is also a trainer on teamwork and leadership in educational programs for youth. Email: nejra.kadic.sa@gmail.com

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Nejra Kadic Meskic: *Islamophobia in Croatia: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

In Croatia in 2019, incidents that can be addressed as hate speech against Muslims or potentially Islamophobic mostly occurred in the field of politics or involved politicians since two elections took place in the year in question: the EU parliamentary elections and the presidential elections.

The polarization of society and the use of populist rhetoric in political campaigns for the EU parliamentary elections and the election for the presidency of the Republic of Croatia with regards to migrants were present on almost every social level, media, and platforms. Unacceptable messages and hate speech against Islam marred the media, the Internet, and political appearances in election periods.

The lack of self-criticism in the context of recognizing discriminatory messages is also evident in some of the media. Often, they correctly recognize the discriminatory speech of public figures, politicians and others, however, do not show sufficient willingness to renounce their own unacceptable speech and condemn the egregious examples of their employers in articles.

People are reluctant to speak up when they feel discriminated against for being Muslims, because of vulnerability when expressing religious beliefs in public and respecting religious customs. This is why we don't have true insight into the frequency of discrimination on the basis of Islam in Croatia.

On the other hand, government bodies and institutions as well as other religious communities spread the message of social cohesion, their openness to policies that promote and secure diversity and equality, and the coexistence and acceptance of all Croatian citizens regardless of religious differences. The few incidents that took place are considered individual and sporadic occurrences, and were condemned by the majority. Overall, comparing to other European countries, Croatian society does not follow the trend of fast growing Islamophobia. One of the reasons is that Republic of Croatia is one of the few countries in Europe that institutionally recognized Islam as an equal religion.

## Sažetak

Incidenti koji nagovještavaju govor mržnje prema muslimanima ili potencijalno islamofobne incidente u Hrvatskoj u 2019. godini uglavnom su bili u području politike ili su dolazili od strane političara obzirom da je 2019. godina u Hrvatskoj obilježena predsjedničkim izborima i izborima za Europski parlament.

Polariziranje društva te korištenje populističke retorike pri razračunavanju s migrantima i izbjeglicama a u svrhu političkih bodova na izborima za Europski parlament i Predsjednika Republike Hrvatske bilo je prisutno na svim društvenim razinama, medijima i platformama. Neprihvatljive poruke i govor mržnje prema islamu obilježile su kako političke istupe tako i medije i internet u periodu izbora.

Nedostatak samokritičnosti u kontekstu prepoznavanja diskriminatornih poruka, vidljiv je kod dijela medija. Oni nerijetko ispravno prepoznaju diskriminatoran govor javnih osoba, političara i drugih, međutim, ne pokazuju dovoljnu spremnost da se odreknu vlastitog neprihvatljivog govora i osude eklatantne primjere u člancima svojih zaposlenika/ca.

Pojedinci, kada smatraju da su diskriminirani temeljem toga što su muslimani, nerado o tome progovaraju, zbog ranjivosti kojoj su izloženi prilikom javnog očitovanja religijskih uvjerenja i poštivanja vjerskih običaja, a to je razlog zašto izostaje pravi uvid u kvantitet diskriminacije prema muslimanima u Hrvatskoj.

S druge strane, tijela i institucije vlasti u Republici Hrvatskoj kao i druge religijske zajednice širili su poruke vrijednosti socijalne kohezije i pokazali volju za politikama koje promoviraju i jamče raznolikost i jednakost, zajednički život i prihvaćanje svih hrvatskih građana neovisno o njihovim religijskim razlikama.

Sumirajući, možemo reći da pokazana anti-muslimanska netrpeljivost predstavlja pojedinačne i sporadične ispade individualaca koji su bili osuđeni od većine. U suštini, u poređenju s drugim zemljama Europe, hrvatsko društvo ne prati trend brzog rasta islamofobije u Europi. Svakako da je jedan od razloga tome i činjenica da je Republika Hrvatska jedna od samo četiri zemlje Evrope koja je institucionalno priznala islam kao ravnopravnu religiju.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Croatia

**Type of Regime:** Democratic republic

**Form of Government:** Unitary parliamentary constitutional republic

**Ruling Parties:** Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ)

**Opposition Parties:** Social Democratic Party (SDP)

**Last Elections:** 2014 Presidential Election (Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović won 50.74% of the vote against 49.26% that went to Ivo Josipović in the second round); 2016 Legislative Election (HDZ, HDS, HSL: 61 seats; SDP, HNS, HSS, HSU: 54 seats; MOST: 13 seats; ŽIVI ZID, PH, AM: 8 seats; IDS, PGS, RI: 3 seats; STRANKA RADA I SOLIDARNOSTI, REFORMISTI, NOVI VAL, HSS-SR, BUZ: 2 seats; HDSSB, HKS: 1 seat; NL-ŽELJKO GLASNOVIĆ: 1 seat; National Minorities: 8 seats)

**Total Population:** 4,284,889 (2011)

**Major Languages:** Croatian

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** N/A

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** N/A

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Christianity (86.28% Catholics and 4.44% Orthodox), No Religion (3.81%), Islam (1.47%), Others (less than 1%)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 62,977 (1.47%) (2011)

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Islamic Community in Croatia (*Islamska zajednica u Hrvatskoj*)

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** Center for Cultural Dialogue (CCD), The International Red Cross, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Human Rights House Zagreb, Are You Serious, Center for Missing and Abused Children, Centre for Peace Studies (CMS; CPS), Centre for Promotion of Tolerance and Preservation of Holocaust Remembrance, Croatian Legal Center

**Far-Right Parties:** N/A

**Far-Right Movements:** N/A

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

The Islamic Community in Croatia continues to play an integrative role in Croatian society. The Republic of Croatia used the position of the Islamic Community as a role model of integrating Muslim minorities into European societies and as an instrument in building its democratic, inclusive, and intercultural state brand. Institutionally and strategically regulated relationships through the Treaty on Issues of Common Interest between the government of the Republic of Croatia and the Islamic Community in Croatia from 2002 were used as examples of promising practice in integrating religious minorities into societies around the world. The construction of the Islamic Cultural Center in Sisak continues and with it Croatia will get its fifth mosque (in addition to the ones in Zagreb, Rijeka, Bogovolja, and Gunja). The Islamic Community in Croatia hosted a gala dinner to celebrate Eid al-Fitr with the presence of all state leaders, their presence there testifies to their good relations with the country's Islamic Community and Muslims.<sup>1</sup> The President of the Republic of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic,<sup>2</sup> Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia Andrej Plenkovic,<sup>3</sup> Speaker of the Croatian Parliament Gordan Jandrokovic,<sup>4</sup> and President of the Croatian Episcopal Conference (HBK) Zelimir Puljić<sup>5</sup> expressed their best wishes on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha to the Mufti and President of the Islamic Community of Croatia Aziz Hasanovic and all Muslims in Croatia with the warm messages of coexistence, respect, and acceptance as values underpinning the intercultural Croatian society.<sup>6</sup>

The annual report published by Croatia's Security Intelligence Agency (SOA) stated, "Although Islamist radicalism has gained a significant number of supporters in the western EU countries and in the countries neighboring southeastern southeastern Croatia, it has not been able to gather more followers in the Republic of Croatia. One of the main reasons for the absence of significant Islamist radicalism in Croatia is the good position, reputation and integration of the Islamic community

1. "Državni vrh na proslavi Ramazanskog bajrama. Svečanost u zagrebačkom Westinu obilježio je potez američkog i iranskog ambasadora u Hrvatskoj", Jutarnji.hr, 3 June 2019, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/foto-drzavni-vrh-na-proslavi-ramazanskog-bajrama-svecanost-u-zagrebackom-westinu-obiljezio-je-potez-americkog-i-iranskog-ambasadora-u-hrvatskoj/8962805/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

2. "Kolinda čestitala Bajram: 'Prepoznala sam želju za istinskim zajedništvom'", Index.hr, 3 June 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/kolinda-cestitala-bajram-prepoznala-sam-zelju-za-istinskim-zajednistvom/2090421.aspx>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

3. "Premijer Plenković čestitao Ramazanski bajram", Jutarnji.hr, 3 June 2019, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/premijer-plenkovic-cestitao-ramazanski-bajram/8961770/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

4. "Jandroković čestitao Kurban Bajram", Index.hr, 11 August 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/jandrokovic-cestitao-kurbanbajram/2107803.aspx>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

5. "Predsjednik HBK čestitao Ramazanski bajram", Jutarnji.hr, 3 June 2019, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/predsjednik-hbk-cestitao-ramazanski-bajram/8961764/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

6. "Muftija Hasanović: Bog nam je naredio da se volimo", Večernji.hr, 4 June 2019, <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/muftija-hasanovic-bog-nam-je-naredio-da-se-volimo-1323629>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

in Croatian society.”<sup>7</sup>

The Croatian neighborhood includes Bosnia and Herzegovina whose relations with Croatia in 2019 were marked by a scandal in which the SOA was accused of smuggling weapons into places connected with the Salafi Islamist movement in Bosnia.

The SOA in its annual report also reported that there is no serious anti-immigration extremism in Croatia, although the trend of the growing popularity of anti-immigration movements in Europe could lead to the equivalent developments of similar groups in Croatia.

The question of financing religious communities with funds from the public budget was raised in public discourse and in the Croatian Parliament. According to Eurostat data, the Republic of Croatia is among the member states that allocate the highest percentage of their GDP to religious communities (0.6% in 2016), with only Hungary allocating more. A proposal to start negotiations on amendments to the treaty between the Holy See and the Republic of Croatia was raised in Croatian Parliament and several organizations including the Movement for Secular Croatia raised the issue of the Catholic Church being in a privileged position compared to other religious communities, a fact that violates constitutionally guaranteed secularity. In 2019, the Croatian Parliament and government rejected the proposal to amend the treaty.

It remains positive that religious leaders from different religious communities in most cases emphasized the quality of mutual cooperation and the importance of building friendly relationships. One example of interreligious dialogue is the establishment of the Interreligious Council of Rijeka which brought together the most represented religious communities in the city within the framework of the Rijeka – European Capital of Culture 2020 program to further advance interreligious dialogue. Catholic religion teachers on several occasions pointed out the beauty and purity of Islam and how different it is from the distorted interpretation of the faith often found in the media or often circulated in popularist publications.

The issue of Croatian border safety in relation to migrants heading to Europe was raised several times in public discourse and media. Under the excuse of guarding the Croatian border and ensuring the security of Croatian territory, the humane approach and compassion for refugees increasingly faded. Politicians such as Ivan Pernar continued sharing negative stories and foreign media news about refugees, instilling fear of migrants and refugees in the local population. On the other hand, non-governmental organizations reminded the public of the fact that the EU and

---

<sup>7</sup> “SOA objavila izvješće o prijeljama Hrvatskoj, okrili smo koliko je Hrvata u ISISu”, Index.hr, 3 June 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/soa-objavila-izvjesce-o-prijeljama-hrvatskoj-otkrili-koliko-je-hrvata-u-isisu/2090371.aspx>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

Croatia weren't facing a migration crisis but rather a solidarity and humanity crisis presented under the pretext of a so-called security issue.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

Hate crimes that threaten basic human rights and freedoms were often not reported, were not sufficiently recognized, and their prosecution was sometimes inadequate. The non-reporting of hate crimes occurs because of the victims' lack of confidence that the authorized institutions will provide them with adequate protection, and because of the fear of revictimization.

According to statistics of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the basis of discrimination in 9 complaints was religion (3% of all recorded complaints). Eight crimes were against Jews (specifically identified by the Ministry of Internal Affairs as anti-Semitism), while the motive of one crime was religion.<sup>8</sup> Authorities didn't specify whether that was against Muslims because they do not label crimes as Islamophobic. Anti-Muslim hate crime doesn't exist as a separate category in the hate crime statistics. According to the Ministry of Justice, courts have dealt with 35 hate crimes cases, and in 13% of them the motive was religion.

In April 2019, a group of seven Muslim tourists prayed in a parking lot in the Croatian city of Split. Several people reported the situation to the police, who determined that no misdemeanor or criminal act had been committed. Photographs and a video were published online by the media, causing a number of negative reactions. City Council member Martin Pauk wrote a Facebook post saying that the praying individuals marked their territory and sent a message that they have arrived and that there will be more of them, comparing the prayer to the act of dogs when they urinate to mark their territory.<sup>9</sup>

The question of the difference between Muslims praying in the parking lot in Split and Catholics praying in front of a hospital providing abortions was raised by critics and freedom advocates, who concluded that Muslim individuals praying at least didn't condemn the actions of others.<sup>10</sup>

8 "Report of the Ombudsman for 2018", Office for Ombudsman of the Republic of Croatia, 25 April 2019, <https://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/download/izvjesce-pucke-pravobraniteljice-za-2018-godinu/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

9 "Molitva na parkingu. Sisački imam odgovorio je li uobičajeno da muslimani mole na ulici", Dnevnik.hr, 25 April 2019, <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/molitva-na-parkingu-sisacki-imam-odgovorio-je-li-uobicajeno-da-muslimani-mole-na-ulici--558455.html>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

10. Vladimir Matijanić, "Ima li razlike između muslimana na splitskom parking i moliteljima pred bolnicama", Index.hr, 25 April 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/ima-li-razlike-izmedju-muslimana-na-splitskom-parking-i-molitelja-pred-bolnicama/2081025.aspx>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).



**Figure 1:** Transcript of Facebook post of Split City Council member Martin Pauk on the news portal Dnevnik.hr saying: “From their acts the goal of this performance (referring to praying act of group of Muslim tourists at one parking in Split) is completely obvious and it sends the message: We came. We are here. There is more of us coming. Just like a dog that comes to the meadow and has an enormous need to pee on it and marks the territory, these newcomers from another continent marked parking. After the parking, comes the park, the neighborhood, the city, the country...”<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 2:** Muslim tourists praying at parking in Split.<sup>12</sup>

## Employment

Research shows that the presence of discrimination in society is still much higher than reported to the relevant authorities. For example, in 2019, the request of a Muslim woman to wear a hijab in her working place was denied by a public institution in Croatia. The decision of the institution’s directorship referred to the practice and previous rulings of the European courts. This case wasn’t reported to relevant institutions for discrimination.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

The Ombudswoman received inquiries from Muslims about the right not to work on religious holidays, which happened in previous years as well. Also, the Catholic Faculty of Theology continued demanding baptismal certificates as part of the application documentation in the process of hiring administrative and technical staff, which is a case of direct discrimination based on religion.

## Education

The Islamic Community in Croatia published the following books: *The Islamic Encyclopedic Almanac* that listed almost 500 Muslims who have contributed to the development of the Islamic community and Croatian society in different areas,<sup>13</sup> and *Halal – Standard for Humankind* by the author Aldin Dugonjic, PhD, about the importance of halal and the halal market in every segment of life.<sup>14</sup>

There were accusations that the textbooks for Croatian language and for religious education potentially encouraged discrimination. The Ministry of Science and Education stated that they would consider the remarks and adopt the necessary changes in future textbook editions.<sup>15</sup>

The association of students of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Zagreb Virtus on the occasion of International Women's Day in 2019 organized a panel on the position of women in monotheistic religions with representatives of Islam, Catholicism, and Judaism. During the event, an incident occurred when several students interrupted and complained about a public educational institution in a secular country like Croatia hosting a discussion on a religious topic with religious representatives. The left-wing Internet news portal index.hr reported that during the event *shaytan* (devil) entered the imam when he said that we are all equal but we have different roles in this world and that was the moment when the situation escalated.<sup>16</sup> He also stated that society shouldn't force gender equality because it is unnatural. However, when listening to the entire speech, it becomes clear that what he was actually referring to were the different biological characteristics of men and women, and he was not implying that they shouldn't be respected in the same way and treated equally in the context of human rights.

13. Tomislav Šoštarčić, "Knjiga koja svjedoči o sveprisutnosti i doprinosu muslimana u Hrvatskoj", Aljazeera Balkans, 23 June 2019, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/knjiga-koja-svjedoci-o-sveprisutnosti-i-doprinosu-muslimana-u-hrvatskoj>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

14. Sanadin Voloder, "Dugonjić: Halal industrija je perspektiva za privredni rast i razvoj", Aljazeera Balkans, 21 May 2019, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/dugonjic-halal-industrija-je-perspektiva-za-privredni-rast-i-razvoj>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

15. "Report of the Ombudsman for 2018", Office for Ombudsman of the Republic of Croatia, 25 April 2019, <https://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/download/tzvjesce-pucke-pravobraniteljice-za-2018-godinu/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

16. "Don Stojić, musliman i židov na faksu pričali o ženama. Stojić nije bio najgori", Index.hr, 7 March 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/don-stojic-musliman-i-zidov-na-faksu-pricali-o-zenama-stojic-nije-bio-najgori/2069293.aspx>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

## Politics

In March 2019, the independent news website [zurnal.info](https://zurnal.info),<sup>17</sup> based in Sarajevo, published interviews with Bosnian Muslims who said the Croatia's Security Intelligence Agency (SOA) had tried to coerce them into smuggling weapons into places connected with the Salafi Islamist movement in Bosnia.

The “discovery” of these arms caches would then justify comments by Croatia's President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic. Two years ago she said there were 10,000 people with “very radical rhetoric and intentions” in Bosnia – remarks which caused outrage at the time.<sup>18</sup>

Not surprisingly, the website's allegations caused a furor. Croatia's Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic called the story “a matter of creative manipulation” during a visit to the Bosnian town of Neum. The SOA described the claims as “false and malicious,” though it confirmed that its officers had been in contact with the Bosnian citizens quoted in the story.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, Bosnia's Security Minister Dragan Mektic rushed to claim credit for foiling a “false flag” operation which would have tarnished his country's international reputation. “The plan was to discredit Bosnia and show it as a terrorist hub and a threat to the region and Europe,” he said.

It seemed logical when Bosnia's state prosecutor stepped in to investigate the allegations. But then it turned out that the focus of the investigation was Mektic.<sup>20</sup> The prosecutor suspected the security minister of revealing secret information and giving false statements. Mektic called the investigation “a farce, to mislead the public.”<sup>21</sup>

Confusion would be understandable. But Bosnians understand that the claims and counter-claims fit into a queasy ethnopolitical game which has persisted since the Dayton Agreement brought an end to Bosnia's ruinous conflict in 1995.<sup>22</sup>

17 “Hrvatska protjerala bh. građane koji su odbili špijunirati za SOA”, [Žurnal.info](https://zurnal.info/novost/21954/hrvatska-protjerala-bh.-gradane-koji-su-odbili-spjuniirati-za-soa?fbclid=IwAR1s7SFfGJLEAll-Jizb_DqcuPLw0KnZaccrPGnBI5vrtdBx5it106UXCj0), 16 March 2019, [https://zurnal.info/novost/21954/hrvatska-protjerala-bh.-gradane-koji-su-odbili-spjuniirati-za-soa?fbclid=IwAR1s7SFfGJLEAll-Jizb\\_DqcuPLw0KnZaccrPGnBI5vrtdBx5it106UXCj0](https://zurnal.info/novost/21954/hrvatska-protjerala-bh.-gradane-koji-su-odbili-spjuniirati-za-soa?fbclid=IwAR1s7SFfGJLEAll-Jizb_DqcuPLw0KnZaccrPGnBI5vrtdBx5it106UXCj0), (Access date: 10 December 2019).

18. Jurica Körbler, “Hrvatske obavještajne službe državnom vrhu poslale dramatično upozorenje: Islamski radikali sun a granicama Hrvatske, u BiH ih ima 5 do 10 tisuća”, [Jutarnji list.hr](https://www.jutarnji.hr/globus/Globus-politika/hrvatske-obavjestajne-sluzbe-drzavnom-vrhu-poslale-dramaticno-upozorenje-islamski-radikali-su-na-granicama-hrvatske-u-bih-ih-ima-5-do-10-tisuca/6522508/), 5 September 2017, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/globus/Globus-politika/hrvatske-obavjestajne-sluzbe-drzavnom-vrhu-poslale-dramaticno-upozorenje-islamski-radikali-su-na-granicama-hrvatske-u-bih-ih-ima-5-do-10-tisuca/6522508/> (Access date: 10 December 2019).

19. “SOA se oglasila o špijunskom skandalu s BIH”, [Index.hr](https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/soa-se-oglasila-o-spjunskom-skandalu-s-bih/2070878.aspx), 14 March 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/soa-se-oglasila-o-spjunskom-skandalu-s-bih/2070878.aspx>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

20. “Potpuni obrat u špijunskoj aferi, BiH pokreće istragu protiv svog ministra”, [Index.hr](https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/potpuni-obrat-u-spjunskoj-aferi-bih-pokrece-istragu-protiv-svog-ministra/2076295.aspx), 5 April 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/potpuni-obrat-u-spjunskoj-aferi-bih-pokrece-istragu-protiv-svog-ministra/2076295.aspx>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

21. “Mektić ispitan u Tužilaštvu BiH: Potvrđujem sve što sam rekao”, [Index.hr](https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/mektic-ispitan-u-tuzilastvu-bih-potvrđujem-sve-sto-sam-rekao/2071129.aspx), 15 March 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/mektic-ispitan-u-tuzilastvu-bih-potvrđujem-sve-sto-sam-rekao/2071129.aspx> (Access date: December 2020).

22. Guy De Launey, “Bosnia in Spat with Croatia over ‘Arms in Mosques’”, [BBC](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47990274), 20 April 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47990274>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

The BIH presidency sent a protest note to Croatia.<sup>23</sup> It stated that the Prosecutor's Office of BIH will not investigate persons mentioned in an alleged intelligence affair that is part of the affair known as 'the Salafia affair' in media.<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 3:** A screenshot of an article published by BIH news portal Zurnal that accused Croatia for expelling citizens who refused to spy for Croatia's Security Intelligence Agency (SOA).<sup>25</sup>

In July 2019, the President of the Republic of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, who won the 2014 presidential elections as a candidate of the right-wing Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), visited Israel on the occasion of the Holocaust commemoration. One of the most influential Israeli newspapers, *The Jerusalem Post*, published an article claiming that during the meeting of Croatia's president with the Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic stated, "Bosnia and Herzegovina is a very unstable country and under the control of militant Islam; in some aspects it has been taken over by people associated with Iran and terrorists."<sup>26</sup>

This statement provoked a strong resonance in the media and political public of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH). There were many reactions from BIH stating that the statement by Croatia's president tried to revive wartime ideologies, and that the BIH citizens are clearly targeted as a threat and enemy not only to their neighbors but also to one another. Very negative reactions came from the Croat member of the presidency Zeljko Komsic, the Bosniak member of the presidency Sefik Dzaferovic,

23. "Novi obrat, BiH šalje prosvjednu notu Hrvatskoj zbog špijunske afere", Index.hr, 17 April 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/novi-obrat-bih-salje-prosvjednu-notu-hrvatskoj-zbog-spijunske-afere/2079234.aspx>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

24. "Preokret u BiH, pokrenuta istraga špijunske afere za koju su optužili Hrvatsku", Index.hr, 3 April 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/preokret-u-bih-prekinuta-istraga-spijunske-afere-za-koju-su-optuzivali-hrvatsku/2075779.aspx>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

25. Ibid.

26. "Grabar-Kitarovic: BiH je vrlo nestabilna i pod kontrolom militantnog islama, u nekim aspektima su je preuzeli ljudi povezani s Iranom i teroristima", Jutarnji.hr, 30 July 2019, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/grabar-kitarovic-bih-je-vrlo-nestabilna-i-pod-kontrolom-militantnog-islama-u-nekim-aspektima-su-je-preuzeli-ljudi-povezani-s-iranom-i-teroristima/9185855/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

from chairmen of the political parties Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Party of Democratic Action (SDA) in BiH, from the President of the Jewish community in BiH Jakob Finci, etc.

All media in Croatia and BiH reported on this event. For example, Al Jazeera Balkans published a commentary on their portal entitled “Is Militant Islam Guilty for Jasenovac?”<sup>27</sup>

The head of the Islamic Community in BiH Hussein Kavazovic also reacted: “This person who calls herself the Croatian president is known for her attitudes and attempts to dehumanize Muslims. It is a two-faced person who tells one story in Muslim countries and another in Israel and other countries. It’s about political opportunism and nothing more. That’s the worst kind of politician!”<sup>28</sup>

The first reaction to the scandal from Croatia came from the former Croatian Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor via her Twitter account: “Apologies to neighboring and friendly Bosnia and Herzegovina. To all nations.”<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 4:** Twitter account of former Croatian Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor in which she apologized to neighboring and friendly BiH for the statement made by President of the Republic of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic during a visit to Israel.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the president of the Republic of Croatia denied<sup>31</sup> the claims of the *Jerusalem Post*<sup>32</sup> and later on this portal issued a correction and deleted the controversial

27. Mirnes Kovač, “Je li i za Jasenovac kriv militantni islam?”, Aljazeera Balkans, 30 July 2019, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/je-li-i-za-jasenovac-kriv-militantni-islam>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

28. “Pljušte gnjevne reakcije na kontroverznu izjavu predsjednice da u BiH dominira militantni islam. Poglavar Islamske zajednice nije birao riječi”, Jutarnji.hr, 31 July 2019, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/pljuste-gnjevne-reakcije-na-kontroverznu-izjavu-predsjednice-da-u-bih-dominira-militantni-islam-poglavar-islamske-zajednice-nije-birao-rijeci/9187331/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

29. “Jadranka Kosor se zbog Kolinde ispričala BiH”, Index.hr, 31 July 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/jadranka-kosor-se-zbog-kolinde-ispričala-bih/2105256.aspx>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

30. Ibid.

31. “Predsjednica odbacuje tvrdnje izraelskog medija, ‘Nisam to rekla, mimo presica u Izraelu nisam davala intervju i nisam davala izjave novinarima”, Jutarnji.hr, 31 July 2019, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/predsjednica-odbacuje-tvrdnje-izraelskog-medija-nisam-to-rekla-mimo-presica-u-izraelu-nisam-davala-intervjue-i-nisam-davala-izjave-novinarima/9187472/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

32. Greer Fay Cashman, “Holocaust Main Subject of Conversation between Rivlin and Croatian President”, The Jerusalem Post, 31 July 2019, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Holocaust-main-subject-of-conversation-between-Rivlin-and-Croatian-President-597095>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

statement that caused turmoil.<sup>33</sup> The journalist who wrote the article apologized for the mistake.<sup>34</sup>

The Austrian newspaper *Der Standard* published an article stating that President Grabar-Kitarovic, for the purpose of her re-election campaign, was “running an anti-Muslim campaign” and “hustling on neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina.”<sup>35</sup>



**Figure 5:** Screenshot of article by Austrian newspaper *Der Standard* about Croatia's President Grabar-Kitarovic running an anti-Muslim campaign for the purpose of her re-election.<sup>36</sup>

Croatia's president commemorated the second anniversary of Praljak's death who was found guilty for war crimes in BiH by The Hague tribunal.<sup>37</sup> Praljak was a Bosnian Croat general who served in the Croatian Army and the Croatian Defence Council, an army of the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia, between 1992 and 1995. The convicted Bosnian Croat war criminal killed himself on live television by drinking poison in a courtroom in The Hague upon confirmation of his 20-year jail term for crimes committed during the Bosnian War.

33. "Jerusalem post korigirao sporni članak novinarka se preznojavala kad su je pitali o lažnoj Kolindinoj izjavi: 'Ma to nije velika priča', Jutarnji.hr, 31 July 2019, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/jerusalem-post-korigirao-spor-ni-clanak-novinarka-se-preznojavala-kad-su-je-pitali-o-laznoj-kolindinoj-izjavi-ma-to-nije-velika-prica/9188282/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

34. "Novinarka Jerusalem posta: 'o navodnim izjavama Kolinde Grabar-Kitarović o Bosni i Hercegovini'", Dnevnik.hr, 31 July 2019, <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/novinarka-jerusalem-posta-o-navodnim-izjavama-kolinde-grabar-kitarovic-o-bosni-i-hercegovini--570120.html>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

35. "Austrijski list: Kolinda vodi kampanju za reizbor huškanjem protiv BiH", Index.hr, 7 August 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/austrijski-list-kolinda-vodi-kampanju-za-reizbor-huskanjem-protiv-bih/2106926.aspx>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

36. Ibid.

37. "Kolinda odala počast osuđenom ratnom zločincu Praljku", Index.hr, 1 December 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/kolinda-odala-pocast-osudjenom-ratnom-zlocincu-praljku/2136754.aspx>, (Access date: 10 January 2020).



**Figure 6:** Screenshot of Croatian president's commemoration of the second anniversary of the death of Praljak, a convict of war crimes in BiH by The Hague tribunal.<sup>38</sup>

In August 2019, the senior Berlin-based Croatian diplomat Elizabeta Madjarevic was accused of damaging her country's reputation after writing inflammatory Facebook posts alongside idyllic images of the Adriatic coast. She posted the following comment: "Pure and authentic Europe. Just white Europeans as it used to be only 30 years ago in the whole Europe. This should be a good advertisement for vacations. One would think this is no longer possible but luckily it is."<sup>39</sup>

Initially she defended her post, arguing that she has a right to speak as a private individual. She also suggested her Facebook page had been hacked. However, Croatian news portal index.hr reported that in earlier Facebook posts she had written about the "Islamization agenda" of Muslims and espoused homophobic views. Madjarevic was also outspoken about German attempts to integrate migrants into society.<sup>40</sup>

38. Ibid.

39. Gordana Duhaček, "Skandalozni rasizam naše diplomatkinje u Berlinu: 'Hrvatska je zemlja bijelaca'", Index.hr, August 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/skandalozni-rasizam-nase-diplomatkinje-u-berlinu-hrvatska-je-zemlja-bijelaca/2108985.aspx>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

40. "Croatian Diplomat Suspended for 'White Europe' Comments", BBC, 20 August 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-49405099>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).



**Figure 7:** Screenshot of Facebook post by Berlin-based Croatian diplomat Elizabeta Madjarevic stating that “pure and authentic Europe” is inhabited solely by white Europeans.<sup>41</sup>

The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs considered the situation a serious breach of official duty and Madjarevic was suspended.<sup>42</sup>

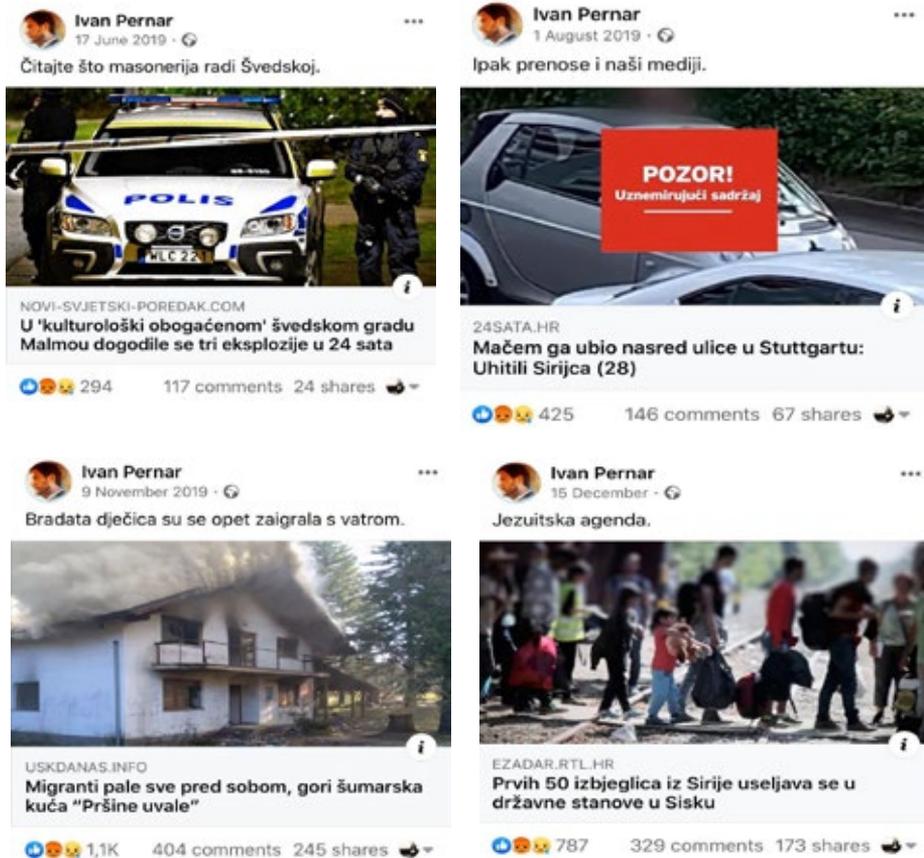
Islamophobic speech was part of presidential election campaigns in 2019 run by candidates such as Anto Djapic from the party Right. He accused Muslims in BIH of cooperating with Serbs in the Islamization of Croatian territory.<sup>43</sup>

41. Ibid.

42. Željka Godeč, “Elizabeta Madjarevic suspendirana i povucena iz veleposlanstva u Berlinu, inspekcija Ministarstva vanjskih poslova predložila da joj se da otkaz”, Jutarnji.hr, 19 August 2019, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/elizabeta-madarevic-suspendirana-i-povucena-iz-veleposlanstva-u-berlinu-inspekcija-ministarstva-vanjskih-poslova-predlozila-da-joj-se-da-otkaz/9253580/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

43. “Đapčić teško optužio muslimane u BIH! ‘Suradujete sa Srbima u islamizaciji hrvatskih prostora. Jasno je zašto u RS-u nema migranata’”, Dnevno.hr, 8 November 2019, <https://www.dnevno.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/dapic-tesko-optuzio-muslimane-u-bih-suradujete-sa-srbima-u-islamizaciji-hrvatskih-prostora-jasno-je-zasto-u-rs-u-nema-migranata-1390029/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

Croatia's Member of Parliament and presidential election candidate Ivan Pernar continued posting and sharing news about migrants that painted them as responsible for explosions, fires, knife attacks, etc.



**Figure 8:** Screenshots of Facebook post of Croatia's MP Ivan Pernar in which he presented migrants as responsible for explosions, fires, knife attacks, etc.<sup>44</sup>

The EU parliamentary election campaigns in 2019 featured negative political opinions about Islam in Europe such as Ladislav Ilčić's political platform which advocated for Europe as a dominantly Christian continent. He said that Christian values and culture produce freedom and equality for all people unlike those of Islam.<sup>45</sup>

When Croatia's and BiH's relations were disrupted, Muslims and Islam usually were mentioned in a negative way such as by the MEP Željana Zovko.<sup>46</sup>

44. Ivan Pernar, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/pernari/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

45. "Ladislav Ilčić na N1", N1, 17 April 2019, <http://hr.n1info.com/Vijesti/a395836/Ladislav-Ilcic-na-N1.html>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

46. Gordan Duhaček, "Tko je Željana Zovko, eurozastupnica koja slavi zločinačku Herceg-Bosnu?", Index.hr, 2 September 2019, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/tko-je-zeljana-zovko-eurozastupnica-koja-slavi-zlocinacku-hercegbosnu/2113045.aspx>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

## Media

Migrants are often portrayed in an unacceptable way and some media continue to market content filled with hate speech and other forms of unacceptable speech. On occasion, media outlets published articles that unnecessarily emphasized the nationality or religion of the perpetrators of illegal acts despite the fact that omitting this information would not affect the quality of the reporting.

Examples of such abuse occurred during a broadcast on six regional televisions when the host said that migrants are savages who come from the east to rape, and during a broadcast in which the alleged victim of a robbery stated that migrants should be beaten to a pulp, while guests in the studio talked about migrants as a sick group of people infected with serious and transmissible diseases such as AIDS and hepatitis. The Electronic Media Council in Croatia found that the broadcast violated the Electronic Media Act and temporarily revoked the concession. For three local television stations concessions were withdrawn for 24 hours, while the remaining stations had their rights revoked for 3 hours. Following this decision, the Electronic Media Council members received death threats, which they reported to the authorities.<sup>47</sup>

Ivica Sola, a Croatian theologian, professor, communicologist, and journalist for *Globus* (Hanza Media) wrote that the Pope's document on the reception of migrants is pure misuse of the Gospel for political purpose. He wrote that the Christ's teachings were not conceived as part of a political program which is characteristic of the Qur'an and Islam where there is no difference between religious and worldly in terms of "competence." He argued that migration policy is the responsibility of the secular state and religious institutions should not intervene.<sup>48</sup>

Sola also wrote columns in which he argued that Islam is masculine to the point of being brutal (as opposed to the feminized Europe), and that it takes advantage of the commonion to sneak up on the "woman" Europe.<sup>49</sup> In another column he claimed that we should call migration by its real name namely an invasion from the Islamic world.<sup>50</sup>

47. "Report of the Ombudsman for 2018", Office for Ombudsman of the Republic of Croatia, 25 April 2019, <https://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/download/izvjesce-pucke-pravobraniteljice-za-2018-godinu/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

48. Ivica Šola, "Za Globus piše Ivica Šola, više nije jasno vodi li Crkvu papa Franjo ili Soros", *Globus*, 21 January 2019, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/globus/Globus-komentari/za-globus-pise-ivica-sola-vise-nije-jasno-vodi-li-crkvu-papa-franjo-ili-soros/8295971/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

49. Ivica Šola, "Ivica Šola: Islam nasuprot feminiziranoj Europi, muževan do brutalnosti, koristi gužvu i uvlači se ženi Europi pod skute", *Narod.hr*, 9 May 2019, <https://narod.hr/eu/ivica-sola-islam-nasuprot-feminiziranoj-euro-pi-muzevan-do-brutalnosti-koristi-guzvu-i-uvlaci-se-zeni-euro-pi-pod-skute>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

50. "Ivica Šola: Nazovimo migracije pravim imenom – invazija islamskog svijeta", *Naron.hr*, 10 December 2019, <https://narod.hr/hrvatska/ivica-sola-nazovimo-migracije-pravim-imenom-invazija-islamskog-svijeta>, (Access date: 15 December 2019).

## Justice System

Most of the proceedings in 2018 and 2019 were conducted for criminal offenses based on discriminatory grounds of sexual orientation and language, followed by national origin, race and ethnicity, gender, religion, social status, and other characteristics.<sup>51</sup>

The Ombudsman acted on the basis of several events that highlighted problems in prosecuting hate crimes and the inadequate punishment of perpetrators. For example, traces of an unknown substance similar to lard were observed on Muslim obituaries on a streetlight in Zagreb. Although this indicated a hate crime, police officers didn't determine the circumstances, the identity of the person, or the motive behind the act after the criminal investigation had been carried out.<sup>52</sup>

In the case of a student recorded by his/her classmates while sharing discriminatory opinions, and expressing contempt and intolerance against Serbs and Muslims, the State Attorney's Office responded in a timely manner acting on reasonable suspicion that a crime against public order had been committed by inciting violence and hatred as referred to in Article 325 (1) of the Penal Code. The State Attorney's Office proposed the investigative detention of the alleged perpetrator because of the risk of influencing witnesses. The process is still ongoing.<sup>53</sup>

In general, hate speech towards Islam and migrants was present in online content including social networks. The Croatian government announced the Law on Preventing Inappropriate Behavior on Social Networks so as to apply the best solutions that will effectively counter this negative phenomenon while respecting the highest standards of protection and respect for the human rights of freedom of expression in accordance with the Croatian Constitution and international conventions.<sup>54</sup>

## Internet

Several Croatian news portals including [dnevno.hr](http://dnevno.hr)<sup>55</sup> shared a news story about the results of a research by the Pew Research Center that showed that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world and that due to the increased number of migrants in Europe, Islam will become the world's leading religion by 2070. Another story that circulated was that in 80 years according to figures by the United Nations, Islam will be

---

51. "Report of the Ombudsman for 2018", Office for Ombudsman of the Republic of Croatia.

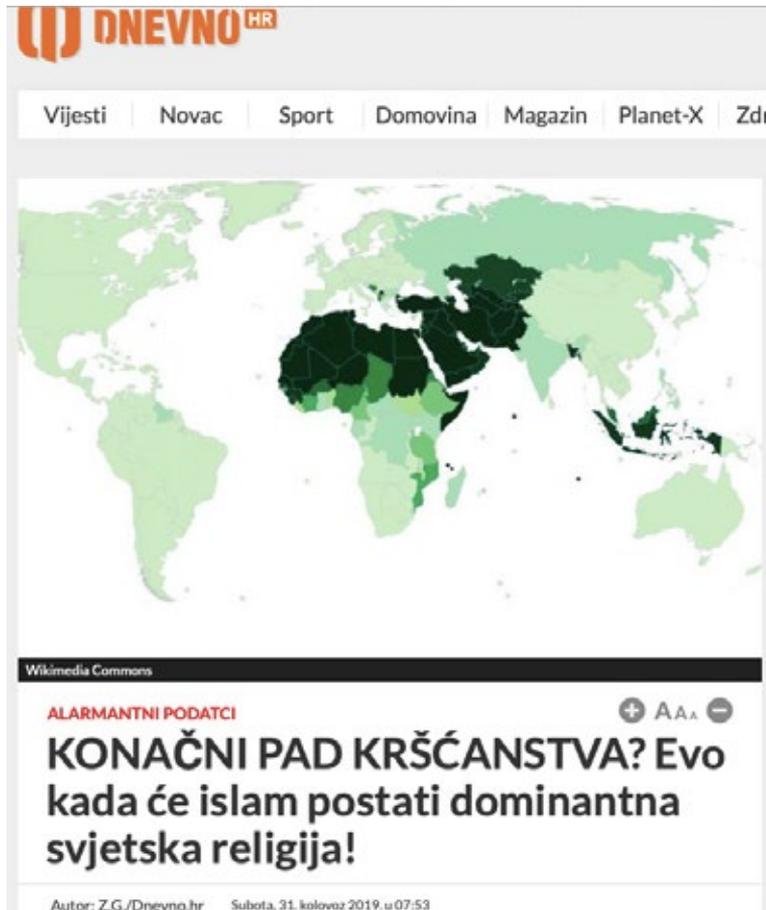
52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. "Panel Discussion Regulation of Hate Speech on Social Networks – Threats to Freedom of Expression", Kuća ljudskih prava, 13 November 2019, <https://www.kucaljudskihprava.hr/en/2019/11/12/panel-discussion-regulation-hate-speech-social-networks-threats-freedom-expression/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

55. "Konačni pad kršćanstva? Evo kada će islam postati dominantna svjetska religija!", Dnevno.hr, 31 August 2019, <https://www.dnevno.hr/vijesti/svijet/konacni-pad-krscanstva-evo-kada-ce-islam-postati-dominantna-svjetska-religija-1357591/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

the most popular religion in the world. This story was reported by poskok.hr<sup>56</sup> that shared news from the website of the *Atlantic*.<sup>57</sup> The Croatian portals mentioned above presented this information as alarming facts that Croats should be worried about. Following these publications, dnevno.hr published stories about weaknesses in Islam and how St. Francis defeated the God of Islam.<sup>58</sup>



**Figure 9:** Screenshot of Croatian news portal dnevno.hr that tagged research results of Islam becoming the dominant world religion as alarmist data.<sup>59</sup>

56. "Svijet za 80 godina: Islam najpopularnija religija, staraca više nego ikad", Poskok.hr, 8 August 2019, <https://poskok.info/svijet-za-80-godina-islam-najpopularnija-religija-staraca-vise-nego-ikad/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

57. Joe Pinsker, "What Happens When the World's Population Stops Growing?", *The Atlantic*, 31 July 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2019/07/world-population-stop-growing/595165/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

58. "Ovo se skriva, čak i Crkvi: evo kako je sveti Franjo pobijedio Boga islama", Dnevno.hr, 4 October 2019, <https://www.dnevno.hr/vjera/svjedocanstva/ovo-se-skriva-cak-i-crkvi-evo-kako-je-sveti-franjo-pobijedio-boga-islama-1373657/>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

59. Ibid.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Central figures that portrayed Islam in a negative context, spreading hatred towards this religion, can be divided into three groups based on their functions and area of work. The first group consists of politicians such as the president of the Republic of Croatia and 2019 presidential candidate Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, Croatian Parliament member and 2019 presidential candidate Ivan Pernar, 2019 presidential candidate Anto Djapic, and member of the European Parliament Zeljana Zovko. The second group consists of diplomats such as the senior Berlin-based Croatian diplomat Elizabeta Madjarevic. The third group consists of journalists and academics like Ivica Šola who wrote for different media outlets like *Globus* and *Jutarnjih.hr* (Hanza Media).

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

In 2019, many steps in social development were taken by different actors in Croatia in order to prevent and condemn discrimination.

The Islamic Community in Croatia and the World Muslim Communities Council organized a conference that gathered 25 European countries in Zagreb where the Croatian model of integration of Muslims was presented as a model that can be used in countries around the world.<sup>60</sup> The Minister of Justice Drazen Bosnjakovic was present during this event. Usually, every event organized by the Islamic Community in Croatia is attended by representatives the state and government. The Islamic Community in cooperation with other religious communities, especially the Croatian Episcopal Conference, organized a number of encounters and events such as *The Spirit of Assisi*,<sup>61</sup> etc.

The Center for Cultural Dialogue organized the Balkan Youth School, an educational program for youth on the challenges of Islam in the contemporary world. It also marked World Hijab Day<sup>62</sup> with the panel where the culture of women's dressing and covering in this region was presented.

The Human Rights House Zagreb in partnership with the Center for Peace Studies organized the panel discussion "Regulation of Hate Speech on Social Networks – Threats to Freedom of Expression." The panel discussion galvanized a public debate in the wake of the Croatian government's plan to enact a Law on Preventing

---

60. "Islamska zajednica u Hrvatskoj model u rješavanju muslimanskog pitanja u Europi", *Večernji.hr*, 15 January 2019, <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/islamska-zajednica-u-hrvatskoj-model-u-rjesavanju-muslimanskog-pitanja-u-europi-1294672>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

61. "Duh Asiza' kao prilika za kršćane, muslimane i židove", *Vecernji.hr*, 30 October 2019, <https://www.vecernji.hr/premium/duh-asiza-kao-prilika-za-krscane-muslimane-i-zidove-1355783>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

62. "U Zagrebu obilježen Svjetski dan hidžaba", *Islamska zajednica u Hrvatskoj*, 4 February 2019, <https://www.islamska-zajednica.hr/izdvojeno/u-zagrebu-obiljezen-svjetski-dan-hidzaba>, (Access date: 10 December 2019).

Inappropriate Behavior on Social Networks, a new legislation designed to combat, *inter alia* hate speech online, fake news, and cyberbullying.

The Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities and NGOs also organized activities and events designed to raise awareness and protect minorities' human rights and the principles of non-discrimination.

Croatian national television HRT produced a documentary film about the integration of migrants in Croatian society entitled "New Neighbors" which was intended to fight stereotypes about those who come from a different culture, have a different skin color, religion, etc. The film is the result of the joint collaboration with eight national televisions from eight European countries that also produced films on the same topic in their countries. HRT will show all nine films in its 2020 program.

HRT also broadcast a live stream of prayers on Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha in 2019 from the cities of Zagreb and Rijeka.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The Islamophobic incidents mentioned in the report do not have wider public support, a significant number of followers, or even a driving potential. They can be treated as individual outbursts and actions by single individuals. In general, we can still note the peaceful coexistence between Muslims and other religious groups in Croatia.

Government efforts showcased the desire to put sound policies in place for social cohesion and acceptance. Religious institutions have displayed their choice to live together and understand one another.

On the other hand, there were politicians who used anti-Islam and anti-Muslim rhetoric to incite Islamophobia and win political points that would give them power. Behaviors and attitudes of politicians are merely the results of political populism.

Recommendations follow:

- At a time when hate speech and occurrences of extremism in Europe are on the rise, the joint work and efforts of all actors in implementing prevention programs and using dialogue to reverse the tide, to heal, to support human rights, and religious freedoms are more important than ever.
- Prevention as part of a system for protecting against discrimination should gain more importance (informing citizens about how to protect themselves, educating people who face discrimination cases through their work so that they don't deny someone their right to equal treatment while making decisions).
- Croatian authorities should raise awareness among media professionals and their organizations about the danger of racism and intolerance.
- All media should act objectively and allow the public to form their own opinions based on facts provided by journalists rather than present the public with

personal conclusions made by authors, derogatory epithets, and unacceptable statements. Media should strive to offer information that can create unbiased perceptions. It is the responsibility of all segments of society, including the media, politicians and other public figures to convey messages in a non-discriminatory and non-hateful way, even though they might resonate with a smaller number of people.

## Chronology

- **16.03.2019:** BIH journalists and Bosnia's Security Minister Dragan Mektic accused Croatia's Security Intelligence Agency (SOA) of smuggling weapons into places connected with the Salafi Islamist movement in Bosnia.
- **17.04.2019:** EU Parliament candidate Ladislav Ilcic stated that Christian values and culture produce freedom and equality for all people unlike those of Islam.
- **25.04.2019:** Following a group of seven Muslim tourists praying in a parking lot in the Croatian city of Split, City Council member of Split Martin Pauk stated that they had announced their invasion in European territory and compared their prayer to dogs urinating to mark their territory.
- **30.07.2019:** The media published a statement by President of Republic of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic that BIH is a very unstable country and under the control of militant Islam, and that in some aspects it has been taken over by people associated with Iran and terrorists.
- **31.07.2019:** The president of the Republic of Croatia denied having said what was published in the *Jerusalem Post*.
- **08.08.2019:** The senior Berlin-based Croatian diplomat Elizabeta Madjarovic stated that pure and authentic Europe means a Europe inhabited only by white Europeans.
- **19.08.2019:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Croatia suspended Croatian diplomat Elizabeta Madjarevic.
- **08.11.2019:** Presidential candidate Anto Djapic from the political party Right accused Muslims in BIH of cooperating with Serbs in the Islamization of Croatian territory.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**CZECH  
REPUBLIC**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

SELMA MUHIČ DIZDAREVIČ



## The Author

**Selma Muhič Dizdarevič** is a sociologist with a degree in political philosophy. She works as a teacher and researcher in the fields of public and social policy, immigration and integration, civil society, and gender and human rights at Charles University, Faculty of Humanities, Prague and is a board member of the Czech Helsinki Committee. Her projects include areas such as the political participation of refugees and asylum seekers; the role of non-governmental organizations in the integration of minorities in the Czech Republic; and the inclusion of Muslim women into the Czech job market. She was a Fulbright visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley. Email: selmamuhdiz@gmail.com

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Selma Muhič Dizdarevič: *Islamophobia in the Czech Republic: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

In 2019 we see the continuing trend of mainstreaming and normalising Islamophobia in the public discourse, particularly among politicians and in social media. However, we may say that it takes a new form of total rejection of admitting any refugees in the Czech Republic. Rejecting Muslims and rejecting refugees merged into one complex of hate speech and hostile proclamations by politicians, journalists, artists, public personalities, and social media users. We are in the situation in which the president of the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy party, which is in parliament, advocates for banning Islam and thus limiting the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of denomination. There is an increasing trend of dealing with hate speech by the state using legal means, perhaps due to the radicalisation of a Czech pensioner who was sentenced for committing a terrorist act inspired by hate towards Muslims. Even though the number and visibility of Muslims and Muslim community organizations remain low, there is general fear and distrust directed at them. This makes the community extremely cautious and limits its capacity to advocate for itself and control the narrative. In most Czech media, every misstep on the part of the community is used against it and against Islam as a religion. The affair with an attempt by citizens, their initiatives, and some politicians to admit 50 orphan children from Greek camps and later the Greek call for admitting unaccompanied minors with health problems show how deep the lack of compassion is for those perceived by the majority as undesirable. Even though there were some 200 families who volunteered to host the children, the politicians from the ruling party ANO and their coalition partner, the Social Democrats, obstructed the process successfully. Due to this type of hostility and radical rejection, the whole society becomes vulnerable to fake news and false alarms spread about Muslims in most media.

## Shrnutí

V roce 2019 pokračoval trend normalizace islamofobie, která se zároveň stal součástí hlavního proudu ve veřejném diskurzu, zejména mezi politiky a na sociálních sítích. Musíme však zdůraznit, že má novou tvář, která je patrná v naprostém odmítání přijímání uprchlíků Českou republikou. Odmítání muslimů a odmítání uprchlíků splynulo do jakéhosi komplexu hovoru z nenávisti a nepřátelských proklamací politiků, novinářů, umělců, veřejných osobností a uživatelů sociálních sítí. Jsme v situaci, kdy předseda parlamentní strany Svobody a přímé demokracie volá po zákazu islámu a tím i po omezování ústavně zaručené svobody vyznání. Posiluje tendence státu trestat hovor z nenávisti právními prostředky, možná i v důsledku radikalizace, kterou prošel česky důchodce a který byl odsouzen za teroristický čin inspirovaný nenávisti vůči muslimům. Přestože počet a viditelnost muslimů a muslimské komunity zůstávají nízké, panují všeobecně vůči obojímu strach a nedůvěra. Z toho důvodu je muslimská komunita extrémně opatrná a limitovaná ve svém potenciálu se svých členů a členek zastávat a kontrolovat škodlivý diskurz, který v souvislosti s muslimy dominuje v české společnosti. Většina médií v České republice i sebemenší prohrěšek komunity využívá jako nástroj proti této komunitě a proti islámu jako náboženství. Na popud občanů, občanských iniciativ a některých politiků a političek, vznikla iniciativa tykající se přijetí 50 sirotek z řeckých táborů a pozdější řecké výzvy k přijetí nezletilých bez doprovodu se zdravotními problémy. Přestože se přihlásilo kolem 200 rodin ochotných sirotky ubytovat a postarat se o ně, politici z vládnoucí strany ANO a jejich koaliční partner Sociální demokracie blokovali veškeré kroky k uskutečnění iniciativy, která tím pádem skončila. Tato aféra poukazuje na hluboký nedostatek soucitu s těmi, které majorita považuje za nežádoucí. Díky takovému radikálnímu odmítání je celá společnost více zranitelná pokud jde o falešné a poplašné zprávy, které najdeme v souvislosti s muslimskou komunitou ve většině médií.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Czech Republic

**Type of Regime:** Parliamentary representative democracy

**Form of Government:** Unitary parliamentary constitutional republic

**Ruling Parties:** ANO 2011 (centrist, populist) and Czech Social Democratic Party (centre-left, populist)

**Opposition Parties:** Civic Democratic Party, (centre-right); Czech Pirate Party; Freedom and Direct Democracy (far-right); Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (far-left); Czech Social Democratic Party (centre-left); Christian Democratic Union, (centre-right); TOP 09 (centre-right); Mayors and Independents (local issues party)

**Last Elections:** 2018 Presidential election (Miloš Zeman won 51.37% of the vote in the second round); 2017 Legislative election (ANO 2011, 78 seats; Civic Democratic Party, 25; Czech Pirate Party, 22; Freedom and Direct Democracy, 22; Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, 15; Czech Social Democratic Party, 15; Christian Democratic Union, 10; TOP 09, 7; Mayors and Independents, 6)

**Total Population:** 10.65 million

**Major Languages:** Czech

**Official Religion:** No official religion

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** For the year 2019 there are no statistics about victims of hate crimes in general or victims of Islamophobia as of yet. According to the Ministry of Interior's data there were 90 hate-motivated crimes in the first half of 2019. In 2018, this number was 179.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** According to the statistics of the Ombudswoman's office, for the period 1 January -30 September 2019, there were 186 cases of alleged discrimination of all inhabitants on a variety of grounds. In 2018, this number was 227.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** According to the 2011 census: no religion (34.5%), Catholics (10.5%), Protestants (1%), believers with no affiliation to religious institutions (6.8%), undeclared, no answer (44.7%).

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** According to the 2011 census 3,358 individuals (0.03%); according to estimates 22,000 (0.2%).

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Centre of Muslim Communities, General Union of Muslim Students in the Czech Republic, Muslim Union

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** *In Iustitia* (collecting data on hate crimes), OPU (Organization for Aid to Refugees), Czechs Help, We Help People on the Run, ROMEA, Multicultural Centre

**Far-Right Parties:** Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)

**Far-Right Movements:** We Do Not Want Islam in the Czech Republic, 7. Republika, National Resistance

**Far-Right Terrorist Organisations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** Limitations at schools and work-regulated by dress codes of the given institutions
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None (depends on local decision)
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** No specific regulations; however, there are no burqa-clad individuals in the country
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

In addition to the normalisation and mainstreaming of Islamophobia in the Czech Republic, we can say that in the year 2019 there have been no radical changes. The most important fact for anti-Muslim discourse is its close relatedness to the issue of refugees and particularly to the relocation quotas problem, also documented in the previous report. The Czech Republic remains adamant about not accepting any refugees either in the framework of relocation quotas or on its own. Refugees are perceived almost exclusively as Muslims but also as “non-compatible” citizens coming from sub-Saharan Africa or predominantly Asian Muslim countries. In the Czech Republic, we can see the mixing of Islamophobia and racism (directed mostly at non-white people). In the public discourse, mentioning refugees usually leads to discussing Muslims and Islam in a negative way. The extreme form this approach has reached can be understood from the ongoing affair about admitting orphans or unaccompanied minors who are already in the EU, namely in Greek refugee camps, to the Czech Republic. Civil society backed by a politician from the Christian Democrat Party developed an initiative to admit a few tens of such children. Over 200 families volunteered to accept them. However, they were constantly sabotaged by the prime minister and other politicians until in 2020, the minister of interior said no children would be admitted. In the opinion of this author, this shows how deeply Islamophobia has penetrated Czech society: even children or young adults deserve no compassion or trust but are instead left on their own in terrible conditions in overcrowded refugee camps in Greece. On the other hand, significantly, the 200 or so families who volunteered to accept refugee children and youth show there is resistance to general intolerance and distrust.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

While incidents of physical nature are fortunately relatively rare, incidents of verbal attacks offline and particularly online are very common. There is no systematic collection of such incidents by the police or the non-governmental (NGO) sector. The Czech Ministry of Interior publishes reports entitled “Incidents of Extremism and Prejudice-Based Hatred”,<sup>1</sup> which on the level of incidents cover only those that reach legal threshold. For the period covered in this report, the latest info is for the second quarter of 2019.

Some of the incidents and legal proceedings are of interest to this report. An MP for the rabidly Islamophobic party frequently mentioned in the previous report

---

1. “Projevy extremismu a předsudečné nenávisti, Souhrnná situační zpráva 2. čtvrtletí roku 2019”, Ministerstvo vnitra, <https://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/ctvrteletni-zpravy-o-extremismu-odboru-bezpecnostni-politiky-mv.aspx>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

(Freedom and Direct Democracy, SDP), Karla Maříková, compared Muslims to invasive species of plants and animals whose import to the EU is forbidden. She did this on her Facebook page in January 2019.<sup>2</sup> In the report, the Ministry of Interior states that the police started gathering information on possible violation of the Czech law, which forbids incitement of hate against a group of people.<sup>3</sup>

In June 2019, an unsuccessful asylum seeker believed to be of Libyan origin from Germany is alleged to have raped and robbed a Czech woman. He was apprehended and is currently being investigated. This incident provoked numerous and extreme verbal attacks on Muslims, refugees, migrants, and undocumented migrants. As stated in the previous reports, in the Czech Republic, most of the commentators are not anonymous, they comment online under their own names. Perhaps aware that they will not be condemned or seriously punished, they openly compared, in reaction to the rape incident, Muslims to monkeys and pigs. One of the commentators suggested that the Libyan man should be “immediately shot, then sewn into pig skin, put in the coffin made of zinc, and sent to his country of origin with a message that you all will end up like this if you break the law in such an appalling manner”.<sup>4</sup> According to the said report, the Prague police is investigating some of the comments.

## Employment

As stated in previous reports on Islamophobia in the Czech Republic, there is no data on employment of Muslims particularly. They are a tiny minority, diverse in their countries of origin, and status in the Czech Republic. They are also frequently employed within their own ethnic group.

## Education

In the sensationalistic and biased magazine *Reflex*, we find an article under the title “Muslims Are Conquering Czech Judiciary; Their Women in Hijab Will Sit in Our Schools”. The article in a very caustic manner reacts to the Supreme Court verdict in the case of the Somali student Ayan Jamaal Ahmednuur. Six years ago, she alleged discrimination on the part of the High School for Nurses in Prague 10 because she was unable to wear a hijab during the theoretical part of the lectures (she agreed to remove the hijab during the practical part). The lower courts sided with the school but the Supreme Court stated that wearing a hijab is her personal choice, which does not endanger anyone and that not wearing a hijab might have a negative impact on the student who can then be in a worse position than other students. The verdict also

2. ČTK, “Policie vyšetřuje poslankyni SPD Maříkovou Na facebooku přirovnala migranty k invazivním druhům”, iRozhlas, 16 August 2019, [https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/spd-karla-marikova-policie-vysetrovani-migrace-uprchlici-evropska-unie\\_1908162152\\_gak](https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/spd-karla-marikova-policie-vysetrovani-migrace-uprchlici-evropska-unie_1908162152_gak), (Access date: 1 February 2020).

3. “Projevy extremismu a předsudečné nenávisti, Souhrnná situační zpráva 2. čtvrtletí roku 2019”.

4. Ire vlc, “Zastřelit, reagují lidé k násilníkovi z ciziny. Komentáře prošetří policie”, iDnes, 19 July 2019, [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/okamura-prispevek-facebook-znasilneni-v-terezine-nenavistne-komentare-nasilni-na-zenach.A190619\\_094654\\_domaci\\_ire](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/okamura-prispevek-facebook-znasilneni-v-terezine-nenavistne-komentare-nasilni-na-zenach.A190619_094654_domaci_ire), (Access date: 1 February 2020).

mentions that schools should teach tolerance and diversity. The verdict means that the lower courts will have to carry out a retrial.

The article, though, first repeats fake news that the student was excluded from the school for not having proper documents, while the student left because of the hijab dispute. It then goes on to mention the negative role of the Ombudswoman (who gave support to the student) and “professional NGOs”,<sup>5</sup> claims that Muslims ask for exceptions from religious neutrality in the Czech educational system, and ends with asking for a Saudi Arab or Qatari Supreme Court verdict in the matter of protection of Christian children in their high schools.

## Politics

In high politics not much changed from 2018. The mainstreaming of Islamophobia continues and it is now well-established in the political discourse. In 2019, Islamophobia transformed into a particularly hostile attitude toward refugees. One big ongoing affair is the issue of the relocation of orphans and unaccompanied minors from refugee camps in Greece. Already in 2018, Prime Minister Babiš said that the Czech Republic would not admit any migrants at all, including orphans. He added that the Czech have their own orphans and asked why they should accept Syrian ones.<sup>6</sup> The prime minister is from the populist centre-right party ANO. His opponent was an MP for Christian Democrats, Michaela Šojdrová, who, together with the voluntary citizens’ movement Czechs Help, led the initiative to admit 50 Syrian refugees who were already in Greece. The prime minister’s argument was that Czechs didn’t admit Ukrainian refugees either and that the Czech Republic helps by having already invested 2.5 billion CZK in the hospital in Syria, which also serves Syrian children.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Minister of Interior Jan Hamáček, who initially claimed that the Czech Republic has more than enough capacity to admit 50 orphans, changed his tune and closed the whole affair by saying that “there is no point in admitting 17-year-olds without right to asylum”.<sup>8</sup>

In the meantime, *Hlidáci pes*, the investigative independent media outlet, found out that Greek Minister of Citizen Protection Michalis Chrysochoidis sent a letter to all EU ministers in August asking them to help by admitting unaccompanied minors who are in Greek camps and who are sick. *Hlidáci pes* found out that the

---

5. Marek Stoniš, “Muslimové si podmaňují českou justici; v našich školách mají sedět jejich ženy v hidžábech”, Reflex, 6 December 2019, <https://www.reflex.cz/clanek/komentare/98803/muslimove-si-podmanuji-ceskou-justici-v-nasich-skolach-maji-sedet-jejich-zeny-v-hidzabech.html>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

6. Ire, ČTK, “Česko nepřijme ani nezletilé syrské sirotky, řekl Babiš. Hamáček oponuje”, iDnes, 15 September 2018, [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/andrej-babis-rozhovor-uprchlici-nechce-syrske-sirotky-v-ceske-republice.A180915\\_132056\\_domaci\\_ire](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/andrej-babis-rozhovor-uprchlici-nechce-syrske-sirotky-v-ceske-republice.A180915_132056_domaci_ire), (Access date: 1 February 2020).

7. Ibid.

8. Redakce Euro.cz, ČTK, “Hamáček: Sirotky z uprchlických táborů nepřijmeme. Nemá to smysl”, Euro.cz, 7 November 2019, <https://www.euro.cz/politika/hamacek-sirotky-z-uprchlickych-taboru-neprijmeme-nema-to-smysl-1472939>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

Czech minister ignored the letter. Prompted by the publicity of the article, Hamáček asked his Greek counterpart for a list of 40 eligible minors. However, it wasn't clear if he was referring to his previous letter, in which he demanded for a list only with Syrian nationals and only up to 10 years of age. Chrysochoidis replied that no such list could be issued. Hamáček concluded for the Czech public that those who would be relocated would be almost adult males, the group which in his view presents a security threat.<sup>9</sup>

## Media

Most media in the Czech Republic are to be found online, thus, it is difficult to separate this category from the one listed as "Internet". We will, therefore, focus here on media, and for the section on Internet, on social media.

The media range from reasonably credible (such as Aktuálně.cz, DeníkN.cz - a paid news channel -, Hlídacípes.org, Investigace.cz, Neolivní.cz, revuebabylon.cz, Romea.cz, A2larm.cz, and Denikreferendum.cz) through to mainstream media (e.g. Czech TV and radio), sensationalistic plus politically biased (Seznam, Seznam TV, Echo, Info, Forum 24, Lidové noviny, iDNES, Novinky) to downright inflammatory (We Don't Want Islam in the Czech Republic, Aeronet, Eurabia, Parlametní listy, Pravdive.eu).

A media outlet of particular interest to the issue of Islamophobia is an online outlet called Center for Study of Political Islam (CSPI),<sup>10</sup> which in addition to English and Czech has mutations in Hungarian, Slovak, Dutch, Lithuanian, German, Danish, Polish, and Romanian. It is founded by one Bill Warner, who is listed by the Southern Poverty Law Center as part of a core group of "10 Anti-Muslim hard-liners".<sup>11</sup>

We will focus here on the Czech version of the CSPI. In the introduction, it defines its character as "a nonprofit, apolitical and nonreligious international educational movement" with a mission to focus on political Islam, e.g. "the part of Islam dealing with kafirs." It also claims that 51% of the core Islamic doctrine deals with *kafirs*.<sup>12</sup> One of the examples of the CSPI educational approach can be found in the blog entry from 28 September 2019 called "Migration and International Treats as Instrument of Jihad for Spreading of Islam".<sup>13</sup> This organization poses

9. Tereza Engelová, "Hamáček odepsal do Atén kvůli dětským uprchlíkům. Sám prý už rok čeká na odpověď z Řecka", Hlídací pes, 14 November 2019, <https://hlidacipes.org/hamacek-odepsal-do-aten-kvuli-detskym-uprchlikum-sam-pry-uz-rok-ceka-na-odpoved-z-recka/?hilitte=%27ham%C3%A1%C4%8Dek%27>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

10. For further information see their website at <https://www.cspii.org/cz>

11. "Bill Warner (writer)", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill\\_Warner\\_\(writer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Warner_(writer)), (Access date: 11 March 2020).

12. "Introduction page", CSPI, <https://www.cspii.org/cz>, (Access date: 11 March 2020).

13. "Migrace a mezinárodní smlouvy jako nástroje džihádu k šíření islámu", CSPI, <https://www.cspii.org/cz/blog/migrace-a-mezinarodni-smlouvy-jako-nastroje-dzihadu-k-sireni-islam>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

as one which provides rational and objective information on Islamic teaching but actually claims that, according to its books, Islam is necessarily violent and expansive and can be stopped by violence only. One of the main figures in the CSPI leadership mentioned only in the English version is the Czech Milan Podlipný, who frequently blogs on the platform of the above mentioned *Parlamentní listy*.<sup>14</sup> By focusing on the term “political Islam”, Bill Warner contributed to Islamophobia by seemingly separating teaching on *kafirs* from teaching of Islam in general, and falsely claiming that political Islam does not target Muslims and practicing of their faith.

In a somewhat bizarre feud between internationally infamous fake news outlet Sputnik and the leading Czech Islamophobe and businessman Tomio Okamura, we read about Okamura being attacked for selling halal meat through his online shop. Sputnik in the Czech version rightly calls Okamura out for blatant hypocrisy, which, however, did not impress his followers much. Even though Okamura invited his followers to fight against halal food and boycott kebab, he himself was making a profit from selling halal-certified food. Sputnik attacked him for hypocrisy but not for the battle against halal food in the context of fighting Muslims.<sup>15</sup>

## Justice System

According to ROMEA reporting, “The acquittal of the former chair of the Muslim Community of Prague, Vladimír Sáňka, with respect to the case involving his distribution of a Czech translation of *The Fundamentals of TAWHEED (Islamic Monotheism)* has now been made definitive. According to InfoSoud, a database of judicial rulings, the Czech Supreme Court has rejected an appeal by Supreme State Prosecutor Pavel Zeman against the acquittal.”<sup>16</sup>

News server iDNES.cz reports that prosecutors have indicted a man and woman who detectives say made threats against a Muslim couple in Šanov Park in Teplice, Czech Republic in the summer of 2018. The incident happened during an event organised by the Teplice branch of the „Bloc against Islamisation“ group. Those attending the event saw a Muslim woman with a baby carriage walking past them and called her vulgar names, after which her husband attempted to discuss their behavior with them. „The 40-year-old man who had verbally assaulted the woman is said to have pulled out a gas pistol, cocked it, and aimed it at the injured party’s husband,“ Teplice Police spokesperson Daniel Vítek

14. For example: “Milan Podlipný: Násilí je neoddelitelnou součástí politické doktríny islámuhttps”, *ParlamentníListy.cz*, 12 June 2017, <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/nazory-a-petice/Milan-Podlipny-Nasili-je-neoddelitelnou-soucasti-politicke-doktriny-islam-491817>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

15. “Jak to, že není ve střetu zájmů? Na Facebooku vidíme, jak Okamura prodává ve svém obchodě halal potraviny pro muslimy”, Sputnik, 23 July 2019, <https://sptnkne.ws/7XY5>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

16. ČTK, “Czech Courts Definitively Acquit Publisher of Salafist Book of Promoting a Movement against Human Rights”, ROMEA, 18 February 2019, <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-courts-definitively-acquit-publisher-of-salafist-book-of-promoting-a-movement-against-human-rights>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

said. „According to eyewitness testimony, the man then threatened to kill the Muslim woman’s husband because of his religious faith,” the spokesperson said. The suspect’s 44-year-old wife has also been indicted for verbally assaulting and threatening the Muslim couple.<sup>17</sup> Later in 2019, the couple received a suspended sentence and was fined.<sup>18</sup>

## Internet

The hotbed of Islamophobia in the Czech Republic is online. It is currently normalised to come upon casual and extreme forms of it. Particularly popular are social media, namely Facebook and Twitter, and YouTube. Overall Islamophobic material can be classified as: (a) insults, humiliation, hostility, calls for violence; (b) fake news, false alarms; (c) manipulation of facts and events in order to stress the negative nature of Muslims and connect it to their faith.

There has been a fusion in public life between Islamophobia and refugee issues. Refugees are often seen as exclusively Muslims. Furthermore, we often come across racism regarding black people from sub-Saharan Africa, even when they are not Muslims. Top and local politicians, and mainstream public opinion and citizens commenting online are united in the rejection of refugees - all refugees, under any conditions. This anti-refugee attitude comes with the rejection of the EU and, in some circles, the glorification of Russia. A particularly strong feature of Islamophobia on the Internet is the generally present view that Western societies are ruined by migration and by yielding to Muslims and their habits (food, dress code, polygamy, etc.). Among the claims about Western European countries is that Muslims are parasites, invited to the West by corrupt or naïve politicians. This fits perfectly into the famous white supremacist conspiracy theory of the Great Replacement. In some circles, Jews are accused of importing Muslims to ruin white people.<sup>19</sup>

An example of spreading fake news and false alarm can be illustrated by Tomio Okamura’s social media post (on Facebook) in which he was “warning of increasing numbers of acid attacks in Great Britain” and alleging incorrectly that they are being committed by “Muslim immigrants” against women. Okamura used a drastic photograph of a woman who was indeed victimized by an acid attack in 1991, by a native Brit, Kelvin Greenhalgs. The *Daily Mirror* reported last year that Greenhalgs

17. “Czech Court to Try Islamophobes Who Attacked Muslim Couple in a Park Last Year”, ROMEA, 10 July 2019, <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-court-to-try-islamophobes-who-attacked-muslim-couple-in-a-park-last-year>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

18. “Za výhrůžky Arabům padly podmíněné i peněžité tresty”, ROMEA, 7 October 2019, <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/domaci/za-vyhruzky-arabum-padly-podminene-i-penezite-tresty>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

19. “Euroafrika: Globalizace nejen kultur, ale i hmyzu, rostlin a podnebí? Kdo ovládá a řídí migraci černochů a Arabů do Evropy?...” AENEWS, 30 June 2018, <https://aeronet.cz/news/euroafrika-globalizace-nejen-kultur-ale-i-hmyzu-rostlin-a-podnebi-kdo-ovlada-a-ridi-migraci-cernochu-a-arabu-do-evropy-kdo-ridi-na-6-prioritach-cely-system-globalizace-uz-to-vime-komu-vyhovuje/>, (Access date: 26 February 2020).

had disappeared after failing to turn up for a court date and republished photographs of his victim online, which Okamura used.<sup>20</sup>

The Notre Dame disaster was another source for hoaxes. According to *Hlidací pes*, a video of a smiling group of men was combined with the photo of the burning cathedral. It was alleged on the Facebook page of the association *Pro-Vlast* (For-Fatherland) that this combination means Muslims are celebrating the destruction of the Christian place of worship. In addition, a person who self-identified as Miroslav Provod sent all Czech media an email “full of proof” that the fire was organized by women from so-called ISIS. To crown it all, a hoax spread that a car full of gas bombs was parked in front of the cathedral and that a Muslim girl, disappointed from love, committed the attack.<sup>21</sup>

The Christchurch mosque terrorist attack was significant for the flood of comments on social media which approved of killing worshipers. Many of the commentators claimed it was a justified revenge for the terrorist attacks committed by Muslims in the West. Jiří Kalvoda from Brno - I would like to reiterate that people comment under their real names - commented as a reaction to the attack on the webpage of media outlet novinky.cz: “No Muslims, no mosques, no problem”. Petr Matys Vraný commented on the Facebook page of Tomio Okamura (SPD): “I do not condemn this!!! At least he showed them we are not afraid of these cripples!!!!”<sup>22</sup>

President of the Czech Republic Miloš Zeman sent his condolences to Governor-General of New Zealand Patricia Reddy, in which he confirmed that the Czech Republic strongly condemns the terrorist attack. The prime minister, minister of foreign affairs, minister of interior, and chairs of some parties also condemned the attack.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

One of the central figures in Islamophobic propaganda is half-Czech half-Japanese leader of the parliamentary party Freedom and Direct Democracy Tomio Okamura and his party members. Regarding his party, even the report of the Ministry of Interior on extremism states: “Xenophobic attitudes of the part of the Czech society were skilfully inspired, particularly through social networks, by the party of SDP. The

20. “Czech Ultra-Nationalist Falsely Attributes Acid Attack Committed by Native British Man to “Muslim Immigrants”, ROMEA, 3 February 2019, <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-ultra-nationalist-falsely-attributes-acid-attack-committed-by-native-british-man-to-muslim-immigrants>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

21. Tereza Engelová, “Zkázú Notre-Dame využívají i autoři hoaxů. Za požárem vidí smějící se muslimy i „černé vdovy”, *Hlidací pes*, 16 April 2019, <https://hlidacipes.org/zkazu-notre-dame-vyuzivaji-i-autori-hoaxu-za-pozarem-vidi-smejici-se-muslimy-i-cerne-vdovy/>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

22. “Desítky komentářů, ve kterých pisatelé schvalují neonacistický útok na Novém Zélandu. Policie prý už koná”, ROMEA, 16 March 2019, <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/domaci/desitky-komentaru-kde-pisatele-schvaluji-neonacisticky-utok-na-novem-zelandu.policie-pry-uz-kona>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

party (movement) continuously and intentionally provoked the impression that the majority in the Czech Republic is in acute danger of immigration and Islamisation, that it is necessary to start defending ourselves immediately, otherwise we will end up as ‘citizens of second category in our own country’. The SDP representatives took a very proactive stance in commenting on every single registered negative phenomenon both in the Czech Republic and abroad, which was related to migrants or Muslims.”<sup>23</sup> His party campaigns for a ban of Islam and hijabs, so far has been unsuccessful. As demonstrated throughout this report, Islamophobia runs across party affiliations. Thus Jaroslav Foldyna, from the Czech Social Democrats, is famous for his denial of the Srebrenica genocide.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to politicians and unmentioned in the previous report is an interesting case of a woman who founded an initiative called Angry Mothers. Eva Hrindová is dedicated to the cause of fighting against migration and Islamisation. For example, on her blog we find her article under the title “Women’s Security Is Endangered the Most by Migration and Political Correctness”,<sup>25</sup> in which she claims that the fact that rapes are related to migration is constantly suppressed. She is also a staunch anti-feminist particularly when it comes to feminists calling for tolerance and diversity.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

According to the European Council for Foreign Affairs survey conducted in 14 countries of the European Union, the respondents from the Czech Republic identified Islamic radicals and migration as the single biggest threat to Europe today.<sup>26</sup> In such an atmosphere, it is challenging to promote policies or even discourse to counter Islamophobia. That’s why such initiatives deserve special appreciation.

The non-formal movement “Czechs Help” led by Czech truck-driver Jaroslav Miko has already been mentioned. He relentlessly fights for the admission of Syrian orphans and for more tolerance in general. He is joined in this initiative by the aforementioned MP Šojdrová and Martin Rozumek, director of the NGO “Organization for Aid to Refugees”.

23. “Projevy extremismu a předsudečné nenávisti, Souhrnná situační zpráva 2. čtvrtletí roku 2019”.

24. Tomáš Krist, “Foldyna: Masakr v Srebrenici naplánovali sami muslimové”, Lidové noviny, 27 May 2011, [https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/foldyna-masakr-v-srebrenici-naplanovali-sami-muslimove.A110527\\_182544\\_in\\_domov\\_spa](https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/foldyna-masakr-v-srebrenici-naplanovali-sami-muslimove.A110527_182544_in_domov_spa), (Access date: 1 February 2020).

25. Eva Hrindová, “Bezpečnost žen nejvíce ohrožuje migrace a politická korektnost”, Evahrindova.cz, 4 January 2020, <https://www.evahrindova.cz/bezpecnost-zen-nejvice-ohrozuje-migrace-politicka-korektnost>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

26. Ivan Krastev, Mark Leonard and Susi Dennison, “What Europeans Really Want: Five Myths Debunked”, European Council on Foreign Relations, April 2019, [https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/what\\_europeans\\_really\\_want\\_five\\_myths\\_debunked#country-cz](https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/what_europeans_really_want_five_myths_debunked#country-cz), (Access date: 1 February 2020); “The poll reveals that Europeans fear Islamic radicalism (more) than any other threat.” See p. 9.

The Initiative Central Station, again, a purely voluntary non-formal association of citizens, provides migrants released from detention camps in the Czech Republic with food, lodging, mobile phones, and tickets to continue their journey to the West. The migrants are caught while in transition to the West, held in detention camps, stripped of all belongings and cash, and released with a deportation order. Without mobile phones they often have no way of knowing where they are.

Finally, the author of this report would like to stress a tiny trend of Muslim community and Muslims fighting against predominantly hostile attitudes towards them. According to Radio Prague, “Imam Leonid Kushnarenko, head of the Prague Muslim Community, has been removed from office and expelled from the community. Both the Czech Muslim Community and its Prague branch distanced themselves from Kushnarenko after he posted a call on Facebook for Muslims to arm themselves in response to the shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand. The head of the Czech Muslim Community Munib Alvari said the vote to expel Kushnarenko had been unanimous.”<sup>27</sup> Kushnarenko is an Ukrainian convert to Islam. Even though there was nothing illegal in his call, it was perceived by the Muslim Community as inflammatory.

Nur Ashraf Bekai, a Palestinian woman from Lebanon, is a beloved teacher of English and civics in the socially excluded location of Předlice, populated mostly by Roma. It is difficult to find teachers for the almost exclusively Roma children school. She wears a hijab and says “discussions about prohibiting the hijab are equally absurd as those forcing women to wear it.”<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

There is continuity in the mainstreaming of Islamophobia in the Czech society. In the realm of politics, with few exceptions the process of othering Muslims is expected and encouraged. In media, there are balanced voices but still very few authentic voices of Muslims from the Muslim community. There are also media whose reason of existence is to spread only the worst stereotypes about Muslims. In the realm of social media, unbridled hate, scare- and conflict-mongering challenge the limitations of freedom of speech and present society with the question of illegality of certain types of speech and fake news. The issue of hatred towards Muslims intensely fused with the issue of refugees and relocation quotas. There are scarce but brave initiatives, particularly in the sphere of civil society that counter the dominant narrative of total rejection. Some Muslims are becoming mildly visible in the Czech society.

---

27. Daniela Lazarová, “Head of Prague Muslim Community Expelled after Call for Muslims to Arm Themselves”, Radio Prague International, 25 March 2019, <https://www.radio.cz/en/section/news/head-of-prague-muslim-community-expelled-after-call-for-muslims-to-arm-themselves>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

28. “Muslimka Nur Ashraf Bekai učí romské žáky ve vyloučené lokalitě”, ROMEA, 9 May 2019, <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/domaci/muslimka-nur-ashraf-bekai-uci-romske-zaky-ve-vyloucene-lokalite>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

- In the case of politicians, it is recommended that they be held to the same standard as regular citizens. They need to take responsibility for the damage brought about by the hate they create.
- In the case of media, there must be an efficient system of countering fake news. Social networks should be held responsible (also financially responsible) for providing a platform for hate speech.
- Civil society organisation should be more persuasive in showing that this is not only an issue of hating Muslims but that Islamophobia, like other forms of hate, endangers the foundations of democracy for everyone.
- Finally, Muslims in the Czech Republic and the Muslim community should be encouraged to take control of the narrative and become more visible.

## Chronology

- **January 2019:** On Facebook, MP for the Freedom and Direct Democracy party (SDP) Karla Maříková: “It is forbidden to import invasive, non-indigenous species of plants and animals to the European Union. Muslim immigrants are also non-indigenous inhabitants in Europe and the same way as other invasive species they represent unexpected expansion and gradual supplanting of indigenous inhabitants of Europe. Therefore, they should be forbidden from entering the EU.”
- **07.09.2019:** Michal Kraft, assistant to MP for Social Democrats Jaroslav Foldyna: “[The parallel measure should be] immediate deportation of all members of the invasive culture to their country of origin or anywhere else. It is clear today that their integration is impossible (at least in a reasonable time) ... this measure should affect all members of the invasive ethnicity regardless of their citizenship just like after WWII...” The last point refers to when Czechs expelled Czech Germans regardless of their citizenship.



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**DENMARK**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

AMANI HASSANI



## The Author

**Amani Hassani** is a Danish anthropologist with a PhD from Concordia University, Canada. She is an urban ethnographer who combines anthropology, sociology, and geography in the study of Muslim minorities living in the Global North. Her recent research compares the experiences of young Muslims in Denmark and Canada, exploring issues of racialisation, social mobility, and urban life in a transatlantic perspective. She is also an active member of the Centre for Danish-Muslim Relations (CEDAR), a Danish NGO that seeks to raise awareness and address Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism in Denmark. Email: [hassani.amani@gmail.com](mailto:hassani.amani@gmail.com)

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Amani Hassani: *Islamophobia in Denmark: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

In the 2019 general elections, the centre-left parties won a majority mandate. This brought minorities and anti-racism campaigners some hope that the ethnonationalist political discourse would be reduced. However, Muslim citizens continued to face political stigmatisation and anti-Muslim racism in 2019. The Social Democrats campaigned with a promise to continue the harsh immigration policies and work against “parallel communities” (an implicit reference to Muslim citizens). They have continued to implement the internationally criticised ‘ghetto’-policies which particularly target and discriminate so-called non-Western citizens. Furthermore, the government has introduced legislation that allows the Minister of Immigration and Integration to deprive dual citizens their Danish citizenship to prevent Danish foreign fighters who have travelled to Syria from re-entering Denmark. This poses a challenge for the division of power within Danish governance, as dual citizens can now be deprived of their citizenship without judicial oversight.

The 2018 niqab ban has been particularly worrisome for Muslim women. The police and state attorney have yet to prosecute any hate crime that women wearing a niqab have reported. This seems to have set a precedence that these women have little recourse for legal action. Nevertheless, the national police have campaigned among the Muslim community to encourage reporting experiences of hate crime in 2018-19, which is an important step to raise awareness of hate crime against Muslims.

Far-right politician Rasmus Paludan and his party, Hard Line, were approved to run for the 2019 elections and campaigned throughout Denmark on an anti-Muslim platform under heavy police protection. However, they did not win any seats in parliament. On a hopeful note, anti-Islamophobia and anti-racist NGOs seem to have become better at creating coalitions and collaborating on common issues in 2019. These NGOs are creating a basis for grassroots mobilisation against racism and Islamophobia, and collaborating with international civil rights organisations.

## Sammenfatning

Folketingsvalget i 2019 resulterede i en sejr for de venstreorienterede partier, og således et håb om en formindskelse af den etnonationalistiske politiske diskurs. Det har dog vist sig, at muslimske borgere fortsat oplevede politisk stigmatisering og anti-muslimsk racisme i 2019 selv efter folkestingsvalget. Socialdemokratiets valgkampagne fokuserede på at fortsætte den hårde indvandringspolitik og arbejde imod hvad de betegner som ”parallelsamfund” (en implicit henvisning til muslimske borgere). De har fortsat implementeringen af den internationalt kritiseret ’ghetto’-lovpakke som især diskriminerer såkaldt ”ikke-vestlige indvandrere og efterkommere”. Derudover har regeringen indført lovgivning, der giver Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeren magt til at fratage dobbeltstatsborgere deres danske statsborgerskab – en lov indført for at forhindre, at danske ”fremmedkrigere” vender hjem. Denne lovgivning er blevet kritiseret for at være en trussel mod Danmarks tredeling af magt, idet dobbeltstatsborgere kan få frataget deres statsborgerskab uden retsligt tilsyn.

Forbuddet mod *niqab* i 2018 har især været bekymrende for *niqab*-bærende kvinders sikkerhed. På trods af, at flere af disse kvinder har oplevet hadforbrydelser, når de færdes offentligt, har hverken politiet eller statsadvokaten retsforfulgt nogen for disse hadforbrydelser. Dette er en bekymrende tendens, da det påviser en manglende villighed til at tage disse kvinders anklager alvorligt. Ikke desto mindre har det nationale politi øget engagementet blandt det muslimske trossamfund for at understrege vigtigheden af at rapportere hadforbrydelser i 2018-19. Dette er et vigtigt skridt for at skabe opmærksomhed omkring hadkriminalitet mod muslimer.

Rasmus Paludan og hans parti, Stram Kurs, blev godkendt til at stille op til valget i 2019 og førte valgkampagne på et anti-muslimsk grundlag under høj politibeskyttelse. De vandt dog ingen pladser i folketinget. Året 2019 har dog vist en positiv fremgang blandt NGO’ers samarbejde i at bekæmpe islamofobi og racisme. Dette har skabt et godt grundlag for græsrods mobilisering, samt et bedre samarbejde med internationale organisationer der arbejder for borgerrettigheder.

## Country Profile EIR 2019

**Country:** Denmark

**Type of Regime:** Constitutional Monarchy

**Form of Government:** Unitary parliamentarism

**Ruling Parties:** The Social Democrats (supporting parties: Danish Social Liberal Party, Red-Green Alliance, Socialist People's Party)

**Opposition Parties:** *Venstre* - Denmark's Liberal Party, Danish People's Party, Liberal Alliance, Conservative People's Party, the New Right, the Alternative (the only leftist party in the opposition)

**Last Elections:** 2019 General Elections: the Social Democrats won 25.9% of the vote against 23.4% of *Venstre*. The Social Democrats with Mette Frederiksen as prime minister formed a single-party minority government in summer 2019.

**Total Population:** 5.8 million

**Major Languages:** Danish

**Official Religion:** Protestant-Lutheran Christianity (the orientation of the Church of Denmark)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** According to the latest available Danish National Police (*Rigspolitiet*) hate crime report, there was a total of 112 religiously motivated hate crimes in Denmark, 63 cases were against Muslims or Muslim institutions in 2018. This means that a majority of religiously motivated hate crime target Muslim (56%).

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** According to the latest available Danish National Police hate crime report there were 260 cases of racist incidents reported.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Protestant Christians (74.7%), Islam (est. 5.5 %), Catholics (0.6 %).

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 320,000 people (5.5%) in 2019. This estimate is an increase of 12,000 from 2018. The reason for this is that Statistics Denmark gained access through CPR (citizen identification data) of the ethnicity of third generation descendants of non-Western immigrants in 2019. Thus, those who originate from Muslim-majority countries can be included in the statistical calculations.

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** *Dansk-Tyrkisk Islamisk Stiftelse*, *Det Islamiske Trossamfund* (DIT), *Dansk Islamisk Center* (DIC), *Muslimsk Ungdom i Danmark* (MUNIDA), *Minhaj-ul-Quran Denmark*, *Dansk Muslimsk Ungdom*, *Dansk Muslimsk Union* (DMU), *Dansk Islamisk Råd*

**Main NGOs combating Islamophobia:** Centre for Danish Muslim Relations, *Sameksistens.dk*, *SOS Racisme*, *Kvinder I Dialog* (Women in Dialogue), European Network Against Racism-Denmark, *Center for Forbyggelse af Eksklusion* (Centre for Prevention of Exclusion)

**Far-Right Parties:** Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*), The New Right (*Nye Borgerlige*), Hard Line (*Stram Kurs*)

**Far-Right Movements:** *Generation Identitær*, *For Frihed* (For Freedom, former PEGIDA), Nordfront

**Far-Right Terrorist Organisations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None. The parliament rejected a bill-proposal to ban public servants from wearing religious symbols in March 2019.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** Yes, implemented in 2018 following a parliamentary vote with a majority ruling in favour of a ban.
- **Prayer Ban:** None. The parliament rejected a proposal to prohibit prayer rooms in public educational institutions in 2018.
-

## Introduction

Denmark does not shy away from directly targeting Muslims in legislation. At the same time, because it is illegal to register a citizen's religion, it struggles to recognise the everyday and structural Islamophobia that its Muslim citizens experience. Racism is neglected in the Danish context.<sup>1</sup> By extension, Islamophobia as a form of racism is often socially dismissed, on the presumption that Muslims are not a 'race' and thus cannot be discriminated against based on their religious beliefs. Also, it is often claimed that the concept of Islamophobia curbs criticism of Islam and thus threatens freedom of speech.<sup>2</sup> This is an important backdrop to understand Islamophobia in Denmark in 2019.

A survey of over 5,900 Danes was conducted in 2019 by Professor Jørgen Goul Andersen in collaboration with the news site Mandag Morgen.<sup>3</sup> The survey focused on Danes' sentiments towards immigration, and concluded that about 28% agreed/partially agreed that Muslim immigrants should be deported. If this number is an indicator of the general sentiments of the Danish population, it means that almost a quarter of all Danes have significantly prejudicial views towards Muslims that may lead them to support restricting Muslims' civil rights. This is a worrying conclusion as it threatens the constitutional principle of religious freedom in Denmark. Although public discourse has become emboldened through the last several years in targeting Muslim citizens, the rhetoric is often masked behind a conflation of non-Western immigrants and descendants. Muslims represent the idea of 'non-Western' in policy, political rhetoric, and the public's imagination. This is significant in Denmark where race and racism are presumed to be non-existent, yet prevail through colour-blind rhetoric. In other words, 'non-Western' serves a colour-blind veneer to avoid emphasising a person's racial or religious belonging. The implication of this is that the Danish government can implement discriminatory legislation targeting 'non-Western immigrants and descendants' that in effect is aimed at Muslim citizens. In turn, this makes the case of Islamophobia in Denmark difficult to document, let alone address and contest.

This report is not a comprehensive overview of Islamophobic occurrences in 2019; rather, it focuses on major events within each subheading to demonstrate how prejudicial rhetoric of previous years is exacerbated with expanding legislation, surveillance, and negative campaigns towards Muslim citizens.

---

1. R. Andreassen and K. Vitus, "Introduction: Affectivity as a Lens to Racial Formations in the Nordic Countries", *Affectivity and Race*, eds. R. Andreassen and K. Vitus, (Routledge, New York: 2016), p. 11–28.

2. F. Elahi and O. Khan, "Introduction", *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All*, eds. F. Elahi and O. Khan, (Runnymede Trust, London: 2017), p. 5-12.

3. Jens Reierman and Torben K. Andersen, "Hver fjerde dansker: Muslimer ud af Danmark", Mandag Morgen, 21 October 2019, [https://www.mm.dk/artikel/hver-fjerde-dansker-muslimer-skal-ud-af-danmark?utm\\_content=bufferc1d11&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](https://www.mm.dk/artikel/hver-fjerde-dansker-muslimer-skal-ud-af-danmark?utm_content=bufferc1d11&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer), (Access date: 2 February 2020).

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

The number of physical and verbal attacks on Muslims in 2019 has yet to be published by the Danish National Police. There are however several public cases pertaining particularly to Muslim women wearing the niqab (face veil) or hijab that are worth mentioning. In April 2019, a 17-year-old girl wearing a hijab was violently attacked by a Danish man.<sup>4</sup> The man yelled racist slurs at her, ripped off her hijab, kicked her in the head and punched her repeatedly. The attack took place in broad daylight and one man came to protect the young woman from her attacker.<sup>5</sup>

In late 2018 (a few months after the niqab ban took effect), a woman wearing a niqab in a grocery store was verbally assaulted by several male shoppers.<sup>6</sup> In January 2019, the woman took the case to the state attorney who, after reviewing her case, argued she was not 'threatened' by the assaulters (according to §266 in Danish criminal law) and she could therefore not press charges. Yet, the woman's attorney explained to the online platform *Hadforbrydelser* that the woman was reporting the assault as a hate crime, which the state attorney neglected to address. The woman's attorney further highlighted that this case sets the precedence for vigilantism against women who wear the niqab.<sup>7</sup> In line with this prediction, a niqab-wearing woman shared her experience of being assaulted in late 2019 on social media.<sup>8</sup> In her post, she explains how a man approached her and her friend as she was leaving a shop and started yelling at her that it was illegal to wear the niqab after which he pulled it off. According to a message she shared on the support page on Facebook for women who wear the niqab in Denmark, she questioned whether she should report the assault to the police as she may be fined for wearing the niqab in the first place.

The Danish National Police have noted a significant rise in hate crimes against the Muslim population in Denmark in 2018, and have therefore started campaigning and raising awareness about hate crimes and the importance of reporting them to the police. As part of the campaign, the police visited a mosque to raise aware-

4. "Vidner søges i sag om overfald på 17 årig pige i Albertslund", Copenhagen West Police Force, 4 April 2019, <https://politi.dk/kobenhavns-vestegns-politi/efterlyste-og-savnede-personer/vidner-soeges-i-sag-om-overfald-paa-17aarig-pige-i-albertslund/2019/04/04>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

5. Caroline Haslund Siegmundfeldt, "17-årig udsat for groft overfald - fik revet tørklædet af", TV2 Nyheder, 4 April 2019, <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/krimi/2019-04-04-17-aarig-udsat-for-groft-overfald-fik-revet-toerklæde-af>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

6. Sibel Özcan and Zeynep Bangert, "Islamophobia in Denmark: National Report 2018", *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2018), p. 251-282.

7. Ronni Abergel, "Statsadvokat afviser racisme sag fra Kvickly", *Hadforbrydelser.dk*, 23 July 2019 <http://hadforbrydelser.dk/statsadvokat-afviser-racisme-sag-fra-kvickly/> (Access date: 30 January 2020).

8. Kvinder i Dialog, Facebook, 1 December 2019 [https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=kvinder%20i%20dialog&cpa=SEARCH\\_BOX](https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=kvinder%20i%20dialog&cpa=SEARCH_BOX) (Access date: 30 January 2020).

ness, answer questions and encourage the congregation to report any experiences of hate crime to the police. They continued this awareness campaign in 2019 and it will be important to see if there has been a change in the amount of reporting of Islamophobic hate crimes in 2019, when the Danish National Police publish their report later this year.

## Employment

In 2019, news media revealed that Danish jobcentres - institutions that are in charge of assisting unemployed citizens find employment - have been categorising unemployed ethnic minorities as ‘non-Western immigrant/descendant’.<sup>9</sup> There is an implicit - and sometimes explicit - racialisation of Muslims as non-Western in Danish public consciousness. Since it is illegal to register religious affiliations in Denmark, the structural discrimination that occurs when citizens are categorised by the public system as ‘non-Western’ can be experienced as Islamophobic. This means that descendants of immigrants from the Global South whose families may have resided in Denmark for several generations are still categorised within policies and the public system as non-Western citizens.

In the case of jobcentres, unemployed ethnic minorities discovered that their online profile included the categorisation of non-Western immigrant/descendant with no easy recourse to delete the designation. Furthermore, they did not volunteer this information; rather, it was provided through the personal records the government has on all Danish citizens through their CPR (citizen identification data), which includes age, employment records, and ethnicity.<sup>10</sup> The Center for Danish-Muslim Relations (CEDAR) as well as local Copenhagen politician Badar Shah, a member of the political party Alternative, requested access to official information regarding this issue from the Employment and Integration authorities in Copenhagen. They were informed that ethnic profiling was a state directive which could influence what offers are given to particular citizens based on their ethnic heritage.<sup>11</sup> CEDAR sent further information requests to the National Board of Labour and Employment questioning the differentiation between ethnic Danes and ethnic minorities within jobcentre registers. They received a clarification that they use statistical information that evaluates which factors can predict who becomes long-term unemployed, and Danish citizens

9. Tania Andersen, “Jurist: Dataprofilering af langtidsløse med etnicitet er ulovlig”, Version 2, 17 October 2019, [https://www.version2.dk/artikel/jurist-dataprofilering-langtidsløse-med-etnicitet-ulovlig-1089176?fbclid=IwAR26QicbA0F-Xe8VPCpwoWGacUMarlU10e8dBqgMHJFDEtIeQsrMljM\\_eqQ](https://www.version2.dk/artikel/jurist-dataprofilering-langtidsløse-med-etnicitet-ulovlig-1089176?fbclid=IwAR26QicbA0F-Xe8VPCpwoWGacUMarlU10e8dBqgMHJFDEtIeQsrMljM_eqQ), (Access date: 3 February 2020).

10. “Profilafklaring – det digitale forberedelseskema på Jobnet”, The National Board of Labour and Employment, 6 November 2019, <https://star.dk/it/borger-it/profilafklaring-forberedelseskema/> (Access date: 30 January 2020).

11. “Badar Shah’s Correspondance with the Employment and Integration Authorities”, Direktion Beskæftigelses- og Integrationsforvaltningen, 9 October 2019, [https://www.kk.dk/sites/default/files/uploaded-files/09-10-2019\\_svar\\_til\\_badar\\_shah\\_vedr.\\_personoplysninger\\_paa\\_jobnet.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3juYyBtiL-25s43D8jwEz8Wp\\_HkEu-V6uR176w0O5Fjo6gDENZ8Efgs7U](https://www.kk.dk/sites/default/files/uploaded-files/09-10-2019_svar_til_badar_shah_vedr._personoplysninger_paa_jobnet.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3juYyBtiL-25s43D8jwEz8Wp_HkEu-V6uR176w0O5Fjo6gDENZ8Efgs7U), (Access date: 3 February 2020).

who originate from the Global South are evaluated to be at a higher risk.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, several jurists and human rights advocates have highlighted that acquiring information on citizens' ethnicity, race, faith, and sexuality without their consent is against EU law and that it discriminates and stigmatises the citizens affected by it.<sup>13</sup>

## Education

In 2019, the Social Democrats campaigned in the Danish general elections with several promises to continue strict integration policies. One of these campaign promises was to remove public funding of Muslim independent schools in Denmark because of a suspicion they are not sufficiently promoting Danish values of freedom, democracy, and gender equality.<sup>14</sup> Following their electoral win, the Social Democrats implemented an audit of 17 independent schools out of which 7 schools were Muslim schools. With only 25 Muslim schools out of 558 independent schools in Denmark, there is a significant overrepresentation of Muslim schools in this audit.<sup>15</sup> One can wonder why this overrepresentation exists; egregiously, one of the selection criteria for the audit is that a school has at least 50% non-Western students.<sup>16</sup> This demonstrates the legal loophole the state has created with the category of 'non-Western' to be able to target Muslim citizens. The majority of these students are presumably Danish citizens, but as explained in the introduction, 'non-Western immigrants and descendants' is a category often used as a placeholder for Muslim.

The Social Democratic government (with the support of the Danish People's Party) seems to be gearing up to attempt to restrict public funding to these schools. *Venstre* and the Conservative People's Party, however, are voicing caution. They argue that the government's use of 'non-Western students' as reasoning for restricting access to public funds can be viewed as discriminatory on the basis of their ethnicity. The Social Liberals are also voicing concern as they worry that the government's attempt at closing down Muslim schools could be an infringement of the rights and freedom of schooling in Denmark.<sup>17</sup>

12. Author's personal communication with CEDAR activists regarding their email correspondence with the National Board of Labour and Employment.

13. "Jobcentre anklages for ulovlig diskrimination: Rammer særlig gruppe ledige", *Radio24syv*, 7 October 2019, <https://www.a4nu.dk/artikel/jurister-jobcentre-diskriminerer-med-nyt-profileringsvaerktoej>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

14. Anders Redder, "Nye tal bekymrer: Muslimske friskoler står foran skærpet tilsyn", *Kristligt Dagblad*, 25 November 2019, <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/danmark/nye-tal-bekymrer-saerligt-muslimske-friskoler-testes-demokratisk-sinddelag>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

15. *Ibid.*

16. Ritzau, "Muslimske friskoler står foran skærpet tilsyn", *Politiken Skoleliv*, 26 November 2019, <https://skoleliv.dk/nyheder/art7517440/Muslimske-friskoler-st%C3%A5r-foran-sk%C3%A6rpet-tilsyn>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

17. "Ny rapport bestyrker S-ønske om at lukke de muslimske friskoler" *Politiken Skoleliv*, 24 April 2019, <https://skoleliv.dk/nyheder/art7156232/Ny-rapport-bestykker-S-%C3%B8nske-om-at-lukke-de-muslimske-friskoler>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

The schools that are being audited had until December 6, 2019, to answer a number of questions posed by the Ministry of Education on how the schools handle issues pertaining to equality, ‘social control’, and the curriculum in Christianity Studies. In early February 2020, the media reported that 24 Muslim schools receive financial support from the government despite the government’s campaign promise to stop funding independent schools with more than 50% non-Western students.<sup>18</sup> However, the Justice Ministry has cautioned that discriminating schools based on ethnicity is against the Danish constitution and the government has not yet found a way to implement their campaign promise without transgressing the constitution. It will be important in 2020 to see if the government succeeds in finding a way to discriminate against Muslim independent schools without transgressing the Danish constitution. Five Muslim schools have already been closed since 2017 through allegations of undemocratic schooling (e.g. finding teaching material on ‘jihad’ in a school’s copy room)<sup>19</sup> or funding from anonymous donors. The government’s current approach seems to be looking for ways of changing current legislation to make it particularly harder for Muslim schools to get public funding as well as funding from anonymous donors. However, they have to formulate a legal language that bypasses laws of rights and freedoms that prohibit discriminating citizens based on ethnicity and religion.<sup>20</sup>

## Politics

The year 2019 saw a change of government in Denmark. The left-leaning parties won with a majority of seats (91 mandates out of 179), leaving the right-wing parties defeated. The Danish People’s Party (DPP) in particular lost a large number of seats: from 21% in 2015 to 8.7% in 2019.<sup>21</sup> For many minorities and anti-racism campaigners, this shift in government presented a hope that the harsh political rhetoric and legislation against Muslims and refugees would change for the better. However, the Social Democrats, who won 25.9% of the national vote, ran a campaign on continuing the harsh legislation against Muslims, ethnic minorities, and refugees/asylum seekers,<sup>22</sup> and they were thereby able to attract a large number of DPP voters. Instead of creating a coalition government with other left parties that also won many seats

---

18. Martin Borre, “Socialdemokratiet: Vi gør noget ved muslimske friskoler inden næste valg”, Berlingske, 10 February 2020, <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/socialdemokratiet-vi-gor-noget-ved-muslimske-friskoler-inden-naeste-valg> (Access date: 18 February 2020).

19. Henrik Jensen and Jens Anton Bjørnager, “Efter alvorlige lovbrud: Muslimsk friskole mister statslig millionstøtte”, Berlingske, 27 September 2017, <https://www.berlingske.dk/samfund/efter-alvorlige-lovbrud-muslimsk-friskole-mister-statslig-millionstoette> (Access date: 18 February 2020).

20. “Ny rapport bestyrker S-ønske om at lukke de muslimske friskoler”, Politiken Skoleliv.

21. Elis Gjevori, “Denmark’s Left Wins Election by Adopting Right-Wing Rhetoric”, TRT World, 6 June 2019, <https://www.trtworld.com/europe/denmark-s-left-wins-election-by-adopting-right-wing-rhetoric-27298>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

22. Ibid.

(e.g. Social Liberals or Red-Green Alliance) giving the government a clear majority government, the new prime minister Mette Frederiksen decided to form a minority single-party government with the approval of the center-left parties.<sup>23</sup> This would mean that although the political left parties would be the government's supporting parties, Frederiksen's government was free to create alliances across the political spectrum. In practice, forming a minority government allows the Social Democrats to collaborate with the political right on issues pertaining to creating a harsher environment for refugees, immigrants, and Muslim minorities, while simultaneously collaborating with left-wing parties on issues of welfare, environment, etc. Nevertheless, the strong mandate of the leftist parties means that the Social Democrats cannot completely neglect the left in their political issues.

Because of this development, general Islamophobic political attitudes have risen in recent years. Right-centrist policies seem to have continued in the latter half of 2019 with the Social Democrats in government. They have introduced legislation on citizenships, 'ghetto'-policies, and a general continuation of Islamophobic political rhetoric. For instance, in October 2019, MP Ida Auken, a member of the left-centre Social Liberal Party, published an opinion piece about meeting with a Muslim male citizen who shook her hand as he entered her office, but explained that he preferred not to shake hands in general because of his religious beliefs. In response to this explanation, Auken published an opinion piece in which she refers to the man as an 'idiot' for not wanting physical contact with her and discloses a number of her prejudicial views towards Muslim men (e.g. as oppressive). As an elected politician, this opinion piece can be perceived as a promotion of Islamophobic rhetoric directed at Muslims.<sup>24</sup> It is highly problematic that as an elected politician who is ethnically Danish and with the power to condemn an already targeted representative of a religious minority, Auken puts herself as a victim vis-à-vis a citizen who has no public power to defend himself. This abuse of power was even criticised by Auken's colleague, Jens Rohde, who called her out on her controversial article. He argued that as an elected politician, any meetings with citizens should be confidential. In this case, Rohde contends, Auken did not only breach this confidentiality but also put herself in the position of the victim of this encounter, when in fact she is part of a powerful privileged political elite.<sup>25</sup>

23. Kristine Korsgaard, "Mette Frederiksen bliver statsminister for en ren S-regering: Svære kampe venter", *Altinget*, 26 June 2019, <https://www.alinget.dk/artikel/mette-frederiksen-bliver-statsminister-for-en-ren-s-regering>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

24. Ida Auken, "Ida Auken er rasende: Manden, der kom ind på mit kontor, var tydeligvis idiot!", *Politiken*, 1 October 2019, <https://politiken.dk/debat/debatindlaeg/art7416529/Manden-der-kom-ind-p%C3%A5-mit-kontor-var-tydeligvis-idiot>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

25. Jens Rohde, "Jens Rohde: Hvad ville der ske, hvis jeg som MAND kaldte en kvinde for IDIOT, blot fordi hun hilser med hånden på hjertet og ikke ved at tage min hånd?", *Politiken*, 15 October 2019, <https://politiken.dk/debat/debatindlaeg/art7440850/Hvad-ville-der-ske-hvis-jeg-som-MAND-kaldte-en-kvinde-for-IDIOT-blot-fordi-hun-hilser-med-h%C3%A5nden-p%C3%A5-hjertet-og-ikke-ved-at-tage-min-h%C3%A5nd?shareToken=W3X-vEaAAHPHw>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

The New Right won 4 seats in the 2019 general elections. The party is a new right-wing political party established in 2015, and believes the Danish People's Party - previously the most anti-immigration/Islamophobic party in Danish politics - is too lenient on immigration issues and issues pertaining to Muslims. One MP from the New Right, Mette Thiesen, shared on her Facebook profile that, as a member of the citizenship committee in parliament, she would make sure to vote against any citizenship application originating from Muslim-majority countries. Questioned on this discriminatory logic, she argued that as long as the parliament does not address the inherent issues of immigration (i.e. allowing Muslim migrants residency), she would not change her position.<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 1:** Mette Thiesen describes how she plans to reject citizenship applications from people originating from Muslim-majority countries.<sup>27</sup>

A few days before Thiesen's social media post, an opinion piece on the Danish citizenship procedures was published in the newspaper *Politiken*. In this article, the author questioned Christian Langballe (Danish People's Party), a long-time chairman and member of the citizenship committee, who admitted to always voting

26. Philip Sune Dam, "Nye Borgerlige-profil: 'Folk fra muslimske lande skal ikke have dansk statsborgerskab'", *Berlingske*, 16 August 2019, <https://www.berlingske.dk/samfund/nye-borgerlige-profil-folk-fra-muslimske-lande-skal-ikke-have-dansk>, (Access date: 10 February 2020).

27. Mette Thiesen, Facebook, 15 August 2019, [https://www.facebook.com/mette.thiesen/?\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=%2Cd%2CP-R&eid=ARDsYb7MwH117KHDJuwZUDM28Zy17i-g\\_aDnZDgKgNvw8RGu2SII3pAsVirZ6fTqOli-8UV2iV55Qtv\\_B](https://www.facebook.com/mette.thiesen/?__tn__=%2Cd%2CP-R&eid=ARDsYb7MwH117KHDJuwZUDM28Zy17i-g_aDnZDgKgNvw8RGu2SII3pAsVirZ6fTqOli-8UV2iV55Qtv_B), (Access date: 10 February 2020).

against a citizenship application if the applicant was from “a distant Middle Eastern country”. He further explained that he had a political interest in reducing the number of Danish Muslim citizens. The article highlights how the approach of both Langballe and Thiesen is a politicisation of citizenship rather than about the individual applicants.<sup>28</sup> This is a worrying development in Danish politics, as the political motivations of MPs in the citizenship committee can discriminate applicants from Muslim-majority countries with impunity. These proceedings happen behind closed doors and with no public transparency, and thus there is no way of contesting rejections on the basis of discrimination.

## Media

Minorities in general, and Muslims in particular, are often excluded from public debates regarding minorities’ experiences in Denmark but also other contemporary and global political issues though they may profess appropriate forms of expertise.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, the lack of recognition in Danish media discourse of its own bias and reproduction of political rhetoric towards minorities, means that the general representation of Muslims continues to be that of ‘Other’ within Danish society. For instance, the culture editor of the newspaper *Berlingske*, Anne Sofie Hermansen wrote an opinion piece criticising the nomination of a song written by the Danish Muslim artist Isam Bachiri (Isam B) in the Danish School Songbook. In her article, she accuses Isam B of being a “Muslim fundamentalist” who should not be included in the Danish songbook, which is a national representation of Danish identity.<sup>30</sup> She includes a number of unverified examples that present Isam B as someone who is incompatible with Danish culture and criticises the choice of including him in the songbook as an attempt to be politically correct.<sup>31</sup> This example demonstrates the level of power the media has in both how debates on Muslims are framed as well as journalists’ capacity to discredit individual Muslims to promote a nationalist and Islamophobic agenda.

A few Muslim public speakers have been able to gain popularity in media debates by publishing opinion pieces regarding experiences of discrimination partic-

28. Thomas Borchert, “Tysker i Danmark: ‘I har gjort det til en absurd øvelse at forsøge at blive statsborger’”, *Politiken*, 10 August 2019, <https://politiken.dk/debat/kroniken/art7321358/I-har-gjort-det-til-en-absurd-%C3%B8velse-at-fors%C3%B8ge-at-blive-statsborger>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

29. Mrutyuanjaj Mishra, “Danske mediers dækning er racistisk” *Information*, 7 May 2019, <https://www.information.dk/debat/2019/05/danske-mediers-daekning-racistisk>, (Access date: 11 March 2020).

30. Anne Sofie Hermansen, “Hvad skal en fundamentalistisk muslim som Isam B i Højskolesangbogen?” *Berlingske*, 8 August 2019, <https://www.berlingske.dk/aok/anne-sophia-hermansen-hvad-skal-en-fundamentalistisk-muslim-som-isam-b-i>, (Access date: 4 February 2020).

31. Steffen Groth, “Isam B udråbes til muslimsk fundamentalist i Berlingske”, *POV*, 9 August 2019, <https://pov.international/personagreb-pa-isam-b-omtaget-af-dampene-fra-antiislamiske-netfora/>, (Access date: 4 February 2020).

ularly pertaining to Muslims as well as calling out the racism in society.<sup>32</sup> This is progress. Yet without a conversation about the lack of cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity in Danish news media -not only in representation of the topics that are being discussed but also who decides what topics and issues are reported on - the racist, Islamophobic, and often reductionist representation of Muslims in Danish media will most likely continue.

## Justice System

Several bills have been implemented in 2019 that target Muslim and/or non-Western citizens: e.g. forced handshake during citizenship ceremonies; a 'paradigm-shift' in immigration/asylum procedures focused on repatriation rather than settlement; and citizenship deprivation of dual citizenship. For the sake of brevity, this report will focus on the last point of citizenship deprivation of dual citizens, specifically targeting 'foreign fighters' who have travelled to Syria and presumed to have joined so-called ISIS. Legislation was introduced to deprive dual citizens of their Danish citizenship easily by political means. This seems to set a problematic precedence for how the government deals with dual citizens in general, particularly Muslim dual citizens. The change in legislation was introduced through an emergency vote on the issue of depriving citizenship of Danish citizens with dual citizenship through the Minister of Immigration and Integration rather than by the traditional judicial procedures. It thus gives one individual - a politician - full power and authority to deprive dual citizens of their Danish citizenship outside of legal procedures.<sup>33</sup> The Danish government is being pressured to take back its citizens captured and stranded in prisons in Syria and neighbouring regions. With this bill, the government is attempting to find a way around it. The bill won a majority vote with the support of parties from the right-centre, mainly *Venstre* and Danish People's Party in October 2019, only a day after the bill was first introduced to parliament.

The bill has been heavily criticised by other politicians, legal experts, and civil rights organisations. Some of the arguments they raise is that the new legislation threatens the division of power in governance as well as being a threat to the Danish judicial system, which already has legal procedures in place to tackle treason as well as other charges related to 'foreign fighters'.<sup>34</sup> As of November 2019, the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) could declare that around 35 'foreign fighters' are currently in the conflict zone. Most of them, however, are Danish citizens and very few are dual

---

32. Tarek Hussein, "Antidemokraterne i DF", *Altinget*, 14 June 2019, <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/tarek-hussein-antidemokraterne-i-df>, (Access date: 4 February 2020).

33. Jeppe Sahlholdt, "Omstridt lov om fremmedkrigere er vedtaget med stemmer fra V og DF", *Altinget*, 24 October 2019, <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/omstridt-lov-om-fremmedkrigere-er-vedtaget-med-stemmer-fra-v-og-df>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

34. Philip Sune Dam and Frederikke Palmu Johansen, "Ekspertter kommer med hard kritik af nyt lovforslag: 'På kanten af menneskerettigheder'", *Berlingske*, 15 October 2019, <https://www.berlingske.dk/samfund/ekspertter-kommer-med-haard-kritik-af-nyt-lovforslag-paa-kanten-af>, (Access date 2 February 2020).

citizens.<sup>35</sup> This has made some critics argue that it is mostly political ‘spin’ to introduce this bill, because Danish citizens cannot be rejected entry into Denmark.<sup>36</sup>

## Internet

Online media, especially social media, are tools that are actively used to promote and enhance an Islamophobic public rhetoric. In 2019, this pattern continued, where right-wing politicians perpetuated Islamophobia on social media platforms. One such example was in late 2019, when an ad from a major grocery store chain presumably displayed Danish Christmas pastries as ‘winter pastries’. The picture went viral especially among anti-Muslim groups who perceived the picture as an accommodation of Muslims who do not celebrate Christmas at the expense of ‘real Danes’ and Danish Christmas traditions.<sup>37</sup> These viral posts were promoted not only by nationalist individuals and blog sites, but also by Danish politicians from the political right. The grocery store later explained that they still sold traditional Danish Christmas pastries - they simply added ‘winter pastries’ to their bakery selection. The whole ordeal, however, demonstrates how Islamophobic rhetoric and fake news can quickly go viral online without much fact-checking – thus legitimising Islamophobic politics and populist rhetoric.



**Figure 2:** Picture of “winter pastries” instead of “Christmas pastries” circulated on Facebook by right-wing politicians. Printed in Lars Dahlager, “Nationalister raser over Føtex’ vinterbolle – men de burde nok lige have tjekket historien”<sup>38</sup>

35. Emma Busk, “De dansken fremmedkrigere: Her er de nu”, Ekstra Bladet, 22 November 2019, <https://ekstrabladet.dk/nyheder/politik/dansktopolitik/de-danske-fremmedkrigere-her-er-de-nu/7882892>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

36. Theis Lange Olsen, “Syrienkriger anholdt: Professor beskylder politikere for at være hyklere”, DR Inland, 12 November 2019, <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/syrienkriger-anholdt-professor-beskylder-politikere-vaere-hyklere>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

37. Lars Dahlager, “Nationalister raser over Føtex’ vinterbolle – men de burde nok lige have tjekket historien”, Politiken, 15 November 2019, <https://politiken.dk/forbrugogliv/art7493846/Nationalister-raser-over-F%C3%B8tex-vinterbolle-%E2%80%93-men-de-burde-nok-lige-have-tjekket-historien>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

38. Lars Dahlager, “Nationalister raser over Føtex’ vinterbolle – men de burde nok lige have tjekket historien”, Politiken, 15 November 2019, <https://politiken.dk/forbrugogliv/art7493846/Nationalister-raser-over-F%C3%B8tex-vinterbolle-%E2%80%93-men-de-burde-nok-lige-have-tjekket-historien>, (Access date: 11 March 2020).

While social media platforms have given Islamophobes an open forum to promote anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia, they have also proved to be an important resource in anti-racist and anti-Islamophobic mobilisation. Anti-racist NGOs have been able to collaborate, engage, and promote each other's events, reports, and work through the use of social media platforms. Furthermore, Muslims, who have experienced Islamophobic abuse, or Danes who have witnessed minorities becoming victims of racist transgressions have used social media to bring awareness to these issues. They have thus been able to bring public awareness to issues that are often neglected in political and media discourse. One example of a positive use of social media platforms was the mobilisation that happened during the 2019 general elections where Muslim citizens established the Facebook group "*Muslimertil stemmeboksene*" ("Muslims to the voting booths"), which quickly grew to several thousand members. The group promoted Muslim participation in the general elections, mobilising group members to scrutinise politicians' views on issues that were important to Danish Muslims, i.e. who would work against racist, Islamophobic, and anti-immigration policies. This created an interesting debate following the elections, which questioned the democratic validity of such popular mobilisation.<sup>39</sup> This debate demonstrates how Muslim citizens can be demonised whenever they engage with the political structures. Muslims are often represented as anti-democratic for *not* engaging in Danish politics, and yet, in the 2019 elections, they were perceived to be a threat to Danish democracy for politically mobilising to *promote* democratic involvement. Today, over six months following the elections, the Facebook group has a member count of more than 24,000 members, who use the platform to share and discuss political news regarding Muslims and ethnic minorities.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The developments noted in the *European Islamophobia Report 2018* on central figures in the Danish Islamophobia network seem to have continued in 2019. For instance, Rasmus Paludan, party leader of Hard Line (*Stram Kurs*), has organised anti-Muslim demonstrations throughout neighbourhoods with a large number of Muslim residents, where he has burnt a copy of the Quran under large police protection.<sup>40</sup> During one such demonstration, the repercussions of his demonstration resulted in clashes between the police and young male residents who were provoked by Paludan and his followers. Paludan argues that he is using his freedom

---

39. Klaus Dohm, "Muslimsk mobilisering af vælgere vækker bekymring for øget polarisering", *Jyllands-Posten*, 9 June 2019, <https://jyllands-posten.dk/politik/ECE11433173/muslimsk-mobilisering-af-vaelgere-vaekker-bekymring-for-oeget-polarisering/>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

40. Peter Thomsen, "Blågårds Plads efter Paludan kom forbi: 'Han vandt. I går fik han det, som han ville'", *Berlingske*, 15 April 2019, <https://www.berlingske.dk/hovedstaden/blaagaards-plads-efter-paludan-kom-forbi-han-vandt-i-gaar-fik-han-det>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

of speech to protest against the presence of Muslims and Islam in Denmark. Nevertheless, burning the Quran in a neighbourhood with a large number of Muslim residents can be perceived as an emphasis of his power to discriminate verbally against their religious beliefs with impunity and under police protection. In turn, this can be perceived as *symbolic* racist violence where the victims have little legal recourse for action. It is important to highlight that the debate that followed this incidence focused on the violent clashes between the youth in the neighbourhood and the police with little attention to the extreme measures Paludan utilises in his rhetoric. In the first half of 2019, leading up to the general elections, the Danish police force estimated that approximately 100 million DKK had been used to protect Paludan and his party's election campaign.<sup>41</sup> Paludan qualified to run for the general election in 2019, and although he only received 1.8% of the general vote and no mandate in parliament, his party Hard Line did qualify to receive yearly party support of 2 million DKK for the next four years until the next general election in order to continue their political work.<sup>42</sup>

It will be important in 2020 to monitor not only the obvious Islamophobes of the right in Denmark, but also observe how the political left becomes complicit in normalising Islamophobic rhetoric that seeks to demonise Muslim citizens with little debate about religious accommodation of minorities to ensure upholding the Danish constitutional right to freedom of religion.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

There have been a number of positive developments in civil society mobilising on anti-racism in Denmark with a particular focus on anti-Muslim racism. Approximately 130 psychologists have formed a professional network working against discrimination. They published an opinion piece highlighting how the debate about racialized minorities can affect the physical, social, and mental health of these citizens.<sup>43</sup> With this article, they added an important professional voice critiquing the problematic effects of discrimination and racism against particular minorities.

A number of NGOs have created a coalition to work particularly against the 'ghetto'-policies that took effect in 2019, which will be implemented through the

41. Emma Toft, "Politiet har brugt over 100 millioner på at beskytte Paludan i år", DR Inland, 11 June 2019, <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/inland/politiet-har-brugt-over-100-millioner-paa-beskytte-paludan-i-aar>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

42. Lars Lindevall, "Stram Kurs får ingen plads i Folketinget – men millioner i partistøtte", DR Nyheder, 6 June 2019, <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/folketingsvalg/stram-kurs-faar-ingen-plads-i-folketinget-men-millioner-i>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

43. Naderah Parwani and Iram Khawaja, "Kroniken: Tonen i debatten er sundhedsskadelig", Politiken, 13 September 2019, <https://politiken.dk/debat/kroniken/art7374320/Tonen-i-debatten-er-sundhedsskadelig>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

next couple of years. Furthermore, in 2019, NGOs demonstrated a greater ability to engage with the international community to raise awareness of racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia in Denmark. For instance, the Centre for Danish-Muslim Relations (CEDAR), SOS Racisme Denmark, Women in Dialogue, Refugees Welcome, *Almen Modstand* (Common Resistance), DEMOS, and ENAR Denmark created a coalition to contribute to a shadow report on the Danish ‘ghetto’-policies to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.<sup>44</sup> The UN concluded that the ‘ghetto’-policies were particularly discriminatory against non-Western immigrants and descendants creating a clear differentiation between ethnic Danish citizens and non-Western citizens. Other international civil rights organisations have likewise been important supporters of anti-racism and anti-Islamophobia NGOs in Denmark. They have offered important encouragement and support to grassroots organisations to collaborate and mobilise on issues they have in common, particularly related to tackling the discriminatory nature of the government’s ghetto policies.

The way that anti-racism NGOs have been able to collaborate and support each other’s work in 2019 is an indication of civil society’s growing awareness and motivation to combat and protest against the structural racism that all minorities experience.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This report has highlighted some of the general tendencies and issues of Islamophobia in Denmark in 2019. The general election in the summer 2019 meant a change of government from the centre-right majority coalition government of *Venstre*, Conservative People’s Party, and Danish People’s Party to a centre-left minority government of the Social Democrats, and with a majority mandate to the centre-left parties. Many minorities and anti-racist campaigners hoped that the change of government would mean less racist and nationalistic discourse in political rhetoric. However, as this report documents, the general Islamophobic tendencies observed in 2018 have continued in the following year. This is unsurprising: research has shown that xenophobia in political discourse is not a partisan issue, but can be found across the political spectrum.<sup>45</sup>

The Social Democrats campaigned on harsh immigration policies towards non-Western immigrants and asylum seekers; promised to implement the ‘ghetto’-policies some of which particularly target Muslim citizens; and promised to increase sur-

---

44. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, “Concluding Observations on Sixth Periodic Report of Denmark”, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commission, 2019, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fDNK%2fCO%2f6&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fDNK%2fCO%2f6&Lang=en); John Graversgaard and Liz Fekete, “Denmark’s ‘Ghetto Package’ – Discrimination Enshrined in Law”, Institute of Race Relations, 21 November 2019, [http://www.irr.org.uk/news/denmarks-ghetto-package-discrimination-enshrined-in-law/?fbclid=IwAR1esCcEAK7XJRUYeTrOs9U3YJea2\\_IR1is5\\_IxGsKXRdRURWrxO-AX-kSkc](http://www.irr.org.uk/news/denmarks-ghetto-package-discrimination-enshrined-in-law/?fbclid=IwAR1esCcEAK7XJRUYeTrOs9U3YJea2_IR1is5_IxGsKXRdRURWrxO-AX-kSkc), (Access date: 2 February 2020).

45. Sivamohan Valluvan, *The Clamour of Nationalism: Race and Nation in Twenty-First-Century Britain*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester: 2019).

veillance and attempt to shut down as many Muslim independent schools as possible. With the Social Democrats continuing ethnonationalist strategies that seek to differentiate between ethnic white Danes and non-Western Danes (who are presumed to be Muslim), 2019 has proven to be a year where it was not only the traditional right and nationalist voices who promoted Islamophobic behaviour. Instead, the traditional left seemed to have adopted a similar rhetoric and helped normalise Islamophobia. Nevertheless, 2019 has also been an important year for civil society and anti-racist NGOs to collaborate and challenge this rhetoric both in policy (especially regarding the ‘ghetto’-policies) and in everyday life by using social media platforms and other open forums to bring awareness to issues of racism and Islamophobia in particular.

The following are a few policy recommendations that focus on bringing public and political awareness to the issues of Islamophobia:

- Political and public recognition of Islamophobia as a real societal issue that discriminates, affects, and limits Muslim citizens’ lives, prospects, and feelings of inclusion in Danish society.
- Invest in public bodies to document and address experiences of Islamophobia beyond hate crimes – including experiences of discrimination in educational institutions, employment opportunities, housing, and in interactions with social and health institutions.
- Invest in research that explores issues and experiences of Islamophobia as a unique form of racism and discrimination that targets Muslim citizens or citizens perceived to be Muslim.
- Promote civil society initiatives that work against racism and discrimination in general, and Islamophobia in particular.

## Chronology

- **01.01.2019:** Law requiring citizen applicants shake hands with public officials during citizenship ceremony come into effect. The legislation was voted in by parliament in late 2018 to oppose Muslim citizen applicants’ *potential* refusal of shaking hands with public officials of the opposite gender.
- **16.01.2019:** State attorney closed the case of a woman who was verbally assaulted while wearing a niqab, claiming the woman was not threatened and could therefore not press charges on that basis, but neglected to consider the case as a hate crime.
- **21.02.2019:** Government introduced a ‘paradigm shift’ in immigration policies with an emphasis on repatriation of immigrants and refugees as soon as legally possibly (according to international conventions).<sup>46</sup>

46. Folketinget, “L 140 Forslag til lov om ændring af udlændingeloven, integrationsloven, repatrieringsloven og forskellige andre love”, Folketinget, 21 February 2019, <https://www.ft.dk/samling/20181/lovforslag/l140/index.htm>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

- **01.07.2019:** As part of the ‘ghetto’-policies, one-year-old toddlers, living in ‘ghetto’-neighbourhoods and whose parents cannot speak Danish beyond a 9<sup>th</sup> grade level, will be forced to attend mandatory day care for at least 25 hours per week.<sup>47</sup>
- **15.08.2019:** Right-wing MPs admit of voting against citizenship applications on the basis of applicants originating from Muslim-majority countries.
- **07.10.2019:** It was revealed that Danish jobcentres obtain information from national registers on unemployed Danish citizens who are categorised as ‘non-Western immigrants and descendants’ without the consent or knowledge of the citizens. Citizens have to formally contact governing bodies to have this information withdrawn from their jobcentre profiles.
- **24.10.2019:** Legislation passed to allow the Minister of Immigration and Integration to deprive dual citizens their Danish citizenship to limit foreign fighters from Syria returning to Denmark.
- **12.11.2019:** UN criticised Denmark’s ‘ghetto’-policies on the basis of discrimination of minorities.
- **06.12.2019:** Auditing of seven Muslim independent schools.

---

47. “Obligatorisk læringstilbud til 1-årige i udsatte boligområder og skærpet straf til ledere for pligtforsømmelser”, Ministry of Children and Education, <https://www.uvm.dk/dagtilbud/love-og-regler--formaal-og-aftaler/af-talen-om-parallelsamfund/om-aftalen>, (Access date: 4 February 2020).

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**ESTONIA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

EGERT RÜNNE, LIINA LAANPERE



## The Authors

**Egert Rünne** is the executive director of the Estonian Human Rights Centre. He is the Estonian project manager of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights research network FRANET. Currently, Rünne is also involved in various studies related to the Roma community and their well-being in Estonia and Europe. Email: [egert.rynne@humanrights.ee](mailto:egert.rynne@humanrights.ee)

**Liina Laanpere** is a lawyer at the Estonian Human Rights Centre and participates as a legal expert in the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights research network FRANET. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Law from Tartu University and a Master's degree in International Human Rights Law from University College Cork, Ireland. Email: [liina.laanpere@humanrights.ee](mailto:liina.laanpere@humanrights.ee)

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Egert Rünne and Liina Laanpere: *Islamophobia in Estonia: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

The Estonian Muslim community makes up approximately 0.1% to 0.3% of the national population, based on different estimations. The local Muslim community, historically comprising largely of Tatars, is rarely the target of any negative attention. However, Islamophobic attitudes are rising in the context of immigration.

In 2019, there were two examples of physical attacks that could be considered Islamophobic, although it is difficult to make a distinction between anti-migrant bias and specifically Islamophobic bias. Verbal attacks were more common, according to refugee organisations, but they were usually not reported to the police. The attacks reflect a hostile attitude towards refugees and migrants, promoted by right-wing politicians. After the elections in March 2019, the far-right nationalist Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) became part of the ruling coalition. The figureheads of the EKRE actively spread anti-refugee and anti-immigration views, which often include Islamophobic stereotypes.

In 2019, the Estonian media mainly focused on incidents involving Muslims in other EU countries; however, there were examples of reporting styles that generate fear and distrust towards Muslims and migrants in general.

There are no legal restrictions to the practice of Islam. However, there is a need to amend the regulation concerning hate speech and hate crime, to ensure that people are held accountable for inciting anti-Muslim hatred, and prosecuted accordingly when committing hate crimes against Muslims or other minority groups.

There were a few positive examples of initiatives aimed at challenging stereotypes and promoting equal treatment of different minority groups. There are no initiatives directly targeting Islamophobia, as it is usually dealt with in the context of xenophobia.

## Kokkuvõte

Erinevate hinnangute põhjal moodustab Eesti moslemikogukond umbes 0,1–0,3% riigi elanikkonnast. Kohalik moslemikogukond, millest on ajalooliselt moodustanud suure hulga tatarlased, satub harva negatiivse tähelepanu alla, kuid islamofobsed hoiakud on tõusetunud immigratsiooni kontekstis.

2019. aasta jooksul raporteeriti kaks füüsilist rünnakut, mis võisid olla ajendatud moslemitevaenust, kuid samas on keeruline eristada konkreetset moslemi-vaenulikkust motivatsioonist üldisemast migrandivaenulikkusest. Pagulasorganisatsioonide sõnul olid verbaalsed rünnakud sagedasemad kui füüsilised rünnakud, kuid politseile neist tavaliselt ei teatatud. Rünnakud kajastavad vaenulikkust suhtumist pagulastesse ja migrantidesse, mida propageerivad parempoolsed poliitikud. Pärast 2019. aasta märtsis toimunud valimisi sai paremäärmuslik Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond (EKRE) valitsevasse koalitsiooni. EKRE juhid levitavad aktiivselt pagulas- ja immigratsioonivastaseid seisukohti, mis sisaldavad sageli ka islamofobseid stereotüüpe.

Eesti meedia keskendus 2019. aasta jooksul peamiselt moslemitega seotud intsidendidele teistes Euroopa Liidu riikides, kuid leidis näiteid artiklitest, mis õhutavad hirmu ja usaldamatust moslemite ja migrantide suhtes üldiselt.

Eesti seadused ei sätesta takistusi Islami praktiseerimisele. Samas vajab muudatuse vaenukõne ja vaenukuritegude regulatsioon, et tagada vastutusele võtmine moslemivastase vaenu õhutamise eest ning kuriteole vastav karistus vaenukuritegude toimepanijatele.

Positiivsena on võimalik esile tõsta mõned näited algatustest erinevate pagulasorganisatsioonide ning Sotsiaalministeeriumi eestvedamisel, mille eesmärk on stereotüüpide murdmine ja erinevate vähemusrühmade võrdse kohtlemise edendamine.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Republic of Estonia

**Type of Regime:** Democratic Republic

**Form of Government:** Unitary Parliamentary Republic

**Ruling Parties:** Centre Party, Conservative People's Party of Estonia, Pro Patria (coalition)

**Opposition Parties:** Reform Party, Social Democratic Party

**Last Elections:** 2019 Parliamentary Election (Reform Party: 34 mandates, Centre Party: 26 mandates, Conservative People's Party of Estonia: 19 mandates, Pro Patria: 12 mandates, Social Democratic Party: 10 mandates, Total: 101); 2017 Municipal Council Elections (Centre Party: 27.3%, Citizens' elections coalitions: 26.8%, Reform Party: 19.5%, Social Democratic Party: 10.4%, Pro Patria and Res Publica Union: 8%, Conservative People's Party of Estonia: 6.7%, Estonian Greens: 0.8%); 2016 Presidential Election (Kersti Kaljulaid was elected president of the Republic of Estonia with 81 votes in the parliament)

**Total Population:** 1,3 million (estimated in 2019)

**Major Languages:** Estonian

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** There are no available statistics on Islamophobia.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** N/A

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Christianity (28%), No religion (54%)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 1,508 (0.12%) according to the last national census in 2011

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Estonian Islamic Centre, Estonian Islamic Congregation

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** NGOs that focus, amongst other things, on equal treatment of Muslims and other minorities in Estonia are the Estonian Human Rights Centre, Estonian Refugee Council, Johannes Mihkelson Centre, and International House Tartu.

**Far-Right Parties:** Conservative People's Party of Estonia

**Far-Right Movements:** Soldiers of Odin

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None. According to the Animal Protection Act, to slaughter a farm animal for a religious purpose, a religious association must obtain the relevant permit.
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

The Muslim community in Estonia is one of the smallest in Europe, although it is difficult to estimate its exact size. According to the last national census in 2011, there were 1,508 people in Estonia who stated their religion to be Islam, making up approximately 0.12% of the Estonian population. However, it is estimated that the actual number is higher, as many Muslims preferred not to state their religious affiliation in the census.<sup>1</sup> In 2005, based on the Estonian Islamic Congregation's estimation, the number of practicing Muslims was approximately 3,500. In 2013, due to increased immigration, Estonians' and Russians' conversion to Islam, and the increased religious activity of younger descendants of Central Asian and Caucasian immigrants, the number was estimated to be nearly 4,500.<sup>2</sup> The three largest ethnic groups in Estonia who identified themselves as Muslims in 2011 were Tatars, Azerbaijanis, and Estonians. In the past years, there has also been a growing proportion of new immigrants from North Africa and Asia.<sup>3</sup>

There are no mosques in Estonia. At first, the Estonian Islamic Congregation held religious services in rented rooms. In 2009, the congregation's activities moved to a permanent location in a former office building near Tallinn Airport. In 2015, the Estonian Islamic Centre was established with the main goal to administer, maintain, and use these premises, as well as to represent Islam in Estonia.<sup>4</sup>

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

According to the Ministry of Justice, there was one crime recorded in 2019 that was possibly motivated by anti-Muslim bias. It was a case of physical abuse (§121 of the Estonian Penal Code). Before the attack, the perpetrator asked the victim about Muslims, Islam, but also about Russians.<sup>5</sup>

Another attack with a possible Islamophobic motivation was reported in the news: on 22 May 2019, a man from Pakistan was verbally and physically attacked in Tallinn. The police started an investigation under §262 of the Estonian Penal Code (Breach of Public Order). It is not possible to claim that the motivation was specifically related to anti-Muslim hatred, as the victim appeared to be targeted because of his migrant background. The perpetrator yelled at the victim "Go home, this is Estonia".<sup>6</sup>

1. Islam Eestis (*Islam in Estonia*), <http://www.islam.pri.ee/index.php?id=66>, (Access date: 18 February 2020)

2. Ege Lepa, "Eesti islamikogukonna dünaamika pärast taasiseseisvumist", PhD Thesis, (Tartu University, Tartu: 2019), p. 195.

3. Ibid, p. 11.

4. Ibid, pp. 194-195.

5. Ministry of Justice, 3 February 2020, <https://www.just.ee/en>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

6. "Politsei alustas pakistanlase rünnaku uurimist avaliku korra rikkumise paragrahvi alusel", Delfi, 13 January 2020, <https://www.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/krimi/politsei-alustas-pakistanlase-runnaku-uurimist-avaliku-korra-rikkumise-paragrahvi-alusel?id=86303537>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

According to the Estonian Refugee Council, there have been several cases of verbal abuse against Muslims in Tallinn, for example, on public transport, especially towards women and girls wearing a hijab.<sup>7</sup> There have also been cases of verbal abuse in Tartu, according to the Johannes Mihkelson Centre. Furthermore, at the end of 2019, a woman wearing a hijab was spat on in Tartu. These incidents were not reported to the police.<sup>8</sup>

## Employment

According to the Labour Inspectorate of Estonia<sup>9</sup> and the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner,<sup>10</sup> no discrimination cases against Muslims or persons perceived as Muslims have been registered in the job market.

## Education

Islamophobic content has not become part of curricula, textbooks, or other education materials.

## Politics

During the period under review, both the 2019 Estonian parliamentary election and the European Parliament election were held in Estonia.

One of the key narratives of the far-right Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) in both election campaigns was aimed against refugees and migration, and the discourse was Islamophobic in nature.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 1:** The EKRE's campaign video stated, "Muslim immigrants are given housing at the expense of the state"<sup>11</sup>

7. Estonian Refugee Council, 13 January 2020, <https://www.pagulasabi.ee/>, (Access date: 5 February 2020).

8. Interview with Johannes Mihkelson Centre, 5 February 2020.

9. Labour Inspectorate of Estonia, 23 January 2020, <https://www.ti.ee/en/home/>, (Access date: 5 February 2020).

10. Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, 10 February 2020, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/structures/estonia/gender-equality-and-equal-treatment-commissioner-soolise-vordoislikkuse-ja-vordse-kohtlemise-volinik>, (Access date: 5 February 2020).

11. "Platform for the Estonian Parliament Elections for 2019", Conservative People's Party of Estonia, 5 January 2019, <https://www.ekre.ee/ekre-programm-riigikogu-valimisteks-2019/>, (Access date: 10 February 2020).

The EKRE's parliamentary election programme stated the following: "We are helping to rebuild the war-affected areas by sending back refugees staying in Estonia",<sup>12</sup> and their European Parliament programme stated that "Europe's rapidly growing Muslim population has put European identity and values at risk".<sup>13</sup>

One of EKRE's election campaign videos for the parliamentary election that was broadcasted on TV and social media showed people coming in boats and destroying the city, while the voiceover read, "Muslim immigrants are given housing at the expense of the state".<sup>14</sup> (Fig. 1)

During the campaign period, party members also published various opinion pieces in national newspapers, where they mentioned Muslims in a negative context. For example, the party chair's wife Helle-Moonika Helme stated the following: "They are Muslims, they carry another culture that is dangerous to us. They have already done their evil deeds."<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 2:** EKRE's Jaak Madison shared his opinion on Facebook that the Notre-Dame de Paris fire could have been an accident, but could also have been the work of Muslims.<sup>16</sup>

Far-right politicians also actively share hate speech and negativity about Islam online, especially on Facebook. For example, then just a candidate, and now a new member of the European Parliament, EKRE's Jaak Madison shared his opinion that the Notre-Dame de Paris fire could have been an accident, but could also have

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. "For Estonia", Conservative People's Party of Estonia, Youtube, 28 January 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7R5gUQoY3c>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

15. "MoonikaHelme: kui meeste nikkorralikult, siis naine ei peagi käima orjatoöl", Eesti Päevaleht, 9 March 2019, <https://epl.delfi.ee/lp/moonika-helme-kui-meeste-nikkorralikult-siis-naine-ei-peagi-kaima-orjatool?id=85529945>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

16. Jaak Madison, Facebook, 16 April 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/jaak.madison/posts/10213700239439843>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

been the work of Muslims. He also added that many Muslims were happy about the incident.<sup>17</sup> (Fig. 2)

## Media

In 2019, different media outlets published opinion pieces by members of the Conservative People's Party of Estonia, using anti-immigration rhetoric and Islamophobic statements. For example, in one opinion piece Jaak Madison promised to focus on “curbing the spread of terrorism and Islam”.<sup>18</sup> In another article, Martin Helme spoke out against multiculturalism, using France and Sweden as threatening examples for the spread of Islam.<sup>19</sup> However, most of the media coverage on Islam or Muslims focused on incidents from other countries, usually in a neutral way, but sometimes using extreme examples of crimes committed by Muslims in a sensationalist manner, for example, “DIE, DIE, DIE! Yelled a Refugee While Stabbing the Child of His Helper”.<sup>20</sup>

## Justice System

There have been no Islamophobic laws or regulations introduced in 2019. However, one problem that can be outlined is that the current Estonian legislation does not provide an effective possibility for prosecuting hate crime and hate speech against Muslims or other minority groups. Estonia has not transposed the Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law. Estonian Penal Code does not include hate crime as a specific type of crime, nor bias motive as an aggravating circumstance. The Penal Code does include a provision for “incitement to hatred”; however, since the provision requires the existence of “danger to the life, health or property of a person”, it is difficult to apply in real situations.

## Internet

There are several websites that regularly spread Islamophobic stereotypes, but there are no websites specifically dedicated to covering topics related to Islam. For example, there is the blog *Rahvuslane* (The Nationalist)<sup>21</sup> that posts stories like “There’s No Place for Islamic Propaganda in Estonian Schools, Islam Is Not

---

17. Ibid.

18. “Jaak Madison: rahvuskonservatiivid kui uus tegus jõud Euroopas”, ERR, 21 May 2019, <https://www.err.ee/943716/jaak-madison-rahvuskonservatiivid-kui-uus-tegus-joud-euroopas>, (Access date: 17 February 2020).

19. “Rahandusminister Martin Helme Soome väljaandele: Eestis käib kultuurimarksistlik rünnak rahva vaimu vastu”, Lõunaestlane, 11 May 2019, <https://lounaestlane.ee/rahandusminister-martin-helme-soome-valjaandele-ees-tis-kaib-kultuurimarksistlik-runnak-rahva-vaimu-vastu/>, (Access date: 17 February 2020).

20. “SURE! SURE! SURE! karjus oma abistaja last pussitanud põgenik”, Õhtuleht, 18 June 2019, <https://www.ohhtuleht.ee/967397/sure-sure-sure-karjus-oma-abistaja-last-pussitanud-pogenik>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

21. *Rahvuslane*, <http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

Part of Europe!”<sup>22</sup> Also, there is the EKRE news portal *Uued uudised* (The New News),<sup>23</sup> which has 17,000 followers on its Facebook page.<sup>24</sup> Some of the 2019 headlines include “Martti Kalda, Expert on the Orient: ‘The Goal of Islam Is to Destroy Europe and the West’”;<sup>25</sup> “Recommendations of Finland’s Minister of the Interior, Extremist Maria Ohisalo, Give Islamic Extremists a Chance to Infiltrate Law Enforcement”<sup>26</sup>; and “Estonian Muslim: National Broadcasting Portrays It as an Idyllic Fairy Tale”.<sup>27</sup> The list goes on, and all of them feature negative stereotypes.

In addition, *Objektiiv* (The Lens),<sup>28</sup> a popular fundamentalist Christian website, publishes stories such as “Muslim of the Year Finalist Called for Jihad”<sup>29</sup> and “Muslims Rejoice at the Fire of Notre-Dame on Social Media”.<sup>30</sup> *Objektiiv* also has a significant following on Facebook;<sup>31</sup> around 17,000 users read its posts.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Islamophobic stereotypes are mainly promoted by the Conservative People’s Party of Estonia in the context of their anti-immigration platform. The most active members spreading hostile content against migrants and refugees, including Muslims, are the party leader and current Minister of the Interior Mart Helme, Minister of Finance Martin Helme, and MEP Jaak Madison. In addition, Varro Vooglaid, the founder of *Objektiiv*, regularly shares Islamophobic content in the context of immigration.

22. “Islamipropaganda tegemine Eesti koolides on lubamatu, islam ei kuulu Euroopasse!”, *Rahvuslane*, 10 April 2018, <http://rahvuslane.blogspot.com/2018/04/islamipropaganda-tegemine-est.html>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

23. *Uued uudised*, <https://uueduudised.ee>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

24. *Uued uudised*, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/uueduudised/>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

25. “Idamaade tundja Martti Kalda: islami idee on Euroopa ja lääs põhimõtteliselt hävitada”, *Uued uudised*, 25 January 2020, <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/maailm/idamaade-tundja-martti-kalda-islami-idee-on-euroopa-ja-laas-pohimotteliselt-havitada/>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

26. “Soome äärmusliku siseministri Maria Ohisalo soovitusid annaksid islamiäärmuslastele võimaluse korrakaitseesse imbuda”, *Uued uudised*, 8 December 2019, <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/maailm/soome-aarmusliku-siseministri-maria-ohisalo-soovitusid-annaksid-islami-aarmuslastele-voimaluse-korrakaitseesse-imbuda/>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

27. “Milline on Eesti moslem – ERR kirjeldab seda idüllilises muinasloos”, *Uued uudised*, 12 April 2019, <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/eesti/milline-on-eesti-moslem-err-kirjeldab-seda-idullilises-muinasloos/>, (Access date 1 February 2020).

28. *Objektiiv*, <https://objektiiv.ee>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

29. “Aasta moslemi” finalist kutsus üles džihaadile”, *Objektiiv*, 30 September 2019, <https://objektiiv.ee/aasta-moslemi-finalist-kutsus-ules-dzihadile/>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

30. “Moslemid röömustavad sotsiaalmeedias Jumalaema kiriku põlengu üle”, *Objektiiv*, 16 April 2020, <https://objektiiv.ee/moslemid-roomustavad-sotsiaalmeedias-jumalaema-kiriku-polengu-ule/>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

31. *Objektiiv*, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/objektiiv>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

There are no initiatives that specifically target combating anti-Muslim racism, but there are projects and campaigns targeting equal treatment of minority groups. For example, the Ministry of Social Affairs has launched a campaign entitled “Everyone Is Different, But Equally Human” encouraging good will towards all minorities. It aims to raise awareness of equal treatment and to highlight the contributions made to Estonian society by members of its minorities.<sup>32</sup>

The Estonian Refugee Council, the Johannes Mihkelson Centre, and the Tartu International House initiated the project ‘Let’s Meet!’, during which they organised 45 different events all around Estonia bringing together beneficiaries of international protection, foreigners living in Estonia, and the local population. The project aimed to challenge the stereotypes surrounding ‘otherness’ and give everyone the possibility to discover new cultures and make personal connections.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The expressions of Islamophobia in Estonia are usually connected to fear of immigration. This means more awareness-raising activities among the general public could be beneficial. As the Estonian Muslim community is small and most people only hear about Islam in the media, where it is often discussed in a negative context, more attention could be paid to introducing the historical Muslim communities in Estonia.

In addition, to ensure effective prosecution of incidents of hate speech and hate crime against Muslims and other minority groups, the Estonian Penal Code should be reviewed and necessary amendments should be adopted to bring Estonian legislation in line with EU law, in particular the Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA.

## Chronology

- **28.01.2019:** The EKRE published an election campaign video that showed people coming in boats and destroying the city, while the voiceover read, “Muslim immigrants are given housing at the expense of the state”.

---

32. “Kampaania „Kõik on erinevad, kuid sama palju inimesed”, Ministry of Social Affairs, 24 January 2020, <https://www.sm.ee/et/sama-palju-inimene>, (Access date: 2 February 2020)

33. “Saame tuttavaks”, Estonian Refugee Council, October 2017 - March 2019, <https://www.pagulasabi.ee/projektid/saame-tuttavaks-kohaliku-tasandi-koostooritused-rahvusvahelise-kaitse-valdkonnas>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

- **08.04.2019:** The EKRE published its programme for the European Parliament elections stating that “Europe’s rapidly growing Muslim population has put European identity and values at risk”.
- **22.05.2019:** A man from Pakistan was verbally and physically attacked in Tallinn. The police started an investigation under §262 of the Estonian Penal Code (Breach of Public Order).



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**FINLAND**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

ENRIQUE TESSIERI



## The Author

**Enrique Tessieri** is a sociologist and former journalist who writes and researches immigration topics. As a journalist, Tessieri worked in countries like Finland, Spain, Italy, Argentina, and Colombia writing on topics including human rights, business, and foreign investment. Tessieri is editor of *Migrant Tales*, a community blog he founded in 2007. He is chairperson and founder of the Anti-Hate Crime Organisation Finland and vice president of Rom-Mikkeli, an association founded in 2015 to further the rights of the Roma minority of Mikkeli, a city located in Eastern Finland. Tessieri works at Otava Folk High School near the city of Mikkeli, and is an advisor for the Master in Conflict, Peace and Security at the Open University of Catalonia. Email: [editor@migranttales.net](mailto:editor@migranttales.net)

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Enrique Tessieri: *Islamophobia in Finland: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

Last year was especially challenging to Muslims in Finland because it was an election year. As in the parliamentary elections of 2011 and 2015, anti-Muslim rhetoric played important roles in attracting voter support for the Islamophobic Finns Party (PS). Last year, the sexual assault cases that took place in the northern Finnish city of Oulu provided the PS with an election lifesaver. Support for the PS in opinion polls stood at 8.6% in December 2018 but soared to 22.7% a year later.

The big prize for the party came in the parliamentary elections of 14 April when it won 39 seats and came in second place losing only by a hair to the Social Democrats. The European Parliament (MEP) elections (26 May) a month later were a sad example of the hostile attitude some candidates expressed concerning asylum seekers. As many as 36.3% (85/234) of the Finnish MEP candidates disagreed or were neutral in an election compass that the EU is obliged to save people from drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. Anti-Muslim sentiment lifted its head again at the end of the year when a heated political debate took place on the repatriation of 11 women and their 30-odd children to Finland from the al-Hol refugee camp in northeast Syria.

The fact that the PS is the biggest opposition party in parliament with 39 MPs means that the following three and half years will be especially trying for the center-left coalition of Prime Minister Sanna Marin, a Social Democrat. The fact that the PS led in the polls at the end of the year has not emboldened the party but is proof that xenophobia and anti-Muslim racism will continue to dominate political discussion in Finland. The awaited reforms to relax asylum policy may take longer than expected due to strong opposition from the PS and other opposition parties like the National Coalition Party (*Kokoomus*) and the Christian Democrats.

## Tiivistelmä

Viime vuosi oli erityisen haastava muslimeille Suomessa, koska 2019 oli vaalivuosi. Kuten vuosien 2011 ja 2015 eduskuntavaaleissa, muslimien vastaisella retoriikalla oli iso rooli populistisen Perussuomalaisen puolueen kannatuksessa. Viime vuoden seksuaalirikostapaukset Oulussa tarjosi Perussuomalaisille tärkeän vaalipelastuksen. Mielipidetutkimukset puhuvat puolestaan: Perussuomalaisten tuki oli joulukuussa 2018 8,6%, mutta se kasvoi 22,7% vuodessa. Puolue sai ison lahjan huhtikuun eduskuntavaalissa, joissa Perussuomalaiset sai 39 kansanedustajaa ja hävisi niukasti sosiaalidemokraateille, jotka voittivat vaalit. Noin kuukausi myöhemmin Europarlamenttivaalien (26. toukokuuta) kampanjoinnissa nähtiin vihamielisyyttä turvapaikkahakijoita kohtaan. Yhdessä vaalikoneessa 36,3% (84/234) eurovaaliehdokkaista katsoi, ettei ole EU:n velvollisuus pelastaa siirtolaisia hukkumisvaaralta Välimerellä. Muslimi-vastainen ilmapiiri nosti jälleen päänsä vuoden lopulla, kun alkoi vilkas poliittinen keskustelu 11 naisen ja heidän 30 lapsensa kotiuttamisesta Suomeen al-Holin pakolaisleiristä Koillis-Syyriassa. Koska perussuomalaiset ovat suurin oppositiopuolue eduskunnassa 39 kansanedustajan voimalla, on selvää että seuraavat kolme vuotta ennen vaaleja tulee olemaan vaikeita pääministeri Sanna Marinin keskustavasemmistolaiselle hallitukselle. Perussuomalaiset johtavat myös mielipidetutkimuksia. Perussuomalaisten muslimivastainen retoriikka tulee olemaan poliittisen keskustelun keskiössä. Odotettu maahanmuuttolain löystyminen tulee kestävämmän kauemmin, koska hallituksella on pelko perussuomalaisten ja muiden oppositiopuolueiden (kokoomus ja kristillisdemokraatit) kannatuksen noususta.

## Country Profile EIR 2019

**Country:** Finland

**Type of Regime:** Parliamentary Republic

**Form of Government:** Republic

**Ruling Parties:** Social Democratic Party, Centre Party, Green League, Left Alliance, and Swedish People's Party

**Opposition Parties:** Finns Party, National Coalition Party, Christian Democrats, and Movement Now

**Last Elections:** 2019 Parliamentary election (Social Democrats: 40 seats, Finns Party: 39 seats, National Coalition Party: 38 seats, Centre Party: 31 seats, Green League: 20 seats, Left Alliance: 16 seats, Swedish People's Party: 9 seats, Christian Democrats: 5 seats, Movement Now: 1 seat, and Åland Coalition: 1 seat); 2019 European Parliament election (National Coalition Party: 3 seats, Green League: 1 + 1 seat if the UK leaves the EU, Social Democratic Party: 2 seats, Finns Party: 2 seats, Centre Party: 2 seats, and Left Alliance: 1 seat).

**Total Population:** 5,527,573 (in 2019)

**Major Languages:** Finnish and Swedish

**Official Religion:** N/A

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** The latest Police University College hate crime report for 2018, the only source for hate crime in the country, showed suspected hate crimes decreased by 22% to 910 cases from the previous year, while Muslims continued to be the most affected group. Police sources state that there is a sharp drop in asylum seekers entering the country after 2015. The lion's share of hate crimes was due to ethnic or national origin (69.7%), and religion (17%). Sixty-seven percent of hate crimes due to ethnic or national background were reported by men and 33% by women. The most affected group by nationality were Iraqis. After rising by 58% in 2017, hate crimes due to religious background fell by 34% and the most affected were Muslims. Like in many EU countries, hate crime cases are underreported and represent only the tip of the iceberg.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** Different studies show that labor market discrimination is a problem in Finland. Akhlaq Ahmad's study in October confirmed what we have known for a long time: if you have a Muslim foreign-sounding name, your chances of getting a job interview may be difficult. Organizations like the Council of Europe Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) have called on Finland to take a tougher stance on hate speech and racism.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church 3,853,106 (69.7%); Islam est. 110,000-120,000 (2-2.2%); Finnish Orthodox Church 59,560 (1.08%); Jehovah's Witnesses 17,303 (0.31%); Finnish Free Church 15,312 (0.28%); Catholic Church 14,357 (0.26%); Pentecostals 11,237 (0.20%);

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints 3,275 (0.6%); Buddhist 1,777 (0.03%); Baptist Church 1,568 (0.03%); United Methodist Church 1,381 (0.02%); Judaism 1,096 (0.02%)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** Estimated at 110,000-120,000 (2-2.2%)

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Federation of Islamic Organizations of Finland (*Islamilaisten järjestöjen liitto*); *Suomen Islamilainen Yhdyskunta*; Islamic Council of Finland (*Suomen Islamilainen Neuvosto*); *Resalat Islamilainen Yhdyskunta* (Resalat Islamic Society); *Suomen Islam-Seurakunta*; *Helsinki Islam Keskus*; *Suomen Muslimiliitto*; *Nuoret Muslimit*; *Nuorten Muslimien Foorumi*; *Tampeereen Islamin yhdyskunta*, Islamic Society of Northern Finland (*Pohjois-Suomen Islamilainen Yhdyskunta*), The Islamic Rahma Center in Finland, *Turun Islamilainen Yhdyskunta*, and *Suomen Islamilainen Diyanet Yhdyskunta*.

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** Finland does not have a specific NGO that combats Islamophobia. Some that address the issue are the Islamic Council of Finland, The National Forum for Cooperation of Religions in Finland, *Nuoret Muslimit*, *Helsingin Muslimit*, Anti-Hate Crime Organisation Finland, Anti-Racist Forum, *Liikkukaa* -Sports for All, and Migrant Tales.

**Far-Right Parties:** The Finns Party, *Suomen Kansa Ensin*, *Reformi puolue* (not a registered party yet).

**Far-Right Movements:** *Kohti vapautta!* (formerly *Kansallinen Vastarintal Suomen vastarintaliike*), Soldiers of Odin, Finnish Defence League, *Suomi Ensi* (Finland First), *Suomen Sisu*

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

- **Limits to Islamic Practices:** None
- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None. There were plans by the former government of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä to ban halal slaughter from 1 January 2021 with the Animal Welfare Act. The draft law became redundant after Sipilä's government resigned in March 2019.
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** The far right and Islamophobic parties like the Finns Party (PS) and Finnish People First have tried to ban the burka and the niqab. PS First Vice-President Riikka Purra stated before the parliamentary election that the party wants to ban the use of the burka, niqab, and girls using hijabs.
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

After four years of tougher immigration policy spearheaded by the previous right-wing government of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä, there was renewed hope that matters would change with the new government led by the Social Democrats and formed by the Centre Party, Green League, Left Alliance and Swedish People's Party. According to Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government program, human rights and respecting international agreements on refugees are high priorities. The program states: "Human rights and human dignity belong to us all. We pledge to build a Finland that is tolerant and respects and promotes everyone's human rights. Our country has zero tolerance for bullying and racism. We want to build a nation that is equal, accessible and supportive".<sup>1</sup> While the Muslim community hopes that the government will take bolder steps to challenge racism and discrimination, the big question is how far it will go in light of the Finns Party, which is the biggest opposition party and is openly hostile to Muslims and people of color.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

In January 2020, there was a plot by a 22-year-old Latvian national to kill Muslims and migrants in Helsinki on New Year's Eve 2018 with a homemade bomb.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the Latvian construction worker, who denies such plans to kill people, is not being charged with plotting a terrorist act but for preparing "a serious crime that threatens life and health." The suspect will be indicted in February by a court and faces a four-year prison term.

After being vandalized nine times since September 2017, the Oulu Mosque did not suffer any new attacks after 26 February 2019.<sup>3</sup> The Al-Ikhlâs Mosque in the Helsinki suburb of Espoo saw fireworks thrown at it on 10 May and 23 May 2019.<sup>4</sup> Another mosque in the eastern Helsinki neighborhood of Mellunmäki was smeared a number of times with hate graffiti.<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 1)

1. "Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government 10 December 2019 – Inclusive and Competent Finland", *Publication of the Finnish Government*, 33 (2019), [http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161935/VN\\_2019\\_33.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161935/VN_2019_33.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y), (Access date: 12 January 2020).

2. Kimmo Oksanen and Kaisu Moilanen, "Miksi pommi-isku suunnittelusta epäiltyä miestä ei syytetä terrorismista? Syyttäjät ja oikeustieteilijät arvioivat ratkaisua", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 17 January 2020, <https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000006375914.html?share=e413a0190ea236b4db1228bcff00fc66>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

3. Enrique Tessieri, "Oulu Mosque Vandalized for the Ninth Time", *Migrant Tales*, 26 February 2019, <https://www.migranttales.net/oulu-mosque-vandalized-for-the-ninth-time/>, (Access date: 12 January 2020).

4. Enrique Tessieri, "Another Firework Is Thrown at the Al-Ikhlâs Mosque on Thursday," *Migrant Tales*, 25 May 2019, <https://www.migranttales.net/another-firework-is-thrown-at-the-al-ikhlas-mosque-on-thursday/>, (Access date: 12 January 2020).

5. Enrique Tessieri, "Facebook Abbas Bahmanpour: Kun syyllistät kaikki muslmit ja hiljaisuus on vastaus", *Migrant Tales*, 14 March 2019, <https://www.migranttales.net/facebook-abbas-bahmanpour-kun-syyllistat-kaikki-muslimit-ja-hiljaisuus-on-vastaus/>, (Access date: 12 January 2020).



**Figure 1:** Facebook post by Imam Abbas Bahmanpour: "It is irritating to arrive in the morning to open the mosque [in east Helsinki] to a group of students who came to see the mosque and find such text written on the wall. Unfortunately, this happens when politicians start to blame Muslims collectively as a result of what one person has done. It is irritating that even people like [Helsinki deputy mayor for leisure and culture] Nasima Razmyar cave in to this [type of rhetoric]. Is everyone blamed when [white Finn] Teppo stabs his girlfriend? I am very disappointed with our MPs. One should not spread hatred in our society to get votes. Moral values should be above populism if we do not want to suffer from fascism and oppression."<sup>6</sup>

Oulu Mosque's imam Dr. Abdul Mannan said that the hostile environment in Oulu caused by the sexual assault cases involving former asylum seekers, and which brought Islamophobes like Katie Hopkins to the city in January, made Muslims feel unsafe, and that some avoided going to the city center.<sup>7</sup> Despite the hostile environment experienced by some Muslims in Oulu, matters calmed down after the 14 April parliamentary elections, according to Dr. Mannan. The Christchurch attack was another factor that instilled fear. Members of the Oulu mosque guarded the building during Friday prayers because their request for security by the police was turned down. Other hostile acts against the Muslim community of Finland were seen before the European Parliament elections of May when a far-right Finland First candidate desecrated the Koran in public.<sup>8</sup>

Even if suspected hate crime cases retreated by 21.9% in 2018 compared with the previous year, or a total of 910 versus 1,165 cases, the lion's share (86.8%) of all

6. Imam Abbas Bahmanpour, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/abbas.bahmanpour>, 14 March 2019, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

7. Enrique Tessieri, "Is Oulu, Finland, a Safe Place for Muslims?", Migrant Tales, 29 April 2019, <https://www.migranttales.net/is-oulu-finland-a-safe-place-for-muslims/>, (Access date: 29 April 2019).

8. Ali Murat Alhas, "Far-right Finnish Politician Rips up Quran", Anadolu Agency, 26 May 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/far-right-finnish-politician-rips-up-quran/1489562>, (Access date: 12 March 2020).

hate crimes were motivated by national-ethnic origin and religion.<sup>9</sup> The Iraqis faced the highest frequency of hate crime due to national and ethnic origin; the majority of hate crimes due to religious backgrounds were against Muslims. An intense public debate at the end of the year, which almost turned into a political crisis,<sup>10</sup> surrounding the repatriation of 11 Finnish women and about 30 children from the al-Hol refugee camp in Syria. This was reported to have impacted Muslim women in Finland who wear a niqab negatively as they were harassed publicly for being “ISIS wives.”<sup>11</sup>

The European Court of Human Rights announced in November that Finland was guilty of violating Articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Article 2 guarantees that everyone has a right to life, while Article 3 prohibits inhumane treatment like torture. The decision was seen as a visible thumbs down against Finland’s strict asylum policy. The case involves an Iraqi national who was denied asylum in 2017 and who was allegedly killed few weeks after he returned to his home country.<sup>12</sup> The majority of asylum seekers who came to Finland (1 January-6 December 2015) were from Muslim-majority countries like Iraq (20,031 or 64% of total), Afghanistan (4,816 or 15%), Somalia (1,954 or 6%), and Syria (785 or 3%).<sup>13</sup>

## Employment

Finding work is one of the biggest challenges migrants in general and Muslims specifically face in Finland’s racialized and segregated labor markets. Unemployment of people who don’t speak Finnish, Swedish, or Saami as their mother tongue, stood at 22.4% against the national average of 10.48% for 2017, according to the latest Statistics Finland figures.<sup>14</sup> Some of the groups with the highest unemployment rate were Arabic speakers (50.9%), Somali speakers (43.5%), Pastu Afghan speakers (41.4%), Persian Farsi speakers (36.5%), Turkish speakers (24.3%), and Urdu speakers (19.5%). By sex, national unemployment rates for men and women were 11.8% and 9.1%, respectively. That compares with 65.4% for women who are Arabic speakers and 49.5% for Somali speakers.

9. Jenita Rauta, “Poliisin tietoon tullut viharikollisuus Suomessa 2018”, Poliisiammatikorkeakoulu, 4 November 2019, [https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/261556/Polamk\\_katsaus\\_15\\_Viharikos\\_B5\\_WEB.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/261556/Polamk_katsaus_15_Viharikos_B5_WEB.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y), (Access date: 12 January 2020).

10. “Timeline: The Foreign Ministry Flap over Repatriating Finns from al-Hol Refugee Camp”, Yle News, [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/timeline\\_the\\_foreign\\_ministry\\_flap\\_over\\_repatriating\\_finns\\_from\\_al-hol\\_refugee\\_camp/11111113](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/timeline_the_foreign_ministry_flap_over_repatriating_finns_from_al-hol_refugee_camp/11111113), (Access date: 20 February 2020).

11. Conversation with Linda Hyökki via Facebook Messenger (16 January 2020).

12. “Court Rules Finland Violated Human Rights of Murdered Asylum Seeker”, Yle News, 14 November 2019, [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/court\\_rules\\_finland\\_violated\\_human\\_rights\\_of\\_murdered\\_asylum\\_seeker/11068398](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/court_rules_finland_violated_human_rights_of_murdered_asylum_seeker/11068398), (Access date: 21 January 2020).

13. “Vireille tulleet turvapaikkahakemukset 1.12.2015- 6.12.2015”, Maahanmuuttovirasto, 7 December 2015, <https://migri.fi/documents/5202425/6160773/2015+Vireille+tulleet+turvapaikkahakemukset+1.1.-6.12.+%28fi%29>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

14. “Population by Main Type of Activity, Language, Occupational Status, Sex, Age and Year 2000-2017”, Statistics Finland, [http://pxnet2.stat.fi/PXWeb/pxweb/fi/StatFin\\_Passiivi/StatFin\\_Passiivi\\_vrm\\_tyokay/statfinpas\\_tyokay\\_pxt\\_006\\_201700.px/](http://pxnet2.stat.fi/PXWeb/pxweb/fi/StatFin_Passiivi/StatFin_Passiivi_vrm_tyokay/statfinpas_tyokay_pxt_006_201700.px/), (Access date: 1 January 2020).

It is important to note that the most vulnerable groups in the Finnish labor market are immigrants from the Middle East, Northern Africa, Somalia, and those who have arrived as refugees.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, women from these groups suffer higher unemployment than their countrymen even if they have the same level of schooling. Of all the Nordic countries, Finland has performed the worse when it comes to employing migrant women. The employment rate of migrant women was 55% while for migrant men it was 72%.<sup>16</sup>

A study published in October by Akhlaq Ahmad showed again that having a foreign-sounding name puts you at a clear disadvantage in the low-skilled Finnish labor market.<sup>17</sup> All of the applicants had the same qualifications and spoke the same level of Finnish. Those with Finnish names scored the highest (390 people out of 500), with the corresponding figure for Iraqi and Somalis being 134 and 99, respectively.<sup>18</sup>

While it is possible to get employment with a hijab, the religion of the person can be a hindrance. In September, the district court of Helsinki ruled in favor of a Muslim against the City of Helsinki for discrimination and paid him 36,000 euros in damages.<sup>19</sup> The worker, who was hired, was turned down for the job after he asked if he could get 5 minutes unpaid prayer time and one hour on Fridays.

## Education

One particular complaint from Muslim parents is that their children are not getting the right Muslim education at school because teachers are not Muslim or are not qualified.<sup>20</sup> Some imams considered the *Salam* series, which was published by the Finnish National Agency for Education (*Opetushallitus*) for comprehensive and middle school as steps in the right direction for teaching Islam. The new *Salam* series for 7-9 graders will be published in spring.<sup>21</sup>

15. Ojeaku Nwabuzo, "Racism & Discrimination in Employment in Europe 2013-2017", European Network Against Racism Shadow Report, p. 18-19, file:///Users/etessieri/Downloads/ENAR\_Shadowreport\_2013\_2017%20(3).pdf, (Access date: 1 January 2020).

16. "Report: Finland Trails Nordics in Employing Immigrant Women", Yle New", 22 January 2020, [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/report\\_finland\\_trails\\_nordics\\_in\\_employing\\_immigrant\\_women/11170260?fbclid=IwAR3N-liQqNCiwxxk-NHFJPbzy2wucqFA5-eMFIJIS0hxzl-Wt6iLRINRQ\\_cc](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/report_finland_trails_nordics_in_employing_immigrant_women/11170260?fbclid=IwAR3N-liQqNCiwxxk-NHFJPbzy2wucqFA5-eMFIJIS0hxzl-Wt6iLRINRQ_cc), (Access date: 23 January 2020).

17. Enrique Tessieri, "Study: If You Have a 'Foreign'-Sounding Name, You Will Need More Than Luck to Get Work", Migrant Tales, 21 October 2019, <https://www.migranttales.net/study-if-you-have-a-foreign-sounding-name-you-will-need-more-than-luck-to-get-work/>, (Access date: 1 January 2020).

18. "Mies pyysi rukoushetkiä, työsuhde peruuntui – virkamiehille tuomi työsyryjinnästä", Yle, 19 September 2019, <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10980003>, (Access date: 1 January 2020).

19. "Mies pyysi rukoushetkiä, työsuhde peruuntui – virkamiehille tuomio työsyryjinnästä", YLE-STT, 19 September 2019, <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10980003>, (Access date: 12 January 2020).

20. For more information, see: Helsingin Muslimit, "Islamin opetus kouluissa", Islamin Opetus Kouluissa, [https://helsinginmuslimit.fi/islamin-opetus-kouluissa/?\\_\\_cf\\_chl\\_jschl\\_tk\\_\\_=0d9fa829b5688ea04e3ee181645d69096c2010d8-1579457438-0-Aap5IU4pA-LDdmyKxnV2u-E1hdGIT5rbZ4CnfOKNWMPReQE6ZfyooduQ3\\_Wr-ElWuyzkoBh6a\\$D7\\_989sy3pYXpkIDRPuol7qp7b2Us6ETZvuBd0G9GPEwnRsGq9Tyf4M0-O9qNQNf92R-ja3ixR7\\_W0bsgY495TvhYA0J6cqND5iruZMjiuocPNXP6W7ONbX7R7RIKdZcK4nHagMyxUIuU7DzKVGn-j5rZTU8ndnR0\\_f7rKpTMbpZjuPD0W3ahDrnakumHC9NrbtNoZ61yiWEdPOsT0-JZn0Z3ZcPZVoD1weMy](https://helsinginmuslimit.fi/islamin-opetus-kouluissa/?__cf_chl_jschl_tk__=0d9fa829b5688ea04e3ee181645d69096c2010d8-1579457438-0-Aap5IU4pA-LDdmyKxnV2u-E1hdGIT5rbZ4CnfOKNWMPReQE6ZfyooduQ3_Wr-ElWuyzkoBh6a$D7_989sy3pYXpkIDRPuol7qp7b2Us6ETZvuBd0G9GPEwnRsGq9Tyf4M0-O9qNQNf92R-ja3ixR7_W0bsgY495TvhYA0J6cqND5iruZMjiuocPNXP6W7ONbX7R7RIKdZcK4nHagMyxUIuU7DzKVGn-j5rZTU8ndnR0_f7rKpTMbpZjuPD0W3ahDrnakumHC9NrbtNoZ61yiWEdPOsT0-JZn0Z3ZcPZVoD1weMy), (Access date: 19 January 2020). Also telephone conversation with Imam Abbas Bahampour (31 December 2019).

21. Telephone conversation with Imam Anas Hajar (8 January 2020).

## Politics

After four years (2015-2019) of a conservative government headed by Prime Minister Juha Sipilä that tightened immigration laws like family reunification in 2016,<sup>22</sup> there is hope that matters may improve with the new government. The biggest obstacle to any loosening of asylum laws is the Finns Party (PS), which is openly hostile to what it calls “harmful” immigration, which is code for Muslim asylum seekers.<sup>23</sup> One of the anti-Islam claims is to “stop all harmful immigration” to Finland. Some interpret this to mean leaving the Geneva Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights.<sup>24</sup>

The brainchild of the PS’s anti-Islam message is its leader Jussi Halla-aho, who was convicted of ethnic agitation and breaching the sanctity of religion in 2012. In an interview with Danish daily *Politiken*,<sup>25</sup> published a day before the April parliamentary election, Halla-aho said that his only aim in politics is to change immigration policy and convert the Finns Party into such a powerful political force that other parties will have no choice but to accept their policies like the Danish People’s Party did in Denmark. Halla-aho’s comments are no surprise, considering that the Finns Party has been a close ideological ally of the Danish People’s Party<sup>26</sup> which was instrumental in making Denmark a hostile country for Muslims.<sup>27</sup> In light of the present situation and political landscape of the country, anti-Muslim rhetoric will continue to dominate Finnish politics for the time being.

## Media

Stories about Muslims in the Finnish media are too often biased and unbalanced. Likewise, there is little trust among certain leaders of the Muslim community of the media, where there are very few, if any, Muslims working as reporters, never mind as editors. Two cases of biased reporting were the sexual assault cases of

---

22. ”Amnesty International Report 2016/2017”, Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL1048002017ENGLISH.PDF>, (Access date: 1 January 2020).

23. ”Vote Finland Back”, The Finns Party Election Programme 2019, [https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Eduskuntavaaliohjelma-2019\\_SU\\_In\\_English\\_1.pdf](https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Eduskuntavaaliohjelma-2019_SU_In_English_1.pdf), (Accessed date: 19 January 2020).

24. Lauri Finér, ”Millaista on perussuomalaisten maahanmuuttopolitiikka?”, Veropolitiikka blogi, 6 January 2020, <https://veropolitiikka.blog/2020/01/06/millaista-on-perussuomalaisten-maahanmuuttopolitiikka/>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

25. Kristian Klarskov, ”Usædvanlig finsk højrefløjsleder har fordoblet målingerne på fire måneder: ’Man kan se på mit ansigt, at jeg absolut ikke nyder det her’”, *Politiken*, 13 April 2019, <https://politiken.dk/udland/art7137325/»Man-kan-se-på-mit-ansigt-at-jeg-absolut-ikke-nyder-det-her«>, (Access date: 1 January 2020).

26. Enrique Tessieri, ”The ‘Denmarkization’ of Finnish Immigration Policy”, *Migrant Tales*, 19 December 2015, <https://www.migranttales.net/the-denmarkization-of-finnish-immigration-policy/>, (Access date: 1 January 2020).

27. Sibel Özcan and Zeynep Bangert, ”Islamophobia in Denmark National Report 2018”, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, (SETA, İstanbul: 2019), p. 251-282, <http://www.islamophobieurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/DENMARK.pdf>, (Access date: 1 January 2020).

Oulu<sup>28</sup> that came to public light at the end of November 2018, and at the end of last year, the repatriation of 11 women and about 30 children in the al-Hol refugee camp in northeast Syria. During a 79-day period *Yle* alone published 77 stories (27 November 2018 - 13 February 2019) about the sexual<sup>29</sup> assault cases;<sup>30</sup> in the case of al-Hol, *Yle* published 71 stories and *Helsingin Sanomat* 36 stories during a twenty-day period (2-21 December 2019).<sup>31</sup> While some believed there was “a sexual assault epidemic of minors” by Muslims, only eight were found guilty and handed prison terms.<sup>32</sup>



**Figure 2:** The Finnish media commonly reinforces stereotypic perceptions of Muslim women. The story by Finland’s leading daily, *Helsingin Sanomat*, suggests that the 11 Finnish women and their roughly 30 children at the al-Hol camp in Syria wear burkas, even if they actually wear niqabs. Such illustrations help to create the assumption that all Muslim women, even Finnish converts to Islam, wear burkas.<sup>33</sup>

Negative and overzealous reporting by the media had an especially negative impact on the Muslim community of Oulu. The media’s reporting and public outrage, fueled by politicians and even the police, encouraged knee-jerk responses by govern-

28. Enrique Tessieri, “YLE Coverage of Sexual Assaults Committed by White Finns and Migrants Is Unbalanced, Racialized and Opinionated”, *Migrant Tales*, 10 April 2018, <https://www.migranttales.net/yle-coverage-of-sexual-assaults-committed-by-white-finns-and-migrants-is-unbalanced-racialized-and-opinionated/>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

29. Enrique Tessieri, “Actions of the Finnish Police and Yle Reveal Multicultural Incompetence in Coverage of Oulu Sexual Assault Cases”, *Migrant Tales*, 24 April 2019, <https://www.migranttales.net/actions-of-the-finnish-police-and-yle-reveal-multicultural-incompetence-in-coverage-of-oulu-sexual-assault-cases/>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

30. Anu Koivunen, “Turvallisuusuhka”, *Suomen Kuvalehti*, 25 January 2019 <https://suomenkuvalehti.fi/jutut/kulttuuri/mita-saadaan-kun-seksuaalirikokset-turvapaikanhakijat-ja-perussuomalaisten-gallupnousu-kohtaavat-tolkuton-mediapaniikki/?shared=1059892-60bafb74-999>, (Access date: 4 February 2020). For more information, see: Enrique Tessieri, “The Media of Finland Is Part of the Country’s Islamophobia and Racism Problem”, *Migrant Tales*, 26 January 2019, <https://www.migranttales.net/the-media-of-finland-is-part-of-the-countrys-islamophobia-and-racism-problem/>, (Access date: 4 February 2020).

31. Enrique Tessieri, “Media Coverage of the Women and Children Refugees of the al-Hol Camp Is a Low for Finnish Journalism”, *Migrant Tales*, 22 December 2019, <https://www.migranttales.net/media-coverage-of-the-women-and-children-refugees-of-the-al-hol-camp-is-a-low-in-finnish-journalism/>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

32. “Käräjäoikeus antoi viimeiset tuomiot Oulun seksuaalirikosjutussa – kaikki kahdeksan syytettyä vankeuteen, pisin tuomio 4,5 vuotta”, *Ilta-Sanomat*, 12 July 2019, <https://www.is.fi/oulu-seutu/art-2000006171458.html>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

33. Sami Silanpää, “11 naista ja heidän lapsensa”, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 13 December 2019, <https://www.hs.fi/sunnuntai/art-2000006341623.html>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

ment politicians who demanded asylum seekers be given tests on Finnish values, the loss of citizenship if convicted of a serious crime,<sup>34</sup> and brought about recommendations by city officials to momentarily ban asylum seekers from visiting day care centers and elementary schools.<sup>35</sup>



**Figure 3:** *Helsingin Sanomat's*<sup>36</sup> staff celebrating the daily's 130th anniversary in November 2019. Do you see any minorities? Only one person in the picture has a so-called foreign-sounding name. With about 16% of Helsinki's population speaking another language other than Finnish, Swedish and Sami, Muslims and minorities are underrepresented in the newsroom.<sup>37</sup>

## Justice System

Juho Sipilä's government (2015-2019) aimed at changing laws that would impact migrants but they never came into force due to time constraints and because his government resigned in March.

34. "Faster Asylum Process, Civics Test, Proof of Study or Work: Govt's Plans to Combat Immigrant Crime", Yle News, [https://yle.fi/utiset/osasto/news/faster\\_asylum\\_process\\_civics\\_test\\_proof\\_of\\_study\\_or\\_work\\_govts\\_plans\\_to\\_combat\\_immigrant\\_crime/10655505](https://yle.fi/utiset/osasto/news/faster_asylum_process_civics_test_proof_of_study_or_work_govts_plans_to_combat_immigrant_crime/10655505), 20 February 2019, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

35. Enrique Tessieri, "City of Oulu's 'Ban' on Asylum Seekers Visiting Day-Care Center and Schools May Be Unconstitutional. 'Ban' to Be Lifted on April 14", Migrant Tales, 5 March 2019, [https://yle.fi/utiset/osasto/news/faster\\_asylum\\_process\\_civics\\_test\\_proof\\_of\\_study\\_or\\_work\\_govts\\_plans\\_to\\_combat\\_immigrant\\_crime/10655505](https://yle.fi/utiset/osasto/news/faster_asylum_process_civics_test_proof_of_study_or_work_govts_plans_to_combat_immigrant_crime/10655505), (Access date: 29 December 2019).

36. Miska Rantanen and Juhani Saarinen, "HS täyttää 130 vuotta ja teki lukijoilleen erikoislehden", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 16 November 2019, <https://www.hs.fi/kulttuuri/art-2000006308542.html>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

37. "Joka kuudes helsinkiläinen on ulkomaalaistaustainen", Helsingin kaupunki, <https://www.ulkomaalaistaustaisethelsingissa.fi/fi/nykytilanne>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

In light of the Oulu sexual assault cases, former National Coalition Party Interior Minister Kai Mykkänen stated that on top of deportations, a person guilty of a serious crime, like gross sexual assault, could lose his citizenship.<sup>38</sup> Mykkänen suggested that all asylum seekers who are 16 years old and above must take a course on Finnish values and sign an agreement that they will abide by the law.<sup>39</sup>

## Internet

One of the biggest hate crime stories last year was the abrupt 59.2% fall in ethnic agitation cases in 2019 from the previous year due to a drop in police funding.<sup>40</sup> Måns Enqvist of the National Board of Police of Finland said that there are at most 10 police officers monitoring online hate speech.<sup>41</sup> According to the justice ministry, ethnic agitation cases that were taken to court in 2018 numbered 31, up 138.5% from 13 in the previous year. The corresponding figures for 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016 were 4, 3, 1, and 5, respectively.<sup>42</sup> Even if the number of ethnic agitation cases fell sharply, they are only the tip of the iceberg.

Concern about hate speech was brought up by President Sauli Niinistö in his New Year's speech. He stated, "Online shaming and hate speech are new concepts in public debate. However, our legislator has been far-sighted. For example, incitement to ethnic hatred and offences against personal reputation, dignity or privacy of the individual are already criminalized by law. A person committing a crime against another person is liable to prosecution. This has no connection to freedom of speech, let alone its limitation."<sup>43</sup>

Another challenge to growing online hate speech is the founding on 25 December of the *Silakkaliike*, or Baltic Herring Movement. Just like Italy's Sardines Movement, its Finnish counterpart has no political affiliation and aims to be a "non-violent counterforce to populist, hate, and racist-provoking policies."<sup>44</sup> Despite its popularity, the

38. "Sisäministeri Mykkänen olisi valmis viemään kanalaisuuden törkeään seksuaalirikokseen syylistyneeltä – myös Maahanmuuttovirastossa uskotaan, että kovemmat rangaistukset voisivat auttaa", Yle, 13 December 2018, <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10547528>, (Access date: 8 January 2020).

39. "Mykkänen ehdottaa vastaanottokeskuksiin kokeita suomalaisen yhteiskunnan pelisäännöistä", Yle/STT, 10 February 2019, (Access date: 8 January 2020).

40. Enrique Tessieri, "Does the Finnish Police Really Care about Online Hate Speech?" Migrant Tales, 18 January 2020, <https://www.migranttales.net/does-the-finnish-police-really-care-about-online-hate-speech/>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

41. Enrique Tessieri, "Finland Should Have More Police Monitoring Hate Speech on the Internet, Not Less", Migrant Tales, 31 August 2019, <https://www.migranttales.net/finland-should-have-more-police-monitoring-hate-speech-on-the-internet-not-less/>, (Access date: 6 January 2020).

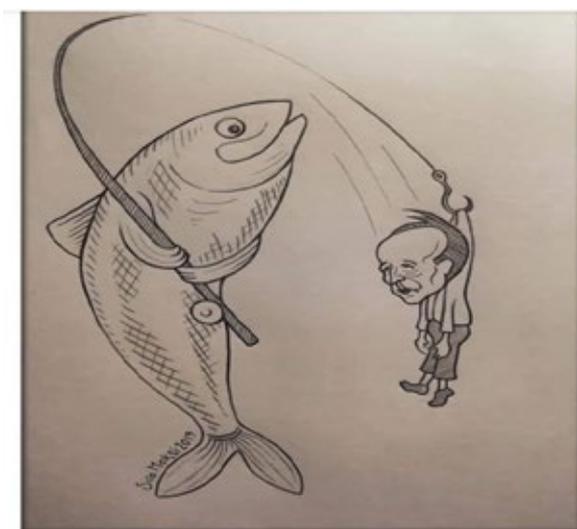
42. "Viharikokset käräjäoikeuksissa vuonna 2018", Oikeusministeriö, [https://api.hankeikkuna.fi/asiakirjat/80a-c0a59-5434-4983-b89e-e2ab0013ba21/f8cd2930-307a-4c79-9df3-d36defb38e91/MUISTIO\\_20190524105518.pdf](https://api.hankeikkuna.fi/asiakirjat/80a-c0a59-5434-4983-b89e-e2ab0013ba21/f8cd2930-307a-4c79-9df3-d36defb38e91/MUISTIO_20190524105518.pdf), (Access date: 6 January 2020).

43. Sauli Niinistö, "President of the Republic Sauli Niinistö's New Year's Speech on 1 January 2020", President of the Republic of Finland, 1 January 2020, <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/speeches/president-of-the-republic-sauli-niinistos-new-years-speech-on-1-january-2020/>, (Access date: 6 January 2020).

44. "Silakkaliike Official Website", <https://silakkaliike.fi/>, (Access date: 12 March 2020).

jury is still out on how successful it will be. After two weeks of its founding (6 January), it had over 24,000 followers on Facebook and over 13,700 on Twitter.<sup>45</sup>

Ilja Janitskin, the former editor of the online *MV-lehti* publication who was sentenced in 2018 to a 22-month prison term for aggravated defamation, ethnic agitation, and copyright infringement, and ordered to pay 136,000 euros in damages to his victims, was unsuccessful in getting the court to reverse the convictions he received last year.<sup>46</sup> New charges were brought against Janitskin by Hanna Huuonen, who was attacked by social media mobs for campaigning successfully in 2016 for advertisers to stop placing ads in *MV-lehti*.<sup>47</sup> Janitskin died of cancer on 7 February 2020.<sup>48</sup>



Kuva: Sira Moksi

**Figure 4:** Sira Moksi is a prolific anti-racism cartoonist. The cartoon was removed by Silakkaliike's Facebook page.<sup>49</sup> In the cartoon, there is a Baltic herring fishing Finns Party leader Jussi Halla-aho.<sup>50</sup>

45. Silakkaliike, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Silakkaliike/> and Silakkaliike, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/silakkaliike>, (Access date: 6 January 2020).

46. "Court Hears Anti-immigrant Agitator Janitskin's Appeal," Yle News, 14 October 2019, [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/court\\_hears\\_anti-immigrant\\_agitator\\_janitskins\\_appeal/11018971](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/court_hears_anti-immigrant_agitator_janitskins_appeal/11018971), (Access date: 20 January 2020).

47. Enrique Tessieri, "The *MV-lehti* Case Should Be Made into an Important Watershed against Hate Speech", *Migrant Tales*, 14 October 2019, <https://www.migranttales.net/the-mv-lehti-case-should-be-made-into-an-important-watershed-against-hate-speech/>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

48. "Iltalehti: Anti-immigrant agitator dies aged 42," Yle News, 7 February 2020, [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/iltalehti\\_anti-immigrant\\_agitator\\_dies\\_aged\\_42/11198014](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/iltalehti_anti-immigrant_agitator_dies_aged_42/11198014), (Access date: 1 June 2020).

49. Silakat, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/Silakkaliike/>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

50. "AJAN KUVIA—poliittisia piirroksia", Facebook, 30 December 2019, [https://www.facebook.com/AJAN-KUVIA-poliittisia-piirroksia-431508767274763/?\\_\\_xts\\_\\_\[0\]=68.ARBthxiGnH8b44hVzzuZkHy5cTd-JTQIOwvt9QXZ3wrRKOXffqnX2DV43lVqfAW\\_jxh4skGyLjPtNhVykTCUP-ObI8HfEu3paSVPJBxm-wiSiwdwZyOeAqx7r3XoML9CUpe40obhQNl6aTeGMaEJKkcA7Qgo8y2Rj\\_OcdYf4qqc\\_pDWZP9NqA-uDbx0SAFqAJOIrMIRk1zFr8-i\\_SjEvdDboYVbLJ2OedA-8mGxi-3sY25ns6WAKZebsoofe7WdhRV08ix-O2yYNErgxGQ3GPQBR\\_Tt7lYvIUCs1agtAt8TA-IFC17qH79GYkFk46Iz8IX1Rdw9O4U\\_4aGwEck-S92i1ke4](https://www.facebook.com/AJAN-KUVIA-poliittisia-piirroksia-431508767274763/?__xts__[0]=68.ARBthxiGnH8b44hVzzuZkHy5cTd-JTQIOwvt9QXZ3wrRKOXffqnX2DV43lVqfAW_jxh4skGyLjPtNhVykTCUP-ObI8HfEu3paSVPJBxm-wiSiwdwZyOeAqx7r3XoML9CUpe40obhQNl6aTeGMaEJKkcA7Qgo8y2Rj_OcdYf4qqc_pDWZP9NqA-uDbx0SAFqAJOIrMIRk1zFr8-i_SjEvdDboYVbLJ2OedA-8mGxi-3sY25ns6WAKZebsoofe7WdhRV08ix-O2yYNErgxGQ3GPQBR_Tt7lYvIUCs1agtAt8TA-IFC17qH79GYkFk46Iz8IX1Rdw9O4U_4aGwEck-S92i1ke4), (Access date: 4 February 2020).

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The good showing of the Finns Party in the April parliamentary elections and its lead in opinion polls have emboldened the far-right party and forced opposition mainstream parties like the National Coalition Party (*Kokoomus*) and Christian Democrats to flirt with the PS. In many respects, Finland's Islamophobia network is a cut-and-paste job of other similar-minded parties across the EU and using the same racist soundbites like "Vote Finland Back," and "harmful" and "uncontrolled immigration."<sup>51</sup> Some "notable" PS Islamophobes in 2019 were Jussi Halla-aho, Riiikka Purra, Sebastian Tynkkynen, Ville Tavio, Laura Huhtasaari, Juha Mäenpää, Ano Turtiainen, Jari Ronkainen, Matias Turkkila, Mauri Peltokangas, Sanna Antikainen, and a long list of others like Asseri Kinnunen and Johannes Sipola of PS Youth. Among the other parties: *Kokoomus*'s Wille Rydman, Atte Kaleva, and Kai Mykkänen; Christian Democrats' Sarah Essayah and Päivi Räsänen; and in far-right groups such as Finland First Marco de Witt, Junnes Lokka, and Tiina Wiik. Katie Hopkins, who was interviewed by the Finns Party and invited by Islamophobes like Lokka and Wiik, visited Oulu in January to "help" the municipality and police concerning the sexual assault cases that took place there.<sup>52</sup> The mayor of Oulu turned down a meeting with Hopkins.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

The track record of combating Islamophobia and other forms of racism is mixed. The creation of a police group to monitor hate crime on the Internet was created in 2017 but suffered in the 2019 budget cuts, which led to a sharp drop in ethnic agitation cases brought to the attention of the public prosecutor. As a Nordic welfare state, Finland has good laws and programs, which if applied rigorously, would effectively challenge Islamophobia. In many respects, anti-Islamophobia initiatives hinge on political and civil will as well as leadership. This means that society must come to terms with its Muslim minority and stop seeing them as "good" (Tatars) and "bad" (Muslims). Tatars are an 800 to 900-strong Muslim community who emigrated to Finland at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Social Democratic Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government has stated in the government program<sup>53</sup> its willingness to uphold human rights and abide by international agreements that

51. "Vote Finland Back", The Finns Party's Election Program 2019, [https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Eduskuntavaalihojelma-2019\\_SU\\_In\\_English\\_1.pdf](https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Eduskuntavaalihojelma-2019_SU_In_English_1.pdf), (Access date: 20 January 2020).

52. "Factsheet: Katie Hopkins", Bridge Initiative Team, 7 August 2018, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-katie-hopkins/>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

53. "Inclusive and Competent Finland – a Socially, Economically and Ecologically Sustainable Society", Finnish Government, 2019, [http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161935/VN\\_2019\\_33.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161935/VN_2019_33.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y), (Access date: 20 January 2020).

protect refugees. When comparing the previous government's program,<sup>54</sup> terms like inclusion, asylum seekers, and racism appear in Marin's government program more often than in Sipilä's. In the face of hate speech, which impacts white Finns as well, it appears that Finland is slowly waking up with President Sauli Niinistö expressing concern about such social ills in his New Year's speech. While such leadership is crucial in the struggle against Islamophobia, the jury is still out on how effective it will be.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Finland's Muslim community continues to believe that direct contact and open dialogue are crucial to challenging Islamophobia and fostering a more harmonious society that respects difference. Strong leadership is needed from all walks of public life, especially from the Muslim and migrant communities. Such efforts, however, face an uphill battle considering that Islamophobia is presently politically in vogue and exploited by parties like the Finns Party.

Building and coexisting in a culturally diverse society is not easy but requires effective solutions like the enforcement of laws that discourage discrimination and hate speech. This long journey towards a better functioning, culturally diverse society will not materialize in a year, four years, or a decade, but will take generations. It is, however, important that we begin this journey for the sake of our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

## Chronology

- **31.01.2019:** In the face of political pressure and parental concerns due to the highly politicized sexual assault cases of Oulu, the city temporarily banned asylum seekers and refugees from visiting day care centers and schools.<sup>55</sup> According to Mika Penttilä, the city's director of education and culture, the ban would be lifted on 14 April, or after parliamentary elections. "This is not a ban," he said, "but a recommendation that asylum seekers should not be allowed to visit day care centers and schools."<sup>56</sup>
- **22.02.2019:** "We want to prohibit the use of clothing that degrades women like the burqa, niqab veils (sic) as well as veils used by little girls. Forced

---

54. "Finland, a Land of Solutions", Strategic Programme of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government, 29 May 2015, [https://valtioneuvosto.fi/documents/10184/1427398/Ratkaisujen+Suomi\\_EN\\_YHDISTETTY\\_netti.pdf/8d2e1a66-e24a-4073-8303-ee3127fbfcac/Ratkaisujen+Suomi\\_EN\\_YHDISTETTY\\_netti.pdf](https://valtioneuvosto.fi/documents/10184/1427398/Ratkaisujen+Suomi_EN_YHDISTETTY_netti.pdf/8d2e1a66-e24a-4073-8303-ee3127fbfcac/Ratkaisujen+Suomi_EN_YHDISTETTY_netti.pdf), (Access date: 21 January 2020).

55. "Oulu Bans Asylum Seeker Visits to Schools", Yle News, 31 January 2019, [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/oulu\\_bans\\_asylum\\_seeker\\_visits\\_to\\_schools/10623356](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/oulu_bans_asylum_seeker_visits_to_schools/10623356), (Access date: 6 January 2020).

56. Enrique Tessieri, "City of Oulu's 'Ban' on Asylum Seekers Visiting Day-Care Centers and Schools".

marriages, genital mutilation, and sending children [abroad] to be indoctrinated by Islam should be effectively punished”, according to PS First Vice-President Riikka Purra.<sup>57</sup>

- **16.03.2019:** “The New Zealand case shows ever-convincingly that multicultural society does not work,” said Lapland Finns Party Youth leader, Johannes Sipola, tweeting right after the Christchurch, New Zealand, mosque shootings. “When other people [of other backgrounds] rape and kill enough [people], it is only a question of time when there will be a reaction from the opposite side.”<sup>58</sup>
- **26.03.2019:** Finns Party MP Ville Tavio said that closing down the Oulu Mosque should be considered in light of the sexual abuse case of a minor there. Imam Abdul Mannan of the Oulu Mosque denies that a child was sexually abused in the mosque.<sup>59</sup> An appeal was sent to the supreme district court to overturn the district court’s decision, which found the suspect guilty of sexually abusing a minor.
- **13.06.2019:** Finns Party MP Juha Mäenpää linked asylum seekers to an “invasive species” that should be repelled. The state prosecutor announced in January that Mäenpää would be charged for ethnic agitation but needed the approval of parliament. The Finns Party have enough votes to block the request that would remove the MP’s immunity.<sup>60</sup>
- **17.07.2019:** Finnish Party chairperson Jussi Halla-aho on being a white Finn: “I think we all have a relatively cohesive, intuitive understanding of whether or not someone walking towards us is a Finn. And this question is much more complicated than what’s that someone’s skin color or family background. We can’t even start by saying that everyone who was born in Finland is part of this group.”<sup>61</sup>
- **04.09.2019:** The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman recommended that all public swimming pool halls in Finland must permit the use of the burkini. The Ombudsman stated that public pool halls should build separate

57. Riikka Purra, Twitter, 22 February 2019, [https://twitter.com/ir\\_rkp/status/1098920935732727808](https://twitter.com/ir_rkp/status/1098920935732727808), (Access date: 6 January 2020).

58. Enrique Tessieri, “Twitter: Perussuomalaiset Youth Leader Condone Terrorist Attack in New Zealand”, Migrant Tales, 16 March 2019, <https://www.migranttales.net/twitter-perussuomalaiset-youth-leader-condones-terrorist-attack-in-new-zealand/>, (Access date: 6 January 2020).

59. “Kansanedustaja Tavio: Oulun moskeijan sulkemista on harkittava”, Kaleva, 26 March 2019, <https://www.kaleva.fi/uutiset/oulu/kansanedustaja-tavio-oulu-moskeijan-sulkemista-on-harkittava/817507/>, (Access date: 6 January 2020).

60. “Prosecutor General Aims to Charge Finns Party MP for Incitement”, Yle News, 23 January 2020, [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/prosecutor\\_general\\_aims\\_to\\_charge\\_finns\\_party\\_mp\\_for\\_incitement/11172792](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/prosecutor_general_aims_to_charge_finns_party_mp_for_incitement/11172792), (Access date: 25 January 2020).

61. “Halla-aho: We All Have Intuitive Understanding of Whether Someone Is a Finn”, Helsinki Times, 17 July 2019, <https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/politics/16570-halla-aho-we-all-have-intuitive-understanding-of-whether-someone-is-a-finn.html>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

showering quarters so that no group is discriminated. “Burkini bans can be discriminatory,” the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman stated.<sup>62</sup>

- **10-31.10.2019:** Two Finns Party politicians were convicted for ethnic agitation for social media postings in 2016 and 2017. MP Sebastian Tynkynen was convicted for a second time of ethnic agitation for publishing on Facebook and Instagram racist and insulting posts about Islam.<sup>63</sup> Finns Party Espoo city councilor, Teemu Lahtinen, was convicted for ethnic agitation and breaching the sanctity of religion for a tweet where he labelled Mohammed a pedophile and for denigrating Somalis.<sup>64</sup>
- **21.11.2019:** “The right [of asylum seekers] to come to Finland and live off tax-payers’ money is not a human right,” said Finns Party chairperson, Jussi Halla-aho.<sup>65</sup>

---

62. “Yhdenvertaisuusvaltuutettu: burkinit tulisi sallia uimahalleissa”, Yhdenvertaisuusvaltuutettu (Non-Discrimination Ombudsman), 4 September 2019, <https://www.syrjinta.fi/-/yhdenvertaisuusvaltuutettu-burkinit-tulisi-sallia-uimahalleissa>, (Access date: 6 January 2020).

63. “Perussuomalaisten Sebastian Tynkkyselle toinen tuomio kiihottamisesta kansanryhmää vastaan – Halla-aho: Nakertaa oikeuslaitoksen uskottavuutta,” Yle, 10 October 2019, <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11013740>, (Access date: 8 January 2020).

64. Juho Jokinen, “Perussuomalaisten poliitikko rinnasti profeetta Muhammedin ja pedofilian, tuomio uskonrauhan rikkomisesta”, Helsingin Sanomat, 31 October 2019, <https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000006291455.html>, (Access date: 8 January 2020).

65. Perussuomalaiset, Twitter, 21 November 2019, <https://twitter.com/persut/status/1197394532196847618/photo/1>, (Access date: 21 November 2019).

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**FRANCE**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

LÉONARD FAYTRE



## The Author

**Léonard Faytre** graduated from Sciences Po Paris University with degrees in both political science (BA) and urban policy (MA). After moving to Istanbul in 2013, he continued his studies and completed a second MA in argumentation theories (*münazara*) at the Alliance of Civilization Institute (Ibn Khaldun University) in 2018. His research focuses on political theory, French foreign affairs, and French immigration policy. Besides French, he speaks English, Turkish, and Arabic. Currently, Faytre works as a research assistant at the European Studies Department of SETA (Istanbul Office). Email: l.faytre@gmail.com

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Léonard Faytre: *Islamophobia in France: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

Similarly to previous years, Islamophobia shaped French society in 2019. The normalization of Islamophobia through endless controversies did not only legitimize the systemic discrimination French Muslims experience but also paved the way to physically violent acts. Two symptomatic examples are the gunshot attack against the mosque of Brest and its popular imam Rachid Eljay (27 June), and the attack against the mosque of Bayonne (28 October) that wounded four. Inquiries for both attacks are still ongoing. Moreover, French intelligence keeps monitoring and dismantling far-right groups that plan attacks against Muslims and Jews. The *Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France* (CCIF) received 789 report forms referring to 1,043 Islamophobic incidents that occurred in 2019.

In October and November 2019, a significant “terror attack – Islamophobia sequence” took place after an attack on Paris Police Headquarters on 3 October by a convert to Islam (4 dead, 4 wounded). Following this incident, President Macron started a campaign targeting the whole Muslim population. Calling for a “watchdog society” and inciting the French people to check “weak signals of radicalization,” Macron and Minister of Interior Christophe Castaner connected terrorism with regular Muslim behaviors and culture (such as having a beard, praying five times a day, eating halal food, not kissing the opposite gender, etc.). The government and many media organs implicitly presented the Muslim communities as responsible and accomplices of the attack, jumping from controversy to controversy. However, the inquiry is still underway.

This sequence also exposed the ambiguity of the French antiterrorism policy that stands officially on two main principles: (1) “combating violent radicalization which can lead to terrorism (these individuals are monitored and prosecuted, if their dangerousness is established)”; and (2) “combating communitarianism (*communautarisme*) and a rigorous practice that deviates from Islam.” If the first principle corresponds to legitimate measures to maintain public order, the second is vague and unclear, and threatens the rights and way of life of French Muslim citizens. This report demonstrates this latter argument and discloses how Islamophobia works as a state racism in a multitude of ways.

At the same time, the French people also protested against the rise of Islamophobia in 2019 as illustrated by the “March against Islamophobia” (10 November) that gathered between 20,000 and 40,000 protestors in Paris (13,500 according to the Ministry of Interior).

## Résumé

A l'image des années précédentes, l'islamophobie a profondément marqué la société française en 2019. La normalisation de l'islamophobie à travers d'incessantes controverses n'a pas seulement légitimé la discrimination systémique des musulmans, mais a également ouvert la voie à des actes de violence physique. Deux exemples symptomatiques peuvent être cités à cet égard, à savoir l'attaque par balles devant la mosquée de Brest – touchant notamment l'imam populaire Rachid Eljay (27 juin) – et l'attaque contre la mosquée de Bayonne (28 octobre). Les services de renseignement ont d'ailleurs démantelé plusieurs groupes d'extrême droite qui planifiaient des attaques contre des citoyens musulmans et juifs. Enfin, le Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France (CCIF) a reçu 789 fiches de signalement faisant état de 1043 incidents islamophobes survenus en 2019.

Entre octobre et novembre 2019, une importante séquence entremêlant attentat terroriste et islamophobie a eu lieu après l'attaque de la préfecture de police de Paris le 3 octobre par un musulman converti (4 morts, 4 blessés). Suite à cet incident, le président Macron a lancé une campagne visant l'ensemble de la communauté musulmane. Appelant à une « société de vigilance » et incitant les Français à signaler les « signaux faibles de radicalisation », le président Macron et son ministre de l'intérieur Christophe Castaner ont fait le lien entre le terrorisme et des traits culturels communs à l'ensemble des musulmans (comme porter la barbe, prier cinq fois par jour, manger de la nourriture halal, ne pas embrasser les femmes, etc.). A travers d'incessantes controverses, le gouvernement et de nombreux médias ont implicitement désigné les musulmans comme responsables et complices de l'attentat. Cependant, l'enquête est toujours en cours.

Cette séquence a également montré l'ambiguïté de la politique antiterroriste française qui repose officiellement sur deux grands principes : i) la lutte contre « la radicalisation violente qui peut conduire au terrorisme (ces individus sont suivis et judiciairisés, si leur dangerosité est établie) » ; ii) la lutte contre « le communautarisme et une pratique religieuse qui dévoie l'islam ». Si le premier principe correspond à des mesures légitimes de maintien de l'ordre public, le second est vague, peu clair et menace les droits des citoyens musulmans ainsi que leur mode de vie. Ce rapport discute ce dernier point et révèle comment l'islamophobie fonctionne, à bien des égards, comme un racisme d'État.

Néanmoins, les Français ne sont pas restés passifs face à cette situation et ont protesté contre la montée de l'islamophobie, comme l'illustre la « Marche contre l'islamophobie » (10 novembre) qui a rassemblé à Paris entre 20 000 et 40 000 personnes (13.500 d'après le ministère de l'intérieur).

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** France

**Type of Regime:** Unitary constitutional republic

**Form of Government:** Semi-presidential system

**Ruling Parties:** *La République En Marche!* (right)

**Opposition Parties:** *Le Rassemblement National, Les Républicains, La France Insoumise*

**Last Elections:** 2019 European Election (Le Rassemblement National (far-right) party won 23.34%, La Republic en Marche! (right) 22.42% and Europe Ecologie les Verts (green) 13.48%); 2017 Presidential Election (Emmanuel Macron won 66.1% of the vote against 33.9% of far-right leader Marine Le Pen); 2017 Legislative Election (*La République En Marche!* (Macron's right): 297 seats; Les Républicains (anti-Macron's right): 104 seats; Mouvement Démocrate (pro-Macron's right): 46 seats; Socialistes (left - ruling party in 2012-2017): 30 seats; UDI, Agir et Indépendants (right): 27 seats; Libertés et Territoires (center): 20 seats; La France Insoumise (far-left): 17; Gauche démocrate et républicaine (far-left): 16; Without a group (many of far-right): 20)

**Total Population:** 66.3 million (2015)

**Major Languages:** French

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** The *Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France* (CCIF) received 789 report forms referring to 1,043 Islamophobic incidents. Among the 1,043 incidents mentioned above, 68 concern physical attacks (6.5%), 618 concern discrimination (59.3%), 210 concern hate speech and incitement to racial hatred (20.1%), 93 concern defamation (8.9%), 22 concern degradation of sacred places (2.1%), and 32 are linked to the fight against terrorism (3.1%).

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** The number of racist and xenophobic incidents increased in 2019, with 1,142 incidents recorded (compared with 496 in 2018). Most of these incidents fall under the category of "threats" (977).

**Major Religions (% of Population):** The compilation of official statistics based on religious beliefs is not permitted by French law. Depending on the methodology applied by the surveys, the figures may differ. For example, according to a note published in GeoConfluences, 64% of the French are Catholics (of which 4.5% regularly go to Sunday mass), 63% have no religion, 6.4% are Muslims, and 0.5% are Jews (see various studies on this subject in "Statistiques sur la pratique religieuse en France", GeoConfluences, December 2016).

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** The compilation of official statistics based on religious beliefs is not permitted by French law. According to the Pew Research Center, the Muslim population may stand between 5 and 6 million people (8.8%).

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** CFCM (*Conseil français du culte musulman*), UMF (*Union des mosquées de France*), *Islam de France*, DITIB, *Milli Görüş*, *L.E.S Musulmans*, *Association musulmane pour l'islam de France*

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** CCIF (*Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France*), CRI (*Coordination contre le racisme et l'islamophobie*), CJL (*Comité Justice et Libertés pour tous*), ADM (*Action Droits des Musulmans*)

**Far-Right Parties:** The National Rally (*Rassemblement national*, RN), France Arise (*Debout la France*), The Patriots (*Les Patriotes*)

**Far-Right Movements:** *Génération identitaire*, *Réseau Remora*, *Volontaire pour la France* (VPF), *Soldats d'Odin Breizh*

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** AFO (Action of Operational Forces)

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** Ban of religious symbols including Muslim headscarf from primary school to high school (2004); “Chatel circular” prohibits parents who accompany children on school trips to display religious symbols (2013).
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None (depends on local decisions)
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** Under a decree issued by French Prime Minister François Fillon women are banned from wearing the niqab in any public place (11 April 2011).
- **Prayer Ban:** None - depends on local decisions since the European Court of Justice ruled in March 2017 that employers can ban staff from manifesting visible religious expressions, including prayers.

## Introduction

Anti-Muslim racism continued to increase in France in 2019. The *Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France* (CCIF) received **789** report forms referring to **1,043** Islamophobic incidents that occurred in 2019. Furthermore, one report form can list many incidents; in other words, a discrimination might be associated with an insult and an attack. The year before (2018), the CCIF collected only 676 report forms. There is thus an increase of 17% between 2018 and 2019. Among the 1,043 incidents mentioned above, 68 concern physical attacks (6.5%), 618 concern discrimination (59.3%), 210 concern hate speech and incitement to racial hatred (20.1%), 93 concern defamation (8.9%), 22 concern degradation of sacred places (2.1%), and 32 are linked to the fight against terrorism (3.1%).<sup>1</sup>

This report does not aim to report all incidents related to Islamophobia but instead to highlight the main underlying dynamics related to anti-Muslim racism in 2019. We can summarize those dynamics into three main issues:

- The normalization of hate speech against Muslims that paves the way to physical attacks.
- Islamophobic incidents that reflect a systemic racism or even state racism.
- The vicious intertwining of Islamist terrorist attacks, French antiterrorism policy, and Islamophobia.

First, attention needs to be drawn to the fact that there is an ongoing normalization of hate speech against Muslims through endless controversies in the media and the political arena. This normalization of Islamophobia does not only legitimize the systemic discrimination that French Muslims experience but also paves the way to physically violent acts. Two symptomatic examples are the gunshot attack against the mosque of Brest and its popular imam Rachid Eljay (27 June), and the attack against the mosque of Bayonne (28 October) that wounded four. The motives behind both attacks have not been clarified and inquiries are still ongoing. Moreover, French intelligence keeps monitoring and dismantling far-right groups that plan attacks against Muslims and Jews at an alarming level.<sup>2</sup> Even if it is difficult to prove the link between the normalization of Islamophobic speech and terrorist attacks, we should not forget that the terrorist behind the shootings at the Christchurch mosques (15 March), who killed 51 and wounded 49, revealed

---

1. "Rapport CCIF 2020, Rapport sur l'islamophobie pendant l'année 2019", Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France, 25 February 2020, <http://www.islamophobie.net/rapport-2020/>, (Access date: 20 March 2020).

2. "Un groupuscule d'ultra-droite soupçonné d'attentats sur des lieux de culte a été démantelé", La Croix, 11 June 2019, <https://www.la-croix.com/France/Justice/groupuscule-dultra-droite-soupconne-dattentats-lieux-culte-ete-demantele-2019-06-11-1201028144>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

he was influenced by the French thinker Renaud Camus and his idea of the Great Replacement.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, the nature and numbers of Islamophobic incidents interrogate the very quiddity of this racism. Do French Muslims face a state racism (*racisme d'Etat*),<sup>4</sup> a systemic racism,<sup>5</sup> or just an individual racism<sup>6</sup> that does not go beyond the individual experience? For sure, we must exclude the third option since statistics show the extent to which Islamophobia shapes the job market, real estate, education, and politics. As a result, Islamophobia is a systemic phenomenon that structures society. Yet, can we speak of “state racism”? On the one hand, the French state does not officially base its actions upon a discriminating corpus of law such as the Nuremberg laws, the Apartheid system, or the racial segregation in the United States. On the other hand, major aspects of Islamophobia in France originate in relations to the state:

- The French government partially bases its antiterrorism policy on Islamophobic misconceptions such as “combating communitarianism (*communautarisme*) in French suburbs (*banlieues*).”
- The French Parliament debates bills to ban the burkini, the hijab, and “communitarian” habits in certain public services and/or public places.

3. The Great Replacement is “a racist conspiracy theory [...] which was popularized by right-wing French philosopher Renaud Camus. An extension of colonialist theory, it is predicated on the notion that white women are not having enough children and that falling birthrates will lead to white people around the world being replaced by non-white people.” For more information, see: Nellie Bowles, “Replacement Theory’, A Racist, Sexist Doctrine, Spreads in Far-Right Circles”, *The New York Times*, 18 March 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/18/technology/replacement-theory.html>, (Access date: 4 March 2020).

4. This term regularly triggers debates in France. “If the terms ‘state racism’ are still so much debated today, it is because, unlike ‘institutional racism’, they imply not only the responsibility of the state, but also a form of intentionality.” For more information, see: Pierre Ropert, “Racisme d’Etat’: derrière l’expression taboue, une réalité discriminatoire”, *France Culture*, 24 October 2017, <https://www.franceculture.fr/sociologie/Racisme-Etat-expression-tabou-discrimination> (Access date: 22 March 2020).

In November 2017, the Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer brought a defamation lawsuit against the SUD Education 93 teachers union because the latter “has decided to talk about state racism.” The announcement in front of the National Assembly was greeted with a standing ovation from the deputies. For more information, see: Frantz Durupt, “Blanquer porte plainte contre un syndicat qui a utilisé l’expression ‘racisme d’Etat’”, *Liberation*, 21 November 2017, [https://www.liberation.fr/france/2017/11/21/blanquer-porte-plainte-contre-un-syndicat-qui-a-utilise-l-expression-racisme-d-etat\\_1611537](https://www.liberation.fr/france/2017/11/21/blanquer-porte-plainte-contre-un-syndicat-qui-a-utilise-l-expression-racisme-d-etat_1611537), (Access date: 22 March 2020).

5. “Systemic Racism includes the policies and practices entrenched in established institutions, which result in the exclusion or promotion of designated groups. It differs from overt discrimination in that no individual intent is necessary.” For more information, see: “Individual and Systemic Racism”, Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre <http://www.aclrc.com/forms-of-racism>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

A study conducted by the Ombudsman office in January 2017 shows that out of a sample of 5,000 people, 80 percent of those who fit the profile of “young man perceived as black or Arab” reported having been stopped by the police in the last five years, compared to 16 percent of the rest of the respondents. For more information, see: Leila Khouiel, “Jeunes noirs ou arabes, vous êtes 20 fois plus contrôlés que la moyenne (mais ce n’est pas une surprise)”, *BondyBlog*, 20 January 2017, <https://www.bondyblog.fr/societe/police-justice/jeunes-noirs-ou-arabes-vous-etes-20-fois-plus-controles-que-la-moyenne-mais-ce-nest-pas-une-surprise/>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

6. “Individual Racism refers to an individual’s racist assumptions, beliefs or behaviours and is ‘a form of racial discrimination that stems from conscious and unconscious, personal prejudice.” (Henry & Tator, 2006, p. 329). “Individual Racism is connected to/learned from broader socio-economic histories and processes and is supported and reinforced by systemic racism.” For more information, see: “Individual and Systemic Racism”, Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre, <http://www.aclrc.com/forms-of-racism>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

- Prominent figures of the French government took Islamophobic positions these last months such as the Minister of Education Jean-Michel Blanquer who on several occasions repeated that the headscarf was not welcome in France.
- The statistics show that Muslims primarily face discrimination in the public service (59%). Hence, the major expression of anti-Muslim racism takes place in the public sector, which emanates from the state itself.
- One of the daily expressions of Islamophobia comes from interactions with the police. The state of emergency following the 2015 terror attacks has only worsened this fact.<sup>7</sup>

We should also mention that this state racism takes place in the more general context of the securitization of the public sphere in France, mainly due, first, to the Islamic terrorist attacks and antiterrorism policy<sup>8</sup>, and, second, to the yellow jackets movement and the hard security response chosen by Macron's office.<sup>9</sup>

The tension between Islamist terrorist attacks and Islamophobia is the third aspect of anti-Muslim racism in 2019. This issue is at the heart of the debates on Islamophobia in France and has already been analyzed in the previous reports.<sup>10</sup> Every Islamist terrorist attack – or presumed as such when the motives of the attack are unclear – triggers xenophobic campaigns against the Muslim community as a whole. Such campaigns directly impact the life of millions of French citizens who experience a resurgence of discriminations, insults, and physical assaults. Yet, it is not easy for French people – and even worse when they are Muslims – to counter such Islamophobic campaigns as they are immediately labeled “traitors of the nation” or/and “supporters of terrorism” if they “dare” to criticize. Moreover, as we just described above, Islamophobia in France is structural and thus partially shapes society. As a result, it is very difficult to counter a racism that takes many different forms according to the context (job, public place, school, media, etc.). In 2019, a significant “terror attack – Islamophobia sequence” took place after the attack on the Paris Police Headquarters on 3 October by one of its employees, a convert to Islam (4 dead, 4 wounded). Following the incident, President Macron started a campaign targeting France's entire Muslim population. Calling for a “watchdog

---

7. For more information, see: Yasser Louati, “Islamophobia in France: National Report 2017”, *European Islamophobia Report 2017*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2018).

8. For more information, see: Ibid.

9. François Vignal, “Violences: la réponse sécuritaire du gouvernement”, Public Senat, 18 March 2019, <https://www.publicsenat.fr/article/politique/violences-la-reponse-securitaire-du-gouvernement-139326>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

10. For more information, see: Olivier Esteves, “Islamophobia in France: National Report 2015”, *European Islamophobia Report 2015*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2016).

society” and inciting the French people to check “weak signals of radicalization,”<sup>11</sup> Macron and Minister of Interior Christophe Castaner connected terrorism with regular Muslim behavior and culture (such as having a beard, praying five times a day, eating halal food, not kissing the opposite gender, etc.).<sup>12</sup> The government and many media organs implicitly represented the Muslim communities as responsible and accomplices of the attack, jumping from controversy to controversy.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the inquiry is still underway.

This sequence shows the ambiguity of the French antiterrorism policy that officially stands on two main principles: (1) “combating violent radicalization which can lead to terrorism (these individuals are monitored and prosecuted, if their dangerousness is established)” and (2) “combating communitarianism (*communautarisme*)<sup>14</sup> and a rigorous practice that deviates from Islam.”<sup>15</sup> If the first principle corresponds to legitimate measures to maintain public order, the second is vague and unclear, and threatens the rights and way of life of French Muslim citizens. Indeed, we can refute the accusation of “communitarianism” in this simple way: first, if there is a criminal offence, then criminals can be put on trial. In this case there is no need for the expression “communitarianism” since both the existing law and the existing vocabulary are operative. Second, if there is no criminal offence and no one is harmed, then what is the problem with being “communitarian” (*communautaire*)?<sup>16</sup>

Ironically, this sequence triggered the organization of one of the greatest manifestations against Islamophobia from common people, activists, and scholars. The “March against Islamophobia” took place on 10 November in Paris and gathered

11. Guillaume Erner, “Signaux faibles de radicalisation: vers une société de la surveillance?”, France Culture, 16 October 2019, <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/linvite-des-matins/signaux-faibles-de-radicalisation-vers-une-societe-de-la-surveillance>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

12. “Christophe Castaner liste les signes de radicalisation? ‘Vous avez une barbe vous-même’, lui répond un député”, Europe 1, 9 October 2019, <https://www.europe1.fr/politique/christophe-castaner-liste-les-signes-de-radicalisation-religieuse-vous-avez-une-barbe-vous-meme-lui-repond-un-depute-3924324>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

13. For an analysis of the controversies related to this sequence, see sections below. The homemade bomb attack in the center of Lyon on 24 May (13 light injuries) also triggered such a hatred sequence. The motives of this attack are still unclear. For more information, see: “Explosion à Lyon: le suspect a avoué avoir conçu la bombe”, Le Parisien, 30 May 2019, <http://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/explosion-a-lyon-le-suspect-a-avoue-avoir-concu-la-bombe-29-05-2019-8082699.php>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

14. “Communautarisme” is a French term negatively depicting “community life” as an ontological threat to the unity of the French nation, for more information, see: Fabrice Dhume, “Communautarisme, une catégorie mutante”, La Vie des Idées, 25 September 2018, <https://laviedesidees.fr/Communautarisme-une-categorie-mutante.html>, (Access date: 5 April 2020). The expression “communautarisme” serves as an injunction to maintain minorities in their subaltern status.

15. “Islamisme et repli Communautaire”, Comité interministériel de prévention de la délinquance et de la radicalisation, <https://www.cipdr.gouv.fr/islamisme-et-repli-communautaire/>, (Access date: 22 March 2020); Laurent Nunez, Twitter, 24 October 2019, <https://twitter.com/NunezLaurent/status/1187290364060864512>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

16. We can present the exact same argument against the claim that “many among Muslims put the law of God above the law of the Republic.”

between 20,000 and 40,000 people (13,500 according to the Ministry of Interior).<sup>17</sup> Although the protest was the target of virulent controversies, it constituted a strong signal for the political elite and the rest of the French society that the current spread of Islamophobia is not normal and will not be accepted without dissent.

Nevertheless, the denunciation of Islamophobia in France will have to overcome a huge obstacle: the condemnation for “communitarianism” and/or “indigenism.” Indeed, this condemnation is a rhetorical weapon to prevent anti-racist movements from claiming justice and equality. Any complaint against a discriminative stance is depicted as being a “communitarianism-based demand” that threatens national unity and the common good. As a result, most politicians and intellectuals agree to condemn any movements that - according to them - fall into these two categories. Even the Fondation Jean Jaures<sup>18</sup> that in November 2019 published a survey on anti-Muslim racism depicts other anti-racist groups such as the CCIF as “indigenist, communitarian, [and] Islamist.”<sup>19</sup>

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

For 2019, the Ministry of Interior reported 154 incidents, consisting of 63 actions and 91 threats.<sup>20</sup> Officially, the French government severely condemns anti-Muslim racism. The *Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France* (CCIF) reported many more incidents since this organization collects report forms sent to its services instead of complaints made at police stations (and thus preserving its monitoring from many biases just mentioned above). The CCIF received 789 report forms referring to 1,043 Islamophobic incidents that occurred in 2019. It should be noted that one report form can list many incidents, for example a discrimination might be associated with an insult and an attack.<sup>21</sup>

The CCIF highlights three major tendencies in Islamophobia in 2019. First of all, Islamophobia is a gendered racism since 70% of the incidents concern women.

---

17. Julien Salingue, “Succès de la marche du 10 novembre contre l’islamophobie”, NPA, 23 November 2019, <https://npa2009.org/actualite/antiracisme/succes-de-la-marche-du-10-novembre-contre-lislamophobie>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

18. The Fondation Jean Jaures is a French “independent, Europeanist and Social-Democrat” think tank, created in 1992 and close to the French Socialist Party (PS). For more information, see: <https://jean-jaures.org>.

19. “L’enquête sur le racisme anti-musulmans”, C l’hebdo, 9 November 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqhWkosF3OU>, (see. from 8’30), (Access date: 22 March 2020).

20. “Bilan 2019 des actes antireligieux, antisémites, racistes et xenophobes”, Gouvernement.fr, 28 January 2020, <https://www.gouvernement.fr/bilan-2019-des-actes-antireligieux-antisemites-racistes-et-xenophobes>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

21. “Rapport CCIF 2020, Rapport sur l’Islamophobie pendant l’année 2019”, Collectif contre l’islamophobie en France, 25 February 2020, <http://www.islamophobie.net/rapport-2020/>, (Access date: 20 March 2020).

Secondly, in most instances, Islamophobia takes the form of discrimination (59% of incidents). Finally, public services are those who discriminate the most against Muslims (59% of all discriminations).<sup>22</sup> The survey conducted by the Fondation Jean Jaures in November 2019 confirmed these tendencies. It shows, first, that women feel much more discriminated against and report being victims of racism because of their religion much more often than men. Forty-two percent of Muslims living in France have experienced at least one form of discrimination related to their religion in their lifetime; this holds true for 35% of men and 45% of women. This overvictimization of women is also pulled upwards by the record rates of discrimination observed among women wearing a headscarf: 60% of women who “often” wear a headscarf report having been the victim of at least one form of discrimination in their lifetime, compared with 44% of women who have never worn it and 38% of men.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the survey shows that there is a significant gap concerning the report of discrimination between Muslims and non-Muslims: 42% of Muslims living in France have experienced at least one form of discrimination related to their religion during their lifetime. That is 5.25 times higher than the national average (8%). Finally, the survey also confirms that public services systemically discriminate against Muslims. Eleven percent of all Muslims report that they have been discriminated against at least once in their lives by public officials (e.g. at the mayor’s office, prefecture, etc.), with this rate reaching a record high among women who “often” wear a headscarf (21%) and among Muslims living in rural areas or in areas with a low proportion of immigrants (19%). Discrimination by the police appears to be proportionally the most frequent (28% among the 44% of Muslims who have ever been stopped by police).<sup>24</sup>

These figures show that Muslim women are the most targeted. We must connect this tendency to French public debates that especially attacked the way of life of Muslim women. Those controversies diabolize the burkini, sports hijab, or Muslim women accompanying school trips on a national scale and legitimize attacks and discrimination against Muslim women (see Politics and Media sections).

Moreover, there are many other examples of discrimination on the local level. On 8 and 9 March 2019, the event *Salon de la Femme et du Bien-être* was held in Béziers. The mayor of Béziers (South France) refused to allow a manager of a cloth-

22. Ibid.

23. Ismail Ferhat and François Kraus, “Etat des lieux des discriminations et des agressions racistes envers les musulmans de France”, Fondation Jean Jaures, 6 November 2019, <https://jean-jaures.org/nos-productions/etat-des-lieux-des-discriminations-et-des-agressions-racistes-envers-les-musulmans>, (Access date: 20 March 2020). This study was conducted in cooperation with an “Interministerial delegation for the fight against racism, anti-Semitism and anti-LGBT hate” (Dilcrah) and Ifop. The study was carried out among 1,000 persons of the Muslim faith.

24. Ibid.

ing store to participate because she was wearing a headscarf.<sup>25</sup> The mayor, Robert Menard, is a famous figure of the Islamophobia network, close to the National Rally. Similarly, in April, the president of Association R'éveil<sup>26</sup> refused to sell a garage sale site to two women on the grounds that they wore Islamic headscarves. Under pressure after the publication of a video of the incident on social media, the association decided to dismiss the president a few days later.<sup>27</sup>

Regarding verbal attacks, the survey by the Fondation Jean Jaures shows that a quarter of Muslims have been insulted because of their religion (24%) during their lifetime, a proportion twice as high as that observed among non-Muslims residing in France (9%). The apparent religiosity of individuals increases the risk of insult: 42% of women who wear a hijab have already been victims of a religious insult, compared to 27% of women who do not wear it and 19% of men.<sup>28</sup> The CCIF monitored 210 incidents related to hate speech and incitement to racial hatred in 2019, which corresponds to 20.1% of all reported Islamophobic acts.

Physical attacks are also another trend of anti-Muslim racism in France. On this matter, both the CCIF and the Fondation Jean Jaures underline the link between the spread of Islamophobia across society and the increasing risk of violent aggressions or/and anti-Muslim terror attacks. The survey of the Fondation Jean Jaures indicates that 7% of Muslims have been physically assaulted because of their religion at least once in their life, compared to 3% of non-Muslims. The CCIF monitored 68 physical attacks, i.e. 6.5% of all Islamophobic reported acts. Among them, there was Sylia a woman wearing hijab who was insulted and stabbed seven times by an unknown man in front of her two children after she parked her car in Sury-le-Comtal (small village near Lyon).<sup>29</sup>

On 27 June, the famous imam of the Sunna Mosque in Brest, Rachid Eljay, and one of the worshippers were victims of several shots in front of the mosque, injuring them both. Rachid Eljay was shot four times, two in the abdomen, two in the legs. The worshipper was shot twice in the legs. Despite the violence of the act and its resemblance to the Christchurch terror attack earlier that year, mainstream media and

25. "Rapport CCIF 2020, Rapport sur l'Islamophobie pendant l'année 2019", Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France, 25 February 2020, <http://www.islamophobie.net/rapport-2020/>, (Access date: 20 March 2020).

26. Local NGO (North of France) that aims at "changing the image of coma and brain injury to the public and governments. [...] To promote self-help and moral support among traumatized people and their families." It is a well-known NGO supported by public institutions. For more information, see: "Bienvenue sur le site de l'Association R'éveil!", l'association R'éveil, <https://reveil-coma5962.org>, (Access date: 20 March 2020).

27. Bruno Renoul, "Discrimination à Croix L'association R'éveil annonce la démission de Myriam Cattoire", La Voix du Nord, 30 April 2019, <https://www.lavoixdunord.fr/576135/article/2019-04-30/l-association-r-veil-annonce-la-demission-de-myriam-cattoire>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

28. Ismail Ferhat and François Kraus, "Etat des lieux des discriminations et des agressions racistes envers les musulmans de France", Fondation Jean Jaures, 6 November 2019, <https://jean-jaures.org/nos-productions/etat-des-lieux-des-discriminations-et-des-agressions-racistes-envers-les-musulmans>, (Access date: 20 March 2020).

29. "Rapport CCIF 2020, Rapport sur l'Islamophobie pendant l'année 2019", Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France.

politics remained relatively silent. The assailant was found dead in his car 500 meters away. The motive of the attack is still unclear. A letter by the attacker was found that allegedly shows signs of mental illness.<sup>30</sup>

On 28 October, a supporter of the National Rally (far right) attempted to set fire to the mosque of Bayonne and shot two individuals in front of the mosque, severely wounding one. (Fig. 1) The attacker was then arrested at his home and charged with attempted murder and destruction of property committed for reasons of race or religion by dangerous means to persons. In February 2020, he died in custody.<sup>31</sup> The motive behind this attack has not been clarified yet and the inquiry is still underway.<sup>32</sup>



**Figure 1:** Front of the Mosque of Bayonne. On 28 October, a supporter of the National Rally (far right) attempted to set fire to the mosque of Bayonne and shot two individuals in front of the mosque, severely wounding one.<sup>33</sup>

Following the attack at Christchurch, the Minister of Interior Christophe Castaner was heard by the commission of inquiry on the fight against far-right groups (9 May). He stressed that the rhetoric of these groups “is particularly marked by Islamophobia: it evokes the ‘Muslim invasion’ and the ‘Great Replacement’ with violent intentions.”<sup>34</sup> To the question of whether an attack like the one in Christchurch is likely to occur in France, the Minister of Interior replied, “You want to know if

30. “Ce que l’on sait de l’attaque d’une mosquée à Brest, qui a fait deux blessés dont un imam”, L’Obs, 28 June 2019, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/societe/20190628.OBS15095/ce-que-l-on-sait-de-l-attaque-d-une-mosquee-a-brest-qui-a-fait-deux-blesses-dont-un-imam.html>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

31. “L’octogénaire accusé de l’attaque de la mosquée de Bayonne est mort pendant sa détention”, France Info, 27 February 2020, [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/faits-divers/attaque-de-la-mosquee-de-bayonne/l-octogenaire-accuse-de-l-attaque-de-la-mosquee-de-bayonne-est-mort-pendant-sa-detention\\_3843507.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/faits-divers/attaque-de-la-mosquee-de-bayonne/l-octogenaire-accuse-de-l-attaque-de-la-mosquee-de-bayonne-est-mort-pendant-sa-detention_3843507.html), (Access date: 25 March 2020).

32. “Attaque à Bayonne : on vous explique pourquoi le Parquet national antiterroriste ne s’est pas saisi de l’affaire”, France Info, 31 October 2019, [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/faits-divers/attaque-de-la-mosquee-de-bayonne/attaque-a-bayonne-on-vous-explique-pourquoi-le-parquet-national-antiterroriste-ne-s-est-pas-saisi-de-l-affaire\\_3682739.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/faits-divers/attaque-de-la-mosquee-de-bayonne/attaque-a-bayonne-on-vous-explique-pourquoi-le-parquet-national-antiterroriste-ne-s-est-pas-saisi-de-l-affaire_3682739.html), (Access date: 25 March 2020).

33. “Attaque de la mosquée de Bayonne : ‘Un acte terroriste qui doit être reconnu comme tel’, estime le fils d’une des victimes”, France Info, 31 October 2019, [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/religion/attaque-de-la-mosquee-de-bayonne-un-acte-terroriste-qui-doit-etre-reconnu-comme-tel-estime-le-fils-d-une-des-victimes\\_3683349.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/religion/attaque-de-la-mosquee-de-bayonne-un-acte-terroriste-qui-doit-etre-reconnu-comme-tel-estime-le-fils-d-une-des-victimes_3683349.html), (Access date: 25 March 2020).

34. “Compte rendu – Audition de M. Christophe Castaner, ministre de l’Intérieur”, Commission d’enquête sur la lutte contre les groupuscules d’extrême droite en France – Assemblée Nationale, 9 May 2019, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/15/cr-celgroued/18-19/c1819031.asp>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

people carrying this far-right ideology are still likely to carry out attacks against a mosque: yes, it is possible.”<sup>35</sup> We should not forget that the terrorist of Christchurch had donated more than 2,000 euros to the French far-right group Generation Identity (GI).<sup>36</sup> In fact, French intelligence announced in June 2019 that they had dismantled far-right groups that plan attacks against Muslims and Jews.<sup>37</sup>

Verbal and physical attacks also took place within the “terror attack – Islamophobia sequence” that followed the attack on the Paris Police Headquarters by Mickaël Harpon, a Muslim convert. This incident fuelled a series of verbal attacks, instances of physical aggression and defamation against the entire Muslim community. One of the discriminating incidents during this period occurred on 11 October 2019. During a meeting of the regional council of Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, Julien Odoul, a local representative of the far-right party National Rally, verbally attacked a woman in the public that had come accompanying her son’s class on a school trip. He asked the rest of the assembly to expulse the woman from the council because she wore a headscarf, claiming this piece of cloth was against democratic and secular values. The mother was also violently attacked and prosecuted in the corridors of the council.<sup>38</sup> (Fig. 2)



**Figure 2:** Drawing of the mother that was forced to leave the regional council meeting in Bourgogne Franche-Comté embracing her son in tears.<sup>39</sup>

35. Ibid.

36. James Kleinfeld, “NZ Suspect Donated Money to French Branch of Far-Right Group”, Aljazeera, 5 April 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/nz-suspect-donated-money-french-branch-group-190405090848567.html>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

37. “Démantèlement d’un groupe d’ultradroite qui visait les musulmans et juifs”, Le Point, 11 June 2019, [https://www.lepoint.fr/faits-divers/demantèlement-d-un-groupe-d-ultradroite-qui-visait-les-musulmans-et-juifs-11-06-2019-2318161\\_2627.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/faits-divers/demantèlement-d-un-groupe-d-ultradroite-qui-visait-les-musulmans-et-juifs-11-06-2019-2318161_2627.php), (Access date: 25 March 2020).

38. “Un élu RN prend à partie une femme voilée, qui accompagnait la classe de son fils lors d’une visite scolaire à un Conseil regional”, BFM TV, 13 October 2019, <https://www.bfmtv.com/mediaplayer/video/un-elu-rn-prend-a-partie-une-femme-voilee-qui-accompagnait-la-classe-de-son-fils-lors-d-une-visite-scolaire-a-un-conseil-region-al-1193779.html>, (Access date: 28 March 2020).

39. “Rapport CCIF 2020, Rapport sur l’Islamophobie pendant l’année 2019”, Collectif contre l’islamophobie en France.

## Employment

According to the survey of the Fondation Jean Jaures, nearly a quarter (24%) of Muslims who have ever looked for a job in their lives report having been discriminated against because of their religion, including 16% in the last five years. Similarly, nearly one in four Muslims who work (23%) reports having been discriminated against in the last five years of their working life (26% for women, 20% for men), a proportion five times higher than that of the French population as a whole (5%).<sup>40</sup>

Surprisingly enough, the greater number of Muslims reach higher ranks in the professional world, the more they experience discrimination and racism. This point refutes one of the major ideals of the French Republic, i.e. a meritocratic system and the promise of success through education and work. Indeed, 44% of adults aged 25-44, 48% of the most highly educated (at least MA level), and 63% of managers and senior professionals report racist experiences in their professional life. This indicates that the categories that should be the most integrated in society (young adults, university graduates, higher professions) are precisely those who are the most exposed to racism. In other words, Islamophobia cannot be confronted through a “better integration” or even “assimilation.”<sup>41</sup>

## Education

According to the survey of the Fondation Jean Jaures, the rate of victims of discrimination by teachers in an educational establishment (e.g. college, high school, university, etc.) in the last five years is higher among Muslims (7%) than among the rest of the population for all reasons combined (5.4%).<sup>42</sup>

An example of such discrimination – and of its institutionalization – is the form sent by email by the University of Cergy-Pontoise (near Paris) to all academic staff asking them to list students and colleagues who show “weak signals of radicalization” (14 October). Among the possible signals, we find: “stopped drinking alcohol”, “suddenly stopped eating pork”, “recent consumption of halal food”, “behavioral changes towards women”, “prayers in the buildings of the university”, “sudden interest in national politics and international relations”, “sudden interest in religion.” (Fig. 3)

In the period and Islamophobic sequence described above, three mothers wearing hijabs were abused by the rector of the Academy of Versailles (near Paris). On 10 October 2019, activities were organized with parents at the Charles de Gaulle nursery school in Clamart as part of the National Anti-Harassment Day. An official visit by the rector of the Academy of Versailles, the academic director, and the

40. Ismail Ferhat and François Kraus, “Etat des lieux des discriminations et des agressions racistes envers les musulmans de France”, Fondation Jean Jaures, 6 November 2019, <https://jean-jaures.org/nos-productions/etat-des-lieux-des-discriminations-et-des-agressions-racistes-envers-les-musulmans>, (Access date: 20 March 2020).

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

mayor took place in order to promote “mutual aid and respect for others.” But once they saw three mothers wearing hijabs among the mothers accompanying the pupils, they shortened their visit and stopped the workshops under the name of secularism. The rector claimed that “the rule is clear, inside the school, religious signs are not allowed.”<sup>43</sup> Similarly, on 14 October 2019, a school trip to a fire station was cancelled in Creil (North Paris) because two mothers who were escorting the class wore hijabs. The fire station’s officials announced later that their teams made a “mistake in the interpretation” of *laïcité*.<sup>44</sup>

Changement de physionomie : port de la barbe sans moustache	oui	non
<b>Réintégration ou réappropriation dans une pratique religieuse</b>		
arrêt de consommation de boissons alcoolisées	oui	non
arrêt soudain de consommation de nourriture à base de porc	oui	non
consommation récente de produits halal	oui	non
arrêt de faire la fête	oui	non
<b>changement de comportement envers les femmes</b>		
personne qui ne dit plus bonjour	oui	non
personne qui n'embrasse plus ou qui ne serre plus la main	oui	non
personne qui n'adresse plus la parole	oui	non
personne portant un discours sur le rôle des femmes	oui	non
réalisation de la prière dans les locaux de l'université	oui	non
<b>Défense de nouvelles convictions</b>		
intérêt soudain pour l'actualité nationale et internationale	oui	non
intérêt soudain pour la religion	oui	non

**Figure 3:** Screenshot of the form shared with teachers by the University of Cergy-Pontoise. Academic staff can tick several options to indicate the possible radicalization of one of their students or colleagues. Among the options: “stopped drinking alcohol”, “suddenly stopped eating pork”, “recent consumption of halal food”, “behavioral changes towards women”, “prayers in the buildings of the university”, “sudden interest in national politics and international relations”, “sudden interest in religion”.<sup>45</sup>

A few days later, the teacher union *SUD Éducation 93* denounced the growing Islamophobic atmosphere in education and announced that it stands with colleagues, students, and parents of students who may be its victims. They especially criticized the Minister of Education Jean-Michel Blanquer who spread the fake news that in some schools little boys “refuse to hold the hands of little girls” and claimed that “the headscarf would not be desirable in our society.”<sup>46</sup> This same minister had also strongly criticized the decision of the left-wing parents’ association FCPE to

43. Jahan Lutz, “Islamophobie à l’école: 3 mères voilées dans l’école, la rectrice fait demi-tour”, *Revolution Permanente*, 9 November 2019, <https://www.revolutionpermanente.fr/Islamophobie-a-l-ecole-3-meres-voilees-dans-l-ecole-la-rectrice-fait-demi-tour>, (Access date: 29 March 2020).

44. “Oise: Une sortie scolaire dans une caserne de pompiers annulée à cause du voile d’une accompagnatrice”, *20 Minutes*, 16 October 2019, <https://www.20minutes.fr/societe/2629087-20191016-oise-sortie-scolaire-annulee-cause-voile-accompagnatrice>, (Access date: 29 March 2020).

45. “Université de Cergy-Pontoise: un formulaire, destiné à détecter les ‘signaux faibles de radicalisation’ parmi les étudiants et les enseignants, crée la polémique”, *France Info*, 14 October 2019, [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/faits-divers/police/attaque-a-la-prefecture-de-police-de-paris/universite-de-cergy-pontoise-un-formulaire-destine-a-detecter-les-signaux-faibles-de-radicalisation-parmi-les-etudiants-et-les-enseignants-cree-la-polemique\\_3659205.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/faits-divers/police/attaque-a-la-prefecture-de-police-de-paris/universite-de-cergy-pontoise-un-formulaire-destine-a-detecter-les-signaux-faibles-de-radicalisation-parmi-les-etudiants-et-les-enseignants-cree-la-polemique_3659205.html), (Access date: 20 March 2020).

46. “Islamophobie à l’école: SUD Éducation 93 dénonce un climat de plus en plus pesant”, *Sud Education 93*, 16 October 2019, <https://www.sudeducation93.org/Islamophobie-a-l-ecole-SUD-Education-93-denonce-un-climat-de-plus-en-plus.html>, (Access date: 29 March 2020).

launch a campaign supporting the right of Muslim mothers to accompany school trips wearing their hijabs. (Fig. 4) Similarly, thousands of people signed the petition “No to Islamophobia in education” after the escalation of Islamophobic discourse and acts following the attack on the Paris Police Headquarters.<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 4:** The campaign by the parents' association FCPE supporting the right of Muslim mothers to accompany school trips wearing their hijabs. The campaign was part of the parents' association elections. The flyer reads, “Yes, I come to the school trip. So what? Secularism means welcoming all parents without exception, Let's respect each other, Vote FCPE.”<sup>48</sup>

In January 2019, Aala Abdelgadir and Vasiliki Fouka, two researchers at Stanford University, published an article assessing the effects of the hijab ban at school (voted in 2004). The article “Political Secularism and Muslim Integration in the West: Assessing the Effects of the French Headscarf Ban” shows that the law reduces the secondary educational attainment of Muslim girls, and impacts their trajectory in the labor market and family composition in the long run. The authors state, “We provide evidence that the ban operates through increased perceptions of discrimination and that it reduces assimilation by casting religion and national identities as incompatible.”<sup>49</sup>

47. Rached Cherif, “Une pétition appelle à dire ‘Non à l’islamophobie’ dans l’éducation”, *Le Courrier de L’Atlas*, 31 October 2019, <https://www.lecourrierdelatlas.com/societe-une-petition-appelle-a-dire-non-a-l-islamophobie-dans-l-education-22891>, (Access date: 29 March 2020).

48. Delphine Bancaud, “Affiche de la FCPE: Pourquoi le sujet des sorties scolaires avec des mères voilées refait-il surface?”, *20 Minutes*, 24 September 2019, <https://www.20minutes.fr/societe/2611979-20190924-affiche-fcpe-pourquoi-sujet-sorties-scolaires-meres-voilees-refait-surface>, (Access date: 29 March 2020).

49. Aala Abdelgadir and Vasiliki Fouka, “Secular Policies and Muslim Integration in the West: The Effects of the French Headscarf Ban”, *American Political Science Review*, (January 2019), <https://vfouka.people.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj4871/f/abdelgadirfoukajan2019.pdf>, (Access date: 29 March 2020).

## Politics

Like the previous years, in 2019, politicians and political debates exacerbated the Islamophobic discourse in society. Any topic, any issue can be a pretext for scapegoating Muslims in the name of identity, public order, secular values, or women rights. Actually, the “Lepenization of minds”<sup>50</sup> is such that defending the Muslim way of life in the name of human rights and multiculturalism is now depicted as treason to the French nation. Anti-racist activists hardly find support in political parties whether from the right or the left, from nationalists or liberals. Examples of Islamophobic controversies that animated the year 2019 follow below.

In October and November 2019, while political parties were preparing for the local elections of spring 2020, a debate arose about “communitarian party lists” (*listes communautaristes*). Presented as party lists that would defend communitarian and particular interests against majority interests,<sup>51</sup> these few lists were actually attacked because Muslims were on top of them and/or their candidates did not hide their belonging to Islam. In other words, this expression was used by the government and other politicians to exclude the legitimate formation of a representative party.<sup>52</sup> The debate was focused above all on the party Union of French Muslim Democrats (*L'Union des démocrates musulmans français*) that had already presented a list at the European election in spring 2019. (Fig. 5) The government spokesperson Sibeth Ndiaye advocated for “a high degree of severity with regard to these communitarian lists.”<sup>53</sup>

As early as 16 June, the Minister of Action and Public Accounts Gérald Darmanin proposed to extend “the obligation of neutrality to all local elected officials” in order to “defend the Republic” from “communitarian lists.”<sup>54</sup> On 8 November 2019, the senator of *Les Républicains* (right) Bruno Retailleau presented a bill “to ensure respect for the values of the Republic in the face of communitarian threats.”<sup>55</sup> According to the bill, parties that have the “intention to run for elections with the aim of undermining the unity of the Republic” will be deprived of financing and excluded from the elections. The whole bill is then based on the very vague concept of “inten-

50. The meaning of “Lepenization” is the “minds that get shaped by Jean Marie Le Pen’s ideas and worldview.” The term is constructed from the famous French xenophobic leader’s name (Le Pen) and from the suffix of action “-ation”. For more information, see: Pierre Tevanian and Sylvie Tissot, *Les mots sont importants*, (Libertaria, Paris: 2010).

51. For more information, see: statements by Sebastien Lecornu, the minister responsible for local and regional government, in “Listes communautaires, ça existe vraiment?” BFM TV, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Znofi8\\_qfE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Znofi8_qfE), (0’44), (Access date: 29 March 2020).

52. For more information, see: interview of Fabrice Dume in Justine Faure, “Listes communautaires’ aux municipales: de quoi parle-t-on exactement?”, LCI, 30 October 2019, <https://www.lci.fr/politique/listes-communautaires-aux-municipales-de-quoi-parle-t-on-exactement-2136334.html>, (Access date: 29 March 2020).

53. “Listes communautaires, ça existe vraiment?” BFM TV, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Znofi8\\_qfE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Znofi8_qfE), (3’24), (Access date: 29 March 2020).

54. Frederic Fortin, “Interdiction des listes communautaristes: le débat reste ouvert”, MCM Presse, 13 November 2019, <https://www.banquedesterritoires.fr/interdiction-des-listes-communautaristes-le-debat-reste-ouvert>, (Access date: 29 March 2020).

55. Ibid.

tion” - no mention on who and how this “intention” would be assessed. The president of the region Hauts-de-France (North France), Xavier Bertrand (independent, right), even called on the government for an outright ban of the so-called communitarian party lists.<sup>56</sup> Both Bruno Retailleau and Xavier Bertrand were received by the Minister of Interior Christophe Castaner on 12 November, to discuss the subject of “communitarian” lists for the next municipal elections. Christophe Castaner himself conflated those lists, French suburbs, communitarianism, Islam, and anti-Semitism in an interview on 17 November.<sup>57</sup> Finally, the President of the Republic Emmanuel Macron rejected any ban of these lists during the French Mayors Congress on 19 November. Yet, he stressed that the government will fight “political Islam” and “political Islamism” that have “a project of separation from the Republic.”<sup>58</sup> In conclusion, the head of the state participated in this Islamophobic discourse over the “communitarian party lists” but did not go as far as banning them.



**Figure 5:** Picture of members of the party Union of French Muslim Democrats.<sup>59</sup>

56. Ibid.

57. Christophe Castaner, Twitter, 17 November 2019, <https://twitter.com/CCastaner/status/1196033688116637702>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

58. Emmanuel Macron, “Discours du Président Emmanuel Macron au Congrès des Maires et des Présidents d’intercommunalité de France”, Elysee, 19 November 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/11/19/discours-du-president-emmanuel-macron-au-congres-des-maires-et-des-presidents-dintercommunalite-de-france>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

59. “Quinze minute - Premier tour des Municipales en France: focus sur l’UDMF, l’Union des démocrates musulmans français”, RTS, 14 March 2020, <https://www.rts.ch/play/radio/quinze-minutes/audio/quinze-minute-premier-tour-des-municipales-en-france-focus-sur-ludmf-lunion-des-democrates-musulmans-franais?id=11146264>, (Access date: 29 March 2020).

This debate takes place in the “terror attack – Islamophobia sequence” described above. Actually, the sequence opened the doors to explicit racism without any limits or feeling of shame. In this way, fake news and provocations became the new standards. On 7 October, the deputy of *Les Republicains* Valerie Boyer said that “50% of Muslims consider the Shari’a more important than the law of the Republic.”<sup>60</sup> The survey she is referring to mentions 27% of Muslims in France think so - not 50%. Furthermore, we could even interrogate the meaning of such poll questions and in specific, the very question “Do you consider the Shari’a more important than the law of the Republic?”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, as long as the citizens of a country respect the laws of that specific country it is of questionable worth to inspect what they personally believe about ethics and norms. In another example of Islamophobic provocation, on 13 October, the Minister of the Education Jean-Michel Blanquer claimed on BFM TV that “the headscarf is not desirable in our society, it is not something to be encouraged. What it says about the status of women is not in line with our values.”<sup>62</sup> Politicians well known for their Islamophobic positions applauded the statement. Eric Ciotti, deputy of the *Les Republicains*, wrote on Twitter that “Jean-Michel Blanquer is right, the Islamic headscarf is not desirable in France. I applaud the courage of this stance.”<sup>63</sup> (Fig. 6) Such statements directly undermine the liberal aspect of the French state and deny the basic expressions of freedom of thought. In other words, it is an unacceptable intervention from politics into private life.



**Figure 6:** The tweet by Eric Ciotti, deputy of the right-wing party *Les Republicains*, applauding the Islamophobic comment of the Minister of Education: “Jean-Michel Blanquer is right, the Islamic headscarf is not desirable in France. I applaud the courage of this stance. I hope he will be listened by President Macron who is currently under pressure of leftists.”<sup>64</sup>

60. Anais Condomines, “Un sondage affirme-t-il que 50% des musulmans placent la Charia au-dessus des lois, comme le dit Valérie Boyer?”, *Liberation*, 11 October 2019, [https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/2019/10/11/un-sondage-affirme-t-il-que-50-des-musulmans-placent-la-charia-au-dessus-des-lois-comme-le-dit-valer\\_1756730](https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/2019/10/11/un-sondage-affirme-t-il-que-50-des-musulmans-placent-la-charia-au-dessus-des-lois-comme-le-dit-valer_1756730), (Access date: 22 March 2020).

61. “Etude auprès de la population musulmane en France, 30 ans après l’affaire des foulards de Creil”, *Le Point*, Ifop and Fondation Jean Jaures, September 2019, [https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/116646\\_Rapport>Ifop\\_le\\_Point\\_FJJ\\_2019.09.11.pdf](https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/116646_Rapport>Ifop_le_Point_FJJ_2019.09.11.pdf), (Access date: 22 March 2020).

62. “Cette folle semaine où un élu RN, Julien Odoul, a relancé la chasse au voile”, *L’Obs*, 18 October 2019, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/politique/20191018.OBS20000/cette-folle-semaine-ou-un-elu-rn-julien-odoul-a-relance-la-chasse-au-voile.html>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

63. *Ibid.*

64. Eric Ciotti, Twitter, 13 October 2019, <https://twitter.com/ECiotti/status/1183401703598690305>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

In 2019, one can claim that there was a competition between politicians regarding who will push the limits of Islamophobia further. The examples are countless and on most occasions concern Muslim women. On 23 June, a dozen women of the civil association *Alliance citoyenne de Grenoble* entered the swimming pool of Grenoble (Southeast France) wearing burkinis in order to claim the right to bathe in this attire. Covering clothes such as the burkini are not allowed in most local swimming pools in France. Most French journals and TV channels spoke of a “provocative operation,” while some politicians even evoked an action of “Islamist activists”<sup>65</sup> and “fundamentalist Muslim women.”<sup>66</sup> The government through the Secretary of State to the Minister of the Interior Laurent Nunez shared the same view in the French Senate and depicted the incident as a “political provocation” that threatened French Republican values (i.e. public order and *laïcité*). He maintained that the burkini is forbidden because of hygienic and security issues. He finally stated, “You can trust our determination to eradicate these kinds of ‘communitarianist actions’ (*replis communautaires*)” under the governmental program of prevention against radicalization.<sup>67</sup> However, we must keep in mind that the French Council of State (*Conseil d’Etat*) in a ruling of 26 August 2016 considered that the ban of the burkini constitutes a serious and illegal infringement of fundamental freedoms.<sup>68</sup> Earlier in the year, at the end of February, a controversy started on Twitter over the promotion of a hijab designed especially for running by the company Decathlon (Fig. 7). The retailer planned to sell this product on March 2019. Government members and politicians from the left to far right competed in messages of consternation and rejection of this product. Aurore Bergé, spokesperson and deputy of the ruling party LREM, claimed, “Sport emancipates. It does not submit. My choice as a woman and a citizen will be to no longer trust a brand that breaks with our values. Those who tolerate women in

65. Eric Ciotti: “The #Burkini has no place in France where women are equal to men. Letting these Islamist activists in #Grenoble as everywhere in France is to renounce the Republic. I will never accept it.” For more information, see: Elisa Frisullo, “Tout comprendre à l’opération burkini qui provoque une vague de reactions”, 20 Minutes, 24 June 2019, <https://www.20minutes.fr/societe/2547983-20190624-grenoble-tout-comprendre-operation-burkini-provoque-vague-reactions>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

66. Local opposition: “Following the new intrusion of fundamentalist Muslim women in the municipal swimming pool, I ask Eric Piolle @EricPiolle (city mayor) to stop these provocations, to enforce the rules that apply to everyone. His laxity goes beyond the Republican limits.” For more information, see: Elisa Frisullo, “Tout comprendre à l’opération burkini qui provoque une vague de reactions”, 20 Minutes, 24 June 2019, <https://www.20minutes.fr/societe/2547983-20190624-grenoble-tout-comprendre-operation-burkini-provoque-vague-reactions>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

67. Video of Laurent Nunez posted on Senate Twitter account: “Count on our determination to eradicate these communitarian secessionist phenomena”, Sénate, Twitter, 9 July 2019, <https://twitter.com/Senate/status/1148610880529022977>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

68. Aurelia Gervais, “Suspension par le Conseil d’Etat d’une mesure d’interdiction des ‘burkinis’”, Legal News, 30 August 2016, [http://legalnews.fr/index.php?option=com\\_content&id=325432](http://legalnews.fr/index.php?option=com_content&id=325432), (Access date: 22 March 2020)

the public space only when they are hiding are not lovers of freedom.”<sup>69</sup> Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, president of Republic Arise (*Debout la France*, far right) added, “I have two daughters and I don’t want them to live in a country where the place of women in society is regressing like in Saudi Arabia. I call for a boycott of the #Decathlon brand that markets this type of clothing!”<sup>70</sup> Within a few days, Decathlon had to cancel its project to sell this product in France after having received hundreds of insulting and threatening emails. Once again, this controversy politicizes and stigmatizes Muslim women’s right to participate in activities – in this case sports – that are taken for granted by the majority.<sup>71</sup>



**Figure 7:** Tweet that launched the polemic over Decathlon’s “sports hijab”. Lydia Guirous, a member of the party *Les Républicains* (right) wrote, “Decathlon also submits to #Islamism which only tolerates women with their heads covered with a hijab to affirm their belonging to the ummah and their submission to men. #Decathlon therefore denies the values of our civilization for the market and community marketing.”<sup>72</sup>

The organization of the “March against Islamophobia” (10 November) was paradoxically a great moment of Islamophobic expression too. Naturally, politicians of right-wing and far-right parties depicted this rally as a provocation and denounced the presence of so-called Islamists. A few days before the rally, the Minister of the

69. “Rapport CCIF 2020, Rapport sur l’Islamophobie pendant l’année 2019”, Collectif contre l’islamophobie en France.

70. “La polémique autour du hijab de running de Decathlon en sept actes”, France Info, 26 February 2019, [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/religion/laicite/la-polemique-autour-du-hijab-de-running-de-decathlon-en-sept-actes\\_3208539.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/religion/laicite/la-polemique-autour-du-hijab-de-running-de-decathlon-en-sept-actes_3208539.html), (Access date: 22 March 2020).

71. “La polémique du ‘hijab running’ de Décathlon expliquée en cinq points”, Les Inrocks, 27 February 2019, [https://www.lesinrocks.com/2019/02/27/actualite/actualite/\\_\\_trashed-60/](https://www.lesinrocks.com/2019/02/27/actualite/actualite/__trashed-60/), (Access date: 22 March 2020).

72. Lydia Guirous, Twitter, 24 February 2019, [https://twitter.com/LydiaGuirous/status/1099635203188903936?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1100056279186321408&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lesinrocks.com%2F2019%2F02%2F27%2Factualite%2Factualite%2F\\_\\_trashed-60%2F](https://twitter.com/LydiaGuirous/status/1099635203188903936?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1100056279186321408&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lesinrocks.com%2F2019%2F02%2F27%2Factualite%2Factualite%2F__trashed-60%2F), (Access date: 22 March 2020).

Education Jean-Michel Blanquer described it as “pathetic” and “a fight against secularism.”<sup>73</sup> Even among leftist politicians who first supported the rally the debate was intense. For instance, the deputy of Unsubmissive France Alexis Corbière who had signed the manifesto calling for the rally, later told the right-wing newspaper *Le Figaro* that he thought that “the Human Rights League was behind the initiative of this protest.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, he regretted having signed the manifesto. Another emblematic leader of the far-left movement, François Ruffin, when asked whether he will attend the rally alongside the CCIF, replied, “I will not go there on Sunday because I’m playing football.”<sup>75</sup> Victims of Islamophobia must feel content to hear such euphemisms from people who present themselves as protectors of the oppressed. As for the leader of the Green party Yannick Jadot, he refused to attend the rally even if he had signed the manifesto, and mentioned, “I have never considered that there was state racism in our country... I don’t see any oppressive laws today against Muslims in our country.”<sup>76</sup>

All the messages of hesitation and rejection highlight the contradiction in French politics towards Muslims. On the one hand, they do not want to see the rise of an autonomous Muslim agency, independent from their political influence. On the other, they do not want to endorse the cause of Muslim people.

Regarding the government’s approach towards Islamophobia, we must stress two main tendencies. First, despite its tolerant appearance, Macron’s office relies on conservative discourse on identity and immigration. For instance, Macron is the one who included the question of “immigration and identity” in the grand debate following the yellow vest movement that was grounded in social and economic claims.<sup>77</sup> This hostile approach towards diversity and multiculturalism clearly discloses the government’s understanding of the Muslim question. The quotations of ministers mentioned above provide examples. Second, the government maintains an Islamophobic stance on issues concerning Muslims through its antiterrorism policy. This latter has two dimensions:

73. “Interview de M. Jean-Michel Blanquer, ministre de l’éducation nationale et de la jeunesse, à France 2 le 7 novembre 2019, sur les conditions de travail des enseignants et le harcèlement scolaire”, Vie Publique, 7 November 2019, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/272157-jean-michel-blanquer-7112019-enseignants-harcelement-scolaire>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

74. “Pourquoi la manifestation contre l’islamophobie du 10 novembre divise au sein de la gauche”, BFM TV, 6 November 2019, <https://www.bfmtv.com/politique/pourquoi-la-manifestation-contre-l-islamophobie-du-10-novembre-divise-au-sein-de-la-gauche-1800559.html>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

75. Guillaume Stoll, “Ces élus de gauche qui n’assument plus d’avoir signé la tribune contre l’islamophobie”, L’OBS, 6 November 2019, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/politique/20191106.OBS20773/ces-elus-de-gauche-qui-n-assument-plus-d-avoir-signé-la-tribune-contre-l-islamophobie.html>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

76. Ibid.

77. Nathalie Birchem, “Grand débat national: Identité, retrouver un vivre-ensemble”, La Croix, 13 January 2019, <https://www.la-croix.com/Economie/Economie-et-entreprises/Grand-debat-national-Identite-retrouver-vivre-ensemble-2019-01-13-1200995008>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

1. “Combating violent radicalization which can lead to terrorism (these individuals are monitored and prosecuted, if their dangerousness is established).”
2. “Combating communitarianism (*communautarisme*)<sup>78</sup> and a rigorous practice that deviates from Islam.”<sup>79</sup>

Relying on the second principle, Macron takes a stance against “people who in the name of a religion are pursuing a political project, a political Islam that wants to secede from our republic.”<sup>80</sup>

If the first principle corresponds to legitimate measures to maintain public order, the second is vague, unclear, and threatens the rights and way of life of French Muslim citizens. Indeed, we can refute the accusation of “communitarianism” in this simple way: if there is a criminal offence, then criminals can be put on trial. In this case there is no need for the expression “communitarianism” since both the existing law and the existing vocabulary are operative. If there is no criminal offence and no one is harmed, then what is the problem with being “communitarian” (*communautaire*)?<sup>81</sup>

As a result, beyond Macron’s call for a “watchdog society” (on 8 October, see above), the institutionalization of Islamophobia in France takes its roots in this second dimension of French antiterror policy, i.e. misconceptions about a so-called communitarianism and related security measures to tackle it. In fact, the term “communitarianism” conflates a wide range of meanings that do not help to understand the issue of radicalization nor terror: namely political Islam, Islamist parallel society, Islamism, obscurantism, parallel economy, inequality between women and men, Shari’a laws above those of the Republic...<sup>82</sup> Again, these expressions are vague and target a way of life (religious and not secular) more than real offenses.

Put differently, the term “communitarianism” refers *in fine* to the far-right ideology of “reverse colonization” or “Great Replacement.”<sup>83</sup> The boundary between anti-terror policies and far-right ideology then becomes thin and permeable. So, when the president and the minister of interior announce that since the beginning of the year they have closed 12 places of worship, 4 private schools, 9 associations, and nearly 130 bars/pubs because of radicalization and political Islam, we do not know if we

78. For more information, see: footnote 14.

79. “Islamisme et repli Communautaire”, Comité interministériel de prévention de la délinquance et de la radicalisation, <https://www.cipdr.gouv.fr/islamisme-et-repli-communautaire/>, (Access date: 22 March 2020); Laurent Nunez, Twitter, 24 October 2019, <https://twitter.com/NunezLaurent/status/1187290364060864512>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

80. “Conférence de presse à l’issue du Grand Débat national”, Elysee, 25 April 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/04/25/conference-de-presse-grand-debat-national>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

81. For more information, see: footnote 16.

82. Christophe Castaner, Twitter, 29 November 2019, <https://twitter.com/CCastaner/status/1200375164325773313>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

83. For more information, see: Leonard Faytre, “Islamophobia in France: National Report 2018”, *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2019).

should see in those measures the success of war on terror or the progress of far-right ideology.<sup>84</sup> Yet, the government applies many policies based on this understanding such as circulars to prefects or the “Republican Reconquest of Suburbs” (*Quartiers de la Reconquete Republicaine*).<sup>85</sup>

It is exactly on this issue that Fionnuala D. Ní Aoláin, the UN special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, published a report on 8 May 2019, where she warns that the new antiterrorism laws (i.e. SILT law)<sup>86</sup> risk undermining fundamental rights and freedoms. The report states, “The Special Rapporteur highlights the potentially disproportionate effects of administrative measures on individual and collective rights occasioned by the SILT law. She is particularly conscious of encroachment on religious freedom implicated by the closure of some mosques, allied with the broader social and religious consequences of judicial power over religious exercise, and recalls that any restriction on the right to freedom of religion or belief must strictly comply with the limitation regime stipulated by international human rights law (A/73/362 and A/HRC/31/65).”<sup>87</sup>

Similarly, the French NGO *Action droits des musulmans* (ADM) published a report on 13 June that counts seven mosque closures since the SILT law came into force (October 2017). The NGO denounces the use of an administrative and non-judicial procedure for this, and calls for “stopping to conflate Islam and terrorism.”<sup>88</sup>

## Media

Like in the previous years, in 2019, Islamophobic controversies often started from social media before being debated in mainstream media and triggering reactions among French politicians. It is not always easy to untangle these three spheres. Yet, mainstream media (i.e. books, TV, radio, and newspapers) greatly participated in

84. “Municipales 2020: Emmanuel Macron se prononce contre l’interdiction des listes communautaires”, 20 Minutes, 19 November 2019, <https://www.20minutes.fr/politique/2655251-20191119-municipales-emmanuel-macron-prononce-contre-interdiction-listes-communautaires>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

85. “For each ‘Republican Reconquest of Suburbs’ 10 to 35 additional police or gendarmerie personnel will be assigned. These additional personnel will be immediately operational and will go into the field. Each of these districts also has an anti-trafficking unit (CLT) adapted to each territory and local situation. By the end of the five-year period, 60 Republican Reconquest districts will be set up. By 2018, 15 neighborhoods have been set up and 326 staff members have been assigned to them.” For more information, see: “Effectifs de juin 2019 dans les quartiers de reconquête républicaine”, interieur.gouv.fr, 21 June 2019, <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/fr/Le-ministre/Dossiers-de-presse/Effectifs-de-juin-2019-dans-les-quartiers-de-reconquete-republicaine>, (Access date: 26 March 2020).

86. Maxime Jacob, “French Anti-terrorism Law Normalises State of Emergency”, 15 December 2017, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/french-anti-terrorism-law-normalises-state-of-emergency/>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

87. “Visit to France – Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism”, United Nations General Assembly, 8 May 2019, [https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2012517/a\\_hrc\\_40\\_52\\_add.4\\_E.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2012517/a_hrc_40_52_add.4_E.pdf), (Access date: 25 March 2020).

88. Anne-Benedicte Hoffner, “Une association musulmane qualifie les fermetures de mosquées de ‘punitions collectives’”, La Croix, 14 June 2019, <https://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Islam/association-musulmane-qualifie-fermetures-mosquees-punitions-collectives-2019-06-14-1201028723>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

creating a negative newspeak related to Islam and Muslims. We can define this Islamophobic newspeak as a process of keeping French Muslims within a degrading linguistic framework. The main expressions of the Islamophobic newspeak in the 2019 French media follow.

### ***- Hysteria over the “Islamic Headscarf”***

Following the aggression of Julien Odoul, a local representative of the National Rally, towards a woman wearing a hijab in the regional council audience, mainstream TV channels kept debating this issue for days. Surprisingly enough, they did not discuss the violence of Julien Odoul but the legitimacy of wearing a hijab in a public place – here the council of the region of Bourgogne-Franche-Comté. Around 85 debates were organized in just a week on the channels LCI, CNews, France-Info, and BFMTV.<sup>89</sup> This media frenzy led to many excessive statements. For instance, while the journalist Olivier Galzi and his guests were discussing the possibilities of banning the hijab in public places (i.e. everywhere but inside people’s homes) on a talk show, Galzi stated, “Shouldn’t we move it [the problem] and say: it’s not a religious sign that we want to ban but a political signal, just as we banned SS uniform, that’s all.”<sup>90</sup> In most media broadcasts, the hijab became a sign of aversion and repugnance. A few days before, during a similar talk show on the same channel about the same topic, the deputy editorial director of the newspaper *Le Figaro* Yves Thréard claimed, “There were times in France when I took a bus or a boat and then I saw someone with a headscarf, and I got off.”<sup>91</sup> He then added, “I hate the Muslim religion... You have the right to hate a religion, you have every right to say so.”<sup>92</sup> There was the same hysteria about the sports hijab, a controversy we already mentioned in this report. On a talk show on CNews (26 February), the speaker Laurence Ferrari could not bear listening to one of her guests defending the right of Muslim women to wear a hijab. She tried to refute him and then shouted, “It’s freedom! Freedom! Freedom not to wear the headscarf!”<sup>93</sup> This hysteria over the headscarf also informed the topic

89. “Cette folle semaine où un élu RN, Julien Odoul, a relancé la chasse au voile”, L’OBS, 18 October 2019, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/politique/20191018.OBS20000/cette-folle-semaine-ou-un-elu-rn-julien-odoul-a-relance-la-chasse-au-voile.html>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

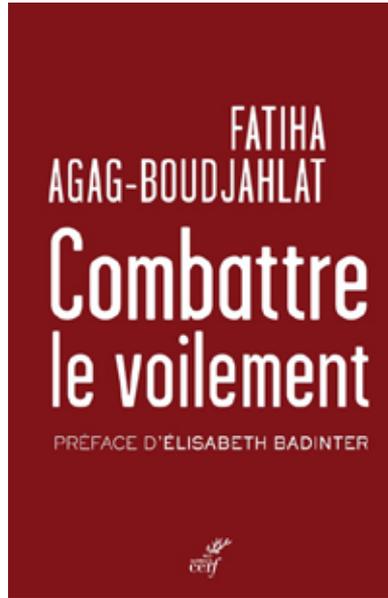
90. “Stupeur: sur LCI, Olivier Galzi compare le voile à un uniforme”, Les Inrocks, 17 October 2019, <https://www.lesinrocks.com/2019/10/17/medias/tele/video-stupeur-sur-lci-olivier-galzi-compare-le-voile-a-un-uniforme-ss/>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

91. “Je déteste la religion musulmane”: Yves Thréard du “Figaro” en roue libre sur le voile”, Les Inrocks, 15 October 2019, <https://www.lesinrocks.com/2019/10/15/actualite/medias-actualite/je-deteste-la-religion-musulmane-yves-threard-du-figaro-en-roue-libre-sur-le-voile/>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

92. Ibid.

93. Simon Gonzalez, “Polémique autour du hijab: vives tensions entre Laurence Ferrari et un chroniqueur de CNews”, 27 February 2019, <https://www.programme.tv/news/actu/204876-polemique-autour-du-hijab-vives-tensions-entre-laurence-ferrari-et-un-chroniqueur-de-cnews-video/>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

of the book by Fatiha Agag-Boudjahlat, *Fighting Veiling - Islamist Entryism and Multiculturalism*.<sup>94</sup> (Fig. 8)



**Figure 8:** Cover of the book by Fatiha Agag-Boudjahlat *Combattre le voilement - Entrisme islamiste et multiculturalisme* (Fighting Veiling - Islamist Entryism and Multiculturalism) (March 2019).<sup>95</sup>

### - *The Alleged New Muslim Anti-Semitism*

The thinker Alain Finkielkraut was verbally attacked during a yellow jacket rally in the streets of Paris on 16 February 2019. Some protesters shouted to him “Fucking Zionist, go away! [...] Palestine! Fucking Racist! Get out of here! You will go to Hell, God and the people will punish you!”<sup>96</sup> Finkielkraut is a well-known thinker, author of philosophical books, who often intervenes on TV, radio, and newspapers. He also supports contested ideas on French identity, Israeli current policy in Palestine, and on multiculturalism.<sup>97</sup> The verbal attack he experienced was recorded and broadcasted on media and social media, triggering a new debate on the so-called Muslim anti-Semitism. On CNews, the columnist Jean-Claude Dassier claimed, “We are facing an Islamo-Muslim

94. Fatiha Agag-Boudjahlat, *Combattre le voilement: entrisme islamiste et multiculturalisme*, (Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris: 2019).

95. Picture found in Aurore Van Opstal, “On ne peut pas être féministe quand on se soumet au patriarcat arabo-musulman”, Mediapart blog, 14 October 2019, <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/aurore-van-opstal/blog/141019/ne-peut-pas-etre-feministe-quand-se-soumet-au-patriarcat-arabo-musulman-0>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

96. Ambre Lepoivre, “Gilets jaunes: Alain Finkielkraut violemment insulté par des gilets jaunes”, BFM TV, 16 February 2019, <https://www.bfmtv.com/police-justice/paris-alain-finkielkraut-injure-par-des-gilets-jaunes-1634185.html>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

97. Frederic Joignot, “Alain Finkielkraut, un Immortel contesté”, Le Monde, 11 April 2014, [https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2014/04/11/alain-finkielkraut-un-antimoderne-a-l-academie-francaise\\_4399590\\_3260.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2014/04/11/alain-finkielkraut-un-antimoderne-a-l-academie-francaise_4399590_3260.html), (Access date: 25 March 2020).

anti-Semitism, some say ‘Islamist-leftist’ [...] It is a form of anti-Semitism that rises in the suburbs (*banlieues*).”<sup>98</sup> Eric Zemmour, polemist and supporter of the infamous French Nazi-collaborator Marechal Petain, stated on the channel LCI that “this anti-Semitism is the fruit of Islamic culture.”<sup>99</sup> The leader of the National Rally, Marine Le Pen, claimed that “the most obvious danger comes from Islamist anti-Semitism.”<sup>100</sup>

**- The Muslim Brotherhood’s Hidden Project: Reverse Colonization**



**Figure 9:** The cover of the magazine *Marianne* (n. 1179, third week of October 2019): “Muslim Brotherhood: Their Strategy of Conquest – Their Networks, Their Victories, How They Want to Get Control of French Islam, Will Macron Surrender?”<sup>101</sup>

Like in previous years, the French media organs spread conspiracy theories about the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim organization is suspected of weaving its way into French society secretly by opening schools, entering companies, unions, and political parties - a multi-tentacle monster! This conspiracy theory is close to the far-right theory of “reverse colonization.” Popularized by the polemist Eric Zemmour, this theory claims that France

98. Samuel Gontier, Twitter, “We’re Dealing with Muslim-Islamic Anti-Semitism, Some People Call It Leftist-Islam”, Jean-Claude Dassier, editorial writer on CNews, 19 February 2019, <https://twitter.com/samgontier/status/1097984641435340801>, (Access date: 25 March 2020).

99. “Le CSA met en garde LCI pour les propos islamophobes de Zemmour”, France Soir, 5 August 2019, <http://www.francesoir.fr/culture-medias/le-csa-met-en-garde-lci-pour-les-propos-islamophobes-de-zemmour-video>, (Access date: 3 April 2020)

100. “Zapping de l’actualité islamophobe de la semaine...”, CCIF, 22 February 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOHbY2cnAEA>. This video of CCIF collects the most outrageous statements of that period.

101. For more information, see: *Marianne*: <https://www.marianne.net/magazine/freres-musulmans-leur-strategie-de-conquete>, (Access date: 3 April 2020).

is being colonized by hordes of African migrants and by Muslim culture. In October, the weekly *Marianne* (nationalist left) published a series of articles on the topic “Muslim Brotherhood: Their Strategy of Conquest.” (Fig. 9) Similarly, the monthly *La Revue des Deux Mondes* dedicated its November edition on the Muslim Brotherhood movement, with the following title: “Muslim Brotherhood, Their Strategy for France.”<sup>102</sup> Some of the articles trigger conspiracy feelings. Some of the authors are also well known for their Islamophobic views, including Zineb El Rhazoui and Fatiha Boudjahlat. (Fig. 10)

### DOSSIER : LA STRATÉGIE DES FRÈRES MUSULMANS

« **L'Etat n'a pas à s'adapter à l'islam** » - Zineb El Rhazoui -

Valérie Toranian

**Histoire et stratégie de la confrérie des Frères musulmans**

- Michaël Prazan

« **Ce sont les Frères musulmans qui vous choisissent, et non l'inverse** » - Mohamed Louizi

**L'islam politique à la conquête des quartiers** - Michel

Aubouin

**Le piège de l'islamophobie** - Fatiha Boudjahlat

« **Je conseille aux musulmans de France de s'intégrer dans leur société** » - Rached Ghannouchi

**L'engouement de nombreux Franco-Maghrébins pour**

**Erdogan, leur « frère musulman »** - Ariane Bonzon

**Le prophète, le poète et la psychanalyste : sur l'islam et la violence** - Véronique Taquin

**Les accommodements déraisonnables : de la démission à la soumission** - Josepha Laroche

**Le multiculturalisme contre la démocratie** - Jérôme

Maucourant

**Figure 10:** Articles in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on “Muslim Brotherhood, Their strategy for France”:

- “The State Does Not Have to Adapt to Islam”...
- “History and Strategy of the Muslim Brotherhood”...
- “It Is the Muslim Brotherhood That Chooses You, Not the Other Way Around”...
- “Political Islam Conquers French Suburbs”...
- “The Trap of Islamophobia”...
- “I Advise Muslims in France to Be Integrated in Their Society”...
- “The Enthusiasm of Many Franco-North African for Erdogan, Their ‘Muslim Brother’...”
- “The Prophet, the Poet and the Psychoanalyst: On Islam and Violence”...
- “Unreasonable Accommodations: From Resignation to Submission”...
- “Multiculturalism against Democracy”...<sup>103</sup>

102. For more information, see: *Revue des Deux Mondes*: November 2019, <https://www.revuedesdeuxmondes.fr/revue/la-strategie-des-freres-musulmans/>, (Access date: 3 April 2020).

103. For more information, see: *Revue des Deux Mondes*, November 2019, <https://www.revuedesdeuxmondes.fr/revue/la-strategie-des-freres-musulmans/>, (Access date: 3 April 2020).

### **- Alleged Islamist Radicalization in Public Services**

In May 2019, for days the French media covered a controversy in public services that supposedly demonstrated the spread of “radical Islam”: a bus driver of the city of Paris was accused of refusing to let two women enter the bus because of their miniskirts. It finally transpired that one of the girls had made a slanderous denunciation, i.e. this incident never occurred.<sup>104</sup> Meanwhile, the media got into frenetic debates over the Islamization of public services. A sample of random titles follows: “How Islamism Settles in France” (*Figaro Blog*, 6 May);<sup>105</sup> “The Miniskirt and the Paris Bus Network: The Expansion of Cultural Islam” (*Valeurs Actuelles*, 10 May);<sup>106</sup> “Paris Bus Drivers: The Scandal That Hides a Deeper Reality” (*Causeur*, 10 May).<sup>107</sup> This controversy took on a second life after the publication in June 2019 of an inquiry of two French deputies on the “Islamist radicalization in public services.”<sup>108</sup>

### **- Grand Finale: Zemmour’s Speech Broadcasted Live on Television**

On 28 September 2019, the polemist Eric Zemmour, who ten days earlier was condemned for “incitement to racial hatred,”<sup>109</sup> gave a public speech at the “Convention of the Right” organized by supporters of Marion Maréchal Le Pen (alt-right). (Fig. 11) This speech that includes all the worst Islamophobic claims one could imagine, was broadcasted without interruption by the right-wing news channel LCI. Extracts of his delirious and extreme speech follow.

“Today, we are experiencing a demographic inversion that is leading to a reversal of migratory flows, which is leading to a reversal of colonization. I’ll let you guess who will be their “Indians” and their “African slaves.” It will be you.

Thus, they [immigrants] behave as if they were in conquered land, as *Pieds Noirs* did in Algeria or the English in India: they behave as colonizers. Big shots and their gangs join forces with the imam to bring order to the streets and to people’s consciences according to the old alliance of the sword and the papists, in this case the Kalashnikov and the *djellaba*.

104. Collectif contre l’islamophobie en France, “Rapport CCIF 2020, Rapport sur l’Islamophobie pendant l’année 2019”, 25 February 2020, <http://www.islamophobie.net/rapport-2020/>, (Access date: 20 March 2020).

105. Ivan Rioufol, “Comment l’islamisme s’installe en France”, *Blog Le Figaro*, 6 May 2019, <https://blog.lefigaro.fr/rioufol/2019/05/comment-lislamisme-sinstalle-e-1.html>, (Access date: 3 April 2020).

106. Frederic Saint Clair, “La minijupe et la RATP, ou l’expansion de l’islam culture”, *Valeurs Actuelles*, 10 May 2019, <https://www.valeursactuelles.com/societe/la-minijupe-et-la-ratp-ou-l-expansion-de-lislam-culturel-106832>, (Access date: 3 April 2020).

107. Lina Murr Nehme, “Chauffeurs de bus RATP: la ‘jupe trop courte’ qui cache la forêt”, *Causeur*, 10 May 2019, <https://www.causeur.fr/chauffeur-bus-ratp-mini-jupe-islamisme-161334>, (Access date: 3 April 2020).

108. “Rapport d’information – Assemblée Nationale”, 27 June 2019, [http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/rapports/cion\\_lois/115b2082\\_rapport-information](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/rapports/cion_lois/115b2082_rapport-information), (Access date: 3 April 2020).

109. “Eric Zemmour définitivement condamné pour provocation à la haine raciale”, *Le Monde*, 20 September 2019, [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/09/20/eric-zemmour-definitivement-condamne-pour-provocation-a-la-haine-raciale\\_6012389\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/09/20/eric-zemmour-definitivement-condamne-pour-provocation-a-la-haine-raciale_6012389_3224.html), (Access date: 3 April 2020).

The question we have to ask ourselves is: will young French people accept to live in a minority on the land of their ancestors? If so, they deserve to be colonized. If not, they will have to fight for their liberation. But how do we fight? Where to fight? What to fight for?

In the street, women in hijab and men in *djellaba* are propaganda in fact, an Islamization of the street. [They wear] uniforms of an occupying army [that] reminds the defeated his submission. The old expression “Immigration, Integration, Assimilation” has been replaced by “Invasion, Colonization, Occupation.”

The native French who must submit or resign... [has the choice between] living under the domination of Islamic morals and halal, or fleeing.”<sup>110</sup>



**Figure 11:** The TV channel LCI broadcasted the full speech of Zemmour at the alt-right event “Convention of the Right” (8 September).<sup>111</sup>

Despite this scandal, the competitor channel CNews nominated Zemmour as the head polemist on the show “Face à l’info” on 14 October. Islamophobia has probably never been as explicit and widespread as today.

\*\*\*

One of the consequences of this Islamophobic newspeak is the rejection of Muslims by the rest of society. A survey published by the *Journal du Dimanche* shows that 61% of those questioned think that “Islam is not compatible with the values of the French society.”<sup>112</sup> This percentage was 26% in 2011 and 46% in 2015.<sup>113</sup> In the light of the information provided in this report, we consider that this rejection is not only the fruit of the bloody attacks committed by Muslim terrorists but also of the constant Islamophobic propaganda.

110. “Rapport CCIF 2020, Rapport sur l’Islamophobie pendant l’année 2019”, Collectif contre l’islamophobie en France.

111. “Discours de Zemmour sur LCI pour la Convention de la droite: les censeurs lancent l’offensive”, Novopress, 2 October 2019, <https://fr.novopress.info/215672/discours-de-zemmour-sur-lci-pour-la-convention-de-la-droite-les-censeurs-lancent-loffensive/>, (Access date: 3 April 2020).

112. Herve Gattegno, “Sondage. Face à l’islam, les Français s’inquiètent”, *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 27 October 2019, <https://www.lejdd.fr/Politique/sondage-face-a-lislam-les-francais-sinquietent-3927720>, (Access date: 3 April 2020).

113. Ismail Ferhat and François Kraus, “Etat des lieux des discriminations et des agressions racistes envers les musulmans de France”, Fondation Jean Jaures, 6 November 2019, <https://jean-jaures.org/nos-productions/etat-des-lieux-des-discriminations-et-des-agressions-racistes-envers-les-musulmans>, (Access date: 20 March 2020).

## Justice System

The French state already bans several aspects of the Muslim way of life such as the hijab ban from primary school to high school (2004), and the ban of niqab in public spaces (2011). Moreover, other restrictions occur on the local level (ban of burkini in local swimming pools) or in private contexts (companies' regulations that forbid prayer or hijab for instance). In 2019, members of the French Parliament passed many bills that aimed at restricting the freedoms of Muslims. These bills are examples of attempts to legalize Islamophobia in France. Some of the official motives introducing these bills are in line with Zemmour's racist vision of society outlined above. A sample of these bills follows:

- Bill of 9 July 2019 to ensure the religious neutrality of persons contributing to the public service of education [i.e. banning headscarf in those services]. This bill was drafted by the Senate. The Senate, with a right-wing majority, adopted the bill on 29 October 2019, at the first reading. The National Assembly has still to discuss the bill.<sup>114</sup>
- Bill of 15 October 2019 to ban burkini-type clothing in swimming pools open to the public and to forbid any discrimination between the sexes with regard to opening hours. This bill was drafted by the Senate. This bill has not passed yet.

Abstract of the motives that introduce the bill:

“In the past, immigrants who came to France did their best to integrate into our society. Today, certain migratory flows lead to radically different behavior. [Immigrants] create communitarian clusters that reject our way of life and would even like to impose their habits and customs on us. It is therefore regrettable that, under the guise of an extravagant conception of individual freedom, political leaders tolerate such attitudes.”<sup>115</sup>

- Bill of 18 October 2019 to react against communitarian practices, such as the wearing of the Islamic headscarf in the assemblies of local and regional authorities by persons accompanying young schoolchildren on school trips. This bill was drafted by the Senate. This bill has not passed yet.

Abstract of the motives that introduce the bill:

“Immigrants and people with an immigrant background must not impose their habits and customs on us. On the contrary, if they come to our country, they must adapt to our way of life and the rules of our society.”<sup>116</sup>

- Bill of 6 November 2019 to ban the wearing of signs or clothing explicitly

---

114. “Proposition de Loi, No.643”, Senat, 9 July 2019, <https://www.senat.fr/leg/pp18-643.pdf>, (Access date: 4 April 2020).

115. “Proposition de Loi, No.54”, Senat, 15 October 2019, <https://www.senat.fr/leg/pp19-054.pdf>, (Access date: 4 April 2020).

116. “Proposition de Loi, No.79”, Senat, 18 October 2019, <https://www.senat.fr/leg/pp19-079.pdf>, (Access date: 4 April 2020).

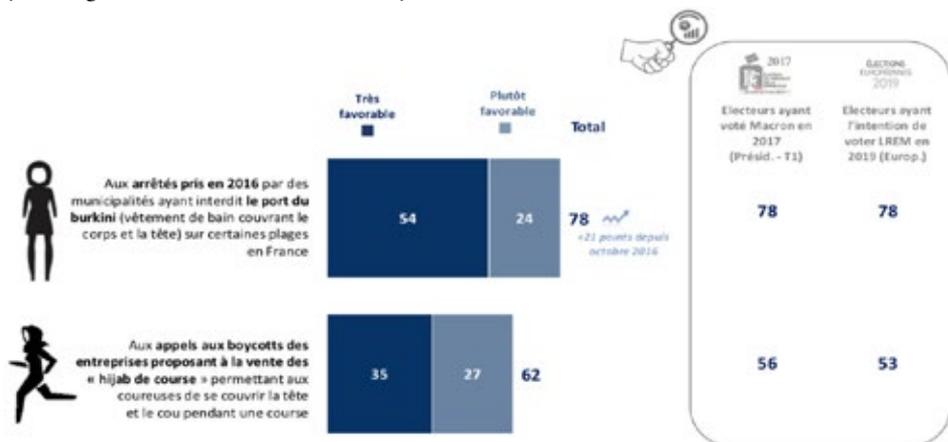
indicating religious affiliation on school trips and during school activities. This bill was drafted by the National Assembly. This bill has not passed yet.<sup>117</sup>

- Bill of 8 November 2019 to ensure respect for the values of the Republic in the face of communitarian threats. This bill was drafted by the Senate. This bill has not passed yet.

Abstract of the motives that introduce the bill:

- “The rise of radical Islam, which seeks to isolate Muslims from the rest of the national community and to substitute the laws of the Republic with religious laws, is the most worrying illustration of this [the threat of the dissolution of the society].”<sup>118</sup>

Unfortunately, according to opinion polls published by the Fondation Jean Jaures (May 2019) a majority of the French people backs such bills.<sup>119</sup> (Figs 12 & 13) For instance, 78% of the French people agree with the municipal bylaws that forbade the burkini (swimming attire that covers the whole body) in certain French beaches in 2016, and 62% agree with the calls for boycotting companies that sell “sports hijab” (see the Decathlon controversy in Politics section). The fact that a large majority of those who voted for Macron in 2017 and who planned to vote for his party in 2019 European elections agreed with both the above indicates that this rejection is not only by far-right factions of French society.



**Figure 12:** Extract from the survey “French People, Secularism and the Place of Religion in Society” (May 2019): 78% (54% highly agree + 24% agree) of the French people agree with municipal bylaws that forbade the burkini in certain French beaches in 2016; 78% of those who voted for Macron in 2017 and 78% of the those who planned to vote for his party in 2019 European elections agree with this ban. Sixty-two percent (35 highly agree + 27% agree) agree with the calls for boycotting companies that sell “sports hijab”. Fifty-six percent of those who voted for Macron in 2017 and 53% of the those who planned to vote for his party in the 2019 European elections agree with this boycott.<sup>120</sup>

117. “Proposition de Loi, No.2379”, Assemblée Nationale, 6 November 2019, [http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/textes/l15b2379\\_proposition-loi](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/textes/l15b2379_proposition-loi), (Access date: 4 April 2020).

118. “Proposition de Loi, No.108”, Senat, 8 November 2019, <https://www.senat.fr/leg/pp19-108.pdf>, (Access date: 4 April 2020).

119. Fondation Jean Jaures, Ifop, “Les Français, la laïcité et la place de la religion dans la société Étude publiée à l’occasion de la rencontre-débat ‘Les Français et la laïcité: état des lieux’”, 11 May 2019.

120. Ibid.



**Figure 13:** Extract of the survey published by the Fondation Jean Jaures (May 2019) on the opinion of the French about the following banning measures:

- Banning prayer or religious ceremonies on the streets: 58% very favorable, 26% favorable (total: 84%).
- Banning ostensible religious signs for public services users: 46% very favorable, 30% favorable (total: 76%).
- Banning ostensible religious signs in classes at university: 45% very favorable, 31% favorable (total: 76%).
- Banning ostensible religious signs for people accompanying pupils in school trips: 45% very favorable, 31% favorable (total: 76%).
- Banning ostensible religious signs for people working in private companies: 41% very favorable, 33% favorable (total: 74%).
- Abrogation of the concordat in Alsace-Moselle region, which allows public funding for Catholic, Lutheran, Reform and Israelite places and ministers: 28% very favorable, 34% favorable (total: 64%).
- Suppression of the possibility for local authorities to facilitate the acquisition of land for the construction of places of worship on their territory: 26% very favorable, 34% favorable (total: 60%).
- Suppression of religiously inspired holidays (Christmas, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Assumption, All Saints' Day): 5% very favorable, 11% favorable (total: 16%).<sup>121</sup>

### Internet

The CCIF registered 210 incidents concerning hate speech and incitement to racial hatred which accounted for 20.1% of all incidents reported. According to the NGO, most of these incidents occurred on the Internet. Moreover, Islamophobic controversies often started on social media before being debated in mainstream media and triggering reactions among French politicians. In sum, the Internet plays a great role in the formation and diffusion of Islamophobic discourse.

121. Ibid.

In last year's report, we distinguished Islamophobic discourse rooted in the left tradition and Islamophobic discourse in the far-right tradition. Currently, we find it more accurate to split Islamophobic discourse between mainstream Islamophobia and hard Islamophobia.

#### - *Websites*

Online activities of NGOs such as *Printemps Republicain* (Republican Spring) and *Comité Laïcité République* (*Laïcité* – Republic Committee) do not attack Muslim people straightforwardly but hide their anti-Muslim racism under the veil of secularism, women's rights, and Jacobin ideology. This is the reason why their Islamophobia looks acceptable and easily convertible to political measures. This is mainstream Islamophobia.

Websites such as *FDeSouche*, *Resistance Républicaine*, *Riposte Laïque*, *Boulevard Voltaire*, *TVLibertés*, *Breizh-info*, or *Observatoire de l'Islamisation* openly claim being Islamophobic and base their discourse upon the “clash of civilizations”, the “Great Replacement”, and “reverse colonialism” theories. This is hard Islamophobia.

*FigaroVox* is an influential platform that uses its reputation of respectful mainstream media<sup>122</sup> for spreading Islamophobic and nationalistic contents. Websites of far-right parties such as National Rally, *Debout la France*, *Parti de la France* are also active voices of Islamophobia online.

#### - *Social Media Accounts*

Twitter and Facebook platforms give the floor to mainstream Islamophobic accounts that constantly attack the headscarf and “Muslim backwardness” in the name of secularism and the French “way of life.” This is the case of activists such as Laurent Bouvet and Gilles Clavreul, co-founders of *Printemps Republicains*; and of polemist such as Zohra Bitan<sup>123</sup> and Celine Pina.<sup>124</sup>

There are also Islamophobic accounts on social media that refer to the far-right xenophobic tradition, among them accounts of politicians such as Jean Messiha (National Rally), Patricia Guilbaud (Republic Arise), and Eric Ciotti (The Republicans), and also famous polemist such as Gilles-William Goldanel<sup>125</sup> or Damien Rieu.<sup>126</sup> In their tweets, anti-Muslim racism is connected to anti-immigration and nationalism discourses.

122. *Le Figaro* is a famous historical right-wing newspaper.

123. Polemist at the popular “Les Grandes Gueules” talk show on BFM TV.

124. Politician, engaged in the Socialist Party (PS) for years and often invited on TV shows.

125. Jurist, writer, and activist.

126. Real name Damien Lefevre, far-right activist close to the National Rally.

Finally, there are self-proclaimed ex-Muslim activists such as Majid Oukacha and Waleed Al-Husseini who conflate regular Muslim activities (headscarf, prayer, etc.) and radicalization in their lawful criticism of religion. According to them, any Muslim is intrinsically a potential terrorist, or at least abides by the “barbaric” corpus of Shari’a law.

These accounts are just some (of many) well-known names and widely followed accounts. Their ideas are supported and retweeted by a number of anonymous accounts and common users.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Since Islamophobia in France is a systemic racism – or even a state racism – it is difficult to give a clear picture of the Islamophobia network. Should we list members of the government, politicians who design discriminatory bills, or bureaucrats who discriminate against Muslim people in public services on a daily basis? The difficulty of drawing a clear network that shapes and feeds Islamophobia in France becomes apparent.

Therefore, we prefer to give an indicative table where major actors of the Islamophobia networks are split into subcategories.

Fields	Examples of Actors	Examples of Islamophobic Behaviors/Actions (2019)
Institutions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members of the government (e.g. Macron, Blanquer, Castaner)</li> <li>Right-wing members of Parliament (mostly from <i>Les Republicains</i> &amp; National Rally)</li> <li>Local initiatives (Grenoble swimming pool, rector of the Academy of Versailles, etc.)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conflating common cultural features and terrorism (second aspect of antiterrorism policy); scapegoating Muslims in an effort to hide social problems.</li> <li>Bills on burkini ban, hijab ban; “communitarian party lists” ban.</li> <li>Hijab ban in local swimming pools; cancelling school trips.</li> </ol>
Political arena	<p>Politicians: Eric Ciotti, Jean Messiha, Sebastien Chenu, Valerie Boyer, etc.</p>	<p>Spreading hate speech against Muslims. Conflating Muslim regular habits and terrorism.</p>

Individuals	Citizens who share Islamophobic ideas	Physical and verbal attacks on individuals; degradation of mosques.
Non-Governmental Groups	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Leftist anti-Muslim NGOs: <i>Printemps Republicain, Comité Laïcité Républicaine</i>, etc.</li> <li>2. Rightist anti-Muslim NGOs: <i>Riposte laïque, Résistance Républicaine</i></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lobbying, trolling, publishing &amp; conferences: Islamophobia hidden behind “<i>laïcité</i>” discourse.</li> <li>2. Lobbying, trolling, publishing &amp; conferences: Islamophobia as an extension of racism-xenophobia.</li> </ol>
Media	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. TV, radio, newspapers: CNEWS and Zemmour’s show, LCI, BFM TV, <i>Le Figaro, Valeurs Actuelles</i>, etc.</li> <li>2. Intellectuals, polemicists: Zemmour, Pina, Rouffiol, Goldnadel, Agag-Boudjahlat, etc.</li> <li>3. Accounts on social media: <i>@DamienRieu, @F_Desouche</i>, etc.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Islamophobic front covers, editorials, articles, talk shows, etc.</li> <li>2. Shaping public opinion; diffusion of concepts (“Islam-leftists”, “communitarianism”).</li> <li>3. Trolling, sharing hate content.</li> </ol>

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

The most sticking initiative to counter Islamophobia in 2019 was the organization of the “March against Islamophobia” in Paris on 10 November that gathered between 20,000 and 40,000 people – or 13,500 according to the Ministry of Interior.<sup>127</sup> Although this protest was the target of virulent controversies (see Politics section), it constituted a strong signal for the political elite and French society as a whole that the current spread of Islamophobia is not normal and will not be accepted without dissent. (Fig.14)

127. Julien Salingue, “Succès de la marche du 10 novembre contre l’islamophobie”, NPA, 23 November 2019, <https://npa2009.org/actualite/antiracisme/succes-de-la-marche-du-10-novembre-contre-lislamophobie>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).



**Figure 14:** Beginning of the “March against Islamophobia” on 10 November 2019 in Paris.<sup>128</sup>

The march was organized by Madjid Messaoudene, a local official, the *Collectif contre l’islamophobie* (CCIF), the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), *Le Comité Adama*, the NGO *L.E.S Musulmans*, the Libertarian Communist Union (UCL), the National Union of French Students (Unef), and the journalist Taha Bouhafs. The march was preceded by a manifesto published in the newspapers *Liberation* and *Mediapart* signed by hundreds of activists, scholars, politicians, journalists, and well-known personalities.<sup>129</sup> Before the march, in October and November, other demonstrations were organized to contest the rise of Islamophobia. On 21 October, the *Collectif de défense des jeunes du Mantois* (Youth Defense Collective of Mantes-la-Jolie) organized a rally against Islamophobia in Paris. The media barely covered the organization of the rally. As a result, there were less than a thousand participants in attendance.<sup>130</sup> Similarly on 15 October,

128. “Plus de 13.000 personnes à la marche controversée contre l’islamophobie à Paris”, Khippi, 10 November 2019, <http://khippi.com/Lifestyle/plus-de-13000-personnes-la-marche-controversee-contre-lislamophobie-paris.aspx>, (Access date: 3 April 2020).

129. “Marche du 10 novembre à Paris: nous dirons STOP à l’islamophobie!” Mediapart Blog, 3 November 2019, <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/edition/les-invites-de-mediapart/article/031119/marche-du-10-novembre-paris-nous-dirons-stop-l-islamophobie/>, (Access date: 3 April 2020).

130. Yassine Bnou Marzoul, “Voix fortes mais succès faible pour le rassemblement contre l’islamophobie”, Bondy Blog, 21 October 2019, <https://www.bondyblog.fr/societe/voix-fortes-mais-succes-faible-pour-le-rassemblement-contre-lislamophobie/>, (Access date: 3 April 2020).

90 personalities signed a manifesto asking President Macron to put an end to the rise of Islamophobia.<sup>131</sup>

The *Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France* (CCIF) developed a new platform against hate speech online. The project HATEMER is funded by the European Commission and aims at fighting Islamophobic messages on social media. The platform monitors and automatically analyzes data on Islamophobia online.<sup>132</sup> Generally speaking, the NGO monitors Islamophobic acts and provide legal assistance to victims. The CCIF publishes the most reliable records on Islamophobia in France. The organization also assists victims in their cases and regularly organizes workshops and training on French legal procedures. Alongside the CCIF, the Coordination against Racism and Islamophobia (CRI) and the Action for Muslim Rights (ADM) work significantly towards assisting victims and denouncing anti-Muslim racism in the public sphere. Similarly, the NGO Committee Justice and Liberties (CJL) conducts several actions and studies analyzing the relations between terrorism, counterterrorism, and Islamophobia in France.

Moreover, the regular analysis of the Islamophobic newspeak by journalists such as Samuel Gontier and Clément Viktorovitch is a precious tool to counter the “Lepeningation of minds.”<sup>133</sup> In the same way, the heads of the state-funded Observatory of *Laïcité* Jean-Louis Bianco and Nicolas Cadène continued to promote a liberal understanding of French secular order which does not discriminate against Muslim people, especially women.

Concerning Muslim empowerment, the umbrella platform *L.E.S Musulmans* that connects hundreds of local mosques and organizations under one roof launched a program to train 100 Muslim citizens to become future spokespeople of Muslim communities. This program takes place within a broader project to raise awareness of Islamophobia among French policy-makers.<sup>134</sup> This issue is one of the first concerns of French Muslims since in most Islamophobic debates and controversies non-Muslim polemicists speak in the name of Muslims and distort the reality of their conditions. In this regard, the intervention of the citizen Sara El Attar in the TV talk show “l’heure des Pros” on CNews (October 2019) was a promising premiere as a woman wearing a hijab expressed her point view in front of thousands of viewers.<sup>135</sup> On a

131. “Islamophobie: une tribune signée par 90 personnalités demande à Emmanuel Macron d’agir”, BFM TV, 15 October 2019, <https://www.bfmtv.com/societe/islamophobie-une-tribune-signee-par-90-personnalites-demande-a-emmanuel-macron-d-agir-1787978.html>, (Access date: 3 April 2020).

132. “Rapport CCIF 2020, Rapport sur l’Islamophobie pendant l’année 2019”, Collectif contre l’islamophobie en France.

133. For more information, see: footnote 51.

134. “Sortir de la réaction: la plateforme L.E.S. Musulmans propose son plan de lutte nationale contre l’islamophobie”, L.E.S Musulmans, <https://lesmusulmans.fr/plan-lutte-islamophobie/>, (Access date: 20 March 2020).

135. “Sara El Attar: Pascal Praud, le débat sur le voile, le féminisme...”, Alonews-Youtube, 25 November 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AR6iKfG1V4I>, (Access date: 3 April 2020).

similar issue, the feminist NGO *Lallab* organized the “Muslim Women’s Day” for the second time on 27-29 March 2019.<sup>136</sup>

Regarding Muslim representation, the movie *Soumaya* that tells the story of a Muslim woman facing Islamophobic violence and discrimination during the state of emergency (2015-2017) was released. An official tour took place between September and December 2019. However, the public screening of the movie at the prestigious Parisian theater hall Grand Rex was cancelled after a far-right campaign against it (15 March).<sup>137</sup>

The state also developed a platform to monitor online hate speech. The program PHAROS aims at harmonizing, analyzing, crosschecking, and directing alerts. In 2019, the program received more than 200,000 alerts.<sup>138</sup> The ruling party also designed a bill to combat hate content online. Yet, deputy Laetitia Avia who promoted the bill finally withdrew the mention of “Islamophobia” from the bill as one of the categories of online hate speech. It is clear that the government and mainstream politicians never choose to fight Islamophobia.<sup>139</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Since in France Islamophobia is a state racism it is difficult to provide recommendations strong enough to counter its multilayered consequences. In fact, the French state must rebuild a relation of trust between its institutions, French Muslim communities, and the rest of French society by fighting discourses, actions, and policies that participate in ostracizing the Muslim minorities in French society. Recommendations regarding trust building, security policies, and hate discourse follow below. Some of them are directly taken from the reports of previous years.

### Recommendations Regarding Trust Building

- Abandon top-down policymaking that aims at engineering “French Islam” irrespective of civil society initiatives and networks.
- Support the bottom-up building project which benefits from popular recognition and a wide network of mosques and civil organizations.
- Promote a liberal and inclusive understanding of *laïcité* such as that defined by the Observatory of *Laïcité* in education, media, and state institutions.

136. Arièle Bonte, “Journée des femmes musulmanes : elles témoignent de l’islamophobie à l’école”, RTL, 27 March 2019, <https://www.rtl.fr/girls/identites/journee-des-femmes-musulmanes-elles-temoignent-de-l-islamophobie-a-l-ecole-7797287157>, (Access date: 29 March 2020).

137. “Rapport CCIF 2020, Rapport sur l’Islamophobie pendant l’année 2019”, Collectif contre l’islamophobie en France.

138. “Bilan 2019 des actes antireligieux, antisémites, racistes et xenophobes”, Gouvernement.fr, 28 January 2020, <https://www.gouvernement.fr/bilan-2019-des-actes-antireligieux-antisemites-racistes-et-xenophobes>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

139. Anais Condomies, “Cyber-haine: pourquoi le mot ‘islamophobe’ a-t-il été enlevé de la proposition de loi?”, LCI, 21 June 2019, <https://www.lci.fr/politique/cyber-haine-pourquoi-le-mot-islamophobe-a-t-il-ete-enleve-de-la-proposition-de-loi-2124845.html>, (Access date: 4 April 2020).

- Launch a nationwide assessment on the effects of the 2004 ban on headscarves in public schools.

### Recommendations Regarding Security Policies

- Redefine the antiterrorism policy by avoiding the use of far-right concepts and newspeak such as “communitarianism” and “political Islam.”
- Involve grassroots organizations, community leaders, and education personnel to elaborate more effective counterterrorism.
- Publicize this cooperation with grassroots organizations in order to deconstruct negative stereotypes that depict Muslims as supporters of terrorism.
- Rely on investigation and proof rather than mere suspicion in prosecuting individuals.
- Abolish the adopted measure in the 2017 antiterrorism law that allows arbitrary closing down of places of worship unless a clear definition of radicalization is adopted and alternatives are offered to the affected communities. Freedom of speech is a fundamental right even in places of worship on the premise that there is no disruption of public safety.

### Recommendations Regarding Hate Speech

- Protect freedom of speech by pressing state-owned media to adhere to a charter of plurality and promote Muslim visibility to normalize their presence.
- Cancel state subsidies to media outlets that promote individuals condemned of incitement of hatred, calling for discrimination, violence against individuals, or who have been found guilty by courts of promoting racism.
- Facilitate the right of reply to individuals or organizations when attacked on media platforms.
- Train top management of state-owned media on Islamophobia, its consequences, and on how they can protect social cohesion by combating it.
- Include discrimination cases in official statistics of anti-Muslim racism.
- Apply existing laws against discrimination at work and increase fines for companies.
- Grant freedom of religion and thought in workplaces.
- Train school teachers on Islamophobia, strengthen an anti-racism approach in education programs, and promote a liberal and inclusive understanding of *laïcité*.

## Chronology

- **08-09.03.2019:** The mayor of Béziers (South France) refused to allow a manager of a clothing store to participate in the event *Salon de la Femme et du Bien-être* because she was wearing a headscarf.

- **08.05.2019:** Fionnuala D. Ní Aoláin, the UN special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, published a report where she warns that the new antiterrorism laws risk undermining fundamental rights and freedoms.
- **23.06.2019:** A dozen women of the civil association *Alliance citoyenne de Grenoble* entered the swimming pool of Grenoble (Southeast France) wearing burkinis in order to claim the right to bathe in this attire.
- **27.06.2019:** The famous imam of the Sunna Mosque in Brest, Rachid El-jay, and one of the worshippers were victims of several shots in front of the mosque, injuring them both.
- **09.07.2019:** The Senate debated a bill to ensure the religious neutrality of persons contributing to the public service of education (i.e. banning headscarf in those services).
- **28.09.2019:** The polemist Eric Zemmour gave a public speech at the “Convention of the Right” organized by supporters of Marion Maréchal le Pen (alt-right). This speech was broadcasted without interruption by the right-wing news channel LCI.
- **03.10.2019:** An employee of the Paris Police Headquarters, Mickaël Harpon, burst into his workplace armed with a knife, and injured several policemen. Four policemen died and a fifth was wounded. The assailant, a convert Muslim, was also killed.
- **05-30.10.2019:** Dozens of police officers were suspended for being suspected of radicalization.
- **08.10.2019:** The President of the Republic Emmanuel Macron promised a “relentless fight against Islamist terrorism,” calling on “the entire nation” to “mobilize” in the face of the “Islamist Hydra.” He also called for a “watch-dog society.”
- **08.10.2019:** The Minister of Interior Christophe Castaner gave a speech at the French National Assembly about the attack on the Paris Police Headquarter. He called on the French people to report to the police any “weak signals of radicalization,” i.e. “having a beard; an exaggerated practice of religion especially during Ramadan; ostentatious prayer; not kissing the opposite gender; not wanting to work with women.”
- **11.10.2019:** Julien Odoul, a local representative of the far-right party the National Rally, verbally attacked a woman in the public that came accompanying her son’s class on a school trip in the regional council of Bourgogne-Franche-Comté.
- **14.10.2019:** The University of Cergy-Pontoise (near Paris) sent a form by email to all academic staff asking them to list students and colleagues who show “weak signals of radicalization.”

- **14.10.2019:** A school trip to a fire station was cancelled in Creil (North Paris) because two mothers who were escorting the class wore hijabs.
- **15.10.2019:** The Senate debated a bill to prohibit the wearing of burkini-type clothing in open swimming pools.
- **18.10.2019:** The Senate debated a bill to ban “communitarian practices” such as the wearing of the Islamic headscarf in the assemblies of local and regional councils and among people accompanying young schoolchildren on school trips.
- **28.10.2019:** A supporter of the National Rally (far right) attempted to set fire to the mosque of Bayonne and shot two individuals in front of the mosque, wounding one severely.
- **29.10.2019:** The French Senate voted in favor of a bill for banning headscarves on school trips at the first reading.
- **06.11.2019:** The National Assembly debated a bill to ban the wearing of signs or clothing explicitly indicating religious affiliation on school trips and during school activities. This bill has not passed yet.
- **08.11.2019:** The Senate debated a bill to ensure respect for the values of the Republic in the face of communitarian threats. This bill has not passed yet.
- **10.11.2019:** The “March against Islamophobia” took place in Paris gathering between 20,000 and 40,000 people (or 13,500 according to the Ministry of Interior)



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**GERMANY**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

ENES BAYRAKLI



## The Author

**Enes Bayraklı** earned his BA, MA and PhD from the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna, and conducted research for his PhD thesis at the University of Nottingham in Britain between 2009 and 2010. He took office as a deputy director at Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in London in 2011-2013. Mr. Bayraklı also served as the founding director of Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers in Constanta and Bucharest during the period of August-December 2012. Mr. Bayraklı has been a faculty member in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the Turkish German University in Istanbul. Currently he is also the director of European Studies at SETA foundation. His fields of research include the Islamophobia in Europe, Far right movements in Europe, Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy, Foreign Policy Analysis, German Politics and Foreign Policy. Email: ebyrakli@setav.org

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Enes Bayraklı: *Islamophobia in Germany: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

In 2019, 871 hate crimes against Muslims were reported to the police. Fifty-eight of them were crimes against Muslim religious sites and in 46 crimes Muslims were physically injured by anti-Muslim racists. The numbers of Brandeilig, an initiative against attacks on mosques, are even higher than those of the police: Brandeilig counted 122 attacks on mosques in 2019. The year was also a year of right-wing terror with three right wing-motivated murders. Walter Lübcke, who had campaigned for the admission of refugees, was murdered by a right-wing extremist in Kassel. In a racist attack in Halle, a woman was killed in front of a synagogue and a man in a kebab shop. Sawsan Chebli, a politician, and Seda Başay-Yıldız, a lawyer, have received death threats from right-wing extremists, and many Muslims have been discriminated against or even attacked by racists. The electoral success of the Islamophobic party Alternative for Germany (AfD) can largely be explained by the derogation of Islam and Muslims by a large part of the electorate. Unilateral media reports on crime by foreigners and terror as well as dull generalisation foster the normalisation of hostility to Muslims. The anti-Islamic AfD receives its intellectual superstructure from right-wing masterminds and publicists, whose main goals are to prevent an alleged Islamisation of German culture and to produce “cultural purity”. Despite the many negative events there are also a lot of organisations in Germany that act against Islamophobia and a strong civil society that demonstrates against racism and the AfD. However, there is still a lot to do. Although there is broad and decades-old research on the causes of prejudice, racism, and right-wing extremism, research results are still being ignored by politics. The reduction of Islamophobia in many arenas of society such as work, education, state institutions, civil society, etc. should have top priority. Successful prevention programmes, especially in the youth field, that promote empathy and contacts between Muslims and non-Muslims should be long-term and not short-term. Right-wing extremism has to be fought more and the media should also be asked to report responsibly and in a differentiated way with less focus on “bad news” about Muslims.

## Zusammenfassung

In 2019 wurden bei der Polizei 871 Hassverbrechen gegen Muslime angezeigt. 58 von diesen waren Verbrechen gegen muslimische religiöse Stadten und in 46 Verbrechen wurde Muslime korperlich von Rassisten verletzt. Die Zahlen von Brandeilig, einer Organisation gegen Angriffe auf Moscheen, sind sogar noch hoher als die der Polizeistatistik. Brandeilig zahlte 122 Angriffe auf Moscheen. Das Jahr war auch ein Jahr des rechten Terrors mit drei rechtsextrem motivierten Morden. Walter Lubcke, der sich fur die Aufnahme von Fluchtlingen eingesetzt hatte, wurde seine Menschlichkeit zum Schicksal als ein Rechtsextremist ihn ermordete. Bei einem rassistischen Anschlag in Halle wurde eine Frau vor einer Synagoge und ein Mann in einem Donerimbiss getotet. Die Politikerin Sawsan Chebli und die Anwaltin Seda Bařay-Yildiz erhielten Morddrohungen von Rechtsextremen und viele Menschen wurden diskriminiert oder sogar angegriffen, weil sie als Muslime fur Rassisten erkennbar waren. Die Wahlerfolge der islamophoben Partei Alternative fur Deutschland (AfD) lassen sich durch die Ablehnung des Islam und der Muslime durch einen Grosteil der Wahlerschaft erklaren. Einseitige Medienberichte uber Kriminalitat durch Auslander und Terror sowie dumpfe Pauschalisierungen tragen mit dazu bei, dass Muslimfeindlichkeit normalisiert wird. Die islamfeindliche AfD erhalt ihren intellektuellen Uberbau durch rechte Vordenker und Publizisten, deren Hauptziele die Verhinderung einer angeblichen Islamisierung der deutschen Kultur und die Herstellung „kultureller Reinheit“ ist. Trotz der vielen negativen Ereignisse gibt es in Deutschland allerdings auch viele Organisationen, die gegen Islamfeindlichkeit vorgehen und zudem eine starke Zivilgesellschaft, die gegen Rassismus und die AfD demonstriert. Trotzdem ist noch eine Menge zu tun. Obwohl es eine breite und jahrzehntealte Forschung zu den Ursachen von Vorurteilen, Rassismus und Rechtsextremismus gibt, werden diese noch zu stark von der Politik ignoriert. Der Abbau von Islamophobie in vielen Arenen der Gesellschaft wie Arbeit, Bildung staatliche Institutionen, Zivilgesellschaft etc. sollte hohe Prioritat haben. Erfolgreiche Praventionsprogrammen vor allem im Jugendbereich, die Empathie und Kontakte zwischen Muslimen und Nicht-Muslimen fordern, sollten langfristig und nicht kurzfristig angelegt sein. Rechtsextremismus muss starker bekampft werden und auch die Medien sind in der Verantwortung differenziert zu berichten und weniger „bad news“ uber Muslime zu verbreiten.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Germany

**Type of Regime:** Federal and Representative Democracy

**Form of Government:** Federal parliamentary republic, head of government: chancellor

**Ruling Parties:** Christian Democratic Party (CDU)/Christian Social Union (CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD)

**Opposition Parties:** The Greens, The Left, the FDP (FDP/The Liberals), the Alternative for Germany (AfD), independent candidates

**Last Elections:** 2017 Elections – CDU/CSU 33% (246 seats), SPD 20.5% (153 seats), AfD 12.6% (94 seats), FDP 10.7% (80 seats), The Left 9.2% (69 seats), Greens 8.9% (67 seats)

**Total Population:** 83.1 million (Federal Statistical Office, Germany; June 2019)

**Major Languages:** German

**Official Religion:** Christianity

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** According to official police crime statistics 871 Islamophobic crimes have been reported in Germany. Fifty-eight of the reported crimes were committed against Muslim religious sites. In 2019, a total of 46 Islamophobic crimes were reported in which victims were physically injured. Brandeilig, an initiative against attacks on mosques, counted 122 attacks on mosques in 2019.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** In their report on hate crimes the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community show that in the year 2018, 1,725 racist crimes were reported to the police of which 259 were violent; 910 hate crimes were Islamophobic, of which 74 were violent. A report of a counselling centre for discriminated pupils in Berlin (ADAS) reveals that discrimination based on ethnic origin and/or religion in the period from June 2016 to April 2018 played a role in 137 of the reported cases (83%). Ninety-seven reports related to ethnic origin and 40 to religion or belief. Seventy-eight per cent of the reports of discrimination based on religion related to Islam. The German police also appear to have problems regarding racist attitudes and behaviour. A representative study from 2017 shows that 14% of black people in Germany have experienced racial profiling in the past five years.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Christianity (53.17%), Without Religion (38%), Islam (approximately 5.4 to 5.7%)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** Between 4.4 and 4.7 million people (estimated).

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB); Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Germany (AMJ); Islamic Community Millî Görüş (IGMG); Central Council of Muslims in Germany (ZMD);

Union of Islamic Cultural Centres (VIKZ); Islamic Community of Shia Communities in Germany (IGS)

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** Netzwerk gegen Diskriminierung und Islamfeindlichkeit (CLAIM) lists 37 NGOs: Salaam-Schalom-Initiative; Katholische Erwachsenenbildung im Land Sachsen-Anhalt e.V. (KEB); Gesicht Zeigen! Für ein weltoffenes Deutschland e.V.; Muslimisches Jugendwerk; Interkulturelles Institut für Inklusion e.V.; Türkische Gemeinde in Deutschland (TGD); Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Evangelischen Jugend in Deutschland; Junge Islam Konferenz; AWO – Nicht in meinen Namen; La Red e.V.; Rat muslimischer Studierender und Akademiker; Breaking Up; Fair International; Kreuzberger Initiative gegen Antisemitismus; NIR – Netzwerk gegen Islamfeindlichkeit und Rassismus Leipzig e.V.; 5hoch4 – Jugendclub im Netz; WoW – With or Without; ufuq.de; Inssan e.V.; RAHMA; Minor; isaar; Begegnungs- und Fortbildungszentrum muslimischer Frauen e.V.; Al-Etidal Bremen – Gegen Radikalisierung & Extremismus; AntiDiskriminierungsbüro Köln; Muslimrat München e.V.; JUMA — jung, muslimisch; aktiv; Bildungsteam Berlin Brandenburg e.V.; Antidiskriminierungsnetzwerk Berlin des Türkischen Bundes in Berlin-Brandenburg; Zentrum für Europäische und Orientalische Kultur e.V.; Verband binationaler Familien und Partnerschaften, Mosaik e.V.; Anlaufstelle für Diskriminierungsschutz an Schulen (ADAS); Aktionsbündnis muslimischer Frauen; Abrahamisches Forum; Stiftung gegen Rassismus; Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland e.V.

**Far-Right Parties:** Alternative for Germany (AfD), National Democratic Party Germany (NDP), *Die Rechte, Der III. Weg, Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW*

**Far-Right Movements:** *Identitäre Bewegung, Reichsbürgerbewegung, PEGIDA*

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** *Gruppe Nordadler, Kameradschaft Aryans, Atomwaffen Division, Gruppe S*

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** A ban on the hijab exists for people holding official offices such as in courts (or being a lawyer), in school (schoolteacher), or entering the police force.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

For many years, results from German studies have revealed that about half of the population in Germany has Islamophobic views. In the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Religion Monitor 2019, 50% of the population of West Germany and 57% of the population of East Germany state that Islam is a threat to them<sup>1</sup> and in the Leipzig authoritarianism study from 2018, 42% of West Germans and 51% of East Germans agree on the statement that Muslims should be prohibited from immigrating to Germany.<sup>2</sup> Since 2016 polarisation and radicalisation processes in Germany in the wake of the so-called refugee crisis can be viewed, which led to an increasing authoritarian aggression against Muslims.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Islamophobic Alternative for Germany (AfD) with a strong right-wing extremist faction achieved considerable election successes on the federal level - also in 2019. The questions about a leading German culture ("Leitkultur") and whether Islam belongs to Germany are not only discussed by right-wing populists, but are also part of the debate of the political centre. Furthermore, media coverage on Islam and Muslims in Germany is very much focused on bad news. Reports of terrorism, clan crime, and honour killings contribute to the fact that the non-Muslim population in Germany is more likely to reject Muslims, especially in those regions where only few Muslims live. Many Germans are unable to correct their negative image through social contacts with Muslims.<sup>4</sup> Most Germans are not even aware of the many facets of Islam with its many different religious communities and its plurality. As it seems, Islamophobia is omnipresent in key areas of German society. This report summarises significant events related to Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism in 2019, and in this context describes the extent and forms of Islamophobia in various arenas of society such as employment, education, politics, media, justice, and the Internet. Islamophobia is not just a problem for Muslims. It shakes the basic democratic values and also leads to division of society and tendencies of co-radicalisation and thus possibly to a spiral of violence. The report also refers to some of the many organisations in Germany that actively campaign against Islamophobia. The last part briefly outlines what can be done politically in the fight against Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism.

---

1. Gert Pickel, *Weltanschauliche Vielfalt und Demokratie. Wie sich religiöse Pluralität auf die politische Kultur auswirkt*, (Bertelsmann Stiftung, Gütersloh: 2019), [https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/Religionsmonitor\\_Vielfalt\\_und\\_Demokratie\\_7\\_2019.pdf](https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/Religionsmonitor_Vielfalt_und_Demokratie_7_2019.pdf), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

2. Oliver Decker and Elmar Brähler, *Flucht ins Autoritäre. Rechtsextreme Dynamiken in der Mitte der Gesellschaft*, (Psychosozial-Verlag, Gießen: 2018).

3. Oliver Decker, Johannes Kiess and Elmar Brähler, *Die enthemmte Mitte. Autoritäre und rechtsextreme Einstellung in Deutschland*, (Psychosozial-Verlag, Gießen: 2016).

4. Gert Pickel and Alexander Yendell, "Islam als Bedrohung?", *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, 10 (3-4) (2016), pp. 273–309; Alexander Yendell, "Warum die Bevölkerung Ostdeutschlands gegenüber Muslimen ablehnender eingestellt ist als die Bevölkerung Westdeutschlands", *Grenzen der Toleranz Wahrnehmung und Akzeptanz religiöser*, (Springer, Wiesbaden: 2014).

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

#### *- Documented Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes*

It is difficult to make a statement about the exact number of crimes with an Islamophobic background. The reason is that police statistics only focus on the reported cases. What matters in this context is whether people report such incidents. Representatives of Muslims in Germany as well as German politicians criticise the procedure of how crimes are classified as they believe the German police does not classify enough crimes as Islamophobic.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, we do not have adequate knowledge about all committed crimes with Islamophobic background and can only speculate that the number of unreported cases is significantly higher. In 2019 871 Islamophobic crimes were reported in Germany.<sup>6</sup> 58 of the reported crimes were committed against Muslim religious sites. In 2019, a total of 46 Islamophobic crimes were reported in which victims were physically injured. Eight people were arrested for committing an Islamophobic crime. Brandeilig, an initiative against attacks on mosques, counted 122 attacks on mosques in 2019. This number differs from the official police statistics.

In May 2019, the Ministry of the Interior published the case numbers on politically motivated crimes in 2018. The report shows that 910 crimes with an Islamophobic background were committed in 2018 (in 2017 this number was 1,075) of which 840 were assigned to the category of politically motivated crimes associated with the political right.

#### *- Major Incidents in the Context of Right-Wing Extremism*

Again, in 2019 it became clear that Germany has a huge problem with right-wing extremism. Besides the remarkable successes of the far-right and anti-Islam party Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the state elections in Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia, two events attracted worldwide attention. On 2 June 2019, Kassel's dis-

5. Till-Reimer Stoldt, "Werden islamfeindliche Straftaten übersehen?", Die Welt, 22 July 2019, <https://www.welt.de/regionales/nrw/article197230655/Uebergriffe-in-NRW-Werden-islamfeindliche-Straftaten-uebersehen.html>, (Access date: 12 February 2020).

6. "Antwort der Bundesregierung zur kleinen Anfrage Islamfeindlichkeit und antimuslimische Straftaten im ersten Quartal 2019", Deutscher Bundestag (Drucksache19/10570); "Antwort der Bundesregierung zur kleinen Anfrage Islamfeindlichkeit und antimuslimische Straftaten im zweiten Quartal 2019", Bundesministerium des Innern, Bau und Heimat, [https://www.ulla-jelpke.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Islamfeindlichkeit\\_2\\_2019.pdf](https://www.ulla-jelpke.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Islamfeindlichkeit_2_2019.pdf), (Access date: 11 March 2020); "auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Ulla Jelpke, Dr. André Hahn, Gökay Akbulut, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Fraktion DIE LINKE", Deutscher Bundestag (Drucksache19/10570), <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/19/105/1910570.pdf>, (Access date: 11 March 2020); "Antwort der Bundesregierung zur kleinen Anfrage Islamfeindlichkeit und antimuslimische Straftaten im dritten Quartal 2019", Deutscher Bundestag (Drucksache 9/15647); "Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Ulla Jelpke u.a. und der Fraktion Die Linke – Islamfeindlichkeit und antimuslimische Straftaten im Vierten Quartal 2019» Deutscher Bundestag-/Drucksache 19/17613".

trict president Walter Lübcke, member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), was shot dead on the porch of his house.<sup>7</sup> A right-wing extremist with a criminal record is strongly suspected. He initially confessed, but later withdrew his confession. In his confession, he claimed that his motive were Lübcke's statements during the so-called refugee crisis in 2015. In October 2015, Lübcke had publicly spoken out in favour of accepting refugees at a citizens' meeting where he opposed KAGIDA, the Kassel offshoot of the Islamophobic and racist Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident (PEGIDA). According to previous investigations, the alleged murderer attended this citizens' meeting. A video of this gathering was shared on the social networks by right-wing extremists and racists which led to numerous death threats against Lübcke. The case also triggered horror because the alleged murderer and neo-Nazi had links to the Islamophobic and right-wing extremist party AfD and took part in one of the far-right "funeral marches" in Chemnitz in 2018. A discussion arose in Germany about the extent to which the AfD is an agitator through its racist policies and whether it bears responsibility for the right-wing extremist violence in Germany.

Another event was the anti-semitic motivated rampage in Halle on 9 October 2019.<sup>8</sup> The perpetrator obviously took the mass shootings of Oslo in 2011 and the mosque shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019 as a model and filmed his crime. At the beginning of the video recording, the terrorist said that he believed that the Holocaust had never taken place and that feminism was the reason for low birth rates in the West, which in turn has led to mass immigration. The "Jew" was the cause of all problems. His attempt to kill Jews in a synagogue failed and instead he killed an uninvolved passer-by who was not Jewish, and then drove to a kebab shop, where he executed a person with actually no migrant background. However, in the discussion about the crime, it was often not discussed that the murderer chose a kebab shop as a replacement after his failure at the synagogue. This changed when it became known that the Halle murderer confessed that he wanted to kill a Muslim after failing to kill Jews in the synagogue.<sup>9</sup> Kebab shops in Germany are associated with immigrants

7. Frank Jansen, "Stephan E. erschoss Lübcke aus Hass auf dessen Flüchtlingspolitik", *Der Tagesspiegel*, 26 June 2019, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/rechtsextremist-gesteht-mord-stephan-e-erschoss-luebcke-aus-hass-auf-desen-fluechtlingspolitik/24496132.html>, (Access date: 10 March 2020); Julian Feldmann and Nino Seidel, "Stephan E. war offenbar für AfD aktiv", *Tagesschau*, 21 February 2020, <https://www.tagesschau.de/investigativ/ndr/stephan-e-afd-101.html>, (Access date: 10 March 2020), ZEIT, "Video soll Stephan E. und Markus H. auf rechter Demo zeigen", *ZEIT*, 11 January 2020, <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2020-01/walter-luebcke-stephan-e-markus-h-teilnahme-demonstration-chemnitz-2018-video-mdr>, (Access date: 11 March 2020).

8. Camilla Kohrs, "Auf einer Baustelle endet die Fahrt des Terroristen", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10 October 2019, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/halle-anschlag-chronik-1.4634951>, (Access date: 8 March 2020); "Stunden der Angst: Die Chronologie des Halle-Anschlags", *Merkur*, 20 February 2020, <https://www.merkur.de/politik/halle-anschlag-stunden-angst-chronologie-tat-zusammenfassung-nachrichten-zr-13100665.html>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

9. Maik Baumgärtner, Sven Röbel and Wolf Wiedmann-Schmidt, "Die Granaten versteckte er im Bettkasten", *Der Spiegel*, 9 April 2020, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/rechtsterrorist-von-halle-stephan-balliet-die-granaten-versteckte-er-im-bettkasten-a-88b24f0e-90e9-4ba4-b2f2-ea743887bb2b>, (Access date: 17 April 2020)

from Turkish and Arab countries. Both the Halle attack and the murder of Walter Lübcke have led to weeks of discussions in Germany about right-wing extremist violence. In particular, there was a debate about radicalisation in social networks.

### **- Reported Attacks: A Selection**

There were other Islamophobic and anti-Muslim racist incidents which have been reported by the media. A selection of those are listed below in chronological order.

January 2019: German lawyer Seda Başay-Yıldız who represented the family of the first murder victim of the right-wing terrorist cell National Socialist Underground (NSU) received a threatening letter, which was signed “NSU 2.0”.<sup>10</sup> In an earlier threat, five Frankfurt police officers were suspected. According to media reports, this act again indicates that the perpetrator has access to police data. The new letter relates to the suspension of the Frankfurt police officers. It contained the following text: “You brain-dead shit doner are obviously not aware of what you did to our police colleagues! However, it is now getting really bad for you, you Turkish pig! We will tear off shitty’s (Başay-Yıldız daughter’s name) head ... and the rest of your kebab crew will also be taken care of competently”.<sup>11</sup> Together with other incidents the letter led to a debate on the problem of right-wing extremism within the German police. Another incident took place in Stralsund where a man from Syria was attacked and abused. The state security department was investigating this because it is believed to have a politically motivated background.<sup>12</sup> Another incident took place in Konstanz. The president of the football club Türkischer SV Konstanz received a copy of a newspaper article, on which all sorts of anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim slogans had been written.<sup>13</sup> The article featured slogans such as “Muslim pig,” “these disgusting Turkish louts”, “the biggest mistake since 1945, letting Muslims in” and “Need UZI”. (Fig. 1)

February 2019: At a weekend, three young girls were the victims of an anti-Muslim racist attack.<sup>14</sup> The first case occurred in the Berlin district of Marzahn.

10. Annette Ramelsberger, “Rechte bedrohen erneut Frankfurter Anwältin”, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 January 2019, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/seda-basay-y-ld-z-rechte-bedrohen-erneut-frankfurter-anwaeltin-1.4286346>

11. Annette Ramelsberger, “Rechte bedrohen erneut Frankfurter Anwältin”.

12. “Fremdenfeindlicher Angriff auf Syrer in Stralsund”, *Focus*, 14 January 2019, [https://www.focus.de/regional/mecklenburg-vorpommern/kriminalitaet-fremdenfeindlicher-angriff-auf-syrer-in-stralsund\\_id\\_10183177.html](https://www.focus.de/regional/mecklenburg-vorpommern/kriminalitaet-fremdenfeindlicher-angriff-auf-syrer-in-stralsund_id_10183177.html), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

13. Jürgen Rössler, “Hetzparolen im Clubheim-Briefkasten des Türkischen SV Konstanz”, *Südkurier*, 28 January 2019, <https://www.suedkurier.de/regional/regional-sport/regional-sport-bodensee-west/Hetzparolen-im-Clubheim-Briefkasten-des-Tuerkischen-SV-Konstanz;art2783,10033165>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

14. “Vier Kinder in Berlin angegriffen und bedroht”, *t-online*, 10 February 2019, [https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/panorama/kriminalitaet/id\\_85230122/fremdenfeindliche-attacken-vier-kinder-in-berlin-angegriffen-und-bedroht.html](https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/panorama/kriminalitaet/id_85230122/fremdenfeindliche-attacken-vier-kinder-in-berlin-angegriffen-und-bedroht.html), (Access date: 10 March 2020); “Islamfeindliche Angriffe auf junge Mädchen”, *Islamiq*, 10 February 2019, <http://www.islamiq.de/2019/02/10/fremdenfeindliche-attacken-auf-muslimische-maedchen/>, (Access date: 10 March 2020); Karin Christmann and Sigrid Kneist, “Rassistische Attacke: Kind geschlagen und getreten”, *Tagesspiegel*, 10 February 2019, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/polizei-justiz/berlin-hellersdorf-rassistische-attacke-kind-geschlagen-und-getreten/23969954.html>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).



and punched her in the stomach.<sup>18</sup> The police in Hennef reported that a man attacked immigrants twice for racist reasons.<sup>19</sup> The 29-year-old man is said to have insulted a young family from Syria and tossed a glass bottle in their direction. After the 30-year-old father filmed the man's insults on his mobile phone, the 29-year-old hit him with his fists. The victim had to be taken to hospital. A few minutes later, the perpetrator confronted two Syrians (a 20-year-old and 21-year-old) in an intense fight for no apparent reason. Police also reported that a 21-year-old Syrian man in Querfurt was beaten and abused by five or six attackers.<sup>20</sup>

June 2019: In Bremen, 50 Korans were torn up in a mosque and some of them were stuffed into a toilet. The chairman of the mosque criticised the police for not having reacted sensitively enough in this case, as the police initially only assumed property damage, not an Islamophobic act.<sup>21</sup> In Hamburg, a Muslim woman was molested and beaten in the stomach by a right-wing extremist. Another hate crime in Bremen happened in a tram. A 27-year-old man insulted a 16-year-old man in an anti-Muslim, racist manner. When the 16-year-old and his friends tried to avoid the conflict and to sit somewhere else, the perpetrator suddenly stabbed the 16-year-old with a knife from behind. The young man was seriously injured.<sup>22</sup>

July 2019: A woman in Berlin-Mitte was insulted because of her headscarf.<sup>23</sup> The 54-year-old visited a grocery store on Friday afternoon, accompanied by two other people. There, the three clashed with a 46-year-old woman. She insulted the 54-year-old Turkish woman because of her headscarf. Witnesses alerted the security forces. The state security took over the investigation.

August 2019: SPD politician Sawsan Chebli received an anti-Muslim racist letter in which, among other racist comments, it stated: "I know you Arabs are not so blessed with intelligence, but maybe you will get it someday. Religions are ideology and it doesn't matter what the stinking pedophile Mohammed or the anti-social genocidal Jew God wants. You can slaughter what you want in your housings. German culture and European values have to be accepted here in Germany" (see figure 2). It ended

18. "Greifswalder Straße in Weißensee: Frau mit Kopftuch beleidigt und in den Bauch getreten", Berliner Zeitung, 15 April 2019, <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/berlin/polizei/greifswalder-strasse-frau-mit-kopftuch-beleidigt-und-in-den-bauch-getreten-32378586>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

19. "Fremdenfeindlichkeit Staatsschutz ermittelt gegen Sankt Augustiner", Kölnische Rundschau, 26 April 2019, <https://www.rundschau-online.de/region/bonn/stadtbonn/fremdenfeindlichkeit-staatsschutz-ermittelt-gegen-sankt-augustiner-32433048>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

20. "Syrrer beschimpft und attackiert", Volksstimme, 6 May 2019, <https://www.volksstimme.de/sachsen-anhalt/polizei-syrrer-beschimpft-und-attackiert>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

21. Lisa Boekhoff, "Entsetzen über zerrissene Koran-Ausgaben in Bremen", Weserkurier, 11 June 2019, [https://www.weser-kurier.de/bremen/bremen-stadt\\_artikel,-entsetzen-ueber-zerrissene-koranausgaben-in-bremen-\\_arid,1836659.html](https://www.weser-kurier.de/bremen/bremen-stadt_artikel,-entsetzen-ueber-zerrissene-koranausgaben-in-bremen-_arid,1836659.html), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

22. "Islamfeindlicher Angriff? Messerstecher in Bremen gefasst", Ntv, 5 June 2019, <https://www.n-tv.de/incoming/Islamfeindlicher-Angriff-Messerstecher-in-Bremen-gefasst-article21068395.html>, (Access date: 9 March 2020).

23. "Frau wird in wegen ihres Kopftuchs beleidigt", Berlin.de, 13 July 2019, <https://www.berlin.de/aktuelles/berlin/kriminalitaet/5833559-4362932-frau-wird-in-wegen-ihres-kopftuchs-belei.html>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

with a quote which threatened Chebli: “They laughed, they thought it was fun. Well, they don’t laugh anymore today, because it’s deadly serious” (see figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Sawsan Chebli tweets a picture of a racist threatening letter.<sup>24</sup>

A Syrian man filed a criminal complaint for sedition with the police in Finsterwalde in August. The victim claimed to have been verbally attacked. According to the police, a stranger approached him, turned violent and pushed him. The perpetrator also uttered hate speech towards the victim, performed the Nazi salute, and showed him the middle finger.<sup>25</sup>

September 2019: A 20-year-old man from Syria was attacked in Cottbus and subjected to racial insults. According to the police spokeswoman, the man was beaten by another man at a downtown stop, pushed to the ground, and insulted.<sup>26</sup>

October and November 2019: A month after the burial of a young Turkish woman in Wirges, her grave was desecrated for the first time in early October. In November, perpetrators struck again on the Muslim cemetery. They maliciously trod the fence that surrounds the tomb, trampled the flowers, tore out the grave sign with the name of the deceased, and threw it into an adjacent hedge.<sup>27</sup> In November,

24. Sawsan Chebli, Twitter, 18 August 2019, <https://twitter.com/sawsanchebli/status/1163082777614606336?lang=de>, (Access date: 12 March 2020).

25. “Volksverhetzende Parolen und ein Hitlergruß in Finsterwalde”, Lausitzer Rundschau, 12 August 2019, [https://www.lr-online.de/lausitz/finsterwalde/volksverhetzende-parolen-und-ein-hitlergruss-in-finsterwalde\\_aid-45019435](https://www.lr-online.de/lausitz/finsterwalde/volksverhetzende-parolen-und-ein-hitlergruss-in-finsterwalde_aid-45019435), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

26. “Syrier angegriffen und fremdenfeindlich beleidigt”, Focus, 30 September 2019, [https://www.focus.de/regional/cottbus/extremismus-syrer-angegriffen-und-fremdenfeindlich-beleidigt\\_id\\_11197465.html](https://www.focus.de/regional/cottbus/extremismus-syrer-angegriffen-und-fremdenfeindlich-beleidigt_id_11197465.html), (Access date: 8 March 2020).

27. Stephanie Kühn, “Fremdenfeindlicher Hintergrund unklar: Unbekannte schänden in Wirges muslimische Gräber”, Rhein-Zeitung, 14 November 2019, [https://www.rhein-zeitung.de/region/aus-den-lokalredaktionen/westerwaelder-zeitung\\_artikel,-fremdenfeindlicher-hintergrund-unklar-unbekannte-schaenden-in-wirges-muslimische-graeber-\\_arid,2052304.html](https://www.rhein-zeitung.de/region/aus-den-lokalredaktionen/westerwaelder-zeitung_artikel,-fremdenfeindlicher-hintergrund-unklar-unbekannte-schaenden-in-wirges-muslimische-graeber-_arid,2052304.html), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

there was also a racist attack on a Muslim woman in Hamburg. According to media reports, a 23-year-old was first insulted and threatened, and later the perpetrator hit the woman in the stomach.<sup>28</sup> SPD politician Sawsan Chebli received another racist letter. In the letter, the Berlin state secretary is asked, among other things, to “publicly” resign from her office. Chebli posted the full text on Twitter. An excerpt from the racist letter follows: “You negro lover too made it onto our death list and officially took third place. No government in the world will be able to save you from our assassination because your life is worth nothing to them just as little as that of Jews, Muslims and Negroes. We do not tolerate an Islamisation of our Aryan Germany”.<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 3:** Politician Sawsan Chebli tweets the content of a threatening letter against her.<sup>30</sup>

December 2019: In Seibnitz, two teenagers attacked an eleven-year-old Muslim girl, tore off her headscarf, pulled her hair to the ground, kicked her, and asked her what she wanted in Germany.<sup>31</sup> Also in December, a 54-year-old driver drove into several Muslim graves in a cemetery in Nuremberg. According to investigations, she

28. Daniel Gözübüyük, “Rassistische Attacke in Hamburg Muslima erst bepöbelt – dann in den Bauch geschlagen”, Hamburger Morgenpost, 21 November 2019, <https://www.mopo.de/hamburg/polizei/rassistische-attacke-in-hamburg-muslima-erst-bepoebelt—dann-in-den-bauch-geschlagen-33487968>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

29. “Rechter Terror in Deutschland: Auch SPD-Politikerin Chebli erhält Morddrohungen”, Focus, 4 December 2019, [https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/lasse-mich-von-euch-nazis-nicht-einschuechtern-rechter-terror-in-deutschland-auch-spd-politikerin-chebli-erhaelt-morddrohungen\\_id\\_11415539.html](https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/lasse-mich-von-euch-nazis-nicht-einschuechtern-rechter-terror-in-deutschland-auch-spd-politikerin-chebli-erhaelt-morddrohungen_id_11415539.html), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

30. Sawsan Chebli, Twitter, 2 December 2019, <https://twitter.com/sawsanchebli/status/1201436817242951680>, (Access date: 12 March 2020).

31. “Teenies reißen Mädel (11) Kopftuch herunter”, Heute, 8 December 2019, <https://www.heute.at/s/teenies-reissen-maderl-11-kopftuch-herunter-54923712>, (Access date: 12 March 2020).

apparently hit the graves on purpose.<sup>32</sup> At the Wilhelmine-Fliedner comprehensive school in Hilden near Düsseldorf, the police investigated a teacher who racially insulted a student with Lebanese roots. Despite the investigation, the teacher was not suspended. The teacher reportedly said to the student: “You don’t have to smile at all. In former times, something like you would have been gassed”<sup>33</sup>.

## Employment

There is no reliable empirical material that can provide sufficient information about discrimination against Muslims in the German labour market. This is mainly due to the fact that there are no studies with sufficiently large samples. A large number of population surveys are carried out in Germany, but there are not particularly many carried out among the migrant population - this group is also marginalised in terms of research.

An interesting study would be, at least in theory, a representative survey by the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency.<sup>34</sup> However, the proportion of Muslims (n = 21) is so small that no reliable statements can be made (about half of those surveyed stated that they were discriminated against on the basis of their religious affiliation). However, a logistic regression analysis based on the data reveals that religious affiliation among the “differently religious” group, which also includes Muslims, is a significant factor of discrimination in working life.<sup>35</sup> This study can serve as an important first hint, but more recent studies with a higher number of Muslims interviewed would be desirable.

Another survey of people who were discriminated against in the context of work revealed that women wearing a headscarf are particularly affected by discrimination in the labour market.<sup>36</sup> In seven out of ten cases where Muslims were discriminated in the job market, the affected persons regularly wore a headscarf. This was often

---

32. “Frau verwüstet auf Nürnberger Friedhof mit dem Auto Gräber”, Bayerischer Rundfunk, 12 December 2019, <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/bayern/frau-fahrt-mit-auto-auf-friedhof-und-verwuestet-mehrere-graeber,RkR1bJK>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

33. Tobias Dupke “Hildener Lehrer soll Schüler beleidigt haben - Staatsanwaltschaft ermittelt”, RP Online, 3 January 2020, [https://rp-online.de/nrw/staedte/hilden/hilden-lehrer-an-wilhelmine-fliedner-gesamtschule-soll-schueler-beleidigt-haben\\_aid-48120369](https://rp-online.de/nrw/staedte/hilden/hilden-lehrer-an-wilhelmine-fliedner-gesamtschule-soll-schueler-beleidigt-haben_aid-48120369), (Access date: 19 March 2020).

34. “Diskriminierung in Deutschland. Dritter Gemeinsamer Bericht der Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes und der in ihrem Zuständigkeitsbereich betroffenen Beauftragten der Bundesregierung und des Deutschen Bundestages”, Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, 2017, [https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/publikationen/BT\\_Bericht/Gemeinsamer\\_Bericht\\_dritter\\_2017.pdf?\\_\\_blob%3DpublicationFile%26v%3D10](https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/publikationen/BT_Bericht/Gemeinsamer_Bericht_dritter_2017.pdf?__blob%3DpublicationFile%26v%3D10), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

35. Steffen Beigang, Karolina Fetz, Dorina Kalkum and Magdalena Otto, *Diskriminierungserfahrungen in Deutschland. Ergebnisse einer Repräsentativ- und einer Betroffenenbefragung*, (Nomos, Baden-Baden: 2017), [https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/publikationen/Expertisen/Expertise\\_Diskriminierungserfahrungen\\_in\\_Deutschland.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&cv=6.](https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/publikationen/Expertisen/Expertise_Diskriminierungserfahrungen_in_Deutschland.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&cv=6.), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

36. “Diskriminierung in Deutschland. Dritter Gemeinsamer Bericht der Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes und der in ihrem Zuständigkeitsbereich betroffenen Beauftragten der Bundesregierung und des Deutschen Bundestages”, Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, p. 242.

put forward by potential employers as a reason why employment in the respective company or organisation was not possible.

The results of a survey in companies show how difficult it is for a Muslim woman who wears a headscarf to find a job: 35% of the companies surveyed stated that they generally do not consider Muslim women who want to wear a headscarf at work for training positions.<sup>37</sup>

Another study by the Anti-Discrimination Agency illustrates the problem further.<sup>38</sup> A job agent at a job centre testifies the following in the study:

“Yes, of course, the origin can be a risk or the religion. If I have someone sitting in front of me with a headscarf, then at least I have to address it if the person would like to work in sales, and then you have to address it, and there is a risk that this will be considered my opinion. (...) So, I really try to put it simply: okay, that’s the job market. And now there are two options. You adapt to the job market and you may have a relatively good chance of finding employment on the job market, or you stay the way you are, feel comfortable with it, can live in harmony with your religion, but may have poorer job market opportunities.”<sup>39</sup>

A study by the Berlin Science Center for Social Research (WZB) conducted between October 2014 and April 2016 examined the feedback on fictitious applications from people with different migrant backgrounds.<sup>40</sup> The researchers found that people with roots in Africa or Muslim countries were the most discriminated against. Overall, the positive response rate for applicants without a religious signal was 54%, 57% for Christians, 53% for Buddhists and Hindus, and 46% for Muslims. The researchers come to the conclusion that discrimination is not against “non-Christians” per se or against migrants from Muslim countries, but specifically against Muslims.

## Education

In cooperation with the Center for Educational Integration, the Georg Eckert Institute examined 65 textbooks on the subject of politics, social studies, history, and

37. Albert Scherr, “Betriebliche Diskriminierung. Warum und wie werden migrantische Bewerberinnen und Bewerber um Ausbildungs- und Arbeitsplätze benachteiligt?”, ed. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, (Bonn: 2014), <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/wiso/10470.pdf>, (Access date: 18 March 2020).

38. Martin Brüssig, Dorothee Frings and Johannes Kirsch, *Diskriminierungsrisiken in der öffentlichen Arbeitsvermittlung*, (Nomos, Baden-Baden: 2017), p. 244, [https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/publikationen/Expertisen/Diskriminierungsrisiken\\_in\\_der\\_oeffentlichen\\_Arbeitsvermittlung.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=10.](https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/publikationen/Expertisen/Diskriminierungsrisiken_in_der_oeffentlichen_Arbeitsvermittlung.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=10.), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

39. Martin Brüssig, Dorothee Frings and Johannes Kirsch, *Diskriminierungsrisiken in der öffentlichen Arbeitsvermittlung*.

40. Ruud Koopmans, Susanne Veit and Ruta Yemane, *Ethnische Hierarchien in der Bewerberauswahl: Ein Feldexperiment zu den Ursachen von Arbeitsmarktdiskriminierung*, (Discussion Paper, SP VI 2018-104), <https://bibliothek.wzb.eu/pdf/2018/vi18-104.pdf>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

geography from five different federal states.<sup>41</sup> They researched how migration and integration with regard to social diversity are represented in the textbooks and whether they show diversity as a normal state. One result of the study is that textbooks do not reflect the reality that prevails in the classrooms and migration is still seen as a problem. The terms “foreigners”, “strangers”, and “migrants” are used as synonyms and are not differentiated or even questioned, and the construction of “we” versus “others” is maintained.

In the analysed textbooks, the problematisation of migration outweighs the representation of diversity as a normal state of affairs. Migration is primarily described in social studies and history textbooks, sometimes also in geography textbooks, as conducive to conflict and crisis. It inevitably leads to socially controversial situations. In this context, migration and diversity ultimately only appear as a problem and challenge for a society that is still predominantly presented as homogeneous.

The scientist Silvia Horsch-Al Saad also criticises the portrayal of Islam since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.<sup>42</sup> Since that date, textbooks have often linked Islam to violence and terror in a problematic manner. For example, when there are a few pages in books with photos of the mosque from Mecca, these are followed by pictures of the attacks in New York.

Another problem is discrimination against Muslims in schools. The *Anlaufstelle für Diskriminierungsschutz an Schulen* (Contact Point for Protection against Discrimination at Schools, ADAS) is a contact and advice centre for cases of discrimination at schools in Berlin. In the period from June 2016 to April 2018, it documented and evaluated cases of discrimination.<sup>43</sup> Based on the data, it can be seen that the largest group of discriminated students are from countries in the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey. Racist discrimination based on ethnic origin and/or religion played a role in 137 of the reported cases (83%). Ninety-seven reports related to ethnic origin, and 40 to religion or belief. Seventy-eight per cent of the reports on discrimination were based on the religion of Islam.

## Politics

While in Germany right-wing extremist parties such as *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (National Democratic Party of Germany), *Die Rechte* (The Right), and *Der III. Weg* (The Third Path) have hardly any success in elections, the right-wing

---

41. “Schulbuchstudie Migration und Integration”, Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration, 2015, [https://narrt.eaberlin.de/w/files/narrt/religionspaedagogik/studien/schulbuchstudie\\_migration\\_und\\_integration\\_09\\_03\\_2015.pdf](https://narrt.eaberlin.de/w/files/narrt/religionspaedagogik/studien/schulbuchstudie_migration_und_integration_09_03_2015.pdf), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

42. Silvia Horsch, “Klischees laut Lehrplan? Der Islam in Schulbüchern”, Norddeutscher Rundfunk, 28 April 2017, <https://www.ndr.de/kultur/kulturdebatte/Klischees-laut-Lehrplan-Der-Islam-in-Schulbuechern,freitagsforum454.html>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

43. Aliyeh Yegane, *Empfehlungen zur Einrichtung einer unabhängigen Berliner Beschwerdestelle bei Diskriminierung in Schulen*, (LIFE e.V, Berlin: 2018), [https://adas-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ADAS\\_Empfehlungen.pdf](https://adas-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ADAS_Empfehlungen.pdf), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

populist party *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany, AfD) succeeded in 2019 in three state elections. In Bremen, the AfD achieved a share of 6.1%, in Thuringia 23.4%, in Brandenburg 23.5%, and in Saxony 27.5%. Contradictory intra-party tendencies can be found in the AfD. In addition to the national conservative, liberal economic, and conservative values, and Christian fundamentalist and direct democratic forces, there are members within the party who represent authoritarian, ethnic-nationalist, homophobic, anti-feminist, anti-Semitic, historical revisionist, and Islamophobic positions. This faction of the party is called the “Flügel” and is supported by around 40% of AfD members, according to party estimates. Björn Höcke is considered the leader of the Flügel. Due to the pressure on “The Flügel” as it was supposed to be observed by the intelligence services, it has been dissolved in 2020. It is unclear in which way the “Flügel” is still functioning as an informal group.

In his book *Nie zweimal in denselben Fluss* (Never Twice in the Same River), which appeared in mid-2018, the fascist Björn Höcke conjured the “death of the people by the exchange of populations” as a central goal of his party and called for Germany to be cleansed of “cultural aliens”.<sup>44</sup> Höcke wrote, “In addition to protecting our national and European external borders, a large-scale remigration project will be necessary”.<sup>45</sup> This refers to his desire to banish millions of citizens from the country. Höcke wrote that this “remigration project” can only be achieved by violence. He called his cynical vision of the future the “politics of ‘well-tempered cruelty’”. Not only does Höcke want to cleanse Germany ethnically, but also politically as his policy of “well-tempered cruelty” contains the elimination of those people who are responsible for the failed immigration policy. Höcke, like many other AfD politicians, has voiced anti-Islam views. In a speech in 2018, he emphasised that Muslims were “infinitely far” from Allah, and that the founder of their religion, Mohammed, was a field commander and therefore Muslims were war-loving and to be taken as a threat.<sup>46</sup> In 2017, Höcke even announced that as soon as his party comes to power, the Islamic faith will even be forbidden in Turkey. He already announced this in a tweet in 2017 (“Islam has a home and it is not called Europe! On the Bosphorus, ‘Mohamed, Muezzin & Minaret’ must end!”) (see figure 4).

44. Sebastian Henning and Bernd Höcke, *Nie zweimal in denselben Fluss*, (Manuscriptum, Lüdinghausen: 2018).

45. Henning and Höcke, *Nie zweimal in denselben Fluss*.

46. “Höcke sorgt mit „Türkei-Direktive“ für Aufsehen”, *Die Welt*, 28 January 2018, <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article172934056/AfD-Bjoern-Hoecke-will-Verbot-des-Islam-in-der-Tuerkei.html>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).



**Figure 4:** Islamophobic statement of Björn Höcke on Twitter: "Islam has a home and it is not called Europe! On the Bosphorus, 'Mohamed, Muezzin & Minarett' must end!"<sup>47</sup>

However, political parties are political interest groups that rise from the population itself. Especially after the election in Thuringia, there was a discussion about the AfD voters and their reasons for choosing a party that is against immigration and stirs up fears of an alleged "Islamisation" of Germany. Quite a few scientific articles on the reasons people vote for AfD were published in the past three years. Here, two main hypotheses competed. Firstly, that AfD voters are often economically disadvantaged and express their dissatisfaction as protest voters, and another hypothesis stated that the AfD voters, like the AfD party itself, are xenophobic and therefore support the AfD. Two studies are worth mentioning here. Martin Schröder's study in 2018 found that AfD supporters are not economically deprived, but are primarily xenophobic and afraid of an alleged "infiltration" of their own culture.<sup>48</sup> Another study based on a multivariate analysis of the Leipzig study on authoritarianism in 2018, also came to the conclusion that objective economic indicators such as low income and unemployment have no influence on the choice of the AfD while hostility towards Muslims is a particularly strong predictor for this choice.<sup>49</sup>

Against the background of the high potential for Islamophobia in the German population, however, it would be careless to keep an eye only on the AfD. There has been a debate about the German "Leitkultur" (guiding culture) since the late 1990s. In this context, the question is repeatedly asked whether Islam belongs to Germany at all. Hidalgo et al. argue that the question alone is problematic because it plays in the hands of right-wing populists and right-wing extremists.<sup>50</sup> The far right are then the ones who are able to define who belongs to the German culture and who does not. Also the question assumes that the fact that a religion belongs to Germany is up for debate itself is problematic, as freedom of religion is also one of the basic dem-

47. Björn Höcke, Twitter, 28 March 2017, <https://twitter.com/BjoernHoecke/status/846790530314964994>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

48. Martin Schröder, "AfD-Unterstützer sind nicht abgehängt, sondern ausländerfeindlich", *SOEPpapers on Multidisciplinary Data Research*, 975 (2018), [https://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw\\_01.c.595120.de/diw\\_sp0975.pdf](https://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.595120.de/diw_sp0975.pdf), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

49. Gert Pickel and Alexander Pickel, "Religion als konfliktärer Faktor im Zusammenhang mit Rechtsextremismus, Muslimfeindschaft und AfD-Wahl", *Flucht ins Autoritäre. Rechtsextreme Dynamiken in der Mitte der Gesellschaft*, ed. Oliver Decker and Elmar Brähler, (Psychosozial-Verlag, Gießen: 2018), pp. 217–242.

50. Oliver Hidalgo, Philipp W. Hildmann and Alexander Yendell, "Religion und Rechtspopulismus", *Argumentation kompakt*, 3 (2019), [https://www.hss.de/download/publications/Argu\\_Kompakt\\_2019-3\\_Religion.pdf](https://www.hss.de/download/publications/Argu_Kompakt_2019-3_Religion.pdf), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

ocratic principles in Germany. The problem is that with asking this question more moderate parties also fall into the right-wing populist trap. Against this background, it is not surprising that the Christian Social Union (CSU) made the headlines in 2019 when they had a discussion about whether they should list the Muslim applicant Şener Şahin as a candidate for mayor.<sup>51</sup> According to Şahin, there was support from the ranks of the CSU, but there were also significant intra-party protests because, as a Muslim, he apparently did not suit the programme of a Christian party. It is not surprising that some members of the CSU do not believe Islam belongs to Germany: in 2018, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (CSU) emphasised this notion.

It is not only the CSU that has problems with Islam and Muslims. In the SPD it had been difficult for years with the racist concepts of Thilo Sarrazin, who in 2018 published a new Islamophobic book entitled *Feindliche Übernahme: Wie der Islam den Fortschritt behindert und die Gesellschaft bedroht* (Hostile Takeover: How Islam Hinders Progress and Threatens Society). Sarrazin's party exclusion was repeatedly discussed. In 2019, an arbitration commission judged that the application for exclusion was legal.

## Media

With regard to Islamophobia, the biggest problem for the German media is that media reports focus on the “bad news” and there is almost no good news related to Islam and Muslims. The media are particularly focused on reports of Islamist terrorism, in this context particularly the so-called Islamic State, and there has also been an increase in coverage of “clan crime” that right-wing populists and extremists like to use as evidence of the failure of a multicultural society. It is therefore not surprising that Germans often relate Islam to fanaticism, proneness to violence, and backwardness.<sup>52</sup> In 2019, the *Neue Deutsche Medienmacher*, a network for media professionals with a migrant background, awarded four TV talk shows (“hart aber fair”, “maischberger”, “Anne Will”, and “Maybrit Illner”) a negative award (“The Golden Potato”).<sup>53</sup> From the jury's point of view, the reason for the negative award is that these programmes give a distorted picture of living together in Germany as an immigration country by exaggerating problems and conflicts, solidifying prejudices, and violating journalistic standards. According to the jury, the recipients' headlines are sensational; for example, “Homeland Germany - Only for Germans or Open to Everyone?”, “Citizens Anxious - How Do We Deal with Criminal Immigrants?”, “Fear of Islam: Is All

51. Tobias Chmurra and Kilian Geiser, “Nach Eklat um Sahin – CSU in Wallerstein nominiert keinen Ersatz”, Bayerischer Rundfunk, 10 January 2020, <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/bayern/nach-eklat-um-sahin-csu-in-wallerstein-nominiert-keinen-ersatz,Rn9nnhP>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

52. Detlef Pollack, Olaf Müller, Rosta Gergely, Nils Friedrichs and Alexander Yendell, *Grenzen der Toleranz Wahrnehmung und Akzeptanz religiöser Vielfalt in Europa*, (Springer VS, Wiesbaden: 2014), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

53. “Preisverleihung Goldene Kartoffel 2019”, *Neue Deutsche Medienmacher\*innen*, 2 November 2019, <https://www.neuemedienmacher.de/preisverleihung-goldene-kartoffel-2019-2/>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

Just Populism?”, and “Here to Stay. New Immigrants, Old Problems?”. The *Neue Deutsche Medienmacher* criticised the fact that such TV show clichés are promoted. The programmes on the topics of migration, refugees, and Islam are characterised by prejudice and alarmism because they are almost always about extremism, crime, and other threats posed by migrants. They also criticised the occurrence that despite the fact that a quarter of the population of Germany has a migrant background, when TV shows present topics such as pensions, care, climate, etc., hardly any people of colour are represented.

A media report in July 2019 in particular triggered both Islamophobic reactions and a discussion about hate against Muslims in Germany. The tabloid newspaper *Bild* reported with outrage that a day centre for children in Leipzig does not prepare pork anymore out of respect for two Muslim children.<sup>54</sup> (Fig. 5) The day-care centre received threats and a little later withdrew its decision due to the enormous pressure which was triggered by the media report in the *Bild*.<sup>55</sup> For a while after the report under the hashtag #Schweinefleisch (pork) the topic was the most discussed on Twitter. The AfD jumped on the news and Beatrix von Storch, a member of parliament, spoke of “cultural submission” and claimed that those who would not adapt to the leading German culture should not be allowed to live their habits and norms in Germany.



**Figure 5:** On 23 July 2019, the tabloid newspaper *Bild* expressed anger at the fact that a day-care centre for children out of respect for two Muslim children did not want to serve pork anymore.<sup>56</sup>

54. Timo Lokoschat, “Kniefall vor den Falschen - keine Gummibärchen, kein Schnitzel, kein Ostercafé – will das die Mehrheit der Muslime wirklich?”, *Bild*, 23 July 2019, <https://www.bild.de/news/inland/news-inland/debatte-ueberschweinefleisch-in-kitas-kniefall-vor-den-falschen-63490776.bild.html>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

55. “Leipziger Kitas setzen Schweinefleisch-Verbot vorerst aus”, *Die Welt*, 23 July 2019, [https://www.welt.de/newsticker/dpa\\_nt/infoline\\_nt/brennpunkte\\_nt/article197345023/Leipziger-Kitas-setzen-Schweinefleisch-Verbot-vor-erst-aus.html](https://www.welt.de/newsticker/dpa_nt/infoline_nt/brennpunkte_nt/article197345023/Leipziger-Kitas-setzen-Schweinefleisch-Verbot-vor-erst-aus.html), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

56. “Bild zieht wieder in den Schnitzelkrieg”, *Bildblog*, 23 July 2019, <https://bildblog.de/113281/bild-zieht-wieder-in-den-schnitzelkrieg>, (Access date: 13 March 2020).

## Justice System

Public debates and legal cases in Germany are often about wearing the headscarf in public institutions. In 2019, a court handed down a judgment concerning this matter. In March, the Bavarian Constitutional Court decided that judges were not allowed to wear the headscarf in court. The headscarf violated the principle of neutrality.<sup>57</sup> An Islamic religious community complained, claiming that the ban violated freedom of belief and conscience, as well as the principle of equality. They argued that it is common in Bavaria that crosses hang in the courtroom. The judges dismissed the claim on the grounds that these were two different issues. The rooms were set up by the administration and there was no connection to doubts about the independence of the judges. The judges did not see this as discriminatory because it applied to all religious communities.

The German police also appear to have problems regarding racism. A representative study from 2017 shows that 14% of black people in Germany have experienced racial profiling in the past five years.<sup>58</sup> Authorities recorded far fewer cases: from January 2018 to April 2019, the federal police, for example, registered only 58 complaints about racial profiling. The problem is that complaints about racial profiling or police violence have to be made directly to the police.<sup>59</sup> Often the police respond with a report on the complainant which leads to legal action. Unlike in other countries, there is no neutral office in Germany where victims of racial profiling or police brutality can complain.

Unfortunately, there are hardly any studies on the problem of right-wing extremism and racism in the police. An exception is a survey of over 4,000 police officers in Hesse.<sup>60</sup> When asked about political statements, 66.1% of the participating police officers agreed with the statement that immigrants made the country more colourful or diverse. However, more than one in four sees the “danger” that Germany will become an “Islamic country”.

## Internet

While it was still relatively easy to observe the activities of right-wing extremists and racists in the early days of the Internet, nowadays, this is becoming much more

57. “Kopftuchverbot für Richterinnen bestätigt”, Islamiq, 18 March 2019, <http://www.islamiq.de/2019/03/18/kopftuchverbot-fuer-richterinnen-bestaetigt>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

58. “Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Main results”, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2017-eu-midis-ii-main-results\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2017-eu-midis-ii-main-results_en.pdf), (Access date: 13 March 2020); “Rassismus”, Rat für Migration, <https://mediendienst-integration.de/desintegration/rassismus.html>, (Access date: 13 March 2020).

59. “Rassismus”, Rat für Migration.

60. “Hessische Polizeistudie 2020. Polizeiliche Alltagserfahrungen –Herausforderungen und Erfordernisse einer lernenden Organisation - Darstellung erster Ergebnisse der Umfrage”, Hessisches Ministerium des Innern und für Sport, [https://innen.hessen.de/sites/default/files/media/hmdis/polizeistudie\\_2020\\_-\\_erste\\_ergebnisse.pdf](https://innen.hessen.de/sites/default/files/media/hmdis/polizeistudie_2020_-_erste_ergebnisse.pdf), (Access date: 15 February 2020).

difficult with social media and the darknet. It can be observed that in the comments on Facebook, for example, very often Islamophobic comments are made under links to online articles, mostly in the context of reporting on Islamist terror or crimes by immigrants. In 2017, a law was implemented to curb hate comment. Nevertheless, there seems to be a certain laid-back attitude in Germany about the boundaries of freedom of expression and racism.

A prominent website is the right-wing extremist blog “Politically Incorrect”.<sup>61</sup> This blog was founded by the former teacher and right-wing extremist Stefan Herre in 2004 and is directed against the feared “Islamisation of Europe”. The blog is devoted to the topic “Islam” and “immigration” under the guise of criticism of Islam and freedom of expression. The Islamophobic articles put Muslims under general suspicion by reporting on crime, violence, and terror. Obviously, Islamophobic comments from readers are deliberately not removed by the website operators.

An example from 2019 is an article by Stefan Schubert, a former police officer, violent hooligan, and author. In 2019, he published the book *Sicherheitsrisiko Islam: Kriminalität, Gewalt und Terror: Wie der Islam unser Land bedroht* (Security Risk Islam: Crime, Violence and Terror: How Islam Threatens Our Country). The article with the title “Cultural Enrichment by Muslim Immigration Cannot Be Proven” dated 3 September 2019 is about Islam being backward and despising women, and invokes fears of mass immigration.<sup>62</sup> The picture accompanying the article shows black men who are apparently resting.



**Figure 6:** Anti-Muslim racist article on right-wing extremist webpage “Politically Incorrect” entitled “Cultural Enrichment by Muslim Immigration Cannot Be Proven”<sup>63</sup>

61. Politically incorrect, <http://www.pi-news.net>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

62. Stefan Schubert, “Kulturelle Bereicherung durch muslimische Einwanderung nicht belegbar”, PI-News, 3 September 2019, <http://www.pi-news.net/2019/09/kulturelle-bereicherung-durch-muslimische-einwanderung-nicht-belegbar/>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

63. Ibid.

An extract from the comment section shows the hatred against Muslims:

“The massive flooding with such people leads to a decline in culture, prosperity and security.

This violent desert religion, for which women are worth as much as cattle, does not fit into a liberal Europe!’

‘Islam knows only death, war, annihilation, destruction, submission.’

‘How stupid do you actually have to be to expect ‘cultural enrichment’ from these savages?’

‘Muslims have an extremely radical conservative attitude and have maintained a status quo in their way of life since the time of Mohammed.’

‘Why should Muslims be interested in education and civilised customs when all education and all human behaviour is prescribed in the smallest detail in the Koran. Education from outside the Koran is out of the question for the Muslim because it was developed by ‘unbelievers’. As a consequence, nothing independent can come from the Muslims, except that they independently benefit parasitically from civilised and creative ‘infidels’. Of course, this is also a possible way of life, but we should never accept it here in Europe out of our own interest. I suppose that the barrel will eventually overflow. If it is up to me: soon.’<sup>64</sup>

It is not understandable why so far only the Bavarian constitutional protection has put the site under observation.

Right-wing extremists have also increasingly discovered video blogs or YouTube as a way of spreading their racist ideology. Above all, channels of the Identitarian movement are to be mentioned. In addition to the channel of the Austrian neo-Nazi Martin Sellner, the channel *Laut Gedacht* (Loud Thinking) stands out, which now has over 50,000 subscribers and reaches over 400,000 people. Two members of the extreme right-wing Identitarian movement in Leipzig run a kind of news and lifestyle channel there, which under the guise of freedom of expression and satire lashes out against immigrants, Muslims, leftists, and other political opponents. The videos are aimed primarily at young audiences and have the strategy of selling right-wing extremism as a lifestyle. The channel is funded by the One Percent Movement, a kind of far right NGO.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The *Institut für Staatspolitik* (Institute for State Policy) is considered the nucleus for the ethnic-nationalist AfD wing around Björn Höcke. It serves as a think tank for right-wing educational work. The institute was founded in May 2000 by Götz Kubitschek, Karlheinz Weißmann, the lawyer Stefan Hanz, and four other members of the new far right. The founders belonged to the environment of *Junge Frei-*

<sup>64</sup>. Ibid.

*heit*, a weekly newspaper which is on the borderline between right conservatism and right-wing extremism. Both the institute and the publishing company are situated in Schnellroda in Saxony-Anhalt. According to the homepage of the institute, the focus is on the summer and winter academies, and are aimed at young people, especially pupils and students. In addition, there are regular “salons” in Berlin and Halle (Saale) and a congress in central Germany once a year. The institute is supposedly not related to any party, although Götz Kubitschek is supposed to be member of the AfD. It is supported by private funds. The events are attended by people from a wide range of far-right politics, including officials and activists from the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) and its youth organization, the Young National Democrats (JN), and the Identitarian movement.

Another relevant person in the context of far-right think tanks is Jürgen Elsässer. He was formerly an author and editor of left-wing print magazines but since the 2000s, he turned to the far right. He is editor in chief of *Compact*, a far-right monthly magazine which supports the AfD. Elsässer supports anti-American, homophobic, racist, and Islamophobic views against the background of conspiracy theories.

In the context of right-wing pioneers, right-wing publishers, and the Institute for State Policy, the Identitarian movement is also a participating organisation. The Office for the Protection of the Constitution classifies the Identitarians as right-wing extremists. The Identitarians want a closed, ethnically homogeneous European culture, whose identity is endangered by an alleged Islamisation. In cooperation with the Institute for State Policy, they had rented a house for their political purposes in Halle. Due to massive protest and pressure from the population, the Identitarian movement abandoned its house project in December 2019.

In addition to actors in the extreme right-wing scene, two authors in particular have made it into the political mainstream, whose works are spiritual food for Islamophobia and hatred of Muslims. The books by Thilo Sarrazin and Hamed Abdel-Samad are bestsellers in Germany and often run under the label “criticism of Islam”. In 2019, both authors met at an event in Dresden and were able to discuss their theses in front of an audience.<sup>65</sup> Sarrazin explained that the world view on which the Koran is based prevents curiosity, freedom of expression, willingness to change and democracy, and at the same time promotes intolerance towards those who think differently, propensity of violence, and a tendency to be offended. For Sarrazin, this results in a concrete threat to the Western world. Due to their “backwardness” and their “oppression of women” Muslims reproduce more often than Europeans and

---

65. “Thilo Sarrazin und Hamed Abdel-Samad diskutieren in Dresden: Der Hass vergiftet uns alle”, YouTube, 17 January 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiHwb\\_\\_acrU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiHwb__acrU), (Access date: 18 March 2019); “Der Glaube an die Freiheit sinkt in dieser Gesellschaft”, YouTube, Sarrazin und Abdel-Samad (Teil 2), 21 January 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxHfEE4qjWk>, (Access date: 18 March 2019); Ricarda Breyton, “Nicht jeder Muslim ist ein Koran auf zwei Beinen”, Die Welt, <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article187096800/Sarrazin-und-Abdel-Samad-in-Dresden-Islamkritiker-unter-sich.html>, (Access Date: 18 March 2019).

therefore the development of the Western culture and lifestyle was exposed to mortal danger. A particular threat for Sarrazin is that in one or two generations Muslims will outnumber the autochthonous population in many European countries. Therefore, he sees only one possibility.

“In addition to the measures that we have to take in Germany and the European countries, we must make a very clear decision to prevent immigration from Muslim countries as completely as possible for many decades to come.”<sup>66</sup>

Sarrazin’s idea of man is very much shaped by the economic usability of people. His greatest fear is the stultification of the population and with it the economic and cultural decline of Europe and especially Germany. Before the joint discussion Abdel-Samad claimed that he does not agree with Thilo Sarrazin in all his views and that therefore he saw it as important to tell Sarrazin where he is right and where he is wrong.<sup>67</sup> In the discussion he shares Sarrazin’s assumption that there is a “misery” in the Islamic world and in integration. Like Sarrazin, he sees the cause of this in the ideology of Islam, which Abdel-Samad certifies that it was always political. Other than Sarrazin he separates Islam from the Muslims and says “Not every Muslim is a Koran on two legs.” Abdel-Samad’s opinions on the “Islamic world” are highly appreciated by the far right and that becomes clear in this discussion with Sarrazin in Dresden. In that discussion together he distinguishes between Islam and Muslims, but hardly between Islamism and Islam. The danger of Abdel-Samad’s theses is that – maybe even unwillingly – they put Muslims under general suspicion. Abdel-Samad wrote in a book entitled “Mohamed – Eine Abrechnung” (Mohamed – a reckoning) that he is convinced that the “pathology” of Mohammed - he describes him as a narcissist and paranoid person - has been transmitted to Muslims to this day.<sup>68</sup> Daniel Bax wrote about the derogatory depiction of Mohammed by Abdel-Samad whereby 1.5 billion Muslims are associated with violent criminals and terrorist groups.<sup>69</sup> In the joint event with Thilo Sarrazin it becomes clear that for Abdel-Samad Islam means “political Islam” from the beginning, while Christianity was initially and actually never political and therefore less threatening. It was particularly problematic that the German political establishment made concessions to Islam. The left-wing idea of diversity as well as the postcolonial perspective, which have a great impact on journalism and on mainstream society, would contribute to the uncritical relationship and trivialisation of Islam. Abdel-Samad, therefore, welcomes the fact that next to the CDU there is finally a party like the AfD.

66. Ibid.

67. Hamed Abdel-Samad, Facebook, 10 January 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/hamed.abdelsamad/posts/10157052172900979>, (Access date: 19 March 2019).

68. Hamed Abdel-Samad, *Mohamed – Eine Abrechnung*, Droemer Knaur, München: 2015

69. Daniel Bax, “Religionskritik nach Pegida-Art”, *Spiegel*, 28 September 2015, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/mohamed-von-hamed-abdel-samad-die-angst-vor-dem-islam-a-1055047.html>, (Access date: 18 March 2019).

In their undifferentiated focus on the theology of Islam, both authors are united in that with pseudo-scientific explanations they blame Islam for social grievances. Sarrazin's pseudo-science is particularly evident through ad-hoc explanations using simple statistics that confirm an alleged inability of Muslims to integrate. He cannot measure the influence of "Islam" on the ability to integrate, but this does not interest the uncritical audience which seems happy to have its prejudices confirmed.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

There are numerous initiatives that campaign against Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism. The CLAIM project ([claim-allianz.de](http://claim-allianz.de)) is an initiative funded by the Federal Ministry for Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth as part of the federal programme *demokratie leben*. There alone, 35 organisations are listed that are committed to combating Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism. These organisations are involved in consulting, educational work, dialogue, documentation, empowerment, higher education work, youth work, prevention of radicalisation, awareness raising, networking, and science. In addition, there are numerous organisations in Germany to combat right-wing extremism or to provide school material which helps to reduce prejudices and right-wing extremism.<sup>70</sup> In this context, the religious communities that are committed to interreligious dialogue should also be mentioned.<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

We currently have a situation in Germany in which anti-Muslim racism has become socially acceptable in certain milieus and regions. That is why Germany needs a policy which makes it very clear that Islamophobia violates both the anti-discrimination laws and the democratic requirement of freedom of faith. Programmes to reduce Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism in all arenas of society such as work, education, state institutions, and civil society have to be established. Politicians and political parties should consult the results of scientific research. Despite of the many studies on prejudice and right-wing extremism, and despite the positive evaluation of prevention programmes, comparatively little money is invested in the prevention and the reduction of Islamophobia and other forms of group-focused enmity. Prevention programmes are often limited in time and not long-term. Studies show that racism

---

70. For example: "Über uns", Informationsportal zur politischen Bildung, [https://www.politische-bildung.de/ueber\\_dieses\\_angebot.html](https://www.politische-bildung.de/ueber_dieses_angebot.html), (Access date: 10 March 2020).

71. "Christlich-jüdischer Dialog", Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, <https://www.ekd.de/christlich-juedischer-dialog-43227.htm>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

and prejudices can be reduced, especially in childhood and adolescence, for instance by empathy trainings and intergroup contacts.<sup>72</sup>

Authorities, such as the police, need to be screened for anti-Muslim racism. In other countries, for example, the racism problem is taken very seriously by the police and programmes to reduce racism are launched. Such programmes are lacking in Germany.

The media are also obliged to report differently. For example, reporting the origin of criminals has little added value in explaining a crime, especially if little or no other explanation is offered. After crimes or terrorist attacks, the media could, for example, let criminology and psychiatry experts discuss the causes of such deviant behaviour. Often the biographical and psychiatric background of German right-wing terrorists is discussed in every detail, but this is usually not the case in reports on Islamist terrorists. There are two measures here: the disturbed irrational right-wing extremist, and the rational Islamist who is apparently shaped by his “dangerous and violent” religion. In this context, more information from relevant experts would help to foster a discussion on the causes of crimes and terrorism which according to a conclusive study on left-wing and right-wing extremists as well as Islamists in Germany lie primarily in the broken biography and dysfunctional family background of terrorists, whereas in the case of Islamists the religiosity plays no other role than rationalising the hate against others.<sup>73</sup>

The fight against right-wing extremism is most urgent. For too long, state institutions were blind when it came to the political far right and underestimated the danger from the far right. At the moment, the authoritarian aggression of the far right is directed particularly against Muslims. Co-radicalisation creates dangerous dynamics on the part of radical nationalists and Islamists who are interested in a spiral of violence. This spiral of violence needs to be broken. This can also be done by discussing the similarities between the so-called Western and Islamic worlds rather than their differences. Intergroup conflicts can also be resolved by emphasising the fact that there should no longer a “we” and “others” in people’s minds.

## Chronology

- **14.01.2019:** Media reports that German lawyer Seda Başay-Yıldız who represented the family of the first murder victim of the right-wing terrorist cell National Socialist Underground (NSU) receives a threatening letter from right-wing extremists.

72. Andreas Beelmann and Kim Sarah Heinemann, “Preventing Prejudice and Improving Intergroup Attitudes: A Meta-analysis of Child and Adolescent Training Programs”, *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 35 (1) (2014), pp. 10–24.

73. Saskia Lützing, *Die Sicht der Anderen Eine qualitative Studie zu Biographien von Extremisten und Terroristen*, (Luchterhand, Köln: 2010).

- **02.06.2019:** CDU politician Walter Lübcke who campaigned for the admission of refugees is murdered by a right-wing extremist.
- **23.06.2019:** Tabloid newspaper *Bild* reports on a day-care centre which does not want to serve pork and triggers anti-Muslim racists reactions in German public.
- **09.10.2019:** A racist tries to kill Jews in a synagogue in Halle. After his attempt fails, he kills a passer-by and a guest of a kebab shop. Before he runs into the kebab shop, he says “We gonna take that döner”.
- **02.12.2019:** SPD Politician Sawsan Chebli receives death threats by right-wing extremists who write that they will not except an “Islamisation” of Germany.
- **19.12.2019:** CSU politician Şener Şahin announces that he will run for mayor in Wallerstein. Members of the local party organisation are not willing to accept a Muslim candidate. Later, Şahin withdraws his candidacy.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**GREECE**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

ALI HUSEYINOGLU, ALEXANDROS SAKELLARIOU



## The Authors

**Ali Huseyinoglu** was born in Komotini, Greece. After completing primary education at the bilingual (Turkish and Greek) school in his hometown, he continued secondary and higher education in Istanbul and Ankara. Huseyinoglu received his BA and MSc from the Department of International Relations, Middle East Technical University (METU), and his PhD from Sussex University. Since 2013, he has been working as an assistant professor in the Balkan Research Institute at Trakya University, in Edirne, Turkey. His main research interests include human and minority rights, Turkish-Greek relations, the Muslim Turkish minority of Western Thrace, the the Greek Orthodox (Rum) minority in Turkey, Islam, and Islamophobia in Europe. Email: [alihuseyinoglu@trakya.edu.tr](mailto:alihuseyinoglu@trakya.edu.tr)

**Alexandros Sakellariou** teaches sociology at the Hellenic Open University and is a postdoctoral researcher at Panteion University of Athens. He earned his PhD in sociology from the Department of Sociology of Panteion University. He has extensive research experience in large-scale EU projects. Since 2011 he has been working on young people's socio-political engagement and well-being, the evaluation of innovative social policies, and radicalisation. His scientific interests include, among others, sociology of religion, sociology of youth, politics and religion, religious communities in Greek society, youth activism and civic participation, right-wing extremism, radicalisation, and qualitative research methods. He is a board member of the Hellenic League for Human Rights. Email: [sociology.panteion@gmail.com](mailto:sociology.panteion@gmail.com)

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Ali Huseyinoglu, Alexandros Sakellariou: *Islamophobia in Greece: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

This report explores Islamophobia in Greece in 2019 taking into consideration all local, national, and international developments. The main outcome is that Islamophobia continues to exist in different realms across the country. Even if Islamophobia remains manifested primarily on the discursive level as anti-Muslim hate speech, physical violence towards Muslims and sacred places of Islam continued at a lesser extent. In this respect, attacks targeting members of immigrant and refugee groups took place in 2019. Further to that, demonstrations against “Islamisation” were organised in certain cities of mainland Greece while tension between the local islanders and Muslim irregular migrants and refugees continued on specific islands of the North Aegean Sea. Golden Dawn continued protesting against the mosque of Athens especially during the campaign for general elections in Greece, while the exterior of a mosque located in Western Thrace was defamed with anti-Turkish slogans indicating the interrelatedness of Islamophobia with anti-Turkishness in this region of the country. Based on the report’s findings Islamophobia continues to be manifested mainly in Greek politics, printed and electronic media, and among some figures in the Orthodox Church, while it is relatively limited in the education and justice system. The Greek law keeps failing to be powerful enough in fighting anti-Muslim hatred inside Greek society in a way that the vast majority of perpetrators of Islamophobic attacks remain unidentified in general. That is to say, even politicians and clerics of the Greek Church who keep repeating their Islamophobic discourses overtly in their written or oral statements are never penalised for their hate-motivated behaviour. With the exception of a few state and NGO initiatives almost no significant progress has been achieved in effectively confronting Islamophobia across Greece. For the purpose of addressing this vacuum, an official observatory mechanism, which needs to cooperate with Muslims in full terms, should be formed as soon as possible and start monitoring any type of Islamophobic behaviour and incidents occurring in different parts of the country. Moreover, urgent amendments of the Greek criminal law are needed in order to effectively penalise and eventually discourage the usage of any kind of anti-Muslim hatred in all segments of Greek society. Finally, a series of training seminars particularly for civil servants and journalists could be organised to develop their knowledge on Muslims in Greece and Islam in general.

## Περίληψη

Η παρούσα έκθεση εξετάζει την Ισλαμοφοβία στην Ελλάδα για το 2019 λαμβάνοντας υπόψη όλες τις τοπικές, εθνικές και διεθνείς εξελίξεις. Το κύριο συμπέρασμα της έκθεσης είναι ότι η Ισλαμοφοβία στην Ελλάδα εξακολουθεί να υφίσταται σε διάφορους χώρους σε όλη τη χώρα. Παρά το γεγονός ότι η Ισλαμοφοβία εξακολουθεί να εκδηλώνεται ως επί το πλείστον σε επίπεδο δημόσιου λόγου ως ρητορική μίσους εναντίον των Μουσουλμάνων, βίαιες επιθέσεις εναντίον Μουσουλμάνων και ιερών χώρων του Ισλάμ καταγράφηκαν και φέτος, αλλά σε μικρότερο βαθμό. Στη διάρκεια του 2019 καταγράφηκαν ορισμένες επιθέσεις εναντίον προσφύγων και μεταναστών. Διαμαρτυρίες ‘κατά της Ισλαμοποίησης’ οργανώθηκαν σε ορισμένες πόλεις της κεντρικής Ελλάδας, ενώ συγκρούσεις καταγράφηκαν μεταξύ κατοίκων ορισμένων νησιών του Βορείου Αιγαίου και παράτυπων μεταναστών και προσφύγων. Η Χρυσή Αυγή συνέχισε να διαμαρτύρεται για την κατασκευή του τζαμιού της Αθήνας, κυρίως κατά τη διάρκεια της προεκλογικής περιόδου των εθνικών εκλογών, ενώ γράφτηκαν αντι-Τουρκικά συνθήματα στους τοίχους τζαμιού στη Θράκη, που αποδεκνύει τη σύνδεση Ισλαμοφοβίας και αντι-Τουρκικών αντιλήψεων σε αυτήν την περιοχή της χώρας. Σύμφωνα με τα κυριότερα ευρήματα της έκθεσης η Ισλαμοφοβία διαπιστώνεται κυρίως στον χώρο της πολιτικής, του έντυπου και ηλεκτρονικού τύπου, και μεταξύ ορισμένων κληρικών της Ορθόδοξης Εκκλησίας, ενώ είναι ελάχιστη στους χώρους της παιδείας και της δικαιοσύνης. Επιπλέον, η ελληνική νομοθεσία δεν φαίνεται να είναι επαρκής για την αντιμετώπιση του μίσους εναντίον των Μουσουλμάνων, με αποτέλεσμα η πλειονότητα των δραστών να παραμένουν άγνωστοι και ατιμώρητοι. Κατά συνέπεια ορισμένοι πολιτικοί και κληρικοί της Ορθόδοξης Εκκλησίας οι οποίοι εξακολουθούν να αναπαράγουν ανοιχτά τον Ισλαμοφοβικό τους λόγο, στις γραπτές ή προφορικές δηλώσεις και τα κείμενά τους, παραμένουν ατιμώρητοι. Με την εξαίρεση ορισμένων πρωτοβουλιών από την πλευρά του κράτους και ορισμένων ΜΚΟ δεν έχει υπάρξει αποτελεσματική πρόοδος στην αντιμετώπιση της Ισλαμοφοβίας στην Ελλάδα. Προκειμένου να καλυφθεί το εν λόγω κενό κρίνεται απαραίτητη η δημιουργία ενός επίσημου παρατηρητηρίου το οποίο να συνεργάζεται με τους Μουσουλμάνους, έτσι ώστε να καταγράφονται τα Ισλαμοφοβικά περιστατικά σε όλη την Ελλάδα. Τέλος, θα μπορούσε να διοργανωθεί μια σειρά σεμιναρίων ιδίως σε δημοσίους υπαλλήλους και δημοσιογράφους με σκοπό την ενημέρωσή τους για το Ισλάμ και τους Μουσουλμάνους στην Ελλάδα.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Greece

**Type of Regime:** Parliamentary Republic

**Form of Government:** The prime minister is the head of government. The president, elected by the parliament every five years, is the head of state. The president of the republic has limited political power, as most power lies with the government.

**Ruling Parties:** Nea Dimocratia (New Democracy)

**Opposition Parties:** SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left), KINAL (Movement of Change), KKE (Greek Communist Party), Elliniki Lyssi (National Solution), MERA25

**Last Elections:** 2019 Parliamentary Elections: Nea Dimocratia (New Democracy) 39.85% (158 seats); SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) 31.53% (86 seats); KINAL (Movement of Change) 8.1% (22 seats); KKE (Greek Communist Party) 5.13% (15 seats); Elliniki Lyssi (Hellenic Solution) 3.7% (10 seats); MERA25 3.44% (9 seats)

**Total Population:** 10,816,286 in 2011 (national census)

**Major Languages:** Greek

**Official Religion:** Eastern Orthodoxy

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** N/A

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** Data available on each year is made available only later during the following year. The Racist Violence Recording Network in 2018 reported 117 racist incidents with more than 130 victims, while in 2017, it recorded 102 incidents with more than 120 victims. The victims of those 74 incidents were migrants or refugees on the grounds of ethnic origin, religion, and colour; associations of third country nationals; human rights defenders due to their connection with refugees and migrants, and on the occasion of a memorial held for the refugee victims who died at sea. The Police Department against Racist Violence recorded 226 incidents with probable racist motive in 2018, while in 2017 the department recorded 184 incidents.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** No official data available, since religious affiliation is not included in the national census. A Pew Research Institute poll (2015) estimates Orthodox at 90% of the population, the unaffiliated at 4%, other Christian denominations at <4%, Muslims 2%, and other religions <1%.

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** No official data available, since religious affiliation is not included in the national census. A Pew Research Institute poll (2016) estimates Muslims at 5.7% of the population.

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Muslim Association of Greece, Xanthi Turkish Union, Association of Religious Staff of Western Thrace Mosques,

Association of Western Thracian Graduates of Imam Hatip High Schools, Shia Muslim Community of Greece

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** Greek Helsinki Monitor, Racist Violence Recording Network

**Far-Right Parties:** Elliniki Lyssi (Hellenic Solution), Chryssi Avgi (Golden Dawn), Nea Dexia (New Right), Dynamis Ellinismou (Power of Hellenism), Ethniki Laiki Syneidisi (National Popular Consciousness)

**Far-Right Movements:** N/A

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** Crypteia, Combat 18 Hellas, Aneksartitoi Meadrioi Ethnikistes (Independent Meanders Nationalists), Group Epsilon-EY (Order of Greek Fighters), Blood and Honour

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

Islamophobia in Greece is primarily found on the discursive level while physical attacks with religious motivation targeting mosques, cemeteries, Muslim migrants, or refugees, which are actually difficult to record, remain fewer compared to other European countries. Politics, religion, media, and the Internet are four primary realms that continued to play a significant role in the reproduction of Islamophobia in the public domain throughout 2019 without significant changes compared to the previous years. Islamophobia was primarily expressed by specific political parties and politicians of the right and extreme right, certain self-proclaimed liberals, some figures of the Orthodox Church of Greece, and certain media organs and journalists including their posts on social media. The main issues that contributed to the reproduction of Islamophobia in 2019 were the so-called immigration/refugee problem, primarily refugees who reside in Athens and some of the Aegean islands, as well as discussions on the transfer of migrants and refugees from the islands to the mainland; the construction of the mosque of Athens; and issues related to the Muslim Turkish minority of Western Thrace, where Islamophobia is mainly reflected through the lens of Turcophobia.<sup>1</sup> The report is based on data collected during 2019 and takes into account local, national, and international events that might have influenced the (re)appearance or the rise of Islamophobia. The material was mainly collected from printed and electronic media, websites, and blogs, reports of NGOs, international organisations and state authorities, and formal or informal contacts with members of the Muslim communities settled in different parts of the country.<sup>2</sup>

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

As was mentioned in all previous reports, Greece lacks an observatory in order to document regularly and systematically Islamophobic attacks in Greek society. Furthermore, a broader but crucial issue with regard to Islamophobia is that it is not easy to establish Islamophobic motives behind racist attacks against migrants and refugees, although in many cases such motives directly or indirectly underlie the attacks.

---

1. For examples of physical attacks targeting sacred places of Muslims with anti-Turkish slogans see: Ali Huseyinoglu, "Questioning Islamophobia in the Context of Greece", *IRCICA Journal: A Journal on Islamic History and Civilization*, Volume III, Issue 6, (Fall 2015), p. 73-74.

2. It is worth noting that Greece has also been included in the OSCE Hate Crimes reporting mechanism since 2012. Apart from official statistical data from the Greek state, some minority and majority NGOs dealing with human and minority rights in Greece also contribute by reporting Islamophobic actions to this mechanism. The Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association and the Western Thrace Turks Federation in Europe primarily report about biases against Muslims in Western Thrace, Rhodes and Kos, while the Greek Helsinki Monitor and Racist Violence Recording Network offer reports on Muslims in the rest of Greece.

According to the latest data,<sup>3</sup> during 2019, 74,613 migrants and refugees crossed the sea borders with Turkey in the Aegean Sea as well as the land borders in the Evros region in Northern Greece, the vast majority being Muslims. During the year, a series of violent attacks against them was recorded in major Greek cities (e.g. Athens) and especially in the islands that host refugee camps. However, the religious motive usually is not recorded when reporting these attacks. According to the Racist Violence Recording Network and its latest report that recorded a total of 74 incidents, the victims of these incidents were migrants or refugees on grounds of ethnic origin, religion, and colour; associations of third country nationals; and human rights defenders due to their connection with refugees and migrants, and on the occasion of a memorial held for the refugee victims who died at sea.<sup>4</sup> From those only ten were related directly to religion and more specifically Judaism, with no available data on open Islamophobic attacks. In another report of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs only two incidents against Islamic places were mentioned in 2018.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most important attacks in 2019 took place in Thessaloniki where it was reported that two males aged 25-30 dressed in black clothing and wearing hoods attacked a 12-year-old boy from Iran who lives in a city apartment with his family. They threatened him, told him that he should not go to school anymore and leave the country, and with the use of a knife injured his hand.<sup>6</sup> Another Islamophobic incident took place in December 2019 when in the area of Omonia Square in central Athens, where many Muslims operate their stores, a man of Greek nationality started imprecating Allah. The man was arrested for racist hate speech by the police. After this incident, Muslims gathered outside the local police department to demonstrate and organised another rally a few days later.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from the above, two serious incidents of hatred and vandalism targeting sacred places of Muslims in Western Thrace occurred in the same month. On 19

3. "Country Sea and Land Arrivals", UNHCR, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>, (Access date: 28 January 2020).

4. RVRN Annual Report 2018, 18 April 2019, <http://rvrn.org/2019/04/rvrn-annual-report-2018/>, (Access date: 28 January 2020).

5. Annual Report on Incidents against Places of Religious Interest, [https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2019/Ekthesi\\_2018.pdf](https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2019/Ekthesi_2018.pdf), (Access date: 28 January 2020). This report has fundamental methodological problems and tries to showcase that there is no problem of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Greece since most of the attacks reported (569 from 591 incidents) have been against Greek Orthodox religious places. However, the vast majority of these attacks are thefts and muggings with no religious motivation recorded and are recorded in the report following an obvious leap of logic.

6. "Fascist Attack against a Refugee School Student in Thessaloniki", Efimerida ton Syntakton, 6 November 2019, [https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/217807\\_fasistiki-epithesi-kata-mathiti-prosfyga-sti-thessaloniki](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/217807_fasistiki-epithesi-kata-mathiti-prosfyga-sti-thessaloniki), (Access date: 28 January 2020).

7. "Disturbance in Omonia: A Man Was Imprecating Allah and Muslims Are Protesting", Newsbeast, 3 December 2019, <https://www.newsbeast.gr/greece/arthro/5719401/anastatosi-stin-omonia-andras-evrize-ton-allach-moysoyl-manoi-kanoy-n-sygkentrosi-diamartyrias>, and "Demonstration for the Man Who Was Imprecating Allah", Newsbeast, 13 December 2019, <https://www.newsbeast.gr/greece/arthro/5769177/poreia-gia-ton-andra-poy-evrize-ton-allach-stin-omonia-i-islamofobia-einai-ratsismos>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

May, the Sünne Mahalle Mosque located in central Xanthi was targeted with eggs and the slogans “Pontos: Don’t Forget 1919” and “Kemal Was Gay.” Both indicate another example of how Islamophobia is intertwined with anti-Turkish sentiments in this part of the country where the historical Muslim Turkish minority survives for centuries.<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 1)



**Figure 1:** Anti-Turkish defamation of a mosque wall in Xanthi.<sup>9</sup>

More than a week later, in late May 2019, another hate-motivated attack occurred on the Muslim cemetery of the city of Alexandroupolis. Nazi symbols were written on tombs and leaflets with the slogan ‘Greece belongs to the Greeks’ were thrown throughout the cemetery - an act perpetrated by Golden Dawn supporters as was clear from the leaflets.<sup>10</sup> (Fig. 2)



**Figure 2:** Leaflets thrown in the Muslim cemetery of Alexandroupolis. Among others it is written, “Greece belongs to the Greeks. Golden Dawn”.<sup>11</sup>

8. “Heinous Attack to Xanthi’s Sunne Mosque”, Gundem Gazetesi, 19 May 2019, <https://gundemgazetesi.com/trakyahaber/detay/5753>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

9. Ibid.

10. Nikos Fotopoulos, “Members of Golden Dawn Vandalised the Muslim Cemetery in Alexandroupoli”, Efimerida ton Syntakton, 30 May 2019, <https://www.efsyn.gr/node/197725>, (Access date: 28 January 2020).

11. “Alexandroupoli: Demonstration against Islamisation and Illegal Migration”, infognomonpolitics.gr, 24 November 2019, [https://infognomonpolitics.gr/2019/11/blog-post\\_314-34/](https://infognomonpolitics.gr/2019/11/blog-post_314-34/), (Access date: 17 February 2020).

With regard to reactions against migrants and refugees, demonstrations were organised in different parts of Greece using typical slogans like ‘No to the Islamisation of Greece’. In one such case in Katerini, a city in northern Greece, in November, school students participated. (Fig. 3) Later, in November, another similar protest took place in Alexandroupolis under the name ‘Demonstration against Islamisation and Illegal Immigration’.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 3:** The announcement on the demonstration in Katerini. Among others it says, “School students say no to the Islamisation of our country. Greece belong to the Greeks”<sup>13</sup>

In Thessaloniki, a group named ‘Macedonians United’ organised a provocative demonstration against the relocation of migrants and refugees in their region. In order to make their message clear the demonstration included a pork barbecue and consumption of alcohol. (Fig. 4) This was decided in order to argue that the presence of Muslim migrants will have a direct impact on the Greek way of life and that this should not be accepted.<sup>14</sup>

12. “Alexandroupoli: Demonstration against Islamisation and Illegal Migration”, [infognomonopolitics.gr](https://infognomonopolitics.gr), 24 November 2019, [https://infognomonopolitics.gr/2019/11/blog-post\\_314-34/](https://infognomonopolitics.gr/2019/11/blog-post_314-34/), (Access date: 17 February 2020).

13. Patriotic youth of Katerini, Facebook, 11 November 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/pg/patriotikineolaikaterinis/posts/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

14. “Racist Barbecue: The Organiser Provokes Arguing on the Originality of the Demonstration!”, [flash.gr](https://www.nooz.gr/greece/1560486/ratsistiko-mparmpekiy-proklitikos-o-diorganwtis-mila-gia-prwtotypi-diamartyria-), 6 November 2019, <https://www.nooz.gr/greece/1560486/ratsistiko-mparmpekiy-proklitikos-o-diorganwtis-mila-gia-prwtotypi-diamartyria->, (Access date: 28 January 2020).



**Figure 4:** The announcement about the barbecue and alcohol demonstration in Thessaloniki. “Barbecue party-demonstration against illegal immigration! With plenty of pork and alcohol.”<sup>15</sup>

Although this section of the report is not the place to refer to all the violent attacks, but just offer an overview of the most important ones and of their variety, one final case should be mentioned because it is quite important. In January, a committee of Greek soldiers serving their military service in the island of Samos, where a refugee camp is situated, made a public complaint about the circumstances in the military camp. They argued that, among other issues and problems they face, was the fact that propaganda was taking place that included the defamation of the Islamic religion, the argument that the “Turkish race is inferior to the Greek ‘clean’ one” was repeatedly mentioned, and hatred towards migrants and refugees living on the island was reproduced through their categorisation as “dirty thieves who steal the social benefits of the Greek people”.<sup>16</sup>

One important parameter regarding the exercise of violence in its different forms and types is the violence which is practised by state authorities. Although generally speaking there are no official or unofficial reports on this issue, one incident was recorded in 2019. At the end of the year, an official public complaint was made from migrant and refugee women being held in the Foreigners’ Administration of Attica on Petrou Ralli Avenue and was publicised by an NGO in the first days of 2020 after its visit there in December. Since many of these women are Muslims these complaints were also focused on religious issues. One woman mentioned that “they forbade us to wear our headscarves and they told us ‘outside of this place you can be Muslims, but not in here! Here you are Christians...’”. In another case it was

15. “So much Greek? Barbecue - demonstration against migrants and refugees”, Imerodromos, 5 November 2019, <https://www.imerodromos.gr/toso-ellinarades-mparmpekioy-diamartyria-enantia-se-metanastes-kai-prosfyges/>, (Access date: 28 January 2020).

16. “Samos: Soldiers Complain on Hazing and Nazi Propaganda”, Documento, 16 January 2019, <https://www.documentonews.gr/article/samos-fantaroi-kataggelloy-n-kapsonia-kai-nazistikh-propaganda-milane-gia-ko-lasthrio-kai-zhtoy-n-parembash?fbclid=IwAR3nq0O4D3R34-Hd6a73znAsEuSeLhqKi-8QLVaGBYKmw7OV6zstihDkHdc>, (Access date: 28 January 2020).

mentioned that police officers took off the headscarf of a woman from Syria.<sup>17</sup> Despite these complaints there is no feedback regarding any measures taken towards the direction of confronting the situation and improving the living conditions.

## Employment

With regard to employment, due to the lack of any official data on religious discrimination in the job market it is not possible to provide an overview in this field as in the other ones. From all the sources available, media, and personal communication it did not emerge that incidents in the job market have been recorded at any official level (NGOs and/or the state authorities). However, the first findings of a European research project indicate that such incidents do take place, although they are limited and not very severe.<sup>18</sup> What was mentioned by one of the participants in this project was related to the Friday prayer, while another participant mentioned facing a problem of wearing a headscarf. In the first case, obstacles in the exercise of religious duties during working hours were mentioned, and, in the other case, a woman was not employed because of her headscarf. Such incidents are limited in number as Muslims themselves mention; however, from the moment an official reporting of such cases is lacking further and generalised conclusions can't be reached.

## Education

Similarly to the previous year, regarding education and in relation to the policies implemented by the Ministry of Education there are no direct Islamophobic incidents from the part of the ministry to mention. However, there are some issues related to education that should be underlined. The most important was related again to the reactions against the integration of refugee and migrant children in the Greek educational system. In some regions of Greece, in the islands and the mainland, reactions were recorded although not to the same level as in the initial years when the programme on the incorporation of the children in schools started. For example, on the island of Samos in the Aegean Sea, the parents' association made a public announcement and asked for abstention from school classes because of the presence of refugee children in the local schools. Among their arguments were reasons of health security, implying of course that a danger for the Greek children exists.<sup>19</sup> Similar reactions have been recorded in other parts of Greece, such as in

17. "Terrifying Testimonies of Women from Petrou Ralli", *Efimerida ton Syntakton*, 5 January 2020, [https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaiomata/225643\\_frikiastikes-martyries-gynaikon-apo-tin-petroy-ralli](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaiomata/225643_frikiastikes-martyries-gynaikon-apo-tin-petroy-ralli), (Access date: 31 January 2020).

18. The Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality (DARE) project is a Horizon 2020 project. Alexandros Sakelariou, one of the authors of the report, is involved as a senior researcher and all the references included in this report are at the first level of elaboration after the completion of ethnographic fieldwork. For more information on the project, please see: Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality, <http://www.dare-h2020.org/>.

19. "Xenophobic Parents' Announcement about Refugee Children in Samos", *Efimerida ton Syntakton*, 5 March 2019, [https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/185991\\_xenofobiki-anakoinosi-goneon-gia-prosfygopoyla-sti-samo](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/185991_xenofobiki-anakoinosi-goneon-gia-prosfygopoyla-sti-samo), (Access date: 30 January 2020).

Grevena, Macedonia, where the parents' association also reacted and urged school students to abstain from classes.<sup>20</sup>

## Politics

During the last years, Golden Dawn (GD) has been the most important agent of reproducing Islamophobia in Greek society. Despite the fact that GD failed to enter parliament in the 2019 national elections for only a small number of votes, it still plays a central role in the Islamophobia field. Through ideological or news texts uploaded mainly on their website or published in the party's newspaper, the fear of Islam is present and very strong. The main issues are related to 'illegal immigration' as they call it, the negative impact of multiculturalism, and, of course, the construction of the official mosque in Athens. One of the party's publications before the local elections of May 2019, reads,

“The way the violent Islamisation of our country is attempted against the will of the vast majority of the Greek people is indeed sad and outrageous. [...] We will fight with all legal means possible against the construction of the mosque and we call all our fellow citizens to join us in this fight.”<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 5:** Poster of the candidate mayor stating, “They are bringing a mosque to our city. We will not allow this”<sup>22</sup>

20. “Parents in Grevena React against Refugee Children in School”, Efimerida ton Syntakton, 8 March 2019, [https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/186496\\_goneis-sta-grebena-antidroyn-sti-foitisi-prosfygopoylon-sto-sholeio](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/186496_goneis-sta-grebena-antidroyn-sti-foitisi-prosfygopoylon-sto-sholeio), (Access date: 30 January 2020).

21. “Hellenic Dawn for Attica: No to an Islamic Mosque in Athens!” Ethnikismos, 2 March 2019, <https://ethnikismos.net/2019/03/02/%CE%B5%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%B7%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%B7-%CE%B1%CF%85%CE%B3%CE%B7-%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BD-%CE%B1%CF%84%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%B7-%CE%BF%CF%87%CE%B9-%CF%83%CF%84%CE%BF-%CE%B9/>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

22. Photo by Alexandros Sakellariou, Keratsini, 24 May 2019.

Local elections offered the opportunity to other candidates to raise the issue of Muslims, Islam, and the mosque in public debates in the pre-electoral period. In one such case, the candidate for mayor of the Municipality of Keratsini, a municipality near Piraeus, Fillipos Kambouris, argued that the current mayor and candidate planned to establish a mosque in their city. Stimulated by this prospect, he initiated a public campaign in the media and through posters in the city streets presenting the mosque as a threat. (Fig. 5)

Other extreme right parties have also been playing with people's fears of Islam and Muslims, and in this way reproducing a moral panic about Islam through the reproduction of the supposed threats it poses to the alteration of the synthesis of the population (exchange population theory), cultural and religious alienation, etc. Nea Dexia party (The New Right) through public announcements and articles in the press authored by its president Failos Kranidiotis has been reproducing such fears. In one case, in an article entitled "Europe as a Fortress, Greece as a Castle" he argued,

"The New Right [when in power] will close the doors to the subsidised Islamic colonisation; will forbid the functioning of NGOs; will control them financially within a time frame of ten years in the past; will ask for an international warrant on George Soros and his collaborators; will dissolve and lead to prison all the pseudo-anti-racist organisations, which contribute to the abolition of the Law and target the abolition of national borders and of the national and social cohesion."<sup>23</sup>

In addition, the party's president argued,

"And, of course, headscarves [i.e. are everywhere], a lot of headscarves, sometimes chadors, women of all ages near their puberty or older ones, wrapped as *dolma* in the unbearable [summer] heat holding baby carriages, while having another one in their belly and one or two older ones to follow and in front of all of them the father-master. They came, they stay, more are coming and others will follow. That way a de facto minority that grows constantly is created. The New Order stores misery in Athens's neighborhoods. The face of Athens and of other cities in the islands of Eastern Aegean Sea changed and it will become worse. These different populations from Asia and Africa, mainly Arabs, from the deep (sic) East, unable to integrate and usually very angry, full of demands and disappointed since the people smugglers and their propaganda promised them otherwise. The vast majority of them are unable to be integrated because they belong to a religion with dogmas and a value system incompatible with our way of life, our values and usually our laws."<sup>24</sup>

23. Failos Kranidiotis, "Europe as a Fortress, Greece as a Castle", 5 April 2019, <https://www.neadexia.gr/deltaepsilonlambdaiotaalpha-tauupsilonpiomicronupsilonalphaphakappaomicroniotanuomegasigmaepsiloniotasigmadeltaetalambdaomegasigmaepsiloniotasigma/8363429>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

24. Failos Kranidiotis, "Headscarves and dry bread", *Democratia*, 30 June 2019, <https://www.neadexia.gr/alpharhotetarhoomicrongammarhoalphaphiioalphaepsilonpiotasigmatauomicronlambdaepsilonsigmasigmaupsilonnuepsilonnuataupsilonupsilonxiepsiloniotasigma/4475361>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

Although GD failed to enter parliament, another, extreme right party managed to take its place - Elliniki Lyssi (Hellenic Solution). Its leader Kyriakos Velopoulos is a prominent figure in the Islamophobia field constantly reproducing, either in parliament or in media, his views of Islam, Muslims, 'illegal immigration', multiculturalism, etc. In one such case, he gave a speech in parliament arguing the following:

“... [Islam] is not a religion; it is a politico-religious ideology. It is a judicial system since the mufti is also a judge. As a consequence, it is a political-judicial system. Islam is incompatible with the legal culture and the morals of western societies. If you [i.e. the government] from the love you have for Ibrahim and Hassan [i.e. Muslim migrants] and not for Giorgos, Nikos, Stavros [i.e. Greeks] think that you can close your eyes, you are wrong. Don't you know, gentlemen, what Islam says about homosexuals?<sup>25</sup> You close your eyes? Don't you know? They murder them. Don't you know that? Don't you know what Islam says about women? That they have to wear a burqa and that they have to accept clitoridectomy. You didn't know that either?”<sup>26</sup>

In 2019, a new extreme right party emerged in the Greek political sphere established by a former GD MP Giannis Lagos, who is now an MEP, under the name Ethniki Laiki Syneidisi (National Popular Consciousness). The party follows the steps of GD on the issues of 'illegal immigration', multiculturalism, Islam, and Muslims as witnessed by its publications, i.e. internet posts and press releases. In the party's founding declaration there are statements against 'illegal immigration', the sending back of all 'illegal migrants', and in favor of the strengthening of the Orthodox Christian character of the Greek state.<sup>27</sup> In one of the party's public statements, it mentions that the European way of life is directly threatened.

“By whom will all those be in danger? By the foreign hordes of different religion, of course, who have invaded and continue to invade our continent in large numbers. In their vast majority they are NOT refugees, they DO NOT deserve to receive political asylum and, of course, they declare their faith to Allah and his prophet, as hard (sic) Islamists that they are. The packs of young men that arrive mainly from Arab and African countries, they don't come to our fatherland for tourism. In many instances without blushing they admit, both imams and everyday people, that their purpose is the enforcement of Sha-

---

25. This reference is quite hypocritical because Velopoulos and his party are openly homophobic.

26. Giorgos Bourdaras, “Parliament: Elliniki Lyssi against Islam. The Reactions and the Folding Back”, Kathimerini, 8 December 2019, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1055320/article/epikairothta/politikh/voylh-ellhnikh-lysh-kata-islam---oi-antidraseis-kai-h-anadiplwsh>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

27. “Εθνική Λαϊκή Συνείδηση Ιδρυτική Διακήρυξη”, Elasyn, 9 November 2019, <https://elasyn.com/theseis/>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

ria in Europe. Admittedly and unfortunately, if we don't react, soon they will be very close in achieving their goal."<sup>28</sup>

However, apart from extreme right figures, individuals from the conservative right-wing ruling party and even self-declared liberals have been expressing themselves strongly against Islam and the dangers deriving from the presence of Muslims in Greek society. In one such case an MP from Nea Dimocratia (New Democracy), the ruling party, Konstantinos Bogdanos, has argued in the parliament,

"We [i.e. in New Democracy] will never characterise as racists, extreme rightists, or fascists those Greeks who are reasonably worried about the immigration flows that are without any limit, planning, and logic, especially of Asian and African Muslim populations, which will sharpen existing problems and will create new ones. [...] Greece is a country of Orthodox Christian tradition and a liberal law system. It is neither a country for spongers hunting social benefits, nor for followers of the Islamic law."<sup>29</sup>

Another member of the New Democracy party, the chairperson of the Youth Branch of Penteli, a municipality near Athens, sent a letter to the Minister of Citizen Protection arguing against the transfer of young Muslims to the regional hospital. (Fig. 6) Among others, she wrote,

"Most of these minors are Muslims. Are we ready to offer them halal special food? [...] And what will happen with their need to pray to Allah? And who will undertake their religious indoctrination? And how are we going to deal with the sexual teasing of young Muslims towards Greek female school students who consider them, based on their prototypes, of loose morals, because of their different dressing? Should we in order to protect our children make them wear headscarves? We are not going to accept the alienation of our ancestral civilisation."<sup>30</sup>

Charalambos Athanasiou, New Democracy's MP for Lesvos and vice-president of parliament, was the third example from the ruling party to use anti-Muslim and anti-Turkish rhetoric. In an interview to a Greek radio station in November 2019, he raised his concern about the growing numbers of irregular migrants and the impact of immigration on his constituency by stating,

"The average birth rate for the last three years has doubled for Muslims vis-à-vis Greeks. If it continues so, then, in twenty years' time, 30 per cent [of the

28. Giorgos Dimitrakopoulos, "Islam as a Threat against the European Way of Life", *Elasyn*, 1 October 2019, <https://elasyn.com/2019/10/01/to-islam-os-apeili-gia-ton-evropaiko-tropo-zois/>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

29. "Bogdanos: Greece Is Not for Spongers and Followers of the Islamic Law", *Newsique.gr*, 1 November 2019, <https://newsique.gr/mpogdanos-i-ellada-den-einai-gia-kifines-kynigous-epidomaton-kai-opadous-tou-islamiku-nomou/>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

30. For more information about the letter, see: "The President of ONNED Pentelis Resigned – The Letter on Refugees", *The Toc*, 13 October 2019, <https://www.thetoc.gr/politiki/article/paraitisi-tis-proedrou-tis-onned-pentelis-i-epistoligi-gia-tous-prosfuges>, (Access date: 26 February 2020).

population] will be Muslim. Then, demands from Turkey about construction of mosques and their recognition as a minority may construct a ‘new Rhodopi.’<sup>31</sup>



Figure 6: The letter of Fay Nikitopoulou.<sup>32</sup>

In another case, the leader of the neo-liberal party Dimiourgia Xana (Creation, Again!), Thanos Tzimeros, who is a central political figure in the Islamophobia field, continued through his party website or social media accounts to reproduce Islamophobic messages. In one of those, he argued,

31. “Ch Athanasiou: I Am Afraid that Lesbos Will Be a New Rhodopi”, Lesvosnews.gr, 4 November 2019, <https://www.lesvosnews.net/articles/news-categories/politiki/h-athanasioy-fobamai-oti-i-lesbos-tha-ginei-mia-nea-rodopi>, (Access date: 10 December 2019). It is useful to underline that Rhodopi is one the three sub-prefectures of the region of Western Thrace and more than half of its population are members of the Muslim Turkish minority. In the demographical superiority metaphor, Athanasiou used the analogy of Lesbos with Rhodopi.

32. “The President of ONNEΔ Pentelis Resigned – The Letter on Refugees”, The Toc, 13 October 2019, <https://www.thetoc.gr/politiki/article/paraitisi-tis-proedrou-tis-onned-pentelis--i-epistoli-gia-tous-prosfuges>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

“All those who have come in order to escape from the fascism of Islamic theocracy and want their women to move around unattended, their girls to go to school, and live adopting our values, they are welcomed. But they have to prove that. Without wearing a headscarf, with no ‘Allah Akbar’, with no small prayer carpets, with no Koran in their hands, with no halal, no sharia, but with western mini-skirts and bathing suits when the weather is hot, and the first plate in the camp [when they arrive] being pork or soya burgers if they are vegan. This is my home and I set the rules. If you don’t like it, you are not obliged to stay.”<sup>33</sup>

It is also very interesting that because of his views his contacts with the extreme right has evolved in a series of occasions. He gave an interview to the newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos*, an extreme-right publication, presenting his thoughts on Islam and immigration by arguing that Islam can’t cope with Greece (sic).<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, in his party conference and internal elections for presidency, among other discussions, he organised a round table on the concept of the nation and globalisation, and he invited the president of the extreme-right party Nea Dexia, Failos Kranidiotis, who has been mentioned above. There they discussed and agreed that Greece and Europe are threatened by the invasion of Islam, which while self-presented as a religion is, in reality, a political, legal, and military mechanism with the primary goal of causing the fall of Europe from the inside.<sup>35</sup>

## Media

It is not rare to find Islamophobic views and articles published in extreme-right newspapers like *Golden Dawn*, *Makeleio*, *Stohos*, *Eleftheros Kosmos*, and *Eleftheri Ora*, as has been mentioned in previous reports. In most of the cases the main issues are the so-called illegal immigration, the expected threat to the Greek nation in terms of biological and cultural alteration, and, of course, the construction of the mosque of Athens.

33. “Beautiful Countries Are Burning in a Beautiful Way”, The President, 15 November 2019, <https://www.thepresident.gr/2019/11/15/oi-omorfes-chores-omorfa-kaigontai-grafei-o-th-tzimeros/?fbclid=IwAR2o6w3THr7oIZ-cLS6VqQYCp5IXqUjByK47VwcHAGSNRMcfy1gZkh3dqE>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

34. “The ‘Heretic’ Thanos Tzimeros Talks to Eleftheros Kosmos: Islam Can’t Co-Exist with Greece”, Eleftheros Kosmos, 2 May 2019, <https://www.elkosmos.gr/84477/>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

35. Press release, Thanos Tzimeros Re-Elected as President, 24 November 2019, <https://www.dimiourgiaxana.gr/%CE%B3%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%86%CE%B5%CE%B9%CE%BF-%CF%84%CF%85%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%85/%CE%B4%CE%B5%CE%BB%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CF%84%CF%85%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%85/2971-%CE%B5%CF%80%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B5%CE%BE%CE%B5%CE%B-B%CE%AD%CE%B3%CE%B7-%CE%BF-%CE%B8%CE%AC%CE%BD%CE%B-F%CF%82-%CF%84%CE%B6%CE%AE%CE%BC%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%82-%CF%80%CF%81%CF%8C%CE%B5%CE%B4%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%82-%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B7-%CE%B4%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%85%CF%81%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CE%BE%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B1>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).



**Figure 7:** Front page of the extreme-right newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos*: “Islam Invaded Athens. Fears about a Terrorist Attack during Christmas.”<sup>36</sup>

When it comes to the mainstream media it has to be mentioned that open Islamophobic views and opinions are not very common. There are some exceptions, though, to this rule, as certain newspapers and news websites include Islamophobic articles. One of those is the conservative newspaper *Dimokratia* (Democracy) which hosts articles by politicians like Failos Kranidiotis, the leader of Nea Dexia. In one such article, the newspaper writes,

“Greece is being Islamised with the speed of light and people are barely reacting. We have selected a way of life, that at the bottom line, in order to achieve it we paid for it with a lot of blood. We don’t want to change it. The wounds from the co-existence with Islam are very recent and it is justified that we don’t want Islam at our feet. I don’t understand why and to whom we have to give account for this very natural denial to accept illegal migrants that the colonisers of our country capriciously want to impose.”<sup>37</sup>

One of the many newspaper editorials dealing with migrants, refugees, and Islam, mentions the following,

“Islam does not exist with a purpose to enrich other cultures and establish open dialogue with other religions [...]. Islam exists in order to be spread and dominate. [...] The fact that Muslims come to Greece in order to dominate is not a secret. Most of them, furthermore, don’t hide that. In various meetings, events

36. Photo by Alexandros Sakellariou, *Eleftheros Kosmos*, 20 December 2019

37. “The Islands Are Sinking, The Mainland Screams, Maximou Just Watches”, *Dimokratia*, 5 November 2019, <https://www.dimokratianews.gr/content/102425/ta-nisia-voyliazoyn-i-endohora-fonazei-maximoy-koita>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

and demonstrations where they participate -both in our country and abroad- we have heard slogans and seen placards and banners in which it is clear that they want no democracy, but they fight for the Sharia, the Islamic law. Islamists' will is to dominate -and in the countries they colonise- their way of life and this is expressed through their public prayers. We watch this happening with greater frequency in Greece. In Athens, Thessaloniki, but also in the islands that receive the continuous waves of colonisation, Greek citizens watch groups of people occupy public places (squares, streets, sports installations), lay their carpets and start praying to Allah. [...] Islam is not just a religion, it is a way of expressing metaphysical beliefs but at the same time it is an absolute guide of social organisation, interpersonal relations and legal-constitutional regulative framework. [...] For us, Greeks, though, our belief in Christ is everything, as well as our love for the concept and the tangible reality of the nation and the defense of our culture by all means.”<sup>38</sup>

## Justice System

With regard to the justice system there are no incidents related to Islamophobia mentioned either by Muslims or reported in the media. What could be mentioned though is that the Greek Helsinki Monitor<sup>39</sup> has proceeded to a series of lawsuits against individuals (e.g. politicians, journalists) who reproduce Islamophobic rhetoric and hate speech in their public discourse (e.g. texts, articles, the Internet).<sup>40</sup> Until the end of year, no trial has taken place based on lawsuits on the grounds of Islamophobia.

## Internet

The Internet and social media, in particular, have been a fertile ground for the reproduction of Islamophobic views and the expression of hatred of Islam and Muslims. While it is difficult to monitor the whole field in a systematic manner, similarly to the previous years' reports, many extreme right-wing websites continue to disseminate news about Muslim countries in relation to violence (e.g. killings, rapes, murders, etc.) which in most cases are not reliable. These kinds of views, ideological texts, messages, and comments are primarily used to cultivate and impose the fear of Islam and create a repulsive image of Islam and Muslims. Such websites include, of course, the official website of GD ([xrisiavgi.com](http://xrisiavgi.com)); *ethnikismos.net* that is related to GD since many articles appear on both websites; the websites of other extreme-right

38. “Islamists’ Rehearsals to Dominate”, Dimokratia, 21 October 2019, <https://www.dimokratianews.gr/content/102174/proves-kyriarhias-ton-islamiston>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

39. The Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), founded in 1993, monitors, publishes, lobbies, and litigates on human and minority rights and anti-discrimination issues in Greece and, from time to time, in the Balkans. It also monitors Greek and, when opportunity arises, Balkan media for stereotypes and hate speech. For more information, see: Greek Helsinki Monitor, <https://greekhelsinki.wordpress.com/about/>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

40. For all these legal cases one can see the Racist Crimes Watch, <https://racistcrimeswatch.wordpress.com/tag/%ce%b9%cf%83%ce%bb%ce%b1%ce%bc%ce%bf%cf%86%ce%bf%ce%b2%ce%af%ce%b1-islamophobia/>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

parties (*elasyn.com* and *elliniki-lisi.gr*); *nikosxeiladakis.gr*, the website of a journalist, writer, and Turcologist (sic), i.e. a specialist in the study of Turkish history, society, and Greek-Turkish relations, in which a special section dedicated to Islam can be found; and, of course, all the websites of the newspapers mentioned in the media section of the report which belong to the extreme right (*stoxos.gr*, *makeleio.gr*, *elora.gr/portal*, *elkosmos.gr*). Finally, there are many Facebook and Twitter accounts, both personal pages and groups, which reproduce messages, videos, and texts against migrants and refugees and, of course, against multiculturalism, Islam, Muslims, and the construction of the mosque in Athens.

In order to create a climate against Islam and Muslims, and reproduce panic about the latter, some websites have also been presenting and disseminating fake news. For example, in one case, it was mentioned that a large demonstration of Muslims took place in the centre of a city in Macedonia, in northern Greece, but it turned out that this had never occurred.<sup>41</sup> In another case, websites reproduced another fake story about a hypothetical attack by Muslims against a Greek couple for making the symbol of the Christian cross outside of a church in Thessaloniki. It turned out that this also never happened.<sup>42</sup>

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Some of the central figures in the Islamophobia network have already been mentioned in previous sections, e.g. Thanos Tzimeros in the Politics section and Nikos Heiladakis in the Internet section. Another central figure, however, is Andreas Andrianopoulos, a self-proclaimed liberal and former minister with the right-wing party Nea Dimocratia. In the last years, he has been writing articles, books, and making a lot of comments on Facebook and mainly on Twitter openly expressing his anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim views and suggestions. (Fig. 8)

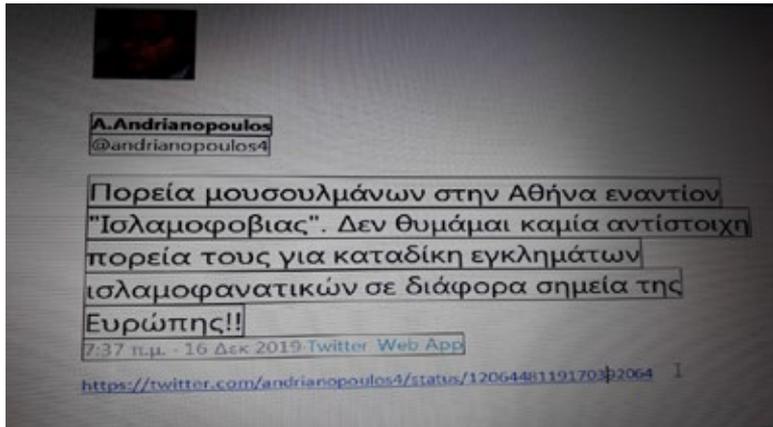
Among the many articles he writes annually in daily newspapers and websites, he has argued the following with regard to immigration,

“The developments in the immigration issue have gone beyond the borders of simple anxiety. They are now a real danger to our society’s cohesion, to our values and our culture. This is not just a flow of people who illegally violate our borders. It has taken the form of a real invasion, which can’t stay unanswered.”<sup>43</sup>

41. Stamos Archontis, “The Demonstration of Muslims against the Greeks in Serres Is Fake News”, *Ellinika Hoaxes*, 25 November 2019, <https://www.ellinikahoaxes.gr/2019/11/25/muslims-protest-against-greeks-in-serres-debunked/>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

42. Spyridoula Markou, “Foreigners DID NOT Attack a Couple for Making the Symbol of Christian Cross”, *Ellinika Hoaxes*, 20 November 2019, <https://archive.ph/SoWpw>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

43. Andreas Andrianopoulos, “We Have No More Time Available”, in.gr, 11 September 2019, <https://www.in.gr/2019/09/11/apopsi/den-yparxoun-alla-perithoria/>. See also: Andreas Andrianopoulos, “The Raid of Islam: The Great Immigration Problem”, in.gr, 16 December 2019, <https://www.in.gr/2019/12/16/apopsi/efodos-tou-islam-megalo-provlima-tou-metanasteytikou/>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).



**Figure 8:** Tweet of A. Andrianopoulos: “Muslims’ demonstration in Athens against Islamophobia. I don’t remember any similar demonstration in order to condemn the crimes of Islamo-fanatics in various places in Europe!”<sup>44</sup>

Another field where one can find Islamophobic views is that of the Orthodox Church of Greece. Clarifying from the very beginning that the Church as a whole and the Holy Synod have never taken any official Islamophobic or anti-Muslim decision, it goes without saying that several Church figures have overtly expressed such views in the last years. A figure that usually reproduces such discourses is the Metropolitan of Piraeus Serafeim. Among his usual arguments is that Prophet Muhammad is not a real prophet and his real personality is not known to the people, implying that he has conducted crimes and exercised violence about which people are not aware of. To those who accuse him of being an Islamophobe, he says,

“Preempting all kinds of ‘human rightists’ and the so-called human rights defenders who, as it is published without refutation, are being funded with a lot of money by the Open Society Foundation in collaboration with the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), by the dark and shadowy world economic player [i.e. George Soros] as well as from the Sunni governments of Saudi Arabia, Oman and Qatar, which spend billions of dollars in order to consolidate and prevail among the ‘useful idiots’ the term ‘Islamophobia’ as a supposedly manifestation of racism and xenophobia. [...] What I do is just mention what the Koran says revealing the personality of the alleged prophet, without adding any judgments of my own. Further to that, the Greek state violates the principle of equality through the establishment and construction with public money of a place of worship of a religious admission that throughout four centuries, raped, slaughtered and murdered our people.”<sup>45</sup>

44. Screenshot by Alexandros Sakellariou, 16 December 2019. The tweet was deleted from his account after other users’ reactions were posted arguing that he was lying.

45. Metropolis of Piraeus, Media Office, 19 July 2019, <https://impenimerosi.gr/index.php/menu-anakoinothen-ta-sevasmiotatou/item/737-fierosis-mitropolitou-peirai-s-serafeim-stoys-rkodotisantas-mousoulmanous-voulef-tas-kathos-kai-stoys-a-tourgoys-t-s-nidryseos-kai-noikodomiseos-to-slamiko-temenous-sto-votaniko>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

Furthermore and with regard to the Koran he argues,

“The Koran, also, can't be considered as a book of culture, because it is a book of hatred, fanaticism, racism, bigotry, female disdain, etc. in which Christ is blasphemed through his downgrade to a simple human of mud and the Holy Triadic God is being disrespected as non-existent.”<sup>46</sup>

The Orthodox Church, as an organization, and the Holy Synod have never expressed such Islamophobic views and opinions especially regarding the Koran and Prophet Muhammad. On the other hand, such discourse has not been condemned by the Church authorities either.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Assessments and Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

The two state policies that could be considered important in confronting Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred in 2019 are the following: First, the programme of the Ministry of Education about the incorporation of refugee children continued to be implemented in 2019 in various regions of Greece despite continued local reactions and obstacles, which were fewer compared to the previous years. Second, in 2019, the preparations (construction work amendments, legislation on the mosque's board and internal regulation, call for applications for the mosque's imam, selection of an imam) for the functioning of the official mosque proceeded, although, in truth, the whole process moves very slowly. On this last issue, while everything was ready and according to the media the mosque was going to officially open either after Easter of 2019 or during the summer, since then, no developments have taken place, probably because of the government change after the elections of July 2019. Apart from the above, it has to be noted that other initiatives targeting the confrontation of Islamophobia have not been recorded. There are, however, civil society organisations like the Helsinki Monitor mentioned previously trying to put pressure on state authorities with regard to Islamophobia through legal activism. At the same time, demonstrations against Islamophobia - although not so regular - have taken place in 2019. (Fig. 9)

---

46. "Metropolis of Piraeus about migrants: Bishops with a 'liberal profile' in big mouth declarations!", *Vima Orthodoxias*, 19 November 2019, <https://www.vimaorthodoxias.gr/mitropoleis/mitropoli-peiraios-gia-metanastes-ierarches-me-filelefthero-profil-se-megalostomes-diakiryxeis/>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

Πακιστανική Κοινότητα Ελλάδος "η Ενότητα"  
 Με την στήριξη της ΚΕΕΡΦΑ  
**Συλλαλητήριο, Πορεία στη Βουλή**  
**Σάββατο 14 Δεκέμβρη, 5μμ,**  
**Πλατεία Κοτζιά, Ομόνοια**  
 Ισλάμ σημαίνει ειρήνη, φιλία, αλληλεγγύη των ανθρώπων.  
 Όχι στην ισλαμοφοβία, όχι στο ρατσισμό.  
 Να τιμωρηθεί ο δράστης της ισλαμοφοβικής ενέργειας



Την Τρίτη 3 Δεκέμβρη 2.30μμ στην οδό Σοφοκλέους, μπροστά σε εκατοντάδες ανθρώπους, μετανάστες και ντόπιους, κάποιο άτομο στάθηκε εκεί και για μισή ώρα πρόσβαλλε βάνουσα τα θρησκευτικά αισθήματα των μουσουλμάνων, προκαλώντας και βρίζοντας με χυδαίο τρόπο το Ισλάμ και τον Προφήτη.

Η περιοχή, με τα πολλά μαγαζά των μεταναστών, είναι μια πολυπολιτισμική γειτονιά στη καρδιά της Αθήνας και θέλουμε να είναι ανοικτή για όλους, όπως είναι τώρα και να ζούμε όλοι ειρηνικά και αρμονικά χωρίς ρατσισμό και μισαλλοδοξία.

Η ισλαμοφοβία είναι ρατσισμός. Όλοι έχουμε ίσα δικαιώματα, όλοι πρέπει να σεβόμαστε τις διαφορετικές θρησκείες. Η Αστυνομία συνέλαβε το άτομο και μάρτυρες κατέθεσαν για το τι συνέβη και η ξεκίνησε ανάκριση.

Ζητάμε να τιμωρηθεί ο δράστης της ισλαμοφοβικής ενέργειας

Επικοινωνία: Τζέβεντ Ασλάμ, πρόεδρος Πακιστανικής Κοινότητας Ελλάδος "η Ενότητα", 694300360

**Figure 9:** Demonstration against Islamophobia in Athens. "Demonstration and walk to the Parliament, 14 December 2019, Kotzia Sq., Omonia. Islam means peace, friendship and solidarity among the people. No to Islamophobia, no to racism."<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

All the available data with regard to Islamophobia in Greece for 2019 indicate that significant changes have not taken place compared to the previous year. Islamophobia is primarily manifested in the public discourse, certain groups of Greek citizens demonstrating against the "Islamisation" of the country, programmes of political parties and politicians mainly of the extreme right, among higher clergy members of the Orthodox Church of Greece, and in different platforms of the Greek media. The Internet and social media are a particularly fertile ground for the reproduction of Islamophobia. However, it is significant to underline that Islamophobia in Greece is found also among self-proclaimed political and/or economic liberals and not only in the extremes. There are, of course, political parties, politicians, and anti-racist groups mainly from the left opposing racist and Islamophobic discourses and discriminatory practices but their impact on the reproduction of Islamophobia in Greece remains very limited. Also, reactions from parents of schoolchildren against the incorpora-

47. "Pakistani Community: The Man Who Disrespected Islam Should Be Punished", Sputnik, 13 December 2019, <https://sputniknews.gr/ellada/201912135581052-pakistaniki-koinotita-na-syllifthei-o-andras-evrize-to-islam-poreia-sti-vouli-to-apogeuma/>, (Access date: 26 February 2020).

tion of immigrant children in Greek schools continued. However, these were smaller in number when compared to those in former years.

Among the primary issues that need to be addressed with regard to monitoring and confronting Islamophobia are the following:

- First of all, a need that still hasn't been met in order to confront Islamophobia is the establishment of an official observatory mechanism that will monitor and record Islamophobic incidents on both the levels of discourse and physical attacks. Towards this direction a first step would be the collaboration of existing state mechanisms and civil society networks in order to achieve a better level of Islamophobia monitoring.
- Second, the legal mechanism in Greece is not effectively tackling Islamophobia and the Greek law is not robust enough to discourage Islamophobic actions and more specifically hate speech.
- Third, the Orthodox Church of Greece should not only publicly disapprove of its metropolitans who insist on using Islamophobic discourse, but also effectively discourage any attempt of reproduction of anti-Muslim hatred by its clerics.
- Fourth, even though Islam is an old religion in Greece dating back to the Ottoman times and the 14th century, knowledge about the fundamentals of Islam and Muslims remains highly limited, which provides another space for Islamophobia to flourish and grow inside the Greek society. In this respect, the new school textbooks that the new government has announced should also include information about Islam, which is likely to assist the overall understanding of Islam in Greece in the near future. For the same purpose, training seminars provided particularly for the journalists, teachers, police officers, coastguards, and other civil servants who have contact with Muslims should be implemented.
- Finally, it is significant to remember that Muslims should not be excluded from decision-making mechanisms combating anti-Muslim hatred in Greece. An effective mechanism of dialogue and cooperation should immediately be established. A platform is necessary where views of Muslims will be taken fully into consideration by Greek decision-makers in Greece's fight against Islamophobia.

Overall, after the political change that took place with the July 2019 national elections it seems that the new government although not exactly hostile, seems to be at least indifferent towards Islam and Muslims. This is supported by developments and observations that took place in the first months of the new administration. Firstly, there are no progress and information about the opening of the mosque of Athens. Secondly, the school textbooks that the previous government initiated will be changed after the decision of the Council of State that found

them unconstitutional. Finally, there are many MPs and party members expressing openly anti-migrant and anti-Muslim views and opinions. As a consequence, the initiatives of civil society, academia, and media organisations in terms of the implementation of relevant projects could actually play a more crucial role in the study and confrontation of Islamophobia, while the government does not appear to be fully determined to act towards this direction.

## Chronology

- **05.03.2019:** Xenophobic parents' announcement about refugee children in Samos.
- **08.03.2019:** Parents in Grevena react against refugee children in school.
- **19.05.2019:** Attack against the Sünne Mahalle Mosque in central Xanthi with anti-Turkish slogans.
- **28.05.2019:** Vandalism against the Muslim cemetery in the city of Alexandroupolis.
- **12.10.2019:** Letter of the president of the Youth Branch of New Democracy party in Panteli, a municipality near Athens, to the minister of citizen protection against the transfer of young Muslims to the regional hospital.
- **06.11.2019:** Attack against refugee school student in Thessaloniki.
- **10.11.2019:** Barbecue and alcohol demonstration against migrants in Thessaloniki.
- **11.11.2019:** School student demonstration against the Islamisation of Greece in Katerini.
- **24.11.2019:** Demonstration "Against Islamisation and Illegal Immigration" in central Alexandroupolis.
- **14.12.2019:** Demonstration against Islamophobia in Athens.
- **19.12.2019:** Official public complaint made from migrant and refugee women in the Foreigners' Administration of Attica on Petrou Rali Avenue publicised by an NGO in the first days of 2020 mentioning Islamophobic incidents.



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**HUNGARY**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

NADIA JONES-GAILANI, GABI GÖBL



## The Authors

**Nadia Jones-Gailani** is assistant professor of gender studies at the Central European University. She received her doctorate degree in 2013 from the University of Toronto in Gender and Women's History. Her monograph *Transnational Identity and Memory Making in the Lives of Iraqi Women in Diaspora* is forthcoming in 2020 in the Gender and History Series of the University of Toronto Press. Email: jonesn@ceu.edu

**Gabi Göbl** received her MA degree in sociology from Eötvös Lóránd University (ELTE), Budapest. She has worked in various non-governmental organizations in Hungary as a project manager before joining the Center for European Neighborhood Studies at the Central European University as program coordinator in October 2013. Since 2015, she has been involved in various international research projects, including the EU's Erasmus+ Jean Monnet program and the Austrian Future Fund, researching the so-called migration and refugee crisis with a specific focus on the Hungarian aspect. Email: goblg@ceu.edu

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Nadia Jones-Gailani, Gabi Göbl: *Islamophobia in Hungary: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

Anti-migration narratives have continued to define the Hungarian political discourse which is dominated by the nationalist aims of the current Hungarian governing party, FIDESZ. The government-friendly media depicts refugees and migrants as a threat to the national identity and security of the country and its people, underscoring the historical Christian identity of the nation. The Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, positions himself as the savior of Christianity and the Hungarian nation, by adopting and promoting a xenophobic stance against those viewed as the “invaders” of Europe. Despite registering 177,135 asylum seekers in 2015, less than a few thousand of these remained in the country, lending further suspicion to the state’s manipulation of “migrants” and “Muslims” as the focus of their efforts to protect the nation.

The anti-migration campaign and securitization has been gradually extended from the constructed image of the “migrant other” to other enemies of the Hungarian illiberal state. The focus of the state’s campaign has been towards internal actors such as civil society, the independent media, the independent judiciary system, academic and cultural institutions, and the Hungarian political opposition parties. Vulnerable groups have increasingly become targets of the hate-mongering and dehumanizing attitude of the government party. Examples include attacks in the state-dominated media against the homeless, members of LGBTQI groups, and, most recently, Hungary’s Roma population. Such attacks create further tension and are eroding solidarity amongst the opposition in Hungarian society.

Although figures on hate crime in Hungary are reported and collected, the Hungarian Working Group Against Hate Crimes (GYEM), a team of advocacy group experts, is raising awareness of the fact that the Hungarian police is still not taking hate crimes seriously, even though a new protocol has been established to identify and register such acts.

## Összefoglaló

Az elmúlt évek politikai diskurzusát, a 2015-ös „menekültválság” óta, a kormányzó párt, a FIDESZ folyamatos bevándorlásellenes kampánya, idegenellenes, gyűlöletkeltő narratívája határozza meg. A kormánypárti média a menekülteket és bevándorlókat a nemzeti identitást, Magyarország biztonságát, keresztény kultúráját fenyegető veszélyként jeleníti meg. A magyar miniszterelnök, Orbán Viktor, magát a kereszténység és a magyar nemzet megmentőjeként pozicionálja, idegengyűlölő álláspontot képvisel és népszerűsít az Európa „betolakodóinak” bélyegzett menekülőkkel és bevándorlókkal szemben. Annak ellenére, hogy 2015-ben 177.135 menedékkérőt regisztráltak, csupán néhány ezren maradtak az országban, alacsony számuk nem indokolja a nemzet védelmére irányuló hatalmas és költséges kormányzati erőfeszítéseket, a „*bevándorlók*” és „*muszlimok*” elleni folyamatos harcot.

A FIDESZ kommunikációs kampánya megeremtette a „bevándorló idegen” fenyegető képét és kijelölte a magyar illiberális állam belső ellenségeit is. A kormányzati harc fokozatosan terjedt ki a civil társadalomra, a független médiára, a független igazságszolgáltatási rendszerre, az akadémiai és kulturális intézményekre, valamint az ellenzéki pártokra is. A dehumanizáló, gyűlöletkeltő narratíva más sérülékeny csoportokat is ellenségnek tekint. A kormánybarát média a hajléktalanokat, az LGBTQI csoportok tagjait és legutóbb, a magyar roma lakosságot vette célba.

Az effajta hadviselés fokozza a társadalmi feszültségeket és tovább rombolja a szolidaritást.

A kampány eredményeként megnövekedett számú gyűlölet-bűncselekményekről alig vannak hivatalos statisztikai adatok. A Gyűlölet-bűncselekmények Elleni Munkacsoport (GYEM) tagjai, magyarországi civil szervezetek szakértői, felhívják a figyelmet arra, hogy a rendőrség továbbra sem veszi komolyan a gyűlölet-bűncselekményeket, holott a nemrég elfogadott új protokoll lehetőséget adna ezen cselekmények azonosítására és az ellenük való hatékonyabb fellépésre.

Jelen riport a bevándorlásellenes, iszlamofób magyar politikai diskurzust, az arra épülő választási kampányok fő motívumait, illetve a médiában továbbra is jelen lévő, gyűlöletkeltő propagandát és annak következményeit foglalja össze. A beszámolóban civil szervezetek képviselőivel és a magyarországi muszlim közösségek tagjaival készült interjúkat is felhasználtunk.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Hungary

**Type of Regime:** Democratic Republic

**Form of Government:** Parliamentary representative democracy

**Ruling Parties:** FIDESZ (FIDESZ – Hungarian Civic Alliance) (governs in coalition with the micro-party KDNP [Christian Democratic People's Party])

**Opposition Parties:** Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik), Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), Democratic Coalition (DK), Politics Can Be Different (LMP), Dialogue for Hungary (PM)

**Last Elections (2018):** 8 April 2018: FIDESZ-KDNP (49.27%); Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary (19.06%); Socialists Party (MSZP-PÁRBESZÉD) (11.91%); Politics Can Be Different (LMP) (7.06%); Democratic Coalition (DK) (5.38%).

**Total Population:** 9,778,371

**Major Languages:** Hungarian

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** N/A

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** N/A

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Catholics (39%), Other Christianity (15%), Judaism (0.1%), Islam (0.1%), Unaffiliated (18.2%) (Central Statistical Office 2011 census)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 5,579 or 0.4% of the population (Central Statistical Office 2011 census)

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Organization of Muslims in Hungary (*Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza*), Hungarian Islamic Community (*Magyar Iszlám Közösség*)

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** The Hungarian Islam Advocacy Association, Menedék Association for Migrants, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Amnesty International Hungary

**Far-Right Parties:** FIDESZ (FIDESZ – Hungarian Civic Alliance), Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary (*Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom*), Our Homeland Movement (*Mi Hazánk Mozgalom*)

**Far-Right Movements:** The Army of Outlaws (*Betyársereg*), Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (*Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom*), Hungarian Self-Defense Movement (*Magyar Önvédelmi Mozgalom*), Generation Identity (*Identitás Generáció*), Force and Determination (*Erő és Elszántság*), Hungarian Legion (*Légió Hungária*)

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

The community of Muslims in Hungary is both small and illusive, and the prevailing Islamophobic and xenophobic rhetoric is at odds with the number of migrants and Muslims who reside in the country.<sup>1</sup> The 2011 census data indicates that there were 5,579 persons who identified as Muslim, and of these the majority followed Sunni Islam. Muslims comprise approximately 0.4% of Hungary's population as of 2017.<sup>2</sup> Institutions that support Muslims are small in number with a few mosques in the capital of Budapest. Before their status was officially revoked by the government in 2012, the Islamic Church (IE – *Islám Egyház*) was the largest Muslim organization in Hungary. Now the two prominent organizations that cater to the Muslim population in Hungary are the Hungarian Islamic Community (MIK – *Magyar Islám Közösség*) and the Organization of Muslims in Hungary (MME – *Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza*).<sup>3</sup> Of these, the latter largely represents foreign-born Muslims, while the former is mainly dominated by Hungarian-born converts and is better represented in the media. At the federal level, the leading representative organization is the Islamic Council of Hungary (MIT – *Magyarországi Islám Tanács*), which is an umbrella organization jointly created by the MIK and the MME in 2011, and recognized as one of the country's thirty-two churches by parliament in 2012.<sup>4</sup>

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Islamophobia is part of a broader and growing xenophobic attitude towards non-Hungarians fueled by the state media channels. General knowledge of the religion of Islam is largely superficial. Islamophobia as a discursive element in Hungarian political discourse draws upon an embedded anti-Semitic and anti-Roma attitude in the population, with a growing focus on the figure of the *migrant*.<sup>5</sup> The illegaliza-

1. Dorothy Manevich, "Hungarians share Europe's embrace of democratic principles but are less tolerant of refugees, minorities", Pew Research Center, 30 September 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/30/hungarians-share-europes-embrace-of-democratic-principles-but-are-less-tolerant-of-refugees-minorities/>, (Access date: 4 January 2020).

2. "Muslim Population Growth in Europe," Pew Research Center, 29 November 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/>, (Access date: 4 January 2020).

3. "Általános kérdések", *iszlám.com*, <http://iszlám.com/kerdes-valasz/altalanos-kerdesek/item/2093-magyarorszag-on-hany-fore-teheto-az-islam-hivokszama-es-a-tobbseg-siita-vagy-szunnita>, (Access date: 1 December 2018).

4. "Nyilvános a lista az elismert egyházakról", *hvg.hu*, 23 April 2012, [http://hvg.hu/itthon/20120423\\_elismert\\_egyhazak/](http://hvg.hu/itthon/20120423_elismert_egyhazak/), (Access date: 8 January 2019); Zsolt Sereghy, "Islamophobia in Hungary: National Report 2016", *European Islamophobia Report 2016*, eds. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2017), <http://www.islamophobia-europe.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/HUNGARY.pdf>, (Access date: 9 January 2020).

5. Ayse Ceyhan and Anastasia Tsoukala, "The Securitization of Migration in Western Societies: Ambivalent Discourses and Policies," *Alternatives*, 27 (2002), pp. 21-39.

tion of providing information or resources to migrants has driven organizations such as Mígszol Migrant Solidarity Group of Hungary underground.<sup>6</sup>

Islamophobia is linked to the anti-migration narrative of the government, and is generally framed within the context of the securitization of migration and the protection of Hungarian citizens. A place of Muslim worship in the city of Pécs, was announced to be closed without notification, supposedly due to renovation. The motivations behind and the conditions of the closure were not made clear by the institution operating the location<sup>7</sup>. The Muslim community of approximately 60-120 members who visited the place of worship weekly were not contacted. Community members revealed that the shutdown may have targeted the Muslim community, since they also received an on-site visit by the Hungarian Counter Terrorism Centre (TEK).<sup>8</sup>

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

In interviews we were able to conduct with Muslims living in Budapest, it was evident that community members continue to suffer from verbal attacks in the case of women and girls (especially those who are veiled). Participant responses demonstrate that there are a number of different kinds of assaults that regularly take place, including physical incidents and the more common acts of spitting, slapping, and shoving of individuals in public spaces. It remains unclear the extent to which these are being recorded and taken seriously by the police forces.<sup>9</sup>

In a report generated by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, officials noted that official statistics were lacking in a wide number of areas, and concluded “The Committee regrets the lack of information on the work of the Office of the Commissioner to prevent racial discrimination and xenophobia against vulnerable ethnic minorities including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The Committee also takes note of the establishment of the Deputy Commissioner responsible for the work for future generations.”<sup>10</sup>

A Muslim community member claims that Islamophobia appears to be slightly less intense compared to the heights of the previous year (2018) with the parliamen-

6. Mígszol Migrant Solidarity Group of Hungary, “Desperate Times Call for New Measures,” *mígszol.com*, 24 April 2018, <http://www.mígszol.com/blog/>, (Access date: 8 January 2019).

7. Babos Attila, “Nagyon gyanús körülmények közt zárta be hirtelen a fenntartó a pécsi kis dzsámit”, *Szabad Pécs*, 2 March, 2019, <https://szabadpecs.hu/2019/03/nagyon-gyanus-korulmenyek-kozt-zarta-be-hirtelen-a-fenntarto-a-pecsi-kis-dzsamit/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

8. Anonymous interview conducted by Gabi Göbl, 6 February 2020.

9. Joanna Perry, Tamás Dombas and Andrea Kozáry, *Facing All the Facts: Connecting on Hate Crime Data in Hungary*, (2019), <https://www.facingfacts.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/11/Facing-Facts-Country-Report-Hungary-with-Self-Assessment-271119.pdf>, (Access date: 19 January 2019).

10. “Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination”, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/HUN/CERD\\_C\\_HUN\\_CO\\_18-25\\_34867\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/HUN/CERD_C_HUN_CO_18-25_34867_E.pdf), (Access date: 20 January 2020).

tary elections. *“Although, there is a dormant fear that an attack will happen. After the Christchurch attack, we have more security on our premises.”*<sup>11</sup>

Although some NGOs provide platforms where one can report being the victim of a hate crime, such incidents are rarely registered anywhere.

“Muslim people experience discrimination at their workplaces, verbal and sometimes physical attacks. But they lost trust in authorities, either because they had bad experiences earlier or simply, they don’t think they would be taken seriously. Latency of hate crimes remains high.”<sup>12</sup>

The following example illustrates how criminal acts may lack the bias motivation when registered. News articles reported of a violent incident at a summer music festival, where four young men were severely beaten up for being considered “migrants.” Although the victims pressed charges for a hate crime, the police registered the case as an assault.<sup>13</sup>

## Employment

Our interviews with members of Muslim communities<sup>14</sup> revealed that discrimination in the workplace is not common, mainly as a consequence of the fact that employees are not openly practicing or declaring their religion; they seek employment within safer environments; or become self-employed.

A member of one of the Muslim communities reported of a case of discrimination in which an employer requested that the employee change his foreign-sounding name and replace it with an “authentic” Hungarian one. The case was not reported to authorities; the employee rejected the request and quit.<sup>15</sup>

## Education

The new Hungarian National Curriculum was completed and accepted by the government in December 2019, and was published in early 2020. It generated harsh criticism by education experts and professional organizations for being too detailed for a basic education plan. The Association of Teachers of Hungarian Literature and the Association of Teachers of History expressed concerns not only regarding the ideological bias implicit in the teaching material, but also for neglecting the needs and capabilities of children. The curriculum overloads students with data and strongly concentrates on nationalist narratives. Mandatory readings include a long list of far-right writers and

---

11. Anonymous interviews conducted by Gabi Göbl, 6 February and 16 February 2020.

12. Interview with Balázs Bakó, president of the Hungarian Islam Advocacy Association, conducted by Gabi Göbl, 14 January 2020.

13. Krisztián Kolontár, “Köcsög külföldinek neveztek és összeverték négy fiatal a Balaton Soundon”, 24.hu, 19 July 2019, <https://24.hu/belfold/2019/07/19/kocsog-kulfoldinek-neveztek-es-osszeverték-negy-fiatalt-a-balaton-soundon/>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

14. Anonymous interview conducted by Gabi Göbl, 6 February 2020.

15. Anonymous interview conducted by Gabi Göbl, 16 January 2020.

revisionist ideologies, clearly assuring that indoctrination starts at a very early stage.<sup>16</sup> Changes demonstrate that the curriculum will be even more inward looking than the previous versions, and although mandatory religious studies are part of the primary school education, comprehensive insight on the religion of Islam is absent.

## Politics

Since its landslide victory in the 2018 Parliamentary elections, FIDESZ has sustained a political focus on migration issues, and has continued to frame Brussels as the site of corrupt EU elites, in addition to the ongoing campaign targeting Hungarian-born philanthropist George Soros. Conspiracy theories, including the so-called Soros Plan,<sup>17</sup> continue to be popular in the national and local media. By mid-February 2019, a new series of anti-migration campaign posters featuring George Soros and Jean-Claude Juncker, then President of the European Commission, appeared. These posters emphasize the narrative of “forced immigration from Brussels.” (Figure 1)

In an unprecedented meeting, PM Victor Orbán was visited by Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi to discuss the issue of migration and the general situation of Muslims within their borders. Aung San Suu Kyi’s trip to Central Europe aimed to strengthen economic ties with the region. Since 2017, Myanmar (formerly Burma) has combated what they consider to be the problem of “Muslim migration” through violent military massacres and abuses of the Rohingya Muslim population. Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director of Human Rights Watch, was quoted as pointing out that “after shamefully helping the Myanmar military cover up their genocide against Rohingya Muslims, now she’s glad-handing and making friends with Europe’s most xenophobic, anti-democratic leader.”<sup>18</sup>

In September, Norbert Hofer, leader of the far-right Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), also visited Hungary. In relation to the event, in his statement, PM Orbán encouraged Austria to continue rejecting political Islam and to help Hungary in its fight to defend Europe from migrants.<sup>19</sup>

The European media continues to report about PM Orbán’s openly hostile and critical stance towards members of the European People’s Party (EPP). He has gone so far as to call members “useful idiots” openly in an interview with German newspaper

16. “The Orbán Regime Begins Educating Its Children in Earnest”, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 3 February 2020, <https://hungarianspectrum.org/2020/02/03/the-orban-regime-begins-educating-its-children-in-earnest/>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

17. Vit Novotny, “The ‘Soros Plan’: What to Keep and What to Scrap”, 28 November 2017, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/140053>, (Access date: 4 February 2020).

18. Hannah Ellis-Petersen, “Aung San Suu Kyi Finds Common Ground with Orbán over Islam”, *The Guardian*, 6 June 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/06/aung-san-suu-kyi-finds-common-ground-with-viktor-orban-over-islam>, (Access date: 2 March 2020).

19. Márk Herczeg, “Orbán reméli, hogy az új osztrák kormány nemet mond a politikai iszlámra”, *444.hu*, 10 September 2019, <https://444.hu/2019/09/10/orban-remeli-hogy-az-uj-osztrak-kormany-nemet-mond-a-politikai-islamra>, (Access date: 2 March 2020).

*Welt am Sonntag*.<sup>20</sup> In reaction, EPP Party President Joseph Daul commented in an interview with the newspaper *Die Welt* that “the European People’s Party is a big family, which can have its differences. But there is a limit and Viktor Orbán overstepped the red line.”<sup>21</sup> Several parties, including Nordic-Benelux, subsequently called for FIDESZ to be expelled and in an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Manfred Weber (then lead candidate of the EPP) demanded an apology from Hungary’s prime minister.<sup>22</sup> Zoltán Kovács, spokesman for the Hungarian government, reiterated on Twitter the importance that Hungary remain a sovereign Christian nation, as well as the fact that “[t]he Hungarian people have decided...we must halt migration. Hungarians have a right to know what kind of pro-migration plans are under preparation by the Brussels bureaucracy.”<sup>23</sup>

Despite Orbán’s rejection of criticism towards his anti-Juncker campaign, on 20 March 2019, FIDESZ was suspended from EPP membership, which according to FIDESZ members happened by their own request. The action by the EPP was on account of Hungary’s infringement on academic freedom, the rule of law, and general norms of democracy within the country. This move by the EPP means that FIDESZ is excluded from the decision-making processes and no longer can vote as part of the party, though FIDESZ MEPs continue to participate as usual in the European Parliament.<sup>24</sup>

The Hungarian government party continues to move towards the right and its political rhetoric is increasingly in line with extremist views both within the European and broader Western context. For a number of years, there has been an alliance developing between right-wing nationalist groups, which after the 2019 European parliamentary elections rebranded under the umbrella of Identity and Democracy (ID). This group includes the French National Rally (RN), Alternative for Germany, *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (Freedom Party of Austria), and *Legia per Salvini Premier* (LSP), who initially invited FIDESZ to join their ranks after the European parliamentary elections in 2019. FIDESZ declined the invitation, and while for now it remains a part of the EPP, it continues to maintain relations with the parties of ID as well as those of the ECR (Jarosław Kaczyński’s group).<sup>25</sup>

20. Matthew Karnitschnig, “Viktor Orbán Calls EPP Critics ‘Useful Idiots’”, Politico, 2 March 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-calls-epp-critics-useful-idiots/>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

21. Emma Anderson, “EPP President Daul Says Orbán Crossed ‘Red Line’”, Politico, 4 March 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/epp-to-debate-expelling-fidesz-on-march-20/>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

22. Peter Muller and Melanie Amann, “Ich erwarte, dass sich Orbán entschuldigt”, Spiegel Politik, 1 March 2019, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/manfred-weber-ich-erwarte-dass-sich-orban-entschuldigt-a-00000000-0002-0001-0000-000162664679>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

23. Zoltán Kovács, Twitter, 2 March 2019, <https://twitter.com/zoltanspox/status/1101829749721235456>, (Access date: 3 January 2020).

24. Keno Verseck, “Viktor Orbán’s FIDESZ Could Need New Allies after EU Vote”, DW, 1 May 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/viktor-orban-fidesz-could-need-new-allies-after-eu-vote/a-48565920>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

25. Alexandra Brzozowski, “Fidesz-PiS talks point towards potential exit from EPP”, Euractiv, 8 January 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/fidesz-pis-talks-point-towards-potential-exit-from-epp/>, (Access date: 11 February 2020).



**Figure 1:** “You have a right to know what Brussels plans” (FIDESZ’s Hungarian EP election campaign billboard, February 2019).<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 2:** “Let’s support PM Orban’s program - let’s stop migration!” (FIDESZ’s Hungarian EP election campaign billboard, April 2019).<sup>27</sup>

Municipal elections were held in Hungary in October 2019. FIDESZ’s campaign was dominated by the well-established war narrative, largely building upon the governing party’s usual accusations of opposition members that they support mass migration into Hungary and of general incompetence.<sup>28</sup> The campaign featured posters and social media ads referring to the constant threat of migration, depicting the governing party as the national savior.<sup>29</sup> The opposition won a decisive victory over FIDESZ in key municipalities, including in Budapest.<sup>30</sup>

26. Balázs Márton, “Mire készül Brüsszel? Csúsztatásokkal van teli a kormány tájékoztatása”, Index, 10 March 2019, [https://index.hu/kulfold/eurologus/2019/03/10/kormany\\_europai\\_bizottsag\\_migranoszas\\_brusszelezes\\_valasz/](https://index.hu/kulfold/eurologus/2019/03/10/kormany_europai_bizottsag_migranoszas_brusszelezes_valasz/), (Access date: 19 April 2020).

27. Judit Windisch, “A számára legkínosabb társaságba kerülhetett az MSZP”, HVG, 12 April 2019, [https://hvg.hu/itthon/20190412\\_Plakatusy\\_a\\_legkinosabb\\_tarsasagba\\_kerulhetett\\_az\\_MSZP](https://hvg.hu/itthon/20190412_Plakatusy_a_legkinosabb_tarsasagba_kerulhetett_az_MSZP), (Access date: 19 April 2020).

28. “The Hungarian government’s disinformation campaign during the 2019 municipal elections”, Political Capital, 5 November 2019, [https://www.politicalcapital.hu/library.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=2467](https://www.politicalcapital.hu/library.php?article_read=1&article_id=2467), (Access date: 19 April 2020).

29. Márk Herczeg, “Városainkat és falvainakt ma kell megvédenünk”, 444.hu, 13 October 2019, <https://444.hu/2019/10/13/fidesz-varosainkat-es-falvainakt-ma-kell-megvedenunk>, (Access date: 19 April 2020).

30. Lili Bayer, “Orbán suffers defeat as opposition wins Budapest mayoral race”, Politico, 13 October, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/orban-suffers-defeat-as-opposition-wins-budapest-mayoral-race/>, (Access date: 19 April 2020).



**Figure 3:** "Our cities and villages need to be defended today! Vote!" (FIDESZ's local elections campaign ad, 13 October 2019).<sup>31</sup>



**Figure 4:** "Hungary will not become a migrant country! Let's support Hungary this Sunday!" (FIDESZ's local elections campaign ad, 9 October 2019).<sup>32</sup>

The Hungarian political landscape offers alternatives on the right, although FIDESZ has repeatedly managed to hijack parts of their agenda. Topics and narratives of the Hungarian far-right political parties' narrative are similar to those of the governing party: building largely on nationalism, the securitization of migration,

31. Fidesz, Facebook, 13 October 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/FideszHU/photos/a.10150098801139307/10158845083709307/?type=3&theater>, (Access date: 19 April 2020).

32. Fidesz, Facebook, 9 October 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/FideszHU/photos/a.10150098801139307/10158830485949307/?type=3&theater>, (Access date: 19 April 2020).

the war of civilizations, and anti-liberalism and anti-establishment sentiments. Their support is low, as FIDESZ has been quite successful in formulating radical narratives and including them in its policies. Additionally, opportunities for opposition parties to get their messages to a wider audience are quite limited due to their lack of access to the state-owned or -influenced media outlets. After the far-right party Jobbik lost popularity significantly in the 2018 elections, a new party, Our Homeland Movement was formed by the party's previously more radical members.<sup>33</sup>

## Media

There is a tendency in the state-dominated media to portray Islam and Muslims as part of a growing “terrorism” linked to migrants and/or immigration. The depiction by FIDESZ of Muslim refugees and migrants in particular as part of the “invasion of Europe” has been continual from 2015 to the present day. Prime Minister Victor Orbán continues to draw upon the fictive notion of “Hungary for the Hungarians,” going so far as to outline truly Hungarian, namely “someone whose grandchildren will be Hungarian as well.”<sup>34</sup> Excluding the possibility of Muslims – especially those who are also designated as migrants – to belong to the nation of “Hungarians,” PM Orbán explained, “We love our culture, which maintains and protects our freedom, we believe in strong families, consider our traditions and history unique, celebrate our heroes and love our homeland above all.”<sup>35</sup> Dominating the state-run media are conglomerates that spread anti-migrant and Islamophobic sentiment: Origo, the re-branded *Magyar Nemzet* (formerly known as *Magyar Idők*)<sup>36</sup>, Hír Tv, Echo Tv, and 888.hu. These media outlets typically depict Muslims as having a hand in terror-related incidents, using their scope and authority to fuel a fake news campaign that draws attention to the securitization of the country.

There are cases reported by the Hungarian Islamic Community where Hungarian-language content in films and interviews abuses the image of the Prophet and “contains lies about Islam and some Islamic countries.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Sándor Németh, who is quoted in the HIC’s newsletter, has proved to be a staunch supporter of the state’s policies that limit Muslim migrants and protect the “native” people of

33. Péter Krekó, Bulcsú Hunyadi, and Patrik Szicherle, “Anti-Muslim populism in Hungary: From the margins to the mainstream”, The Brookings Institution, 24 July 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/anti-muslim-populism-in-hungary-from-the-margins-to-the-mainstream/>, (Access date: 22 February 2020).

34. Péter Krekó, Bulcsú Hunyadi and Patrik Szicherle, “Anti-Muslim populism in Hungary: From the margins to the mainstream”, The Brookings Institution, 24 July 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/anti-muslim-populism-in-hungary-from-the-margins-to-the-mainstream/>, (Access date: 22 February 2020).

35. Ibid.

36. Steve Anthony, “Government recaptures Magyar Nemzet brand”, Budapest Business Journal, 6 February 2019, [https://bbj.hu/politics/government-recaptures-magyar-nemzet-brand\\_161127](https://bbj.hu/politics/government-recaptures-magyar-nemzet-brand_161127), (Access date: 30 April 2019).

37. “Islamophobia Report 2012 – Hungary”, Hungarian Islamic Community, 30 December 2019, <http://magyarislam.hu/mikangol/news.php>, (Access date: 12 April 2020).

Hungary.<sup>38</sup> As leader of the far-right Evangelical Christian network, *Hit Gyülekezete*, Németh takes as his mission the protection of Christian Europe and, in particular, the preservation of Hungarian values.

**ORIGO** ITTHON NAGYVILÁG GAZDASÁG SPORT TÉVÉ FILM

## Magyarországi muszlim áljogvédők a jobboldaliakat terrorizálják

**ITTHON** 2019.04.30, 15:37

A magyarországi muszlimok integrációjáért lobbizik a Magyar Iszlám Jogvédők Egyesülete (MIJE), amit nem meglepő módon a migrációs válság csúcán, 2016-ban alapítottak. A létrehozásuk időpontja sem véletlen, a csoport, mint több más NGO, a szervezett bevándorlás (bevándoroltatás) támogatására alakult meg, együttműködésben a Soros György által is finanszírozott Helsinki Bizottsággal és a TASZ-szal. Az egyesület feleskudott a magyarországi muszlimok jogainak védelmére, és ami még fontosabb, a migráció melletti lobbizásra. Ennek egyébként kiválóan eleget is tesznek: Facebook-oldalukon rendszeresen lázítják követői közösségüket a kormányypárti ...

CÍMKÉK: Soros György · iszlám · migráció · jogvédelem · migráns · fake news · Társaság a Szabadságjogokért · Helsinki Bizottság · Magyar Iszlám Jogvédők Egyesülete · Címkefelhő >

**Figure 5:** The headline of pro-government news portal, Origo, follows the governmental propaganda pattern, featuring a conspiracy theory about the Hungarian Islam Advocacy Association (MIJE) teaming up with human rights organizations Helsinki Committee and the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union - which the article refers to as the Hungarian lawyers of George Soros - to settle migrants in Hungary.<sup>39</sup>

In another case, the headline of *Magyar Nemzet* quotes Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén saying, “Hungary will not let churches turn into shopping malls and mosques.” The statement was one of many expressed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Christian Persecution, held in November, implying that Islam poses a clear and present danger to Christianity in Hungary and, furthermore, globally.<sup>40</sup> There are a number of other examples of media outlets that have orchestrated the government’s Islamophobic stance, such as when Pesti srácok interviewed Miklós Maróth, the new president of the Eötvös Loránd Research Network (ELKH) that was formed after the Hungarian Academy of Sciences lost its battle over its network of research institutions to the government. In the interview, Maróth states that Islam is violent and amoral.<sup>41</sup> This was not the first time Maróth made Islamophobic statements.

38. Sándor Németh, “The European Union and Hungary”, Hit.hu, 22 September 2018, <https://www.hit.hu/hirek/european-union-and-hungary>, (Access date: 30 April 2019).

39. Origo, “Magyarországi muszlim áljogvédők a jobboldaliakat terrorizálják”, Origo, 30 April 2019, <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20190430-magyarorszag-i-muszlim-aljogvedok-a-jobboldali-velemenymalokt-vegjaljak.html>, (Access date: 1 March 2020).

40. “Semjén Zsolt: Magyarországon nem lesz egyetlen templomból sem bevásárlóközpont, sem mecset”, Magyar Nemzet, 26 November 2019, <https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold/semjen-zsolt-magyarorszag-on-nem-lesz-egyetlen-templombol-sem-bevasarlokozpont-sem-mecset-7533299/>, (Access date: 16 January 2020).

41. Kata Jurák, “Maróth Miklós professzor: A multikulti hatása alatt álló fiatalok álomvilágban élnek és nagyon hiszékenyek”, Pesti srácok, 28 December 2019, <https://pestisracok.hu/maroth-miklos-profeszor-a-multikulti-hatasa-alatt-allo-fiatalok-alomvilagban-elnek-es-nagyon-hiszekenyek-ps-interju>, (Access date: 15 January 2020).

Among others, earlier he had suggested that “Muslim refugees and migrants ‘should be wrapped in pork skin’ if they do not accept European norms.”<sup>42</sup>

### Justice System

Official data and figures on crime in Hungary are reported and collected in the Unified System of Criminal Statistics of the Investigative Authorities and of Public Prosecution. The majority of Islamophobic, xenophobic, racially-motivated attacks either remain unreported or uninvestigated as hate crimes. The Hungarian Working Group Against Hate Crimes (GYEM), a team of advocacy group experts, raises awareness of the fact that the Hungarian police is still not taking hate crimes seriously, although the National Chief of Police adopted a new protocol mandatory to all police forces that came into effect in July 2019 to identify and tackle such incidents by using bias indicators when a criminal act is registered.<sup>43</sup> András László Pap, expert member of GYEM adds that amidst the dramatically shrinking space for cooperation between NGOs, expert organizations and public authorities, the collaboration between GYEM and the police is a constructive example, and an important stage towards the recognition and adequate state response to hate crime<sup>44</sup>.

The Fundamental Law of Hungary (formerly the Hungarian Constitution) was amended in 2018 to include provisions that support the government’s anti-Muslim narrative and restrict “foreign populations” from attempting to settle in Hungary.<sup>45</sup> The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination noted that Hungary’s progress in strengthening its legal framework against racial discrimination since 2002 - such as through the Fundamental Law of Hungary, the Equal Treatment Act, and specific provisions of the Labor Code that promote equal treatment - provide inadequate legal provisions for prohibiting discrimination, as specified in Article 1 of the Geneva Convention. In its Final Report, the committee consistently highlighted the lack of full and consistent implementation of legal provisions for prohibiting racial discrimination in courts and relevant complaint mechanisms.<sup>46</sup> Following the series of laws that FIDESZ passed to establish its security framework and prevent

42. Christopher Adam, “Hungarian Islamophobia and the Anti-Migrant Referendum: A Review of an Essay by Zoltan Pall and Omar Sayfo”, Hungarian Free Press, 18 September 2016, <https://hungarianfreepress.com/2016/09/18/hungarian-islamophobia-and-the-anti-migrant-referendum-a-review-of-an-essay-by-zoltan-pall-and-omar-sayfo/>, (Access date: 16 February 2020).

43. Joanna Perry, Tamás Dombas and Andrea Kozáry, *Facing All the Facts, Connecting on Hate Crime Data in Hungary*, (2019), <https://www.facingfacts.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/11/Facing-Facts-Country-Report-Hungary-with-Self-Assessment-271119.pdf>, (Access date: 31 January 2019).

44. Phone interview with András László Pap, expert member of the Hungarian Working Group against Hate Crimes (GYEM), conducted by Gabi Göbl, 20 March 2020.

45. György Folk, “Rule of Law in Hungary: MEPs Call on Council to Act”, Liberties, 31 January 2019, <https://www.liberties.eu/en/news/rule-of-law-ep-debate-hungary-jan-2019/16931>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

46. “Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination”, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/HUN/CERD\\_C\\_HUN\\_CO\\_18-25\\_34867\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/HUN/CERD_C_HUN_CO_18-25_34867_E.pdf), (Access date: 20 January 2020).

any migrants seeking asylum at the border from entering, refugees in Hungary remain a very small number and continue to be difficult to calculate on account of the government's refusal to release official statistics to the UN and EU reporting bodies. In addition, a tax law remains in place that limits so-called propaganda activity that relates in any positive way to immigration through network building, grassroots support, or educational activities. Organizations or groups deemed to be assisting migrants suffer an additional 25% income tax penalty. The law is designed to target in particular NGOs, educational institutions, journalists, individuals, and potentially anyone who dares to disagree with the government on migration.<sup>47</sup>

## Internet

Following the widespread and mainstream Islamophobic, anti-migrant, racist, and xenophobic narratives of the government itself and related media outlets, similar narratives are strongly present online. Groups such as Generation Identity (GI) have been closely aligned with Hungarian political rhetoric through transnational networks online that spread Islamophobic ideas. GI is a European far-right activist network with the professed intention of preventing Muslim migration. In the European case, GI openly promotes the belief that Muslims are being brought into Europe illegally by liberal politicians to “replace” Europeans in Western countries (referred to within the group as the “Great Replacement”). The Hungarian branch of GI is called “Generation Identity” and it is active on social media and more recently in the popular media. Generation Identity's leader, Martin Sellner (a self-professed neo-Nazi) received funds directly from Brenton Harrison Tarrant, the terrorist behind the New Zealand Christchurch attack. When interviewed, Sellner attempted to justify Tarrant's donation with the following: “He gave me a generous donation and I thanked him, that's all.”<sup>48</sup> The sinister ties between their ideologies reveals a further frightening connection, since GI's “Great Replacement” doctrine was also the title of the manifesto that Tarrant released via social media on the morning of the Christchurch massacre.<sup>49</sup> Claiming they are “brothers in arms” with Martin Sellner and the GI network, the Hungarian chapter's president and leader Ábel Bódi has openly criticized FIDESZ's migration policy, claiming the state should be harsher and more consistent: “If they say Hungary is a migrant-free zone, then it should be one. But in the meantime, 4-5 mosques or houses of worship have been established, including

---

47. “The Police and the Ministry of Interior Are ‘Fully Prepared’ for the Implementation of the ‘Stop Soros’ Act”, About Hungary, 5 July 2018, <http://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/the-police-and-the-ministry-of-interior-are-fully-prepared-for-the-implementation-of-the-stop-soros-act/>, (Access date: 30 March 2019).

48. Katrin Bennhold, “Donation from New Zealand Attack Suspect Puts Spotlight on Europe's Far Right”, The New York Times, 27 March 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/27/world/europe/new-zealand-attack-europe-far-right.html>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

49. Katrin Bennhold, “Germany's Far Right Rebrands: Friendlier Face, Same Doctrine”, The New York Times, 27 December 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/27/world/europe/germany-far-right-generation-identity.html>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

Central Europe’s largest mosque in Budapest’s 11<sup>th</sup> district.”<sup>50</sup> After the ban on the use of their logo and the name “Generation Identity” following the Christchurch massacre, Bódi claims that their movements are now mainly concentrated within Budapest and Szeged where they have 15-20 dedicated activists whose targeted actions promote the group on university campuses.<sup>51</sup>



**Figure 6:** Members of the Identitarian movement joined other far-right groups for a march in Vienna in September. Notable are the young women heading the march, and the sea of young and well-dressed followers which is part of an attempt to distance themselves from the “old right” and the imagery of neo-Nazi skinheads<sup>52</sup>.

Even though social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter are trying to shut down accounts which orchestrate fear- and hate-mongering, it is apparent that they are quickly able to rename and rebrand themselves and thus continue their online activities.<sup>53</sup>

Examples of this kind of virulent hate that is being circulated online can be found on the following social media sites, including Facebook: *Dzsihádfgyelő*, *Patrióta*, *Vadhajtások*, *Breitportal*, and *Migrációkutató Intézet*. Other websites include *dzsihadfigyelo.com*, *vadhajtasok.hu* (commonly known as the “wildest right por-

50. “GI Leader Urges Stricter Migration Policies”, The Hungary Journal, 11 April 2019, <https://thehungaryjournal.com/2019/04/11/gi-leader-urges-stricter-migration-policies/>, (Access date: 3 March 2020).

51. Tamás Nótin, “A Fidesz magára hagyta a mi generációnkát – mondja a magyar Identitás Generáció vezetője”, *Alfahír*, 11 April 2019, [https://alfahir.hu/2019/04/11/interju\\_bodi\\_abel\\_identitas\\_generacio\\_identitarianizmus\\_christchurch\\_bevandorlas](https://alfahir.hu/2019/04/11/interju_bodi_abel_identitas_generacio_identitarianizmus_christchurch_bevandorlas), (Access date: 2 March 2020).

52. Katrin Bennhold, “Germany’s Far Right Rebrands: Friendlier Face, Same Doctrine”, *The New York Times*, 27 December 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/27/world/europe/germany-far-right-generation-identity.html>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

53. Oroszi Babett, “Orban’s Media Empire”, *atlatzo.hu*, 29 September 2018, <https://english.atlatzo.hu/2018/09/29/a-case-study-in-hungarian-propaganda-this-is-how-the-pro-government-media-works-if-something-awkward-is-revealed-about-pm-orban/>, (Access date: 18 December 2019).

tal”), generacio.eu, and breitportal.hu -the last two are linked to the group called Generation Identity.<sup>54</sup>

A member of a Muslim community reports on the presence of Islamophobia on online platforms and in the media in general, as follows,

“When I read those hateful comments, below an article on Muslims, I ask myself, would they really do what they say or they hope that someone else will do it, or they may have already done something they say they would?”<sup>55</sup>

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

There are a number of actors spreading Islamophobic views in Hungary including many small networks that cannot be fully documented here. Incze Nikolett, director of the Center for the Study of Political Islam (*Politikai Iszlám Tanulmányok Központja*) is a re-occurring well-known figure spreading Islamophobic discourse. Incze appeared again on public television in December 2019. She was presented as an expert, and claimed that Islam is a strong, violent political ideology. In 2018, renowned researchers publicly distanced themselves from the center.<sup>56</sup>

The pro-government media, including Origo, the rebranded *Magyar Nemzet* (formerly known as *Magyar Idők*), Hír Tv, Echo Tv, and 888.hu, often feature security experts whose task is to underline the governing party’s propaganda on security threats related to migration and Islam. These “experts” lack relevant professional background. Far-right organizations, such as the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (*Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom*), the Army of Outlaws, Generation Identity, or the Hungarian Self-Defense Movement all share similar views on how Islam is culturally (and in other ways) incompatible with Hungarian national identity.<sup>57</sup>

There are a range of sources online that openly promote a targeted hatred of Muslims. *Dzsihádfigyelő* has developed what it claims to be a “jihad watcher,” and frequently cites Geert Wilders and other right-wing politicians who speak out about Muslim migration to Europe. Taking concepts from Islamic history, the site manufactures false claims that migration is part of jihad in Islamic doctrine through a process of forced migration (incorrectly referenced to historic migrations known as

54. “Egyszerűen senkik vagytok”, Political Capital, 15 February 2019, [https://politicalcapital.hu/konyvtar.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=2449](https://politicalcapital.hu/konyvtar.php?article_read=1&article_id=2449), (Access date: 10 January 2020).

55. Anonymous interview conducted by Göbl Gabi, 6 February 2020.

56. Gábor Czene, “Megelégelték az iszlamofóbiát”, Népszava, 2 January 2019, [https://nepszava.hu/3020249\\_megelgelték-az-izlamofobiát](https://nepszava.hu/3020249_megelgelték-az-izlamofobiát), (Access date: 30 January 2020).

57. Péter Krekó, Bulcsú Hunyadi and Patrik Szicherle, “Anti-Muslim populism in Hungary: From the margins to the mainstream”, The Brookings Institution, 24 July 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/anti-muslim-populism-in-hungary-from-the-margins-to-the-mainstream/>, (Access date: 22 February 2020).

the *hijra*).<sup>58</sup> Kuruc.info is another site that incites hatred on the basis of religious and/or perceived racial difference. Targeting in particular Jews and Roma, the site is a hotbed of misinformation and even calls for a “Jewish confrontation.”<sup>59</sup>

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

As the government has a two-third majority in parliament, opposition parties can do little to object to government policies or legislative processes. Although the majority of opposition parties generally criticize the government’s political narratives related to migration and fear-mongering, opinions diverge from one another when it comes to details. The shrinking media landscape does not allow opinions to reach wider audiences, and in most cases national coverage is not translated widely outside of Hungary.

### Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia

There is a very narrow space left to publicly confront Islamophobic, xenophobic, and racist views and stereotypes. Still, there are a number of NGOs and grassroots initiatives continuing their mission to educate the public about the propaganda spread by the government. Activities of such organizations vary from advocacy to reaching out to schools, and public events where these organizations present their cases.<sup>60</sup>

The Hungarian Islam Advocacy Association (*Magyar Iszlám Jogvédő Egyesület*) is the only Muslim rights advocacy organization in Hungary. The group has been active for the past years, since its foundation on 2016, monitoring Islamophobic media appearances, informing the general public on Islamophobia-related incidents, offering legal aid for victims of hate crimes and discrimination, and counteracting anti-Muslims government propaganda. They have recently launched their website, offering a platform to register hate crimes.

The Subjective Values Foundation focuses on promoting inclusion and social cohesion by implementing projects emphasizing cultural diversity. They focus on informal education and address conflicts arising from social inequalities. Their mission includes creating a sustainable society.

The Menedék Association for Migrants continues to hold workshops in local schools that attempt to educate people about strong prejudices towards “Muslim-majority” countries fueled massively by government propaganda.

58. “Hidzsra Európába: „menekültek” gyarmatosítják a kontinenst”, Dzsihadfigyelő, 14 October 2019, <http://www.dzsihadfigyelo.com/category/eurabia/>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

59. “The Hunters and the Hunted: Kuruc.Info’s List of Anti-Hungarians”, Hungarian Spectrum, 24 July 2012, <https://hungarianspectrum.org/2012/07/24/the-hunters-and-the-hunted-kuruc-infos-list-of-anti-hungarians/>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

60. Anita Komuves, “Target or Ally? Hungary Faces the Elections Battle”, vsquare.org, 3 April 2018, <https://vsquare.org/russia-target-or-ally-hungary-faces-the-elections-battle/>, (Access date: 21 December 2018).

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC) is a human rights NGO protecting human dignity through legal and public activities. The organization supports refugees, detainees, and victims of law enforcement violence. Besides holding a series of talks to present information based on cases they are working on, in 2018-19, the HHC launched the project “Right to Faith: Protecting the Right to Freedom of Religion in Hungary” with the support of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Budapest.<sup>61</sup>

Amnesty International Hungary is part of the Amnesty International movement. Its activities include participation in joint international campaigns of the movement’s members and local campaigns focusing on specifically Hungarian human rights violations and matters.

*Szabad Egyetem*, the Open University movement, continues to contribute to bringing together civil society and students who resist the increasingly authoritarian focus of the state towards academic freedom. Since 2017, this grassroots movement has continued to support local human rights organizations working with refugees and Roma populations who are currently under attack by the government.<sup>62</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Since the last report in 2018, disappointingly little has changed in terms of the recommendations by the authors. There continues to be a serious need for independent and open channels of media communication in Hungary that counter the rising anti-migrant and xenophobic attitudes that enable the anti-Roma and Islamophobic discourses to proliferate. There is a desperate need for funding and the protection of NGOs, independent journalists, and newspapers who are helping to try to change the conversation and assist the vulnerable. Oversight and direct action by the European Parliament is sorely lacking; the former could potentially help to curtail the rampant misinformation in the Hungarian media. The departure of the Open Society Foundation to its new location in Berlin, which will soon be followed by the transition of the Central European University (*Közép-európai Egyetem*) to Vienna and the Hungarian government oversight over the entire research network of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences further limits the capacity of democratic public discourse in Hungary.<sup>63</sup>

There is an urgent need to establish stronger pressure from the European Parliament for the protection of non-government affiliated media in order to prevent the development of a one-party system propaganda machine. This is particularly

---

61. “Project Right to Faith: Protecting the Right to Freedom of Religion in Hungary”, The Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2 December 2019, <https://www.helsinki.hu/en/project-right-to-faith/>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

62. Lili Bayer, “Orbán under fire over school segregation comments”, Politico, 10 January 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-under-fire-over-school-segregation-comments/>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

63. “Official: CEU to Leave Budapest”, Hungary Today, 12 March 2018, <https://hungarytoday.hu/official-ceu-to-leave-budapest/>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

important in light of the growing xenophobia and intolerance against minorities and people of colour, as well as the small community of Muslims and migrant individuals. Without significant change in the current developments towards intolerant approaches within the national curriculum, children will fail to learn basic knowledge about other religions and cultures. This is another essential problem that needs to be addressed since education plays a crucial part in tackling misinformation and bias towards vulnerable groups, such as the Hungarian Roma. Furthermore, it is essential that combatting fake news should become an integral part of the education and training of teachers moving forward. And lastly, it is imperative that there be a strengthened cooperation between human rights advocates, NGOs, and expert groups who will work with public offices and authorities to help defend democracy in Hungary.

## Chronology

- **27.02.2019:** The closure of a place of Muslim worship in the city of Pécs was announced without advance notification, allegedly due to renovation.<sup>64</sup>
- **20.03.2019:** The European People's Party suspends the membership of FIDESZ.
- **26.05.2019:** European Parliament elections in Hungary.
- **05.06.2019:** PM Victor Orbán meets Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi to discuss the threat of Islam and migration.
- **05.09.2019:** The government again extends the so-called state of emergency due to mass migration despite the lack of legal grounds.<sup>65</sup>
- **10.09.2019:** PM Orbán's statement that Austria should continue to reject political Islam and help Hungary to defend Europe from migrants after Norbert Hofer's visit.
- **13.10.2019:** Local elections in Hungary.
- **30.12.2019:** Miklós Maróth, a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) and president of the Eötvös Loránd Research Network (ELKH), makes Islamophobic statements in an interview.<sup>66</sup>

64. Babos Attila, "Nagyon gyanús körülmények közt zárta be hirtelen a pécsi kis dzsámít", Szabad Pécs, 2 March 2019, <https://szabadpecs.hu/2019/03/nagyon-gyanus-korulmenyek-kozt-zarta-be-hirtelen-a-fenntarto-a-pecsi-kis-dzsamit/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

65. "Gov't Yet Again Extends 'State of Crisis' Due to Mass Migration", Hungary Today, 6 September 2019, <https://hungarytoday.hu/hungary-extends-state-crisis-emergency-migration/>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

66. Kaka Jurák, "Maróth Miklós professzor: A multikulti hatása alatt álló fiatalok álomvilágban élnek és nagyon hiszékenyek (PS-interjú)", Pesti srácok, 28 December 2019, <https://pestisracok.hu/maroth-miklos-professzor-a-multikulti-hatasa-alatt-allo-fiatalok-alomvilagban-elnek-es-nagyon-hiszekenyek-ps-interju/>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**IRELAND**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

JAMES CARR



## The Author

**James Carr** lectures in the Department of Sociology, University of Limerick, Ireland. In 2016, he published the book *Experiences of Islamophobia: Living with Racism in the Neoliberal Era* (London and New York: Routledge) which focused on anti-Muslim racism in Ireland. Carr has published research with the Immigrant Council of Ireland, supported by the Open Society Foundations, entitled *Islamophobia in Dublin: Experiences and How to Respond*. He has authored the *European Islamophobia Report* submissions on Ireland for 2015-18, and, among others, has been the contributor to the *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* for Ireland in the same period. Email: james.carr@ul.ie

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** James Carr: *Islamophobia in Ireland: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

Islamophobia has continued to manifest in multifarious ways in Ireland in 2019. Interpersonal experiences of Islamophobia continue to impact Muslims in Ireland as high-profile media reports evidence. Previous reports on Ireland have elaborated on issues regarding data gathering and publication of Islamophobic incidents. In 2019, for the first time in a number of years, official data on Islamophobia were published by the state. These data are for the year 2018 and were published in a submission to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Despite this positive step, issues remain in terms of reporting of Islamophobia with reports from within the communities indicating that many cases are going unreported. In terms of politics, there has arguably been an increase in terms of visibility of anti-Muslim groups/individuals and related rhetoric across 2019. These actors remain, by-and-large on the fringes of Irish politics. However, representatives of mainstream political parties have also resorted to Islamophobic rhetoric during electoral campaigning in 2019. At the institutional level, a number of positive steps were taken in 2019, in particular around police uniform policy, and efforts to improve legislation on hate speech. Nonetheless, civil society actors have highlighted that problems remain at the level of the state when it comes to challenging Islamophobia and racism more broadly. Despite some positive and welcome journalistic reporting practices in 2019, problems also remain vis-à-vis media reports of Muslims/Islam. Sensationalist reporting, orientalist discourses, and presentations of Muslims as ‘other’ to the Western ‘us’ maintain. While a number of actions have been undertaken by civil society actors to challenge Islamophobia in Ireland, work remains to be done if Islamophobia is to be successfully challenged.

## Country Profile EIR 2019

**Country:** Ireland

**Type of Regime:** Republic

**Form of Government:** Parliamentary democracy

**Ruling Parties:** Fine Gael (Centre Right), supported by a number of Independents and in a Confidence and Supply Agreement with Fianna Fáil (Centrist)

**Opposition Parties:** Green Party, Independent Alliance, Labour Party Sinn Féin, Social Democrats, Solidarity People Before Profit.

**Last Elections:** 2019 European Elections: Dublin Constituency returned: one Green Party (European Greens) representative; one Fine Gael (European People's Party) representative; one independent candidate. Midlands – North-West Constituency: two Fine Gael (European People's Party) representatives; one independent (European United Left); one Sinn Féin (European United Left). South Constituency: one Fine Gael (European People's Party) representative; one Green Party (European Greens); one independent; and one Fianna Fáil (ALDE).

2019 Local Council Elections: Fianna Fáil 26.9%; Fine Gael 25.2%; Sinn Féin 9.5%; Labour 5.7%; Green Party 5.6%; Social Democrats 2.3%; Solidarity People Before Profit 1.9%; Independents/Others 22.4%.

2019 National Parliament By-Elections for four seats: Sinn Féin one seat; Green Party one seat; Fianna Fáil two seats.

**Total Population:** 4.8 million in 2016 census

**Major Languages:** Irish, English

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** Limited data available. Only official figures for Islamophobic crime in 2018 (as communicated to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) were published in 2019. See below.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** As above, data for 2018 as shared with the OSCE's ODIHR are as follows:

Racism and Xenophobia: 192 incidents; Anti-Muslim: 15 incidents; Anti-Roma and Anti-Sinti: 2 incidents; Anti-Semitism: 1 incident; Anti-Christian: 6 incidents.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Catholicism (78.3%), No religion (9.8%), Church of Ireland (2.8%)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 63,443 (1.3%) in 2016

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland, Islamic Centre of Ireland, Muslim Association of Ireland, Ahlul Bayt Islamic Centre, Irish Sufi Foundation (in no specific order)

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** Irish Network Against Racism Ireland, Immigrant Council of Ireland

**Far-Right Parties:** Fringe only, including: Anti-Corruption Ireland, Identity Ireland, National Party, Irish Freedom Party

**Far-Right Movements:** Generation Identity UK and Ireland

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

**Hijab Ban:** Officially none. However, educational institutions are permitted to decide themselves whether students may/may not wear the hijab to school.

- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None (local planning decision)
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

The following report details the various ways in which Islamophobia has manifested in Ireland across 2019. Islamophobia as lived experiences of hostility and discrimination continues to impact the lives of Muslims in Ireland as detailed below from a number of high-profile incidents from various locations in the state. For the first time in a number of years, official data on Islamophobia were published by the state, albeit in a submission to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Interestingly, reports within the Muslim communities of Ireland indicate that many cases of Islamophobia are going unreported as discussed below.

Politically, there has arguably been an uplift in the visible presence of anti-Muslim political activity and rhetoric across the year. While mainly restricted to fringe political parties and individuals, representatives of mainstream groups have also resorted to Islamophobic rhetoric during electoral campaigning. At the level of state departments, there have been a number of positive steps, in particular around police uniform policy, and also efforts to improve legislation on hate speech. Nonetheless, problems at the level of the state remain as indicated by civil society actors working in the anti-racism space. Likewise, despite some positive journalistic reporting practices, problems also remain when it comes to mainstream media of issues pertaining to Muslims/Islam. These include sensationalist headlines, orientalist discourses, and presentations of Muslims as ‘Other’ to the Western ‘Us’ as evidenced below. This report concludes with recommendations on how to move forward in Ireland vis-à-vis challenging Islamophobia. Before concluding, the positive work undertaken by civil society and associated actors in Ireland will be outlined.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

In 2019, for the first time in four years, the Irish state submitted official data on hate crime to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.<sup>1</sup> In all, the state recorded 368 hate crimes across a range of social groups as recorded by the Irish police for the period 2018. Of these, fifteen were identified as being based on ‘bias against Muslims.’ No information was provided on the crime type associated with these incidents.<sup>2</sup> The publication of these data is welcome; however, a number of events are likely to have gone unreported as demonstrated in previous researches in the Irish context and as acknowledged in efforts of the Irish police to improve reporting and recording

1. “Hate Crime Reporting: Ireland”, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), <https://hate-crime.osce.org/ireland>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

2. Ibid.

of hate crime, and indeed public statements of Islamic organisations in Ireland as discussed further below.<sup>3</sup>

A number of high-profile anti-Muslim incidents from various locations in Ireland also came to light via media reports throughout 2019. In the space of two days early in May, coinciding with the start of Ramadan, news emerged of two incidents involving members of the Muslim community in Limerick city. The first of these involved a seemingly premeditated attack on two Muslim men on their way home from a mosque in the city. Reports suggest that a group lay in wait before assaulting the men on the first night of Ramadan. In the second incident, a Muslim man was set upon and subjected to verbal and physical abuse not far from the location of the above attack. The latter incident was reportedly video recorded on a mobile phone.<sup>4</sup> These attacks instilled fear in the local Muslim communities and members of police met with imams and community representatives to provide reassurance.<sup>5</sup> Speaking to the media, local election candidate Abdul Kalam Azad Talukder also reported that a Muslim woman had her hijab torn from her head in a Limerick supermarket in the days preceding the above attacks.<sup>6</sup>

In August, distressing video footage emerged of a serious assault of two Muslim teenagers in the Dublin suburb of Dundrum on a Sunday afternoon. During the assault, both of the young women were punched, kicked, had eggs thrown at them, and at least one of them had her hijab torn from her head.<sup>7</sup> Early reports suggest that the Irish police did not perceive the attack as being motivated by bias.<sup>8</sup> However, one of the young women attacked stated in a press release from the Islamic Foundation of Ireland that during the attack both of the victims were called “Paki weirdos and

3. “Press Release: Muslim Girls Attack”, Islamic Foundation of Ireland, 21 August 2019, <https://islamicfoundation.ie/news/press-release-muslim-girls-attack/>, (Access date: 13 January 2020); James Carr, *Experiences of Islamophobia: Living with Racism in the Neoliberal Era*, (Routledge, London: 2016).

4. David Raleigh, “Gardaí Meet Muslim Leaders over Suspected Racial Attacks in Limerick”, *The Journal.ie*, 15 May 2019, <https://www.thejournal.ie/gardai-meet-imams-over-suspected-racial-attacks-in-limerick-4635733-May2019/>, (Access date: 13 January 2020); “Three Muslim Worshippers Attacked in Limerick during Ramadan”, *The Irish Examiner*, 10 May 2019, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/two-muslim-worshippers-attacked-in-limerick-on-first-night-of-ramadan-923230.html>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

5. David Raleigh, “Gardaí Meet Muslim Leaders over Suspected Racial Attacks in Limerick”.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Garreth MacNamee, “Garda Probe after Young Muslim Woman Assaulted and Allegedly Had Her Hijab Removed in Dundrum”, *The Journal.ie*, 20 August 2019, [https://www.thejournal.ie/dundrum-attack-assault-4774201-Aug2019/?utm\\_source=shortlink](https://www.thejournal.ie/dundrum-attack-assault-4774201-Aug2019/?utm_source=shortlink), (Access date: 13 January 2020); Harry Brent, “Young Muslim Girls ‘Kicked and Egged’ by Dublin Gang Who Allegedly Pulled Their Hijabs Off”, *The Irish Post*, 20 August 2019, <https://www.irishpost.com/news/young-muslim-girls-kicked-egged-dublin-gang-allegedly-pulled-hijabs-off-170319>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

8. Conor Gallagher, “Gardaí Investigating Dundrum Assault Do Not Believe It Is Racially Motivated”, *The Irish Times*, 20 August 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/garda%C3%AD-investigating-dundrum-assault-do-not-believe-it-is-racially-motivated-1.3992021?mode=sample&auth-failed=1&pw-origin=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.irishtimes.com%2Fnews%2Fcrime-and-law%2Fgarda%25C3%25AD-investigating-dundrum-assault-do-not-believe-it-is-racially-motivated-1.3992021>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

F\*\*\*ing Muslims.”<sup>9</sup> Responding to reports of the attack, Muslim woman Lorraine O’Connor of the organisation Muslim Sisters of Eire stated, “My own daughters were the victims 3 weeks ago on Dublin bus publicly humiliated for 15 mins spat at and aggressively told get the hell out of this country...”<sup>10</sup>

Muslim woman Karimah Duffy, a friend of Muslim convert Lisa Smith who is originally from Dundalk but travelled to and lived in the so-called Islamic State, recalled to media how she herself has had bacon thrown at her house, property damaged, and been subjected to abuse on the basis of her former friendship with Smith. Furthermore, Duffy noted that Muslims in Dundalk were afraid of attacks and were being escorted to mosque by police.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to reports of attacks on individuals, mosques were also targeted in Ireland during 2019. In a relatively minor incident, a mosque in Tralee had graffiti daubed on the exterior wall stating “ISIS OUT”.<sup>12</sup> A much more serious incident occurred in Galway where the Maryam Mosque was broken into and suffered considerable damage. Windows, doors, and furniture were all damaged in the attack, and security equipment was stolen. This is the second time that this mosque was the target of vandalism since 2017.<sup>13</sup> Speaking in the aftermath of the attack, Imam Ibrahim Noonan noted that he was warned by anonymous telephone calls that his mosque was being targeted for attack by far-right groups. Police suspect that the attack was motivated by anti-Muslim bias and noted, “The taking of the security equipment suggests an effort to hide their tracks. It indicates a level of planning and sophistication.”<sup>14</sup>

Dr Amanullah De Sondy, senior lecturer on Contemporary Islam at University College Cork, was subject to personal threats in August 2019. Writing on social media, De Sondy recalled that he “received a horrible voice message on my university office phone today calling me a ‘scumbag, a terrorist’ who ‘must stop lecturing the Irish on how they should live their life’ and the most chilling ‘I hope you are exe-

9. “Press Release: Muslim Girls Attack”, Islamic Foundation of Ireland.

10. Lorraine O’Connor, Twitter, 20 August 2019, <https://twitter.com/eljennah/status/1163872905727492096?s=09>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

11. Seán Dunne, “My Sadness at Isis Bride Lisa Smith, by a Former Best Friend”, *Irish Daily Mail*, 18 March 2019.

12. Anne Lucey and Eoin English, “Tralee Mosque Targeted by Graffiti Attack; Cork Gardaí Appeal over Potential Hate Incident”, *The Irish Examiner*, 18 October 2019, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/tralee-mosque-targeted-by-graffiti-attack-cork-gardai-appeal-over-potential-hate-incident-958208.html>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

13. Conor Gallagher, “Far-Right Groups Suspected of Involvement in Galway Mosque Attack”, *The Irish Times*, 30 July 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/far-right-groups-suspected-of-involvement-in-galway-mosque-attack-1.3971205>, (Access date: 13 January 2020); Sean Murray, “Minister Says He’s ‘Greatly Disturbed’ After Vandals Cause Damage at Galway Mosque”, *The Journal.ie*, 29 July 2019, [https://www.thejournal.ie/galway-mosque-attack-2-4744329-Jul2019/?utm\\_source=shortlink](https://www.thejournal.ie/galway-mosque-attack-2-4744329-Jul2019/?utm_source=shortlink), (Access date: 13 January 2020).

14. Conor Gallagher, “Far-Right Groups Suspected of Involvement in Galway Mosque Attack”.

cuted.”<sup>15</sup> Speaking in the aftermath, De Sony stated his belief that a “sophisticated network” of individuals were fuelling Islamophobia in Ireland.<sup>16</sup>

Two rather unusual events also occurred in Ireland during 2019, both in the Limerick area. In the first instance, in September, posters were placed on public signs in Limerick city centre with nothing but the words “Islam is RIGHT about women” on them. Media reports noted that these posters were part of a broader international far-right campaign, disseminated through social media sites, such as 4Chan, designed to elicit a public response, including that of an anti-Muslim bias.<sup>17</sup> Remaining in Limerick, in April, local media reported on comments made by a local priest, Fr Mockler, during a Good Friday service that some congregants believed to be Islamophobic. The sermon drew from words of Cardinal Robert Sarah from the Vatican: “The ‘West will disappear’ and ‘Islam will invade the world’ and ‘completely change culture, anthropology, and moral vision’ unless we bend the arc of our culture back toward its Judeo-Christian roots.” Some congregants understood the above as a call for greater piety as opposed to being anti-Muslim.<sup>18</sup>

## Politics

The year 2019 played host to local, European, and parliamentary by-elections in Ireland.<sup>19</sup> In the run-up to the local elections held in May, Cork-based independent local election candidate, Joe O’Callaghan, a former lord mayor of the city, called for a ban to be placed on Islamic face coverings in Ireland. O’Callaghan referred to such face coverings as “a joke in this day and age, particular in these dangerous times we live in... it’s a question of security and integration.”<sup>20</sup> His comments were subjected to criticism in local Cork press including by academic De Sony who referred to such statements as “...a very dangerous line to take that infringes on a liberal state.”<sup>21</sup>

At national level, there is a continued increase of both the presence and rhetoric of right/far-right political actors that target Islam/Muslim communities in their

15. Conall Ó Fáirtha, “I Hope You Are Executed’: Chilling Voicemail Left for UCC Lecturer”, *The Irish Examiner*, 21 August 2019, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/i-hope-you-are-executed-chilling-voice-mail-left-for-ucc-lecturer-945418.html#.XV3LfjeSk9-.whatsapp>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

16. Colin Gleeson, “Lecturer Warns of Anti-Muslim ‘Network’ After Anonymous Threats”, *The Irish Times*, 21 August 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/lecturer-warns-of-anti-muslim-network-after-anonymous-threats-1.3993387>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

17. Ben Haugh and Aoife Gallagher, “Far-Right Hoaxers Behind Islam Posters”, *The Times*, 24 September 2019.

18. Norma Prendiville, “Disquiet in Limerick Town over Priest’s Good Friday Homily”, *The Limerick Leader*, 26 April 2019, <https://www.limerickleader.ie/news/home/378113/disquiet-in-limerick-town-over-priests-good-friday-homily.html>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

19. “Elections 2019”, *The Irish Examiner*, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/maintopics/elections-2019-4809.html>, (Access date: 14 January 2020).

20. Sarah Horgan, “Ex-Lord Mayor of Cork Wants Burka Ban but Islamic Leader Says He Is Trying to Make Political Gain”, *Echo Live*, 30 April 2019 <https://www.echolive.ie/corknews/Ex-lord-mayor-of-Cork-wants-a-burka-ban-but-Islamic-leader-says-he-is-trying-to-make-political-gain-f315b921-2d94-4b90-bbfe-7ceffa5141de-ds>, (Access date: 14 January 2019).

21. *Ibid.*

public pronouncements.<sup>22</sup> Gemma O’Doherty is arguably the leading, visible protagonist in this regard in Ireland in 2019. O’Doherty, founder of the political group Anti-Corruption Ireland, ran in the European election and in the national parliamentary by-elections in late 2019 but was unsuccessful in both cases.<sup>23</sup> In April, O’Doherty posted the following comment on twitter accompanied by a map of Ireland (Fig. 1) with images of mosque-like structures covering various locations:

“The mosques of #Ireland. If this phenomenal growth rate continues, in the coming years, our country could become an #Islamic state under Sharia law. If that is what the Irish people want, so be it, but I’m standing for #Europe to represent those who don’t #EUElections2019”.<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 1:** Twitter content shared by Gemma O’Doherty depicting Ireland as being covered with mosques.<sup>25</sup>

22. For more information, see: James Carr, “Islamophobia in Ireland: National Report 2018”, *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2019), <http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/IRELAND.pdf>, (Access date: 14 January 2020).

23. “About”, Anti-Corruption Ireland, <https://anti-corruptionireland.com/>, (Access date: 14 January 2020); “EU Election Result HUB”, The Irish Times, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/european-election/dublin>, (Access date: 14 January 2020); “As It Happened: Fianna Fáil Claim Two by-Election Seats and It’s One Each in Dublin for sf and the Greens”, The Journal.ie, 30 November 2019, <https://www.thejournal.ie/by-election-results-4912865-Nov2019/>, (Access date: 14 January 2020).

24. Gemma O’Doherty, Twitter, 17 April 2019, <https://twitter.com/gemmaod1/status/1118471510933557248?s=09>, (Access date: 14 January 2020).

25. Gemma O’Doherty, Twitter, 17 April 2019, <https://twitter.com/gemmaod1/status/1118471510933557248>, (Access date: 14 January 2020).

In August, video footage emerged on social media wherein O’Doherty stated that hijabs “should be burned”.<sup>26</sup> Also in August, citing data from an unnamed source (Fig. 2) on so-called foreign fighters, she posted the following on social media:



**Figure 2:** Twitter content shared by Gemma O’Doherty calling for prohibition of halal products and the wearing of the hijab. O’Doherty also claims here that, per capita, Ireland produces the second highest number of ISIS recruits internationally.<sup>27</sup>

In November, footage emerged of O’Doherty visiting a halal butcher shop and asking the staff member if they sold pork products. She asked him why not and told him that pork is “one of our national foods in Ireland” and “we are never stopping eating it.”<sup>28</sup>

Peter O’Loughlin of Identity Ireland, (noted in previous European Islamophobia Reports for his openly anti-Islam/Muslim views and association with groups such as PEGIDA in Germany) ran as a candidate in the European elections in 2019 but was unsuccessful.<sup>29</sup> While O’Loughlin the aforementioned individuals are on the margins of Irish politics, headlines were also made in the context of the parliamentary by-elections in late 2019 relating to a mainstream political party candidate. Then Fine Gael candidate for County Wexford, Verona Murphy, speak-

26. Noel Sutton, Twitter, 16 August 2019, <https://twitter.com/noelsutton/status/1162428373869707265>, (Access date: 14 January 2020).

27. Gemma O’Doherty, Twitter, 18 August 2019, <https://twitter.com/gemmaod1/status/1163205503692038144>, (Access date: 14 January 2020).

28. Irish Wolfhound, “Racist Gemma O’Doherty Walks into a Halal Shop and Says.....”, YouTube, 23 November 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lBSUQ1OWzF4>, (Access date: 14 January 2020).

29. James Carr, “Islamophobia in Ireland: National Report 2016”, *European Islamophobia Report 2016*, ed. Enes Bayraktı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2017), <http://www.islamophobieurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/IRELAND.pdf>, (Access date: 14 January 2020); “Election Results Hub”, The Irish Times, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/european-election/ireland-south>, (Access date: 14 January 2020).

ing on national television, suggested that asylum seekers arriving in Ireland would need to be “deprogrammed” on the basis that they may have been “infiltrated by ISIS” and that the group were “a big part of the migrant population”.<sup>30</sup> Murphy later apologised for making the aforementioned comments.<sup>31</sup> Murphy was unsuccessful in her election bid.<sup>32</sup>

## Media

As with previous reports on Ireland in the *European Islamophobia Report*, an analysis of media in Ireland was undertaken for 2019 using the Nexis database online search tool.<sup>33</sup> The focus of this necessarily limited analysis centred on media reporting of the discovery, high-profile national television interview with, and return of Irish citizen Lisa Smith from territory formerly controlled by the so-called Islamic State.<sup>34</sup>

Reports emerged in early March 2019 that Irish citizen Lisa Smith and her two-year-old daughter were being held by U.S. security forces in northern Syria. Smith, a convert to Islam, travelled to the region occupied by the so-called Islamic State in 2015.<sup>35</sup> She was previously a member of the Irish defence forces, earning the rank of

30. Conor McCrave, “FG Candidate Verona Murphy Apologises for Saying Some Asylum Seekers Need to Be ‘Deprogrammed’”, *The Journal.ie*, 18 November 2019, <https://www.thejournal.ie/verona-murphy-apologises-4895323-Nov2019/>, (Access date: 17 January 2020); Jennifer Bray, “Verona Murphy Apologises ‘Wholeheartedly’ for Isis Migrants Claim”, *The Irish Times*, 18 November 2019 [https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/verona-murphy-apologises-wholeheartedly-for-isis-migrants-claim-1.4086836?mode=amp#.XdLNkvV\\_qeA.twitter](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/verona-murphy-apologises-wholeheartedly-for-isis-migrants-claim-1.4086836?mode=amp#.XdLNkvV_qeA.twitter), (Access date: 17 January 2020).

31. Jennifer Bray, “Verona Murphy Apologises ‘Wholeheartedly’ for Isis Migrants Claim”.

32. Daniel McConnell, “Daniel McConnell: By-Elections 2019 Fallout Sees Martin on the Move with Varadkar Stuck in Reverse”, *The Irish Examiner*, 1 December 2019 <https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/views/daniel-mcconnell-byelections-2019-fallout-sees-martin-on-the-move-with-varadkar-stuck-in-reverse-967687.html>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

33. For more information, see: ‘Home,’ Nexis UK, 2020, <https://advance.lexis.com/bisnexishome/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=86790095-5897-4a20-aafc-f74a84db668e>, (Access date: 15 January 2020). The focus of this analysis centred on media reporting in Ireland of three critical events: (1) the discovery; (2) “Prime Time” television interview with; and (3) return of Lisa Smith from territory formerly controlled by the so-called Islamic State. Media reports relating to Lisa Smith, Muslims, and Islam on the day that these events took place and in the fourteen subsequent days were sourced using the Nexis media database search platform and subjected to analysis. The media producers included in the search of Nexis media database as ‘favourites’ were: *Sunday Independent* (Ireland); *Sunday Business Post*; RTE News; *Metro Herald* (Ireland); *The Irish Times*; *Irish Independent*; *Irish Examiner*; *Irish Daily Mail*; *Evening Herald* (Ireland) including related online content and archival coverage (as noted by Nexis). Content from UK impressions of publications also available in Ireland were also returned in the Nexis database search, including: *The Sun*, the MailOnline, The Times.co.uk, *The Mirror*, and *The Sunday Mirror*. The content of the UK version of an article may/may not have varied to that available in the Irish context and vice versa. The search terms used on the Nexis database were: Lisa AND Smith AND Muslim! AND Islam! Only the relevant dates (date of discovery; of “Prime Time” interview, etc.) were changed in each search.

34. See previous footnote.

35. Stephen McDermott, “She Got Duped’: Woman Who Helped Lisa Smith Convert to Islam ‘Shocked’ at Alleged ISIS Links”, *The Journal.ie*, 11 March 2019, <https://www.thejournal.ie/lisa-smith-duck-dundalk-islam-liveline-4535136-Mar2019/>, (Access date: 17 January 2020); “Prime Time Interview”, RTÉ, 18 July 2019 <https://www.rte.ie/news/player/2019/0718/11069287-prime-time-lisa-smith-interview/>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

corporal. At one point she had served as a flight attendant on the government jet.<sup>36</sup> Police and Defence Forces investigations into Smith and her role in the so-called Islamic State continued throughout 2019 to ascertain if she posed a security risk if she returned to Ireland. Smith refuted claims that she was involved in military activity during her time in the region.<sup>37</sup> She publicly dissociated herself from the atrocities carried out by the so-called Islamic State and denied knowledge of any such acts.<sup>38</sup> Her stated motivation to travel to the region in 2015 was to live in an Islamic caliphate.<sup>39</sup> On 1 December 2019, Smith was deported to Ireland from Turkey. On return, Smith maintained her denials of partaking in criminal/terrorist offences. She was subsequently charged under Section Six (1) (i) of the Criminal Justice (Terrorist Offences) Act 2005 with membership of a “foreign unlawful organisation.”<sup>40</sup>

The analysis of media coverage into the Lisa Smith case defined here reveals interesting insights. Importantly, there is evidence of what could be referred to as positive media reporting practices. In such cases, media outlets can be seen to provide space for voices within the Muslim communities in Ireland to respond to the case. For example, this includes comments by a local imam dissociating Islam from violence as well as speaking against people travelling to areas such as the so-called Islamic State; that Smith be allowed to come home to face due process; and also a former associate defending Smith’s character.<sup>41</sup> In certain *somewhat* positive reports, while nuance is provided by noting examples of Islamophobia, problematic terms such as “Isis bride” or “jihadi bride” are present.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, there is a repeated use of terms such as “Isis bride”, “jihadi bride” and variants across the period under analysis here.<sup>43</sup> The utilisation of such terms pres-

36. Fiach Kelly, “Lisa Smith Has Right to Return to Ireland With Child, Says Varadkar”, *The Irish Times*, 11 March 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/lisa-smith-has-right-to-return-to-ireland-with-her-child-says-varadkar-1.3821649>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

37. Garreth MacNamee, “Gardaí Travel to Australia to Gather Intelligence on Jihadi Bride Lisa Smith from Former Colleagues”, *The Journal.ie*, 1 July 2019, <https://www.thejournal.ie/lisa-smith-investigations-4704835-Jul2019/>, (Access date: 17 January 2020); RTE Prime Time Interview 18 July 2019.

38. RTE Prime Time Interview 18 July 2019; Paul Reynolds, “Lisa Smith’s Period of Detention Extended by 24 Hours”, RTÉ, 2 December 2019, <https://www.rte.ie/news/2019/1201/1096386-smith-in-custody-for-second-day/>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

39. RTE Prime Time Interview 18 July 2019;

40. Conor Gallagher, “Lisa Smith Remanded in Custody Charged with Islamic State Membership”, *The Irish Times*, 4 December 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/courts/district-court/lisa-smith-remanded-in-custody-charged-with-islamic-state-membership-1.4104358>, (Access date: 17 January 2020); Paul Reynolds, “Lisa Smith’s Period of Detention Extended by 24 Hours”.

41. Alan O’Keefe, “Imam Would Have Tried to Discourage Lisa’s Journey”, *Sunday Independent*, 10 March 2019; “Lisa’s Very Naïve and Was Brainwashed”, *Irish Daily Mail*, 12 March 2019; Luke Byrne, “Irish Isil Suspect Should Be Brought Home to Face Justice Here, Says Islamic Intellectual”, *Irish Independent*, 11 March 2019.

42. Ali Bracken, Alison O’Reilly, and Seán Dunne, “Irish Muslims Left Shaken and ‘Afraid to Attend Their Daily Prayers’: The Facebook Massacre”, *Irish Daily Mail*, 16 March 2019; Seán Dunne, “My Sadness at Isis Bride Lisa Smith, by a Former Best Friend; Terrorism Fears Exclusive”, *Irish Daily Mail*, 18 March 2019.

43. Kieran Dineen, “IS Bride Didn’t Tell Her Family She Had a Baby; 1RM Jihadi Bid Soldier’s Secrets; Leo: She Has Rights”, *The Sun*, 12 March 2019; John Patrick Kierans, “ISIS Bride Lisa Smith Says She ‘Can’t Be Blamed’ for the Terror Committed by Group; She Travelled to Syria to Join Islamic State around Three Years Ago”, *Irish Mirror*, 18 July 2019.

ents a stereotypical image of Muslim women as exoticised, vulnerable victims, and concomitantly threatening in terms of violence and notions of ‘Us’.<sup>44</sup> As in previous report submissions for Ireland,<sup>45</sup> analysis for 2019 reveals the continued practice of collocating Islam(ic) with negative terms. For example, “Islamic groomers”, “Islamic terror groups”, “Islamic extremist”, “Islamic terror organisation”.<sup>46</sup>

Focussing specifically on headlines, the following examples are interesting. The first, following from above could be understood as collocating Islam with ‘devil worshipping’. The remaining headlines evidence sensationalist reporting practices while the latter two in particular present an ‘Us versus Them’ discourse.

“Pat Flanagan: ‘We Should Have No Sympathy for Devil Worshiping Jihadi Lisa Smith’; Would the Same Sympathy Be Shown to a Naïve Young Man Who Got Caught up in the Kinahan Crime Gang in Spain?”<sup>47</sup>

“Irish ISIS Bride Lisa Smith ‘Could Easily Have Detonated Bomb on Government Jet’; Exclusive: The Suitcase the Former Air Corps Member Carried on Board with Her Personal Belongings Was Never Checked by Security, the Irish Mirror Has Learned”<sup>48</sup>

“Lisa Hates the West... She Knows about Guns and Bombs Some Locals Are Afraid’; EXCLUSIVE: PALS TELL OF SHOCK AT RADICALISATION OF I.S. BRIDE AFTER BAD BREAK-UP WITH FELLA STOPPED BELIEVING WOMEN SHOULD DRIVE BINNED MACDONALD’S HABIT, CALLING IT EVIL”<sup>49</sup>

“Isis Accused Lisa Smith Reverts to Western Dress in Jail”<sup>50</sup>

The above cursory analysis provides a snapshot of the manner in which Irish media actors report on issues relating to Islam and Muslim communities in Ireland.

44. Shiva Zarabadi and Jessica Ringrose, “The Affective Birth of ‘Jihadi Bride’ as New Risky Sexualised ‘Other’: Muslim Schoolgirls and Media Panic in an Age of Counterterrorism”, *Youth Sexualities: Public Feelings and Contemporary Cultural Politics*, ed. Susan Talburt, (Santa Barbara and Denver: Praeger, 2018), p. 83-107.

45. For more information, see: *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, İstanbul: 2019), <https://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/>, (Access date: 15 January 2020).

46. Michael Doyle, “Lisa Hates the West... She Knows about Guns and Bombs Some Locals Are Afraid’; EXCLUSIVE: PALS TELL OF SHOCK AT RADICALISATION OF I.S. BRIDE AFTER BAD BREAK-UP WITH FELLA STOPPED BELIEVING WOMEN SHOULD DRIVE BINNED MACDONALD’S HABIT, CALLING IT EVIL”, *The Sun*, 10 March 2019; Pat Flanagan, “Woman Who Helped Convert Lisa Smith to Islam ‘Shocked and Appalled’ She Ended up with ISIS; The Taoiseach Said Today That Smith Will Be Allowed to Return to Ireland with Her Two-year Old Son [sic]”, *Irish Mirror*, 11 March 2019; Pat Flanagan, “Pat Flanagan: ‘We Should Have No Sympathy for Devil Worshiping Jihadi Lisa Smith’; Would the Same Sympathy Be Shown to a Naïve Young Man Who Got Caught up in the Kinahan Crime Gang in Spain?”, *Irish Mirror*, 15 March 2019.

47. Pat Flanagan, “Pat Flanagan: ‘We Should Have No Sympathy for Devil Worshiping Jihadi Lisa Smith’.

48. Saoirse McGarrigle, “Irish ISIS Bride Lisa Smith ‘Could Easily Have Detonated Bomb on Government Jet’; Exclusive: The Suitcase the Former Air Corps Member Carried on Board with Her Personal Belongings Was Never Checked by Security, the Irish Mirror Has Learned”, *Irish Mirror*, 14 March 2019.

49. Michael Doyle, “Lisa Hates the West... She Knows about Guns and Bombs Some Locals Are Afraid”.

50. Ali Bracken, “Isis Accused Lisa Smith Reverts to Western Dress in Jail”, *Irish Daily Mail*, 13 December 2019.

There is evidence of some good practice. However, as in previous submissions on Ireland for the *European Islamophobia Report*, problematic practices maintain. These include collocating Muslims and Islam with terms such as terrorism or extremist; sensational headlines that conjure up negative images; orientalist presentations of Muslim women; and ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ discourses in a context of Muslims and the West as though they are mutually exclusive categories. There is a need for greater reflexivity and responsibility on the part of media actors when it comes to discussing Muslims and Islam in Ireland. This is not to stifle genuine criticism but to avoid fuelling incidents of anti-Muslim hostility as described above.

## Justice System

There were some positive developments in 2019 that are worth noting briefly here. In April, An Garda Síochána (AGS), the Irish police service, announced changes to their uniform policy the effect of which is to allow members of the AGS of different faith backgrounds to wear items of religious clothing, such as the hijab for Muslim women, to work.<sup>51</sup> Further good news emerged later in 2019 with the release of the AGS’ *Diversity and Integration Strategy 2019-2021*, with challenging hate crime forming a core part of the strategy.<sup>52</sup> In the latter part of 2019, the Department of Justice and Equality (DoJ&E) also undertook a public consultation on hate speech legislation with the aim of improving its effectiveness.<sup>53</sup> In June, the DoJ&E announced the creation of a new anti-racism committee which is welcome but notably Islamophobia was not mentioned in the announcement.<sup>54</sup>

As noted in the report for Ireland for 2018, the proposed construction of a new mosque in the city of Kilkenny was met with public objections, some of which were Islamophobic.<sup>55</sup> Despite being granted planning permission from local authorities to build the mosque, the relevant national authority ruled against the construction in May citing the proposed development as conflicting with broader infrastructural plans for the area.<sup>56</sup> Local imam Ibrahim Ndure referred to the decision as “crushingly disappointing”.<sup>57</sup>

---

51. “Diversity and Integration Strategy 2019-2021”, An Garda Síochána, <https://www.garda.ie/en/about-us/our-departments/office-of-corporate-communications/press-releases/2019/april/an-garda-siochana-opens-recruitment-competition-for-garda-trainees.html>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

52. Ibid.

53. “Hate Speech Consultation”, Department of Justice and Equality, [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Hate\\_Speech\\_Public\\_Consultation](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Hate_Speech_Public_Consultation), (Access date: 16 January 2020).

54. “Minister Stanton announces new Anti-Racism Committee”, Department of Justice and Equality, 28 June 2019, <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PR19000174>, (Access date: 16 January 2020).

55. James Carr, “Islamophobia in Ireland: National Report 2018”, *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2019), <http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/IRELAND.pdf>, (Access date: 16 January 2020).

56. Conor Kane and Sarah Slater, “Permission for Kilkenny Mosque Overturned by an Bord Pleanála”, *The Irish Times*, 15 May 2019.

57. Vivienne Clarke, “Rejection of Plan for Kilkenny Mosque ‘Crushingly Disappointing’”, *The Irish Times*, 16 May 2019.

## Internet

As noted above, individuals operating in the political space have been very active online vis-à-vis disseminating their views on Muslims/Islam. During the local elections, two Muslim candidates, Imran Khurshid and Ammar Ali, were subjected to abuse via social media with the latter receiving messages referring to “brainwashed illegal immigrants” intent to “stab are [sic] kids” while describing immigrants as “stupid barbarians”.<sup>58</sup>

Fringe groups such as the Irish Patriot Movement have a presence online and post content that targets immigrants and Muslims.<sup>59</sup> As do private individuals. In December, the charitable community group Muslim Sisters of Éire shared some of the abuse that they have received on social media. With regard to Figure 3, the perceived mutual exclusivity of Irish and Muslimness held by some is clear.



**Figure 3:** Twitter content shared by Muslim Sisters of Éire evidencing some of the online anti-Muslim content that the group has received.<sup>60</sup>

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

As noted above and in previous *EIR* submissions for Ireland, central figures engaging in anti-Muslim/Islam discourses and activities in Ireland include: Anti-Corruption Ireland’s Gemma O’Doherty (see above); Identity Ireland; Justin Barrett and the National Party; Generation Identity UK and Ireland, and their associates. The degree

58. Ferghal Blaney, “Racist Trolls Targeting Dublin Election Candidates for Not Being White”, Dublin Live, 30 April 2019, [https://www.dublinlive.ie/news/dublin-news/racist-trolls-targeting-election-candidates-16205109?fbclid=IwAR1C3HdlEAaTc4u65Yz9FcNnST5TKWq3nmYNbSc5HR35peOhEwwickJUg\\_I](https://www.dublinlive.ie/news/dublin-news/racist-trolls-targeting-election-candidates-16205109?fbclid=IwAR1C3HdlEAaTc4u65Yz9FcNnST5TKWq3nmYNbSc5HR35peOhEwwickJUg_I), (Access date: 16 January 2020).

59. Irish Patriot Movement, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/irishnational1?lang=en>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

60. MuslimSisters ofÉire, Twitter, 27 December 2019, [https://twitter.com/Msoe\\_Dublin/status/1210609186654040071](https://twitter.com/Msoe_Dublin/status/1210609186654040071), (Access date: 16 January 2020).

to which these individuals/groups form a ‘network’ is debateable. However, video evidence demonstrates O’Doherty engaging in a walkabout in Longford town with James Reynolds, deputy leader of the National Party.<sup>61</sup> On another occasion, Justin Barrett, National Party leader, addressed an event organised by O’Doherty wherein he stated that “European western culture and Christendom in particular is the superior culture on this planet, always has been, always will be.”<sup>62</sup>

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

In the week following the terrorist attacks on mosques in New Zealand, a civil society event was held in Dublin to stand in solidarity with the victims. The event titled ‘Calling All Allies’ marked the attacks in New Zealand and other international Islamophobic attacks internationally. Speaking on national radio on the eve of the event, one of the organisers referred to experiences of Islamophobia in Ireland at interpersonal and institutional levels. One of the aims of the event was for the recognition of Islamophobia, socially and politically, as a reality in Ireland and for measures to be taken to challenge it.<sup>63</sup>

The year 2019 was a very busy year in terms of formal reviews, reports, and campaigns on racism, including Islamophobia in Ireland. In April, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance published its fifth monitoring report on Ireland.<sup>64</sup> The ECRI Report made specific reference to Islamophobia in Ireland and to related activities of the far right. ECRI were also critical of the official Migrant Integration Strategy for collocating radicalisation and Muslim youth, noting the potential for stigmatisation. Finally, ECRI also made specific reference to the gendered element of Islamophobia.<sup>65</sup>

In August, the National Transport Authority (NTA) ran an anti-racism campaign, one of the posters for which displayed an image of a Muslim woman wearing hijab. Interestingly, the NTA received critical correspondence from the general public, including criticism of the use of the image of a Muslim woman as it “implies that

---

61. “Our People”, The National Party, 2019, <https://nationalparty.ie/ourpeople/>, (Access date: 16 January 2020); “Longford – Gemma O’Doherty Visits Town Where Irish Children Are a Minority”, The Tricolour, 2019, <http://www.thetricolour.com/Articles/591/News/politics/Videos/Longford-Gemma-ODoherty-visits-the-Town-where-Irish-Children-are-a-minority/14528675/>, (Access date: 16 January 2020).

62. Mick Slevan, “Behind the mask, this is the true face of ACI”, Twitter, 8 August 2019, <https://twitter.com/mickslev1/status/1159261669069066246>, (Access date: 16 January 2020); The National Party, “Justin Barrett – ‘Does Anyone Stand with Me for the Irish Republic’”, Youtube, 5 August 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zqx-NINPdHSw>, (Access date: 16 January 2020).

63. “Drivetime”, RTÉ, 22 March 2019, <https://www.rte.ie/radio/radioplayer/html5/#/radio1/11013873>, (Access date: 16 January 2020).

64. “ECRI Report on Ireland: Fifth Monitoring Cycle”, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2 April 2019, <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-ireland/168094c575>, (Access date: 16 January 2020).

65. *Ibid.*

Muslims are victims of racism” and “Islam is an ideology”. Other critics claimed that the campaign was “Pure Anti-Whiteism”.<sup>66</sup>

In advance of the UN review of Ireland’s performance vis-à-vis the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) hosted an event in March to gather insights from Irish youth aged between 16 and 24 on ending racial discrimination in Ireland.<sup>67</sup> A number of civil society organisations also submitted alternative reports to that of the state vis-à-vis racism. In both of the reports referred to here, Islamophobia was documented as a reality in Ireland in terms of experiences of hostility and discrimination.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This report details the continued presence of Islamophobia in Ireland. Many of the themes presented above resonate with those submitted previously in submissions on Ireland. Lived experiences of anti-Muslim hostility and discrimination maintain, problematic media practices maintain, and political actors utilising anti-Muslim rhetoric to further presumably their own ends is increasing. Meanwhile the state has taken some positive measures to address Islamophobia. Overall, more could certainly be done. The role of civil society actors vis-à-vis holding the state to account on Islamophobia and broader forms of racism is encouraging. So too is the grassroots organisation of street activities aimed at highlighting and calling for meaningful recognition of Islamophobia in Ireland. A lot of work must be done if Islamophobia is to be challenged in Ireland. The following recommendations highlight just some of the areas that, if addressed, could go some way toward supporting this challenge.

- Efforts must be made by the Irish police service to improve the recording and reporting of Islamophobic incidents in Ireland. The AGS Diversity Strategy (mentioned above) makes reference to improving hate crime reporting levels. This is a vitally important if we are to have a deeper understanding of Islamophobia in Ireland.

66. Hayley Halpin, “It Is Just Pure Anti-Whiteism’: NTA Hit by Complaints over Anti-Racism Campaign”, *The Journal.ie*, 2 October 2019, [https://www.thejournal.ie/nta-anti-racism-campaign-complaints-4833619-Oct2019/?utm\\_source=shortlink](https://www.thejournal.ie/nta-anti-racism-campaign-complaints-4833619-Oct2019/?utm_source=shortlink), (Access date: 16 January 2020).

67. “Be Heard: Ending Racial Discrimination in Ireland”, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 30 March 2019, <https://www.ihrec.ie/events/be-heard-ending-racial-discrimination-in-ireland/>, (Access date: 16 January 2020).

68. “Alternative Report on Racial Discrimination in Ireland”, Irish Network Against Racism, 2019, <https://inar.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/INAR-ALTERNATIVE-REPORT-to-CERD-WEB-1.pdf>, (Access date: 16 January 2020); Jennifer Scheweppe and Amanda Haynes, “Alternative Report on Hate Crime and Related Issues: In Response to Ireland’s Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Periodic Reports to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination”, The Coalition Against Hate Crime (Ireland), 2019, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/IRL/INT\\_CERD\\_NGO\\_IRL\\_38606\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/IRL/INT_CERD_NGO_IRL_38606_E.pdf), (Access date: 16 January 2020).

- Related to the above, Irish hate speech is currently under review. This is a welcomed development. Effective hate speech and hate crime legislation are of the utmost importance. Having such will increase the confidence of the police in their working practices and have the effect of increasing trust with Muslim communities when they experience hostility that something will be done to address it.
- Efforts must continue to encourage greater reflexivity relating to reporting Muslims/Islam issues among media actors in Ireland.
- Official action must be taken against political groupings that target and incite hatred towards minority communities – on- and offline.
- The state should support grassroots Muslim and broader civil society activities that aim to challenge Islamophobia.

## Chronology

- **09.03.2019:** Reports emerge of Irish citizen Lisa Smith being held by U.S./Kurdish forces in Syria.
- **18.03.2019:** A friend of Lisa Smith speaks of the abuse she has experienced in the aftermath of the reports of the discovery of Smith.
- **23.03.2019:** Calling All Allies Anti-Islamophobia event held in Dublin.
- **02.04.2019:** The Irish police service announces changes to uniform policy.
- **19.04.2019:** Co. Limerick priest delivers homily that is perceived by some as anti-Muslim/Islam.
- **30.04.2019:** Local election candidate in Cork City O’Callaghan calls for burqa ban.
- **10.05.2019:** Reports of two assaults on three Muslim men and one Muslim woman in Limerick City.
- **18.07.2019:** Lisa Smith’s interview with Irish television airs.
- **29.07.2019:** Mosque in Galway subjected to criminal damage, suspected far-right involvement.
- **01.08.2019:** The above incident follows an assault on two other young Muslim women in Dublin.
- **16.08.2019:** Footage emerges of Gemma O’Doherty where she states hi-jabs “should be burned”.
- **18.08.2019:** Video footage emerges of two Muslim teenagers being assaulted in Dublin.
- **21.08.2019:** Muslim lecturer at University College Cork receives voicemail threatening execution.
- **25.09.2019:** “Islam is Right about Women” posters emerge in Limerick streets.

- **18.10.2019:** Graffiti daubed at Tralee mosque.
- **15.11.2019:** Verona Murphy, then Fine Gael party by-election candidate, makes comments on asylum seekers being “infiltrated by ISIS”.
- **23.11.2019:** Footage emerges of Gemma O’Doherty visiting a halal butcher shop making statements about Irish people liking pork meat and asking questions such as does the proprietor sell pork products.
- **01.12.2019:** Lisa Smith returns to Ireland.



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**ITALY**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

ANTONIA ROBERTA SIINO



## The Author

**Antonia Roberta Siino** has a PhD in Sociology and Social Research from the University of Bologna and was a visiting student at the Department of Sociology, University of Oxford. Siino has been working for a long time on the study of organized crime (specifically mafia-type organizations) and its interactions with civil society, and conducting empirical research based both on qualitative and quantitative methods. She has published articles, both in Italian and English, in academic journals such as the *Sociological Review* and *Sicurezza e Scienze Sociali Journal*. Email: antoniasino8@gmail.com

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Antonia Roberta Siino: *Islamophobia in Italy: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

The political instability that characterises the Italian scenario has as the direct consequence that political parties seem to be in a perpetual election campaign. All political parties are involved so that the migration issue has become an instrument to use (in different ways by right-wing or left-wing parties) to obtain additional consensus. Public actors do not seem to be aware of the social impact that their words or actions can have on the population expressing anti-Muslim messages. The new element that can be noticed is the trend to distinguish between Islam as a religion and Muslims as people. Attacks pretend to concern just Islam, defining it as extremist and a source of terrorists, and not to target Muslims who peacefully live in Italy and respect the local traditions. Considering the context, this seems to be a pretext which allows the perpetrators to avoid the accusation of being Islamophobic. These kind of attitudes have already expressed their concrete consequences: data shows an increase of verbal and physical assaults both in real life and online dimension. Tweets and messages posted on social networks show an augmentation of hate speech based on racial and religious discrimination. Even if the intervention of people defending Muslims from such attacks are numerous as well, the risk is that a climate of fear and tension grows among people. In 2019, the Casa Pound party was turned into a movement, exiting the election competition. This could be seen as a sign that right-wing extremist ideas gained less traction in Italy. Unfortunately, however, it can be explained by the fact that anti-migration and sovereign positions are now better represented by other political parties, like the *Lega Nord* and *Fratelli d'Italia* that continue to increase their electoral consensus.

## Sintesi

L'instabilità politica che caratterizza lo scenario italiano ha come diretta conseguenza che i partiti politici sembrano essere in una continua campagna elettorale. Tutti i partiti politici risultano coinvolti al punto che il tema della migrazione sembra essere diventato uno strumento da utilizzare (in modo diverso da partiti di destra o sinistra) al fine di ottenere maggiore consenso. Gli attori pubblici non sembrano consapevoli dell'impatto sociale che le loro parole e le loro azioni possono avere sulla popolazione trasmettendo messaggi anti islamici. Il nuovo elemento che deve essere sottolineato è la tendenza a distinguere tra l'Islam come religione e il Musulmano come persona. Gli attacchi vengono presentati come diretti al solo Islam, definendolo come religione estremista e fonte di terroristi, e non ai Musulmani che vivono regolarmente in Italia rispettandone le tradizioni. Considerando il contesto, questo sembra essere più un pretesto grazie al quale evitare le accuse di Islamofobia. Questo tipo di comportamenti ha già manifestato le sue concrete conseguenze: i dati mostrano un aumento del numero di attacchi verbali e fisici, sia nella vita reale sia nella dimensione online. Tweet e messaggi postati sui social networks mostrano un aumento dei discorsi d'odio basati sulla discriminazione razziale o religiosa. Anche se si registra l'intervento di molti Italiani in difesa di Musulmani oggetto di questi attacchi, il rischio è che si diffonda un clima di paura e tensione. Nel 2019, il partito di estrema destra Casa Pound è stato trasformato in un Movimento, uscendo così dalla competizione elettorale. Questo potrebbe sembrare un segno che partiti di estrema destra inizino ad avere meno presa in Italia. Purtroppo, questo trova spiegazione nel fatto che posizioni anti-migranti e sovraniste sono oggi meglio rappresentate da altri partiti politici, come Lega Nord e Fratelli d'Italia, che vedono infatti aumentare il loro consenso elettorale.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Italy

**Type of Regime:** Democratic Republic

**Form of Government:** Parliamentary government

**Ruling Parties:** Five Star Movement, Democratic Party, Free and Equal, *Movimento Associativo Italiani all'Estero, Italia Viva* (2019/09/05 - ongoing)

**Opposition Parties:** Northern League, Forza Italia, Brothers of Italy, *Südtiroler Volkspartei* (2019/09/05 - actual)

**Last Elections:** 2018 Legislative election: Chamber of Deputies: Five Stars, 133 seats; Centre-Right, 151 seats (League North: 17.3% equal to 73 seats); Centre-Left, 88 seats; Left, 14 seats; Far Right, 0 seats; and Senate of the Republic: Five Stars, 68 seats; Centre-Right, 77 seats (League North: 17.6% equal to 37 seats); Centre-Left, 43 seats; Left, 4 seats; Far-Right, 0 seats.

**Total Population:** 60.3 million (in 2019)

**Major Languages:** Italian

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** Regarding 2019, official data on Islamophobia is not available. The last available data was presented in the Hate Crime Reporting 2018 in which the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights reports 13 incidents against Muslims, including attacks against property (6), violent attacks against people (5), and threats (2).

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** Regarding 2019, official data on racism and discrimination is not yet publicly available. The last data presented by the OSCE ODIHR - including information from the Italian police database (SDI) and the Italian Observatory for Security against Acts of Discrimination (OSCAD) - refer to 2018. According to this data, police authorities recorded 1,111 hate crimes among which anti-Muslim crimes are not registered as a separate category. Local associations (such as Lunaria, Association 21 July, Arcigay) reported 301 incidents during 2018 (13 of which were committed on the ground of bias against Muslims).

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Christianity (80.8%), No religion (13.4%), Islam (4.9%), Judaism (1%)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 2,960,000 (4.9%) (Pew Research Center 2015)

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** *L'unione Delle Comunità Islamiche D'Italia* (UCOII), *Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana* (CoReIs), CoReIs Italian Muslim Youth

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** Lunaria, Amnesty International Italia, UCOII, CoReIs, *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia*, Amsi (*Associazione medici di origine straniera in Italia*)

**Far-Right Parties:** *Forza Nuova*

**Far-Right Movements:** Casa Pound

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None (depends on local decision). In 1975, during the so-called Years of Lead, Law n.152 introduced in the Italian Criminal Code the ban to have access to public place with a covered face. Actually, the possibility to wear a hijab or a burka in public places depends on local government. After the sentence of the Court of Appeal of October 2019, this ban has been introduced in Lombardia, Veneto, and Friuli.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None (depends on local decision)
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None (depends on local decision, see above)
- **Prayer Ban:** None (depends on local decision)

## Introduction

The main problem in researching the spread of anti-Muslim hate crime is the lack of official data released by governmental institutions<sup>1</sup> and the fact that the circumstances surrounding a number of such deeds very often remain obscure.

Thus, such an analysis has to integrate the available official data with the unofficial data by media and non-governmental organisations.

The data that will be presented underlines that there is a spreading feeling of fear towards migrants and Muslims in particular. In this context, politics play a great role. As Minister of Interior and responsible for migration policy, Matteo Salvini, had the opportunity to apply the concrete anti-migrant measures proposed by his party, *Lega Nord*. After the crisis of government in August 2019, the Italian government is made up of parties that share different political visions of migration.<sup>2</sup> The political instability seems to lead to migration being treated as a political instrument.

According to ISMU (Iniziativa e Studi sulla Multietnicità), on 1 January 2019, 53.6% of foreigners living in Italy with a legal residency permit (2,815,000) confess the Christian religion,<sup>3</sup> followed by Muslims who represent 30.1% (1,580,000).<sup>4</sup> Even if it is still the main religion practised, data shows a decrease concerning the presence of Christian migrants regularly living in Italy and an increase concerning the presence of Muslim migrants.<sup>5</sup> Concerning the countries of origin, data shows that Muslim people living in Italy come from Morocco (440,000), Albania (226,000), Bangladesh (141,000), Pakistan (106,000), and Egypt (111,000).<sup>6</sup>

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

According to a social research on Islam in Italy conducted by Fabrizio Ciocca on a sample of 300 Muslims asked to complete a questionnaire through Facebook, 65% of the people interviewed declared to have suffered violence, prejudices, or discrimi-

---

1. The official data available concerning hate crimes - recorded by Italian police and released by ODIHR - refer to 2018.

2. *Lega Nord* represents the opposition party, together with *Fratelli d'Italia* and *Forza Italia*.

3. Data include Orthodox Christians (29.7%), Catholic Christians (18.6%), Evangelical Christians (3.5%) and Coptic Christians (0.3%).

4. "Comunicato stampa: Immigrati e religioni in Italia", ISMU, 23 July 2019, <https://www.ismu.org/comunicato-stampa-immigrati-e-religioni-in-italia/>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

5. It can be explained referring to two different aspects: the acquisition of Italian citizenship by 112,523 foreigners and the different dynamics in the migration flux regarding Italy. ISMU, "Comunicato stampa: Immigrati e religioni in Italia".

6. "Comunicato stampa: Immigrati e religioni in Italia", ISMU.

nation because of their religion. The percentage arises to 70% among women.<sup>7</sup> Some examples of attacks based on religion follow.

After his victory at the Sanremo Music Festival, Alessandro Mahmood was the target of verbal anti-Muslim attacks because of his foreign surname. His Italian nationality did not make a difference in him being considered a foreigner, guilty for having proposed “songs with burka that would endanger the Italian musical tradition.”<sup>8</sup>

On 21 March, in the northern city of Turin, a discussion about two Muslim girls’ fear of a dog on a public bus turned into a brawl. The two girls were verbally and physically attacked by a woman who claimed, “You are scared of a dog but you are not afraid to blow yourself up.”<sup>9</sup>

Musli Alievski, founder of “Stay Human” Onlus, was subjected to verbal attacks such as “Islamic extremist” during his electoral campaign in the 2019 administrative elections, in Pesaro.<sup>10</sup>

In Rome, a ticket inspector found a passenger on board a train without a valid ticket. When he understood that the passenger was Muslim, he started to insult him saying “[it’s] better to be a pig than an Arab.”<sup>11</sup>

In Ferrara, two women accidentally bumped into each other. One of them addressed the other in a vulgar way referring to her Islamic veil.<sup>12</sup>

It should be noted that all these episodes took place in public spaces and that someone acted in defence of the victim(s) by publically denouncing the event.

## Employment

The healthcare sector employs about 20,000 foreign workers, mainly from African and Arab countries as well as Eastern Europe.<sup>13</sup> In the last three years, this sector has registered an increase of 35% in discriminatory episodes and racial assaults concern-

7. Beatrice Tauro, “L’Islam italiano. Un’indagine tra religione, identità e islamofobia” di Fabrizio Ciocca”, Arabpress, <http://arabpress.eu/lislam-italiano-unindagine-tra-religione-identita-e-islamofobia-di-fabrizio-ciocca/81298/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

8. “Canzoni col burka’, sovranisti contro Mahmood”, AdnKronos, 11 February 2019, [https://www.adnkronos.com/fatti/cronaca/2019/02/11/canzoni-col-burka-sovranisti-contro-mahmood\\_iOU1HbCijbNCrRwJwIrRrN.html?refresh\\_ce](https://www.adnkronos.com/fatti/cronaca/2019/02/11/canzoni-col-burka-sovranisti-contro-mahmood_iOU1HbCijbNCrRwJwIrRrN.html?refresh_ce), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

9. Emanuela Carucci, “Torino, ragazze musulmane aggredite su un autobus”, il Giornale, 21 March 2019, <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/torino-ragazze-musulmane-aggredite-su-autobus-1666412.html>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

10. “Il razzismo quotidiano”, Cronache di ordinario razzismo, [http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/il-razzismo-quotidiano/?fwp\\_data=2019-01-01%2C2019-12-31&fwp\\_cerca=musulmano](http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/il-razzismo-quotidiano/?fwp_data=2019-01-01%2C2019-12-31&fwp_cerca=musulmano), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

11. After an Italian woman denounced it on Twitter, the public local service Atac granted that measures would be taken against the employee. For more information, see: “Il razzismo quotidiano”, Cronache di ordinario razzismo.

12. “Il razzismo quotidiano”, Cronache di ordinario razzismo.

13. “Medici stranieri: è fuga dall’Italia. Ecco i dati Amsi”, 26 November 2019, Quotidianosanità.it, [https://www.quotidianosanita.it/lavoro-e-professioni/articolo.php?articolo\\_id=79151](https://www.quotidianosanita.it/lavoro-e-professioni/articolo.php?articolo_id=79151), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

ing foreign practitioners, both medical doctors and healthcare staff.<sup>14</sup> The discrimination concerns the lower-ranking healthcare practitioners of foreign origin rather than their Italian colleagues. Discrimination is also due to the fear of patients being seen by a health professional of foreign origin. In the northern region of Veneto, some medics working in private medical practices have received complaints by patients because of their veil and being Muslim, and as a result they have been fired.<sup>15</sup> According to the Amsi (*Associazione medici di origine straniera in Italia*), similar episodes have been registered in other regions like Trentino-Alto Adige, Lombardy, and Campania.<sup>16</sup> In the public healthcare sector, Muslim doctors have to face other kind of difficulties shared with practitioners of foreign origin in general. Indeed, in order to enter a public competition a foreign doctor has to hold Italian citizenship and hold a certificate of knowledge of Italian language at least of level C1.<sup>17</sup>

A research conducted in 2019 reports the experience of Mohamed who was offered a job as long as he accepted that his name tag write “Max.”<sup>18</sup> The same research reports the experience of a young Muslim student wearing the veil:

“During job interviews it happens that I capture the attention with my linguistic knowledge and my education. They offer me the job just as long as I keep the veil off. But I cannot and I do not want it. I continue to look for a job but it is not easy.”<sup>19</sup>

Young people also seem to face problems being accepted for a traineeship. An employee of the local Traineeship Office says:

“... just 6% of trainees have foreign origin [...]. When they call and say their name is ‘Mohammed, etc.’, they have already lost that job.”<sup>20</sup>

14. In 2019, Amsi (*Associazione medici di origine straniera in Italia*, Italian foreign medical association) has received more than 300 denouncements and has stated that the 80% of assaults against foreign practitioners are unreported (the percentage is 60% in the case of assaults against Italian practitioners). For more information, see: Foad Aodi, “Quel razzismo strisciante verso i medici stranieri”, *Amsimed.org*, 9 January 2020, <http://www.amsimed.org/quel-razzismo-strisciante-verso-i-medici-stranieri/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

15. Viviana Franzellitti, “Veneto, Aodi (Amsi): ‘Dottorresse rifiutate da pazienti e direttori sanitari perché indossano il velo islamico’”, *Sanita Informazione*, 8 January 2020, <https://www.sanitainformazione.it/lavoro/veneto-dottorresse-velo-rifiutate/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

16. Luigi Esposito, “Discriminazione dottoresse con il velo. Foad Aodi: ‘Una patologia mediatica’”, *RCS Salute*, 9 January 2020, <https://rcssalute.it/articolo/2304/discriminazione-dottoresse-con-il-velo-foad-aodi-una-patologia-mediatica>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

17. Diana Romersi, “Scuole di Specializzazione, il nuovo bando discriminati i medici stranieri. Scoppia la polemica”, *Sanita Informazione*, 3 May 2019, <https://www.sanitainformazione.it/formazione/scuole-di-specializzazione-il-nuovo-bando-discriminati-i-medici-stranieri-scoppia-la-polemica/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

18. Johanna Mitterhofer and Martha Jiménez-Rosano, “Relazione finale: Dalla scuola al mondo del lavoro: percorsi di transizione di giovani con background migratorio”, *Eurac Research*, May 2019, <http://www.eurac.edu/en/research/autonomies/minrig/publications/Documents/Report-Minderheiten-IT-def.pdf>, p. 21, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

19. Mitterhofer and Jiménez-Rosano, “Relazione finale: Dalla scuola al mondo del lavoro: percorsi di transizione di giovani con background migratorio”, p. 21.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Discrimination episodes on the job market are reduced if a relationship already exists between the aspiring employee and the employer.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the increase of social capital can redefine the discrimination dynamics within a community.

## Education

Behind the constitutional frame of the education system, schools reflect society and its internal dynamics. The fact that schools and universities have been recognised as the main places in which discrimination occur<sup>22</sup> forces all of us to be very careful in understanding what is happening in our society.

All other things being equal, students of foreign origin choose training journeys focused on employability more often than others. This seems to be due to an institutional mechanism of subconscious discrimination triggered by teachers themselves. A teacher stated:

“There is a problem in the orientation of vocational school students. [...] Suggesting to a large part of them [students of foreign origin] to enrol in a professional establishment, their competences and capabilities are not recognised.”<sup>23</sup>

This mechanism can influence the career perspectives of these young people, and increase their feeling of being foreign.

Being small communities, problems of discrimination can manifest themselves not just in the content of curricula but also in daily practices. The schools’ meals can be a trigger for debate, as happened in Mestre where a group of families asked for a halal menu for their children.<sup>24</sup>

## Politics

Racist and xenophobic tones, registered in politics by the *EIR 2018* report,<sup>25</sup> continue to be present in 2019. One of the main issues can be linked to the instability of the Italian political scenario that seems to put Italy in a perpetual electoral campaign. The government formed after the 2018 election - made up of *Lega Nord* and *Movimento 5 Stelle* - has always shown its weakness so that all political actors seek acceptance, looking forward to the next election. During this political experience, the *Lega Nord* proposed a decree - that has not been implemented - aiming to prohibit

21. Ibid., p. 23.

22. Maria Scopece, “I ragazzi di fede musulmana più integrati in Italia hanno la doppia cittadinanza. Parla Ciocca”, *Formiche Analisi, commenti e scenari*, 19 April 2019, <https://formiche.net/2019/04/ragazzi-fede-musulmana-piu-integrati-italia-la-doppia-cittadinanza/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

23. “Relazione finale: Dalla scuola al mondo del lavoro: percorsi di transizione di giovani con background migratorio”, p. 22.

24. Sergio Rame, “Venezia, gli islamici a scuola: ‘Date carne halal ai nostri figli’”, *ilGiornale.it*, 29 September 2019, <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/venezia-islamici-scuola-date-carne-halal-ai-nostri-figli-1760143.html>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

25. *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2019), [http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/EIR\\_2018.pdf](http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/EIR_2018.pdf), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

kosher and halal slaughter, motivated by the desire to defend animal as sentient beings.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, in October 2018, it proposed restrictive rules for foreign financing for the construction of new mosques in Italy, pretending to be blocking financing from extremists countries. Actually, policies implemented while the *Lega* has been in power were not specifically against Muslims but against migrants in general such as the Law Decree n. 113 approved on 4 October 2018 which intended to limit the migratory flow.

After the political crisis in August 2019, the new government is now made up of *Movimento 5 Stelle*, the *Partito Democratico*, and *Italia Viva* while right-wing parties represent the opposition. In this context: (1) the migration issue has been used by all political parties that report numbers and figures to support their own theses, and (2) the internet and social networks represent the main instruments in forming consensus and influencing public opinion. During the European election campaign of 2019, Amnesty International conducted a monitoring on hate speech online, analysing the messages published on Facebook pages and Twitter accounts by Italian candidates.<sup>27</sup> Among the most active candidates, migration is one of the main issues considered by Matteo Salvini (*Lega Nord*), Giorgia Meloni (*Fratelli d'Italia*), and Nicola Fratoianni (*Sinistra Italiana*).<sup>28</sup> An interesting element to consider concerns how much politicians spend to promote their messages. According to the Amnesty International report, the official Facebook page of Matteo Salvini - to whom belongs the 51.5% of interactions -<sup>29</sup> invested 128,782 euros for a total of 58 posts between April and June 2019. Most of his problematic posts concern migrants. In this perpetual election campaign, right-wing parties continue to talk about an “Islamic invasion” and the incompatibility between Islam and Western societies. Here are two social media posts published by Giorgia Meloni and Matteo Salvini:

“If Muslims think of bringing holy war into our house, it is time to take even drastic measures: all that remains is to block all forms of Islamic immigration until they clear up their ideas. We intend to defend our classical and Christian roots from the process of Islamisation of Europe, do-gooders and sultans of half the world need to make a reason.”

---

26. Claudio Cartaldo, “Vietata la macellazione islamica. Arriva la nuova legge della Lega”, *ilGiornale.it*, 2 October 2018, <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/vitetata-macellazione-islamica-arriva-nuova-legge-lega-1583141.html>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

27. “Europee 2019: ha già vinto l'odio”, Amnesty International Italia, 24 May 2019, <https://www.amnesty.it/europee-2019-ha-gia-vinto-lodio/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

28. Meloni and Salvini are among the five politicians who targeted Muslim and refugees with problematic social media posts - as defined by the research team - while no such messages were found to have posted by Fratoianni.

29. “Report Il barometro dell'odio – elezioni europee 2019”, Amnesty International Italia, 26 May 2019, p. 15, <https://d21zrvtkxtgd6ae.cloudfront.net/public/uploads/2019/05/29202706/Amnesty-barometro-odio-2019.pdf>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).



**Figure 1:** Post published by Giorgia Meloni, leader of *Fratelli d'Italia*, on her Facebook page.<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 2:** Post published by Matteo Salvini, leader of *Lega Nord*, on his Facebook page commenting on a television report of the TG2 National broadcast: *We do not want to end up like Sweden, this is not integration! NO to the EURABIA. Oriana, look at us from heaven. SWEDEN ATTACKED. STOP EURABIA!*<sup>31</sup>

Thinking about the consequences of negative politic comments, it is interesting to notice that if hate speech is not expressed in the politicians' posts, it is present among their followers' comments.<sup>32</sup> It seems that a single negative comment is able to multiply its effect generating hate speech indirectly.

Notwithstanding that migration is a complex phenomenon that Italy cannot solve on its own,<sup>33</sup> dealing too generally with migrants can be understood by two kinds of explanations. First, looking for someone to blame for all the suffered evil is a human mechanism and migrants can represent the scapegoat for politicians who

30. Giorgia Meloni, Facebook, 23 April 2019, [https://www.facebook.com/giorgiameloni.paginaufficiale/posts/10157082154732645?comment\\_id=10157082182302645&reply\\_comment\\_id=691268687955011](https://www.facebook.com/giorgiameloni.paginaufficiale/posts/10157082154732645?comment_id=10157082182302645&reply_comment_id=691268687955011), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

31. Matteo Salvini, Twitter, 25 May 2019, [https://twitter.com/search?f=live&q=eurabia%20\(from%3Amatteosalvinimi\)&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?f=live&q=eurabia%20(from%3Amatteosalvinimi)&src=typed_query), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

32. "Report Il barometro dell'odio – elezioni europee 2019", Amnesty International Italia, p. 37.

33. Niccolò Magnani, "Migranti, Lega Musulmana: 'Ue aiuti l'Italia' Appello al Meeting 'Lora del dialogo'", Il Sussidiario.net, 21 August 2019, <https://www.ilsussidiario.net/news/migranti-lega-musulmana-ue-aiuti-litalia-appello-al-meeting-lora-del-dialogo/1917692/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

want to hide their own political responsibilities. Second, a political party can use popular issues like migration to deflect attention from the party's internal turmoil.

Political campaigns have also seen the participation of the extreme right-wing party of Casa Pound. However, 2019 is the year in which its leader decided to turn the party into a movement.<sup>34</sup> This can be explained by the fact that anti-Muslim argumentation and nationalist position are now successfully claimed by the *Lega Nord* and *Fratelli d'Italia*.

## Media

The issue of migration is at the centre of the political debate and consequently it is one of the main issues considered by media and journalists.



**Figure 3:** “Better Chinese than Islamic”. Front page of the newspaper *Libero*.<sup>35</sup>

Presenting his last book *Stop Islam*, Magdi Cristiano Allam claims that “in Italy, in Europe (...), with full respect for Muslim people, we have the right and the duty to ban Islam as a religion because of its incompatibility with our laws, rules, and values.”<sup>36</sup> Maurizio Belpietro, writing about the donation of 10,000 euros to Carola Rackete by the Turkish organization Milli Görüs for her activities, wrote about incitement to conquer.<sup>37</sup> Vittorio Feltri wrote about the new trade agreement between Italy and China

34. “Casapound, Iannone: ‘Finita esperienza di partito, torniamo movimento’”, *La Repubblica*, 27 June 2019, [https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2019/06/27/news/casapound\\_torna\\_movimento\\_iannone-229739363/](https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2019/06/27/news/casapound_torna_movimento_iannone-229739363/), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

35. *Libero*, Facebook, 31 March 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/liberonews/photos/buongiorno-ancora-ecco-la-prima-pagina-di-libero-in-edicola-oggi-qui-il-link-per/2948266671880803/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

36. For more information, see: Magdi Cristiano Allam, Facebook, 16 October 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/MagdiCristianoAllam/videos/1258958127610100/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

37. Ferdinando Primo, “I titoli dei giornali di venerdì 5 luglio 2019”, *La Verità*, 5 July 2019, <https://www.alessioporcuc.it/articoli/i-titoli-dei-giornali-di-venerdi-5-luglio-2019/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

claiming “Better Chinese than Islamic”<sup>38</sup> (Fig. 3) and defined the proposal for removing the crucifixes from public schools as a “humiliating submission to Islam”.<sup>39</sup>

Even if they cannot be considered as central figures of an Islamophobic network, there is an element that these figures seem to share. They claim the possibility to distinguish between Islam as a religion - considered as incompatible with Western society and a source of terrorists - and Muslims as people. They claim that all their insults and verbal attacks are against the religion and extremists and that the Muslims living peacefully in Italy (respecting its culture) should be accepted.

### Justice System

The Italian justice system tries to balance two different kind of constitutional principles: public safety and everyone’s right to express their religious confession. The difficulty in balancing these two aspects resurfaces periodically. In 2019, the Court of Appeal of Milan authorised health facilities to use the following sign to prohibit access to whoever wears a burqa.<sup>40</sup> (Fig. 4)



**Figure 4:** Sign to prohibit the entrance of masked people in public health facilities.<sup>41</sup>

38. Enzo Boldi, “Libero apre le porte alla via della Seta: ‘Meglio i cinesi degli islamici’”, *Giornalettismo.com*, 13 March 2019, <https://www.giornalettismo.com/via-della-seta-libero-islam/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

39. Maria Pezzi, “Vittorio Feltri contro Fioramonti e il vescovo di Bologna: ‘Umiliante sottomissione all’islam’”, *liberoquotidiano.it*, 6 October 2019, <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/politica/13510858/vittorio-feltri-fioramonti-vescovo-bologna-umiliante-sottomissione-all-islam-.html>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

40. “Sentenza”, *Repubblica Italiana in Nome del Popolo Italiano Corte D’appello di Milano*, No: 4330, 28 October 2019, [http://images.go.wolterskluwer.com/Web/WoltersKluwer/%7B0ca6102f-8705-4a0f-8766-a90b65820fad%7D\\_corte-appello-milano-sentenza-28-ottobre-2019.pdf](http://images.go.wolterskluwer.com/Web/WoltersKluwer/%7B0ca6102f-8705-4a0f-8766-a90b65820fad%7D_corte-appello-milano-sentenza-28-ottobre-2019.pdf), (Access date: 7 February 2020). The Court underlined that this sentence is not based on a discriminatory perspective but on the necessity to maintain public safety in so far as the prohibition concerns people wearing helmets or ski masks as well (according to the Law 152/75). The matter started in 2015 when the Regional Council of Lombardy adopted a provision in order to strengthen the security measures in public offices, including public hospitals.

41. “Milano, per il Tar legittimo il divieto per il burqa in ospedale”, *La Repubblica*, 20 April 2017, [https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/04/20/news/legittimo\\_il\\_divieto\\_per\\_il\\_burqa\\_in\\_ospedale-163491435/](https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/04/20/news/legittimo_il_divieto_per_il_burqa_in_ospedale-163491435/), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

The associations that opposed the use of this kind of prohibition signs argued that it does not require the identification of the person wearing the burqa but it simply prohibits the person from accessing the health facility; in fact, there is no kind of system in place to check identities.<sup>42</sup> After the court sentence, the sign has been adopted by other regions such as Friuli and Veneto not only in public health facilities but in public offices as well.<sup>43</sup>

Just a few months later, the Constitutional Court released a sentence that rejected another provision adopted by the region of Lombardy aimed at making the construction of new mosques difficult. In this case, the Court referred explicitly to the religious freedom principle established by the Italian Constitution and the right to have adequate space to practice it.<sup>44</sup>

## Internet

Social networks, websites, and blogs play an important role in the spread of ideas, being both accountable and unaccountable sources of news.

A recent study conducted by the Oxford Internet Institute<sup>45</sup> underlined that news reposted by unaccountable websites is more viral than news diffused by online newspapers.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the most shared news published online - coming from unaccountable sources - can be targeted as anti-migrant and anti-Islam.<sup>47</sup>

One of the last posts published on Facebook by the Anti-Islamisation Party in 2019 was a comment on an anti-Semitic attack in New York.<sup>48</sup> It read as follows: “They will come house-to-house to stalk us because we are not Islamic. Let’s open our eyes.” (Fig. 5)

42. Laura Biarella, “Ospedale, legittimo divieto di ingresso con il burqa”, *Altalex.com*, 6 December 2019, <https://www.altalex.com/documents/news/2019/12/06/ospedale-legittimo-divieto-ingresso-con-burqa#carattere>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

43. In March 2019, the *Legha* party proposed a motion to the Council of Friuli region that adopted it with a majority including both right and left political parties; for more information, see: Elisabetta Batic, “Friuli: stop a burqa, niqab e caschi negli uffici pubblici e ospedali”, *ilmessaggero.it*, 27 March 2019, [https://www.ilmessaggero.it/italia/stop\\_burqa\\_caschi\\_uffici\\_friuli-4389470.html](https://www.ilmessaggero.it/italia/stop_burqa_caschi_uffici_friuli-4389470.html), (Access date: 7 February 2020). The same year, in Padua, the obstetrician clinic of the public hospital posted the prohibition sign too; for more information, see: “Vietato l’ingresso col volto coperto”, *Corriere di Verona*, 10 March 2019, <https://www.pressreader.com/italy/corriere-di-verona/20190310/281792810341441>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

44. “Islam. Stop della Consulta alla legge lombarda anti-moschee, furia della Lega”, *Dire Agenzia di Stampa Nazionale*, 5 December 2019, <https://www.dire.it/05-12-2019/399443-islam-stop-della-consulta-alla-legge-lombarda-anti-moschee-furia-della-lega/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

45. Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard, *The Global Disinformation Order. 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation*, (University of Oxford, United Kingdom: 2019), <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2019/09/CyberTroop-Report19.pdf>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

46. Rosita Rijitano, “Islam e migranti. Gli euroscettici al voto a colpi di fake news”, *ilMattino.it*, 25 May 2019, [https://www.ilmattino.it/primopiano/politica/islam\\_migranti\\_euroscettici\\_voto\\_fake\\_news-4514094.html](https://www.ilmattino.it/primopiano/politica/islam_migranti_euroscettici_voto_fake_news-4514094.html), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

47. Rosita Rijitano, “Islam e migranti euroscettici al voto a colpi di fake news”.

48. PAI - Partito Anti Islamizzazione, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/PartitoAntiislamizzazione/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).



**Figure 5:** Post published by the Anti-Islamisation Party commenting on an anti-Semitic attack carried out in New York.<sup>49</sup>

Concerning Twitter, the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the Map of Intolerance project released by the Italian Vox-Observatory has analysed tweets published between March and May 2019. Compared to 2018, hate speech against migrants in general registered an increase of 15.1% reaching a total of 32% of negative tweets. (Fig. 6)

	Tweet totali	Tweet negativi rilevati	Tweet negativi geolocalizzati
Migranti	74.451	49.695 (32%)	22.043
Donne	55.347	39.876 (27%)	17.242
Islamici	30.387	22.537 (15%)	8.673
Disabili	23.499	16.676 (11%)	3.430
Ebrei	19.952	15.196 (10%)	6.943
Omosessuali	11.741	7.808 (5%)	3.312
<b>TOTALI</b>	<b>215.377</b>	<b>151.783 (70%)</b>	<b>61.643</b>

**Figure 6:** Data showing the number of hate speech tweets published categorized according to content (in the coloured rows, in order: migrants, women, Islamic, disables, Jewish, homosexual) and absolute value and percentage (in the columns, in order: the total number of tweets, negative and geotagged ones).<sup>50</sup>

49. PAI - Partito Anti Islamizzazione, Facebook, 29 December 2019, [https://www.facebook.com/PartitoAntiislamizzazione/posts/1745336668935095?\\_\\_xts\\_\\_%5B0%5D=68.ARAPkVPnbGJYtEcDfu1k08NO6wd3yCuUEx5QBi20oU2B-nI71A9jtFoAzMmaT3TX9BjJqk6P0uDII-XfClo1jM6JkHqOWAZuOGYyDaNI\\_jWcHH-NUJcIiks6icdfZCJ-OueJz4luSgMRg\\_vL69nLZgOwwOp2MwUTX85-PAYw9PWwPB3nw7nB\\_yDW7N5Njp-2JxtwL1poHhaz-Ih6o58UQmc1GIFGKN6jJo\\_rgzj3wsMWQEYukzQfywNsF8kxIk8UJap\\_KWivE4MKIQeuR-9GLx1s2WaIMCj2HhMqQA\\_Lqef5J5QqyPoPvc\\_LKV8GtXDJ0UUPuxlQbHAcKezUVRhaJm-1b6gtuw&\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=-R](https://www.facebook.com/PartitoAntiislamizzazione/posts/1745336668935095?__xts__%5B0%5D=68.ARAPkVPnbGJYtEcDfu1k08NO6wd3yCuUEx5QBi20oU2B-nI71A9jtFoAzMmaT3TX9BjJqk6P0uDII-XfClo1jM6JkHqOWAZuOGYyDaNI_jWcHH-NUJcIiks6icdfZCJ-OueJz4luSgMRg_vL69nLZgOwwOp2MwUTX85-PAYw9PWwPB3nw7nB_yDW7N5Njp-2JxtwL1poHhaz-Ih6o58UQmc1GIFGKN6jJo_rgzj3wsMWQEYukzQfywNsF8kxIk8UJap_KWivE4MKIQeuR-9GLx1s2WaIMCj2HhMqQA_Lqef5J5QqyPoPvc_LKV8GtXDJ0UUPuxlQbHAcKezUVRhaJm-1b6gtuw&__tn__=-R), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

50. "La Mappa Dell' Intolleranza", Vox Diritti, p. 6, [http://www.voxdiritti.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/190610\\_VOX-Comunicato-mappa-2019\\_-completo-compresso.pdf](http://www.voxdiritti.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/190610_VOX-Comunicato-mappa-2019_-completo-compresso.pdf), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

Considering just tweets targeting Muslims, the increase of the registered negative tweets is of 6.9%.<sup>51</sup>



**Figure 7:** The table shows the comparison between tweets published in 2018 and 2019, distinguishing between positive and negative tweets according to the different issue that are (top - down): homosexual, migrants, Jewish, disables, women, and Islamic.<sup>52</sup>

In this dangerous game, the use of fake Facebook accounts or paid advertisements is just two possible ways to pilot the diffusion of a message.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, social networks like Facebook and Twitter should adopt effective measures against such mechanisms.<sup>54</sup>

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid. p. 9.

53. Thanks to the engagement of the no-profit movement Avaaz, 77 European Facebook pages have been blocked. “Islam e Migranti, gli Euroscettici Verso il Voto a Colpi di Fake News”, Il Mattino.it, 25 May 2019, [https://www.ilmattino.it/primopiano/politica/islam\\_migranti\\_euroscettici\\_voto\\_fake\\_news-4514094.html](https://www.ilmattino.it/primopiano/politica/islam_migranti_euroscettici_voto_fake_news-4514094.html), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

54. After an investigation among its members, Twitter stated that a system will be put in place so that tweets expressing hate against any kind of religious groups will be erased. For more information, see: “Twitter cancella i post di odio contro le religioni”, La Repubblica, 9 July 2019, [https://www.repubblica.it/tecnologia/social-network/2019/07/09/news/twitter\\_cancella\\_l\\_odio\\_contro\\_le\\_religioni-230805295/?ref=drac-2](https://www.repubblica.it/tecnologia/social-network/2019/07/09/news/twitter_cancella_l_odio_contro_le_religioni-230805295/?ref=drac-2), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

In Italy, there is not a defined Islamophobic network but there are different actors who play a fundamental role in spreading Islamophobic messages. Among them, right-wing publications like *Libero* and *Il Giornale*, both on paper and online with Facebook pages and Twitter accounts stand out. Their main journalists and their directors express negative perspectives on migrants in general and Islam in particular. Linked to them, there are political parties and movement like Casa Pound, *Lega Nord*, *Fratelli d'Italia*, and *Forza Nuova*. In the last years, Islamophobic ideas have been spread in a mystifying way and as a result even those who seem to be the worst enemies of Muslim people are able to reject this accusation.

Other actors are active in trying to nurture a positive and amiable climate. Among them Pope Francis, who proposes an open and inclusive perspective, local associations, and civil movements are engaged in diffusing anti-discriminating points of views and action.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

A variety of initiatives have been taken by civil society and institutions against Islamophobia.

At the beginning of 2019, the Ca' Foscari University of Venezia completed the three-year SORAPS project entitled "Study of Religions against Prejudices" addressed to school teachers.<sup>55</sup> In the guidelines released on the website, the team suggest to teachers to "be equally careful not to adopt Islamist interpretations of Islam and not to present these minority views as representative of Islam and Muslims in general".<sup>56</sup> In November, the Sapienza University of Rome organised in collaboration with the NGO "Un ponte per..." a workshop on Islamophobia and the available strategies to combat this phenomenon.<sup>57</sup>

Taking a step towards a better integration with the Muslim community, the Archbishop of Bologna proposed to modify the filling of one of the most famous local dishes by substituting pork with chicken.<sup>58</sup>

55. An international team of scholars and experts prepared and offered high school teachers of different European countries new instruments (teaching materials and free online lessons) aimed to help them talk about religion in their classrooms. For more information, see: "The Project", Study of Religions Against Prejudices and Stereotypes, <https://soraps.unive.it/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

56. "Guidelines on Prejudices and Stereotypes in Religions", SORAPS, p. 63, [https://soraps.unive.it/files/2019/04/PROFREAD-IO1-Stereotypes-and-prejudices-Guidelines\\_V4-05\\_01\\_19-2.pdf](https://soraps.unive.it/files/2019/04/PROFREAD-IO1-Stereotypes-and-prejudices-Guidelines_V4-05_01_19-2.pdf), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

57. For more information, see: "Ciclo Di Workshop-Tirocinio Sull'islamofobia E Sulle Possibili Strategie Di Contrasto Al Fenomeno", Sapienza Università di Roma, 22 November 2019, <https://saras.uniroma1.it/archivionotizie/ciclo-di-workshop-tirocinio-sull-islamofobia-e-sulle-possibili-strategie-di>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

58. "Bologna, tortellini al pollo per favorire l'integrazione coi musulmani: la politica italiana si divide", Leggo.it, 2 October 2019, [https://www.leggo.it/italia/cronache/tortellini\\_pollo\\_musulmani\\_bologna\\_ultime\\_notizie\\_oggi-4769715.html](https://www.leggo.it/italia/cronache/tortellini_pollo_musulmani_bologna_ultime_notizie_oggi-4769715.html), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

The campaign *#Ispeakhuman* organised by *Vox - Osservatorio Italiano sui diritti* (Italian observatory on rights) was based on the idea that to combat hate speech the use of a different kind of language is necessary.<sup>59</sup> (Fig. 8)



**Figure 8:** Campaign *#Ispeakhuman* by *Vox - Osservatorio Italiano*.<sup>60</sup>

The project *Task Force Osservatori* adopted by Amnesty International Italy instituted a work group focused on the observation, monitoring, and documentation of discriminatory acts concerning Islamophobia, gender, and migration issues.<sup>61</sup>

In the market job, the multinational company Ikea Italia has not only authorised employees to come to work with the veil but has produced a work veil with the colors and the logo of the company.

Among the institutional initiatives, attention should be drawn to the conference “School & Religions. Good Practices in the Educational Offer of the Italian Public School”, organised on 26 January at the Palazzo Montecitorio, the seat of the Italian Chamber of Deputies.<sup>62</sup> Finally, on 31 October 2019, the Senate of the Republic approved the institution of a commission to combat phenomena of intolerance, racism, anti-Semitism, and incitement to hate and violence.<sup>63</sup>

59. Alice Scaglioni, “Rispetto e tolleranza contro l’odio online: al via la campagna *#Ispeakhuman*”, *Primaonline.it*, 13 May 2019, <https://www.primaonline.it/2019/05/13/289192/rispetto-e-tolleranza-contro-lodio-online-al-via-la-campagna-ispeakhuman/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020). The campaign was organised in collaboration with Bottoni High School and the Università Cattolica of Milan.

60. Rispetto e tolleranza contro l’odio online: al via la campagna *#Ispeakhuman*, *Prima Comunicazione*, 13 May 2019, <https://www.primaonline.it/2019/05/13/289192/rispetto-e-tolleranza-contro-lodio-online-al-via-la-campagna-ispeakhuman/>.

61. For more information, see: “Questa pagina non esiste più o è stata spostata”, Amnesty International Italy, <https://www.amnesty.it/entra-in-azione/task-force-attivismo/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

62. For more information, see: “Intercultural Education Through Religious Studies”, <https://iers.unive.it/news/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

63. “Istituita la Commissione per il contrasto dei fenomeni di intolleranza, razzismo, antisemitismo e istigazione all’odio e alla violenza proposta dalla senatrice a vita Liliana Segre”, *Osservatorio Antisemitismo*, <https://www.osservatorioantisemitismo.it/articoli/istituita-la-commissione-per-il-contrasto-dei-fenomeni-di-intolleranza-razzismo-antisemitismo-e-istigazione-allodio-e-alla-violenza-proposta-dalla-senatrice-a-vita-liliana-segre/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020). The project, proposed by Senator for life Liliana Segre, has been approved with 151 votes in favour and the abstention of right-wing parties like *Lega Nord*, *Fratelli d’Italia*, and *Forza Italia*.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Even if discriminating dynamics have determined the opposition between Northern and Southern Italy since its unification, Italy does not have a known history of systemic racism. However, in the last years, the spread of intolerance and discrimination based on racial or religious factors has been more concrete.

Political actors started to use certain issues in an instrumental way. In this sense, migrants, for which being Muslim is an aggravating circumstance, represent the perfect scapegoat to pin responsibility of all the evil suffered by society from unemployment to the assumed increase of criminality.

The analysis conducted shows an interesting practice. Politicians and journalists base their reflections (or verbal attacks) on the distinction between Islam as a religion and Muslims as a people. They pretend to attack just “radical Islam” and claim to want to defend Muslims who live peacefully in the country respecting Italian traditions. In this way, they protect themselves from the accusation of being Islamophobic. Even assuming that this distinction can be made theoretically, how would it be possible to distinguish an honest Muslim from an extremist just by looking at him/her walking in the street? Public actors should pay more attention to the social impact in the long term. The words and the way in which these actors refer to Muslims can result in a diffusion of the feeling among the public of being authorised to do the same or worse. This kind of attitudes can trigger dynamics difficult to control.

To conclude, the following policies should be supported:

- To promote an effective mechanism to collect - and make public in a short time - official data concerning Islamophobic attacks, assuming that a complete knowledge of a phenomenon is the first step to combating it.
- To promote awareness among public actors of the potential impact of their words on civil society, and not to promote models that legitimise hate speech.
- To improve knowledge at school without stereotypes and prejudices, recognising this as a key role in combating any kind of discrimination. Assuming that it is easier to not be afraid of something you know, school projects aiming at the comprehension of cultural systems other than their own should be promoted.
- To promote a multidisciplinary approach with the collaboration of different actors - such as universities, schools, ministries, police forces, research institutes, institutions, and NGOs - that can contribute to a different way of offering alternative perspectives.
- To promote a real sharing of information and data overcoming the actual fragmentation due to the existence of different observatories on Islamophobia and hate speech in Italy.

- To promote correct attitudes in the job market and the respect of workers' rights, considering this sector as one of the most important in order to accomplish a real integration of people of foreign origin.
- To promote the production of social capital considering how a network of relationships can help both migrants overcome their feeling of being foreigners, and local people understand how it is possible to create bridges with people belonging to different cultures.

## Chronology

- **11.02.2019:** Sanremo (Imperia): After his victory at the Sanremo Music Festival, Alessandro Mahmood is the target of verbal anti-Muslim attacks accompanied by comments on his sexual orientation – solely because of his foreign surname.
- **01.03.2019:** Turin: At the conference Torino's business. *Andata e ritorno per l'Europa*", the *Lega Nord* deputy Danilo Oscar Lancini talks about "atrocities migrants mainly coming from Islamic countries have carried out in Western countries".
- **21.03.2019:** Turin: A mere discussion due to two Muslim girls' fear of a dog on a public bus becomes a brawl.
- **28.03.2019:** Rome: Two women from Morocco who have lived in Italy for 30 years are offered a council house because of mobility disability. When they try to enter the house for the first time, the other residents stop them because they are foreign and Muslim.
- **23.05.2019:** Pesaro: Musli Alievski, founder of "Stay Human" Onlus, decides to run in the 2019 administrative elections and is subjected to verbal attacks such as "Islamic extremist".
- **05.06.2019:** Rome: A ticket inspector discovers a passenger on the train without a valid ticket. When he understands that he is Muslim, the ticket inspector starts to insult him saying "[it's] better to be a pig than an Arab".
- **01.07.2019:** Ferrara: Two women accidentally bump into each other. One of them addresses to the other in a vulgar way referring to her Islamic veil.
- **01.07.2019,** Genova: Maurizio Gregorini, service manager at Genova municipality, publishes a tweet in which he writes, "They want that our sons are homosexual, they want that our countries are Islamised and Africanised".
- **11.07.2019:** Alessandria: A local committee organises a protest demonstration against the project of constructing a new Islamic centre.
- **02.10.2019:** Bologna: Archbishop Matteo Maria Zuppi proposes to modify the filling of one of the most famous local dishes by substituting pork with chicken as a step towards a better integration with the Muslim community.

- **02.10.2019:** Milan: The journalist Vittorio Feltri defines the proposal for removing the crucifixes from public schools as a “humiliating submission to Islam”.
- **31.10.2019:** Rome: The Senate of the Republic approves the establishment of a commission to combat phenomena of intolerance, racism, anti-Semitism, and incitement to hate and violence.



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**KOSOVO**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

ADEM FERIZAJ



## The Author

**Adem Ferizaj** is an independent scholar whose work focuses on the Balkans, Orientalism, and migration. He is the author of the 2018 European Islamophobia Report on Kosovo and the 2019 academic article “Othering Albanian Muslim Masculinities: A Case Study of Albanian Football Players”, published in the journal *Occhiali – Rivista sul mediterraneo islamico*. He completed his trilingual (German, French, and English) BA in political science and sociology and an MA in international relations at Sciences Po Paris, and publishes in Albanian, German, French, and English. Email: adem.ferizaj@sciencespo.fr

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Adem Ferizaj: *Islamophobia in Kosovo: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

Islamophobia in Kosovo, a Muslim-majority country, could be considered paradoxical. On the one hand, Kosovo-Albanian political elites tend to present themselves as ‘good European Muslims’ (as opposed to ‘bad non-European Muslims’) towards their European counterparts. On the other, Islamophobia is a discriminatory praxis threatening the very existence of Kosovo as a state on a global political level.

In this year, the return of 110 Kosovo citizens from Syria was one of the main political topics. Whereas it should be highlighted that condemning Kosovars’ DAESH participation is necessary, the highest political circles of the country focused on considering these nationals as a potential threat to Kosovo’s Euro-Atlantic ambitions instead of seeing them as a problem of their own society. Hence, it could be argued that the country’s political elites were more interested in substantiating their image as ‘good European Muslims’ than dealing with the problem itself. Media coverage of this topic not only reinforced the binary between ‘peaceful’ pre-war Islam and ‘radical’ post-war Islam, but also conflated gender-based violence, extremism, and terrorism with Islam. Moreover, in 2019, a historical mosque (*xhamia e Namazgjahut*) was vandalised in Prizren, the country’s second largest city.

In 2019, the Austrian novelist Peter Handke, who has denied the Serbian genocide against Albanians in Kosovo, won the Nobel Prize in Literature provoking indignation and criticism in Kosovo. Awarding the world’s most important literary prize to such a writer epitomised an instance of the normalisation of Islamophobic attacks against Kosovo’s right to exist by far-right European public figures. For example, in 2019, Eric Zemmour, Marion Maréchal, and Thilo Sarrazin were quoted using Kosovo for their visions of the Great Replacement theory. Furthermore, the ‘racialisation’ of the Kosovo-Albanian workforce was confirmed in the German debate on the lack of nurses in the country in 2019.

Due to the snap parliamentary elections in late 2019, Kosovo will have its first left-wing prime minister who already introduced anti-colonial vocabulary to Kosovo politics. Moreover, in recent years, his takes on Albanian identity have not been subordinated to Islamophobic discourse dynamics – especially, when compared with former Kosovo prime ministers.

## Përmbledhje ekzekutive

Islamofobia në Kosovë, një vend me shumicë myslimane, mund të konsiderohet paradoksale. Nga njëra anë, elitat politike të shqiptarëve (të Kosovës) kanë tendencë të paraqesin veten si ‘mysliman të mirë evropian’ (në krahasim me ‘myslimanët e këqijë jo-europianë’) ndaj homologëve të tyre. Nga ana tjetër, islamofobia është një praktikë diskriminuese që kërcënon vetë ekzistencën e Kosovës si shtet në një nivel global politik.

Në këtë vit, kthimi i 110 qytetarëve të Kosovës nga Siria ishte një nga temat kryesore politike. Përderisa dënimi i pjesëmarrjes së kosovarëve në ISIS është i domosdoshëm, qarqet më të larta politike të vendit u përqendruan në konsiderimin e këtyre shtetasve si një kërcënim i mundshëm për ambiciet euro-atlantike të Kosovës, në vend që t’i shohin ata si një problem të shoqërisë. Prandaj, mund të argumentohet se elitat politike të vendit ishin më të interesuara të vërtetonin imazhin e tyre si ‘mysliman të mirë evropian’ sesa të merreshin me problemin në vetvete. Trajtimi mediatik i kësaj teme jo vetëm që përforcoi binaritetin midis Islamit ‘paqësor’ të paraluftës dhe Islamit ‘radikal’ të pasluftës, gjithashtu ndërthuri dhunën me bazë gjinore, ekstremizmin dhe terrorizmin me Islamin. Për më tepër, një xhami historike (*xhamia e Namazgjahut*) u vandalizua në Prizren në 2019-n.

Në vitin 2019, shkrimtari austriak Peter Handke, i cili mohoi gjenocidin serb kundër shqiptarëve në Kosovë, fitoi çmimin Nobel në Letërsi. Kjo ngjarje ka provokuar indinjatë dhe kritikë në Kosovë. Fakti që çmimi letrar më i rëndësishëm iu dha një shkrimtari të tillë paraqet një rast të përshtatshëm për normalizimin e sulmeve islamofobe kundër të drejtës së ekzistencës së Kosovës nga figura të famshme të djathtës ekstreme në Europë. Për shembull, Eric Zemmour, Marion Maréchal (nga Franca) dhe Thilo Sarrazin (nga Gjermania) u cituan se kishin përdorur Kosovën për vizionet e tyre Islamfobe për shoqëritë përkatëse (Great Replacement theory) në vitin 2019. Për më tepër, ‘racializimi’ i forcës punëtore kosovare u konfirmua në kuadër të debatit gjerman për mungesën e infermierëve në këtë vit.

Pas zgjedhjeve të parakohshme parlamentare në fund të vitit 2019, Kosova do të ketë kryeministrin e saj të parë të majtë i cili tashmë e ka ndikuar fjalorin politik të shqiptarëve duke e shtuar ligjërimin anti-kolonial. Për më tepër, qasja e tij sa i përket identitetit shqiptar nuk është në varësi të dinamikës së ligjëritimit islamofob në vitet e kaluara – veçanërisht, kur krahasohet me ish kryeministrat tjerë të Kosovës.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Republic of Kosovo

**Type of Regime:** Unitary parliamentary constitutional republic

**Form of Government:** Parliamentary Government

**Ruling Parties:** PANA Coalition (centre-right, liberal, centre-left) led by Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj until July 2019. As of February 2020: coalition between *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* (left-wing) and *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* (centre-right) led by Prime Minister Albin Kurti.

**Opposition Parties:** *Partia Demokratike e Kosovës* (centre-right), *AAK* & *PSD*, and *Nisma* & *AKR* (both left-wing, centre coalitions), and *Lista Srpska* (Serbian right-wing party)

**Last Elections:** 2019 snap parliamentary elections (left-wing party *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje*: 29 seats; centre-right party *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës*: 28 seats; centre-right party *Partia Demokratike e Kosovës*: 24 seats; centre coalition *AAK* & *PSD*: 13 seats; centre coalition *Nisma* & *AKR*: 6 seats; reserved for minorities: 20 seats - 10 of those seats went to Serbian party *Lista Srpska*)

**Total Population:** 1.7 million (2011)

**Major Languages:** Albanian

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** No official state or NGO data available

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** Although current statistics on this matter are lacking, a 2017 Civil Rights Defenders report on the situation of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian (RAE) communities stated that “[these] communities remain the most vulnerable and discriminated against groups in Kosovo.”

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Muslim 95.6%, Roman Catholic 2.2%, Orthodox 1.5%

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 1.6 million (96%) in 2011 (according to the last official census)

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** *Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës* (BIK, Islamic Community of Kosovo), and *Bashkësia e Tarikateve të Kosovës* (BTK, Union of Kosovo Tarikats)

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** N/A

**Far-Right Parties:** N/A

**Far-Right Movements:** N/A

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None, but limitations and controversies regarding the wearing of headscarves in public institutions are still ongoing.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None

- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None, but limitations and controversies regarding the wearing of headscarves in public institutions are still ongoing.
- **Prayer Ban:** None, but Kosovo limited police officers' rights to attend prayers during their working hours in 2018.

## Introduction

“Albanian Islamophobia operates within a horizon of Orientalist imaginations, according to which the ‘Other’ is oriental, backward, Muslim, traditional, patriarchal, corrupt, tyrannical, exotic, irrational, fanatical, dangerous, etc.”<sup>1</sup> This quote by Enis Sulstarova suggests how the erasure of Muslimness is enacted in Albanian discourses – and hence applies to Kosovo as well.

Yet, this discursive undertaking can be considered paradoxical as it is “an uncriticised import of the European ‘[O]ther’ by the European ‘[O]ther’ itself”.<sup>2</sup> Kosovo is a Muslim-majority country<sup>3</sup> situated in a continent often defining its Christian identity in binary terms.<sup>4</sup> It is in this geopolitical context that Albanian political elites present themselves as ‘good European Muslims’ (as opposed to ‘bad non-European Muslims’) towards European countries.<sup>5</sup> The adherence to Eurocentric discourse by Muslims in Europe is not unique to Albanians since it is also used by Bosnian Muslims, the majority population of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>6</sup>

On a global political level, Islamophobia is a discriminatory praxis threatening the very existence of Kosovo as a state. After having committed a genocide against Albanians during the 1998-1999 Kosovo War, Serbia still refuses to recognise Kosovo. This genocide mainly was fueled by Serbia’s anti-Muslim racism that also resulted in the 1995 Srebrenica genocide.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Serbia is constantly undermining Kosovo’s statehood by presenting Kosovo Albanians as “barbarians or Muslim extremists” – probably best exemplified by the Serbian campaign against Kosovo’s attempt to become an UNESCO member in 2015.<sup>8</sup> In Europe, Serbia’s anti-Albanian racism towards Kosovo is becoming more and more tolerated and widespread due to the rise in popularity of right-wing politics.<sup>9</sup> One such example is the French right-

1. Enis Sulstarova, *Arratisja nga Lindja: Orientalizmi shqiptar nga Naimi te Kadareja*, (Globic Press, Tirana: 2007), p. 239. The quote has been translated from Albanian into English by the author of this report.

2. Adem Ferizaj, “Shaci’ as Another Product of Albanian Orientalism”, *Prishtina Insight*, 30 October 2018, <https://prishtinainsight.com/shaci-as-another-product-of-albanian-orientalism/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

3. Muslim piety is far from being a monolithic practice in Kosovo. The majority of Muslims are Sunnis (represented by the BIK), but there are also Sufis (represented by the BTK).

4. Fatima El-Tayeb, “Creolizing Europe”, *Manifesta Journal*, 17 (2004), pp. 9-11.

5. Piro Rexhepi, “Arab Others at European Borders: Racializing Religion and Refugees along the ‘Balkan Route’”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41 (2018), p. 2215; Behar Sadriu, “Grasping the Syrian War. A View from Albanians in the Balkans”, *Nationalities Papers*, 45 (2017), pp. 540-541.

6. Denijal Jegic, “The Problem with the Bosnian Responses to Macron”, *Al Jazeera*, 22 November 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/problem-bosnian-responses-macron-191122100828687.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

7. Behar Sadriu, “Rebranding the War on Terror and Remaking Muslim Subjectivities”, *East European Politics* 35 (2019), p. 6; Norman L. Cigar, *Role of Serbian Orientalists in Justification of Genocide against Muslims of the Balkans*, (Logos-A, Prishtina: 2002), p. 62.

8. Adem Ferizaj, “Op-ed: Kosovo, Tear Gas, Mass Exodus and UNESCO”, *Balkanist*, 25 November 2015, <https://balkanist.net/op-ed-tear-gas-mass-exodus-and-unesco/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

9. Maxime Macé, “Grand remplacement et Kosovo: le fantôme de Zemmour et Marion Maréchal”, *France-Soir*, 19 September 2019, <http://www.francesoir.fr/politique-france/grand-remplacement-et-kosovo-le-fantome-de-zemmour-et-marion-marechal>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); “Österreichs Vizekanzler: Kosovo ist ein Teil Serbiens”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 February 2018, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/oesterreichs-vizekanzler-kosovo-ist-ein-teil-serbiens-15443172.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

wing extremist party *Rassemblement National* that criticised Kosovo's independence in 2018 by arguing that "ISIS also seems to have found fertile ground" in Kosovo.<sup>10</sup> In 2019, political actors in Germany and the Czech Republic issued statements in favour of revoking Kosovo's independence.<sup>11</sup> This report will analyse Kosovar Islamophobia by taking into account internal and external factors.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

Kosovo's dominant discourses tend to erase Albanian Muslimness.<sup>12</sup> Hence, it comes as no surprise that figures on anti-Muslim discriminations – be it on the physical or verbal level – are not collected by governmental or non-governmental institutions in Kosovo. However, in 2019, a historical mosque (*xhamia e Namazgjahut*) was vandalised in Prizren, the country's second largest city.<sup>13</sup> (Fig. 1)



**Figure 1:** The vandalised historical mosque (*xhamia e Namazgjahut*) in Prizren.<sup>14</sup>

10. Dominique Bilde, "Migrants, islamisme et trafic d'êtres humains: Kosovo, le trou noir de l'Europe", *Rassemblement National*, 14 September 2018, <https://rassemblementnational.fr/tribunes-libres/migrants-islamisme-et-trafic-detres-humains-kosovo-le-trou-noir-de-leurope/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020). The quote has been translated from French into English by the author of this report.

11. Rachael Kennedy, "Czech President Stirs Anger after Asking if He Can Withdraw Recognition of an Independent Kosovo", *Euronews*, 11 September 2019, <https://www.euronews.com/2019/09/11/czech-president-stirs-anger-after-asking-if-he-can-withdraw-recognition-of-an-independent>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); "Merkels Treffen zum Westbalkan war ein Schlag ins Wasser", *AfD kompakt*, 30 April 2019, <https://afdkompakt.de/2019/04/30/merkels-treffen-zum-westbalkan-war-ein-schlag-ins-wasser/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

12. Adem Ferizaj, "Islamophobia in Kosovo: National Report 2018", *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2019), p. 500.

13. "Dëmtohet xhamia e Namazgjahut në Prizren", in *Fokus*, 27 May 2019, <https://gazetainfokus.com/demtohet-xhamia-e-namazgjahut-ne-prizren/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

14. "Dëmtohet xhamia e Namazgjahut në Prizren", in *Fokus*, 27 May 2019, <https://gazetainfokus.com/demtohet-xhamia-e-namazgjahut-ne-prizren/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

In 2019, the return of 110 Kosovo citizens from Syria was one of the main political topics.<sup>15</sup> (Fig. 2) It should be highlighted that condemning Kosovars' DAESH participation is necessary and not Islamophobic. Yet, as soon as incidents like this are used to put Islam under general suspicion (for examples see the Media section of this report), Islamophobia becomes apparent. On this occasion, Kosovo's political elites reproduced Western mainstream Islamophobia by using the discursive framing that conflates DAESH terrorism with Islam.<sup>16</sup>

After arriving at the Prishtina airport, the returnees were sent to a foreigners detention centre surrounded by heavy police presence.<sup>17</sup> At a press conference, the then Minister of Justice Abelard Tahiri highlighted that "we [the Republic of Kosovo] cannot allow our citizens [referring to the 110 Kosovo citizens from Syria] to turn as a threat to the West."<sup>18</sup> Whereas it should be noted that Kosovo treated its own citizens like foreigners, it also is conspicuous that the highest political circles focused on considering these nationals as a potential threat to Kosovo's Euro-Atlantic ambitions, instead of seeing them as a problem of their own society. On this occasion, Kosovo's President Hashim Thaçi issued the following statement: "Kosovo is oriented towards Western values and is committed to supporting international partners in the fight against any terrorism and extremism that violates those values!"<sup>19</sup> Two things were constantly emphasised on the Kosovar side: First, the return of these citizens was conducted in close cooperation with the United States. Second, Kosovo was highly praised by the U.S. embassy for this step.<sup>20</sup> Hence, it could be argued that the country's political elites were more interested in substantiating their image as 'good Euro-

15. "Detaje të reja nga kthimi i grave e fëmijëve nga Siria në Kosovë", Koha.net, 20 April 2019, <https://www.koha.net/arberi/157996/dhjetera-gra-e-femije-kthehen-nga-siria-ne-kosove/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

16. Irene Zempi and Imran Awan, "Introduction", *The Routledge International Handbook of Islamophobia*, ed. Irene Zempi and Imran Awan, (Routledge, London: 2019), p. 1; Piro Rexhepi, "Arab Others at European Borders: Racializing Religion and Refugees along the 'Balkan Route'", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41 (2018), p. 2227; Behar Sadriu, "Grasping the Syrian War, A View from Albanians in the Balkans", *Nationalities Papers*, 45 (2019), pp. 2-14.

17. Bekim Shehu, "110 kosovarë kthehen nga Siria në Kosovë", Deutsche Welle, 20 April 2019, <https://www.dw.com/sq/110-kosovar%C3%AB-kthehen-nga-siria-n%C3%AB-kosov%C3%AB/a-48413396>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

18. "Kosovë, familjarët e xhihadistëve kthehen nga Siria", A2 CNN, 20 April 2019, <https://a2news.com/video/kosove-familjaret-e-xhihadisteve-kthehen-nga-siria/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020). The quote has been translated from Albanian into English by the author of this report.

19. Hashim Thaçi, Facebook, 20 April 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/HashimThaciOfficial/posts/2612530735483936>, (Access date: 26 January 2020). The quote has been translated from Albanian into English by the author of this report.

20. Shkëlqim Hysenaj, "Kthehen 110 kosovarë, 87 mbesin ende në Siri", Radio Evropa e Lirë, 20 April 2019, <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/tahiri-nga-siria-i-kthym-110-kosovare/29893101.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); "Kthehen 110 kosovare nga Siria", TV Klan, 20 April 2019, <https://tvklan.al/kosove-kthehen-nga-siria-familjaret-e-luftetareve-te-isis/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020). Especially the U.S. embassy is often referred to as an authority in Kosovo politics. Since it is hard to imagine another European state referring to the statement of a foreign embassy in such a servile way, this suggests that the relationship between the U.S. and Kosovo is more colonial than at first glance.

pean Muslims' than dealing with the problem itself.<sup>21</sup> In other words, they chose to soften Western Islamophobic anxieties toward Kosovo by subordinating themselves to Islamophobic discourse dynamics.



**Figure 2:** The return of 110 Kosovo citizens made headlines in 2019. Translation: “110 Kosovo Citizens Return from Syria, Including ISIS Fighters.”<sup>22</sup>

In 2019, one of the most renowned Euro-Atlantic cultural awards, the Nobel Prize, was Islamophobic against Kosovo: the Austrian novelist Peter Handke won the Nobel Prize in Literature provoking indignation and criticism in Kosovo.<sup>23</sup> (Fig. 3) Peter Handke is an author whose literary ‘aesthetics’ draw on white supremacist ideas leading him to deny the 1990s anti-Muslim genocides of the Balkans in his books.<sup>24</sup> During the Kosovo War in 1999, Handke expressed his wish to be “a Serbian Ortho-

21. Piro Rexhepi, “Arab Others at European Borders: Racializing Religion and Refugees along the ‘Balkan Route’”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41 (2018), p. 2215; Behar Sadriu, “Grasping the Syrian War, A View from Albanians in the Balkans”, *Nationalities Papers*, 45 (2017), pp. 540-541.

22. “Kosovë, familjarët e xhihadistëve kthehen nga Siria”, A2 CNN, 20 April 2019, <https://a2news.com/video/kosove-familjaret-e-xhihadisteve-kthehen-nga-siria/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

23. Salih Mehmeti, “Nobeli’ i shkeljes së vlerave njerëzore”, Koha.net, 12 October 2019, <https://www.koha.net/kulture/188525/nobeli-i-shkeljes-se-vlerave-njerezore/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); “MPJ: Shkrimtarit Handke duhet t’i merret Çmimi Nobel”, Gazeta Express, 11 October 2019, <https://www.gazetaexpress.com/mpj-shkrimtarit-handke-duhet-ti-merret-cmimi-nobel/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Mehdi Hyseni, “Të anulohet Çmimi Nobel i Peter Handke”, Bota Sot, 17 October 2019, <https://www.botasot.info/opinione/1172416/te-anulohet-cmimi-nobel-i-peter-handke/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); “Osmani: Çmimi Nobel për Handke, do të inkurajonte përkrahësit e krimeve të fshihen pas veprës artistike”, Zëri, 10 December 2019, <https://zeri.info/kultura/311600/osmani-cmimi-nobel-per-handke-do-te-inkurajonte-perkrahesit-e-krimeve-te-fshihen-pas-vepres-artistike/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Mehmet Kraja, “Why Was a Nobel Prize Awarded to a Man Who Celebrated a War Criminal?”, The Washington Post, 18 October 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/10/18/why-was-nobel-prize-awarded-man-who-celebrated-war-criminal/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); “Kurti për Peter Handke: Shkrimtarin nuk mund ta gjykojmë si të pavarur prej vetes”, Koha.net, 22 October 2019, <https://www.koha.net/kulture/190110/kurti-per-peter-handke-shkrimtarin-nuk-mund-ta-gjykojme-si-te-pavarur-prej-vetes/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

24. Adem Ferizaj, “Peter Handke: Poetische Befuehrung”, neues deutschland, 19 October 2019, <https://www.neues-deutschland.de/artikel/1127382.peter-handke-poetische-befuehrung.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

dox monk fighting for Kosovo” in an interview for a Serbian public TV broadcaster.<sup>25</sup> In 2006, the Austrian writer delivered a eulogy at the funeral of Slobodan Milošević, the Serbian president behind the genocides of Albanians and Bosnians during the 1990s.<sup>26</sup> Kosovo declared Peter Handke a persona non grata in December 2019.<sup>27</sup> Awarding the world’s most important literary prize to such a writer not only suggests a deeply rooted Euro-Atlantic indifference towards the fate of Muslim European countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina or Kosovo, but also epitomises an instance of the normalisation of Islamophobic attacks against Kosovo’s right to exist by European politicians – as outlined in the introduction.<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 3:** A caricature criticising Peter Handke, the 2019 laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature, while Serbian dictator Milošević applauds in the background.<sup>29</sup>

25. Nataly Bleuel, “Peter Handke: Mars Attacks!”, *Spiegel*, 1 April 1999, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/peter-handke-mars-attacks-a-15537.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020). The quote has been translated from German into English by the author of this report.

26. Aleksandar Hemon, “The Bob Dylan of Genocide Apologists”, *The New York Times*, 15 October 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/15/opinion/peter-handke-nobel-bosnia-genocide.html?auth=login-google>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

27. Shaun Walker, “Kosovo Declares Nobel Laureate Peter Handke Persona Non Grata”, *The Guardian*, 12 December 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/12/kosovo-declares-nobel-laureate-peter-handke-persona-non-grata>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

28. It should not be ignored that Kosovo’s independence is disputed within the European Union. In 2020, five EU member states (Spain, Slovakia, Romania, Greece, Cyprus) still do not recognize Kosovo, even though Kosovo declared independence in 2008.

29. “Nobeli’ i shkeljes së vlerave njerëzore”, *Koha Ditore*, 12 October 2019, <https://www.koha.net/kulture/188525/nobeli-i-shkeljes-se-vlerave-njerezore/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

## Employment

Interested in avoiding being viewed by their Western partners as Muslims, Kosovo's political elites aspiring to full acceptance in Euro-Atlantic circles try to keep the public sector free of any conspicuous Muslim markers like the hijab. Hence, frictions between secularism and Islamic piety can be observed regularly in this sphere.<sup>30</sup> For the first time in Kosovo's history, the 2019 snap parliamentary elections brought two hijabi women into the Kosovo Parliament: Labinotë Demi Murtezi, MP of left-wing ruling party *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* and Besa Ismaili, MP of centre-right party *Partia Demokratike e Kosovës*.<sup>31</sup> (Figs. 4 and 5 respectively) Even though controversies regarding the hijab in public institutions are still ongoing, the election of these two women did not cause debates about wearing Islamic signifiers while holding a position in public service.



**Figure 4:** *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* MP Labinotë Demi Murtezi on an election poster.<sup>32</sup>

30. Arber Fetiu, "Islamophobia in Kosovo: National Report 2015", *European Islamophobia Report 2015*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez (SETA, Istanbul: 2016), p. 304-305; Adem Ferizaj, "Islamophobia in Kosovo: National Report 2018", *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez (SETA, Istanbul: 2019) pp. 507-508.

31. Elis Gjevori, "A New Face in Kosovo Looks to Transform the Role of Women in Politics", TRT World, 9 September 2019, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/a-new-face-in-kosovo-looks-to-transform-the-role-of-women-in-politics-29639>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Taulant Osmani, "Ish-deputetja Labinotë Demi Murtezi aderon në VV", Kallxo.com, 3 June 2019, <https://kallxo.com/shkurt/ish-deputetja-labinote-demi-murtezi-aderon-ne-vv/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); "Zgjedhjet për Kuvendin e Kosovës 2019: Rezultatet e kandidatëve", Komisioni Qendror i Zgjedhjeve, 3 November 2019, <http://www.kqz-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/3.Ndarja-e-ul%C3%AB-seve-n%C3%AB-Kuvend-Subjekter-dhe-kandidat%C3%ABt-e-zgjedhur-1.pdf>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

32. Demi Murtezi, Facebook, 26 September 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/LabinotaDemiMurteziOfficial/photos/a.248354985316749/1426563614162541/?type=3&theater>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).



**Figure 5:** Partia Demokratike e Kosovës MP Besa Ismaili on an election poster.<sup>33</sup>

For many decades now, structural political problems like the colonial and Islamophobic Western approach towards Kosovo are negatively impacting the country's economy (high unemployment, lack of health insurance, low wages, etc.). Leading to an inextricable mix of economic and racist discriminations, Kosovo's economy seems to be better understood with Cedric Robinson's concept of "racial capitalism".<sup>34</sup> These structural discriminations have resulted in an ongoing history of emigration to Western Europe, especially to Germany and Switzerland.<sup>35</sup> In 2019, a leading topic was how to overcome the lack of nurses in Germany by 'importing' more Kosovar workers for these low-wage jobs.<sup>36</sup> (Fig. 6) This is a case in point when it comes to illustrating how the Kosovo Albanian workforce is 'racialised' in German-speaking Europe.<sup>37</sup>

33. Ismaili, Twitter, 25 September 2019, [https://twitter.com/besa\\_ismaili/status/1176728985419636736](https://twitter.com/besa_ismaili/status/1176728985419636736), (Access date: 26 January 2020).

34. Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism, The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, (London: 1983), p. 9.

35. Adem Ferizaj, "Othering Albanian Muslim Masculinities: A Case Study of Albanian Football Players", *Rivista Occiali*, 5 (2019b), p. 75-76.

36. "Pflegernotstand: Spahn wirbt um Fachkräfte aus dem Kosovo", *Die Zeit*, 15 July 2019, <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2019-07/pflegernotstand-jens-spahn-kosovo-pflegekraefte-arbeitsplaetze-zusammenarbeit>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); "Personalnot in Deutschland: Spahn wirbt im Kosovo um Pflegekräfte", *Tagesschau.de*, 15 July 2019, <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/spahn-pflegekraefte-kosovo-101.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

37. 'Racialisation' or 'othering' processes in Germany have been analysed here: Fatima El-Tayeb, "Deutschland post-migrantisch? Rassismus, Fremdheit und die Mitte der Gesellschaft", *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 66 (2016), p. 15-21.



**Figure 6:** An article on Germany's Federal Minister of Health Jens Spahn and his visit to Kosovo. Translation of the title: "Staff Shortage in Germany: Spahn Woos Nurses in Kosovo".<sup>38</sup>

## Education

The most important factor regarding Islamophobia in Kosovar education is linked to the ongoing controversies whether it should be allowed to wear the hijab or other Islamic markers in the classroom. Even though Islamophobic incidents affecting this area made no headlines in 2019, the open questions regarding secularism and religious signifiers suggest that Islamophobia is still a constitutive factor in education. For example, girls with hijabs not being allowed to attend classes at school made several headlines in previous years.<sup>39</sup> These incidents will most probably continue to occur as long as the controversies regarding Islamic signifiers in classrooms continue.

As a result of the "uncriticised import [of Eurocentric discourses] by the European '[O]ther' itself", Islamophobia can also be found in educational content in Kosovo.<sup>40</sup> The extent of this phenomenon, which could be called 'deduced Islamophobia', has been explained in last year's Kosovo report.<sup>41</sup>

## Politics

After being summoned by Kosovo's Special Court investigating the war, former Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj resigned from his post in July 2019.<sup>42</sup> Since then, Koso-

38. "Spahn wirbt im Kosovo um Pflegekräfte", Tagesschau.de, 15 July 2019, <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/spahn-pflegekraefte-kosovo-101.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

39. Fetiu, (2016), pp. 302-306.

40. Adem Ferizaj, "Shaci' as Another Product of Albanian Orientalism", 30 October 2018, <https://prishtinainsight.com/shaci-as-another-product-of-albanian-orientalism/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

41. Ferizaj, (2019), p. 509.

42. Zijadin Gashi, "Haradinaj jep dorëheqje, ftohet nga Gjykata Speciale", Radio Evropa e Lirë, 19 July 2019, <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/haradinaj-jep-doreheqje/30065096.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

vo politics were overshadowed by the October snap parliamentary elections. After a stalemate in coalition talks between left-wing *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* and centre-right party *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës*, the country constituted its new government in February 2020.<sup>43</sup> Led by Albin Kurti, Kosovo will have its first left-wing prime minister who has already introduced anti-colonial vocabulary to Kosovar politics.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, in recent years, his takes on Albanian identity were not subordinated to Islamophobic discourse dynamics – especially, when compared with former Kosovo prime ministers.<sup>45</sup>

In 2019, a bribing scandal involving Serbia, the Central African Republic, and an alleged derecognition of Kosovo by the latter was revealed.<sup>46</sup> This incident is to be contextualised in Serbia's ongoing campaign against Kosovo's independence for nearly a decade now – Serbia itself does not recognize Kosovo's existence.<sup>47</sup> Since it is known that Serbia used overt Islamophobic arguments against Kosovo's bid for UNESCO membership in 2015 by describing Albanians as “barbarians or Muslim extremists”, it is entirely possible that similar anti-Muslim racist arguments were and will be used against Kosovo by Serbia in diplomatic meetings behind closed doors.<sup>48</sup> Another worrying consequence of the Serbian derecognition campaign is that it is inviting European right-wing politicians to publicly use Islamophobic arguments against Kosovo. (Figs. 7, 8, and 9) Two famous French right-wing extremists, Eric Zemmour and Marion Maréchal, used their white supremacist understanding of Kosovo in order to justify their Islamophobic opinions to French society.<sup>49</sup> Eric

43. Bekim Shehu, “Kosovë: Albin Kurti zgjidhet kryeministër i Kosovës”, Deutsche Welle, 3 February 2020, <https://www.dw.com/sq/kosov%C3%AB-albin-kurti-zgjidhet-kryeminist%C3%ABr-i-kosov%C3%ABs/a-52245971>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

44. Piro Rexhepi, “In Kosovo, Too, There's a Future for a Leftist Party of Economic and Social Justice”, The Guardian, 12 June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/12/kosovo-leftist-party-social-justice-vetevendosje>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

45. Sadriu, (2017), p. 554; Ferizaj, (2019), pp. 510-511.

46. Eve-Anne Travers, “Kosovo's Foreign Policy 'Needs a Software Update'”, Prishtina Insight, 2 August 2019, <https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovos-foreign-policy-needs-a-software-update-mag/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Gisèle Blanche Moloma, “Scandale de corruption et du trafic des faux documents au ministère des Affaires étrangères”, Corbeau News Centrafrique, 25 August 2019, <https://corbeau-news-centrafrique.com/scandale-de-corruption-et-du-traffic-des-faux-documents-au-ministere-des-affaires-etrangees/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Agata Palickova, “15 Countries, and Counting, Revoke Recognition of Kosovo, Serbia says”, Euractiv, 27 August 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/15-countries-and-counting-revoke-recognition-of-kosovo-serbia-says/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Arton Konushevci, “Ryshfeti s'është faktori i vetëm i tërheqjes së njohjeve”, Radio Evropa e Lirë, 31 August 2018, <https://www.evropalire.org/a/cnjohje-kosove-serbi-/30139494.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

47. Palickova, “15 countries, and counting, revoke recognition of Kosovo, Serbia says”, Euractiv, 27 August 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/15-countries-and-counting-revoke-recognition-of-kosovo-serbia-says/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

48. Adem Ferizaj, “Op-ed: Kosovo, Tear Gas, Mass Exodus and UNESCO”, Balkanist, 25 November 2015, <https://balkanist.net/op-ed-tear-gas-mass-exodus-and-unesco/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

49. Maxime Macé, “Grand remplacement et Kosovo: le fantasme de Zemmour et Marion Maréchal”, France Soir, 19 September 2019, <http://www.francesoir.fr/politique-france/grand-remplacement-et-kosovo-le-fantasme-de-zemmour-et-marion-marechal>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

Zemmour compared Kosovo to the Parisian suburb Seine-Saint-Denis in order to illustrate his fears of a civil war in France caused by ‘Muslim proneness to violence’. He stated, “The Great Replacement? Look, Seine-Saint-Denis is France’s Kosovo. A population replacement is happening there. In Kosovo, it ended with war and independence.”<sup>50</sup> Using Kosovo for her understanding of the Great Replacement theory, the granddaughter of *Front National* founder Jean-Marie Le Pen, Marion Maréchal put it even more bluntly: “I don’t want my France to become Kosovo. [...] It is true that today the accumulation of phenomena, and particularly the demographic phenomenon, threatens us.”<sup>51</sup> In 2019, the prominent German Great Replacement theorist Thilo Sarrazin made headlines by his expulsion from the Social Democratic Party of Germany, although his Islamophobic book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany Abolishes Itself) was published in 2010. The book also addressed how he used Kosovo in order to develop his Islamophobic view of German society: “The Turks are conquering Germany just as Kosovars conquered Kosovo: through a higher birth rate.”<sup>52</sup> Peter Handke has been mentioned earlier in this report – his literary work follows the same patterns.<sup>53</sup>



**Figure 7:** A French newspaper headline addressing the Islamophobic use of Kosovo by French right-wing figures. Translation of the title: “The Great Replacement and Kosovo: The Fanaticism of Zemmour and Marion Maréchal”<sup>54</sup>

50. Ibid. The quote has been translated from French to English by the author of the report.

51. Ibid.

52. “Sarrazin kündigt Berufung gegen Parteiausschluss an”, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 11 July 2019, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/sarrazin-spd-parteiausschluss-1.4520640>, (Access date: 26 January 2020). The quote has been translated from German to English by the author of the report.

53. Adem Ferizaj, “Peter Handke: Poetische Befuehrung”, Neues-Deutschland, 19 October 2019, <https://www.neues-deutschland.de/artikel/1127382.peter-handke-poetische-befuehrung.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

54. Maxime Macé, “Grand remplacement et Kosovo: le fantasme de Zemmour et Marion Maréchal.”



**Figure 8:** A racist and Islamophobic article on Kosovo written by Dominique Bilde, a right-wing French member of the European Parliament. Translation of the title: “Migrants, Islamism and Human Trafficking: Kosovo, the Black Hole of Europe.”<sup>55</sup>



**Figure 9:** An article on Czech Republic President Miloš Zeman’s attempt to revoke the recognition of Kosovo.<sup>56</sup>

55. Dominique Bilde, “Migrants, islamisme et trafic d’êtres humains: Kosovo, le trou noir de l’Europe”, Rassemblement National, 14 September 2018, <https://rassemblementnational.fr/tribunes-libres/migrants-islamisme-et-traffic-detres-humains-kosovo-le-trou-noir-de-leurope/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

56. “Czech president stirs anger after asking if he can withdraw recognition of an independent Kosovo”, Euronews, 11 September 2019, <https://www.euronews.com/2019/09/11/czech-president-stirs-anger-after-asking-if-he-can-withdraw-recognition-of-an-independent>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

## Media

Islamophobic anti-Kosovo-Albanian takes by influential European right-wing figures – as presented in the previous section – were not covered by leading newspapers in Kosovo in 2019.

This silence becomes even more odd, when contrasted with Islamophobic media content created “by the European ‘[O]ther’ itself”, i.e. Kosovars.<sup>57</sup> The 2019, the return of 110 Kosovo citizens from Syria was debated by several media outlets following Islamophobic discourse dynamics. This incident was, for example, used to reinforce the dominant discourse creating a binary with regards to Islam in the tradition of Albanian Orientalism by opposing the ‘West’ to the ‘Orient’ – a consequence of the import of colonial European Orientalism(s).<sup>58</sup> This is a discourse that creates Islamophobia on a structural level.<sup>59</sup> In 2019, several leading newspapers wrote articles touching upon the return of Kosovars from Syria equating Islam with gender-based violence, extremism, and terrorism – hence reproducing Western-biased conventional wisdom on ‘political Islam’.<sup>60</sup> (Fig. 10)

Another controversy was sparked after the Islamic Community of Kosovo (*Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës*, BIK) dismissed the imam Drilon Gashi for allegedly controversial statements regarding Darwin’s evolution theory.<sup>61</sup> The reactions to this event illustrated how the erasure of Albanian Muslimness is enacted in Kosovo.<sup>62</sup> *FM Images Albania*, for example, announced the news regarding Gashi’s dismissal with a polemical headline reinforcing stereotypes between the ‘rational West’ and the ‘irrational Orient’: “Medieval BIK Dismisses Modern Imam Drilon Gashi.”<sup>63</sup> Statements subordinated to Islamophobic discourse dynamics were spread in a widely watched TV talk show dedicated to this matter. A few examples follow: investments from the ‘Arab world’ were blamed for ‘radicalisation’ in Kosovo; it was alluded that Islam has

57. Adem Ferizaj, “Shaci’ as Another Product of Albanian Orientalism”, Prishtina Insight, 30 October 2018, <https://prishtinainsight.com/shaci-as-another-product-of-albanian-orientalism/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

58. Sulstarova, (2006), pp. 9-10.

59. Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*, (Doubleday, New York: 2004), pp. 12-14.

60. “Kosovarët e ISIS-it ishin mizorë, më i tmerrshmi ishte Lavdrim Muhaxheri”, Gazeta Express, 22 April 2019, <https://www.gazetaexpress.com/kosovaret-e-isisit-ishin-mizor-me-i-tmerrshmi-ishte-lavdrim-muhaxheri/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Adelina Ahmeti, “Kosovarët ende me potencial për t’ju bashkangjitur grupeve terroriste”, Kallxo.com, 27 December 2019, <https://kallxo.com/gjate/kosovaret-ende-me-potencial-per-tju-bashkangjitur-grupeve-terroriste/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Marigona Brahimi and Gojart Jashari, “Mashtrimi i madh me luftën në Siri”, Zëri, 20 May 2019, <https://zeri.info/aktuale/261431/mashtrimi-i-madh-me-luften-ne-siri/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

61. “BIK shkarkon nga puna imamin Drilon Gashi”, Bota Sot, 29 August 2019, <https://www.botasot.info/kosova/1146723/bik-shkarkon-nga-puna-imamin-drilon-gashi/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); “Pse Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës e shkarkoi imamin Drilon Gashi?”, Albinfo.ch, 30 August 2019, <https://www.albinfo.ch/kjo-eshte-arsyeja-se-pse-bik-u-shkarkoi-imamin-drilon-gashi/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

62. Ferizaj, (2019), pp. 497-520.

63. “BIK-u mesjetar shkarkon imamin modern Drilon Gashi”, FM Images Albania, 29 August 2019, <https://www.fmimages.net/bik-u-mesjetar-shkarkon-imamin-modern-drilon-gashi/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

nothing to do with ‘real’ Albanian identity; and it was stated that Islam is in desperate need of a ‘Christian enlightenment’.<sup>64</sup>

Interviewing Imam Enis Rama for the TV show “Pressing” in a mosque in June 2019, the interview resembled a situation where a prosecutor – in this scenario the journalist Berat Buzhala – speaks to an accused person in its own ‘house’.<sup>65</sup> This discursive event should not be forgotten: be it for its visual capacity to illustrate, on the one hand, Albanian elitist discourse subordinated to Islamophobic structural logics, and the power dynamics between political elites and Kosovo’s *ulema* on the other. (Fig. 11)



## Mashtrimi i madh me luftën në Siri

**Figure 10:** An article by leading Kosovar daily *Zëri* conflating gender-based violence with Islam on the occasion of the Syrian War. Translation of the title: “The Big Deception of the War in Syria [for Women].”<sup>66</sup>

64. “Ligjerimi islam në Kosovë”, Zona B (Klan Kosova), Youtube, 27 May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=321ZAQfBneY&feature=youtu.be>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

65. “Zoti, njeri, religjioni”, Pressing (T7), Youtube, 4 June 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLvPoSMsQRc>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

66. “Mashtrimi i madh me luftën në Siri”, *Zëri*, 20 May 2019, <https://zeri.info/aktuale/261431/mashtrimi-i-madh-me-luften-ne-siri/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).



**Figure 11:** The journalist Berat Buzhala interviewing imam Enis Rama in a mosque for his TV show “Pressing”. This debate was emblematic of the attempt of Albanian political elites to erase the country’s Muslimness. Translation: “Rama: Sometimes Science Can Also Be a Guess.”<sup>67</sup>

## Justice System

On a legislative level, no law with Islamophobic intentions was issued in 2019, even though such steps were alluded to be linked to the return of 110 Kosovo citizens from Syria in April.<sup>68</sup> However, the tendency to instrumentalise events of this kind in order to highlight that Kosovo is a ‘good European Muslim’ country might lead to the introduction of Islamophobic legislation in 2020.<sup>69</sup>

## Internet

Although uncensored Islamophobic hate speech can be found on the Internet, it is predominantly used in Kosovo in order to show that Islam is not ‘really’ Albanian through for example turning religion into something people can make fun of. This is also in line with the elite’s objective to align Kosovo-Albanian identity with ‘Europe’ through erasing what is not perceived as ‘European’ (read: Islam).

Not only a case in point due to its name, the Facebook page *Feja e shqiptarit është Europa* (“The Religion of Albanians is Europe”, around 40,000 followers) constantly spreads anti-Muslim hate speech to an older audience – as of January 2020,

67. “Enis Rama”, Pressing (T7), Youtube, 4 June 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLvPoSMsQRc>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

68. Thaçi, Facebook, 20 April 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/HashimThaciOfficial/posts/2612530735483936>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Hysenaj, “Kthehen 110 kosovarë, 87 mbesin ende në Siri”, *Evropa Elire*, 20 April 2019, <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/tahiri-nga-siria-i-kthym-110-kosovare/29893101.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Shehu, “110 kosovarë kthehen nga Siria në Kosovë”, *DW*, 20 April 2019, <https://www.dw.com/sq/110-kosovar%C3%AB-kthehen-nga-siria-n%C3%AB-kosov%C3%AB/a-48413396>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

69. Rexhepi, (2018), p. 2215; Sadriu, (2017), pp. 540-541.

however, the website seems to have been closed down.<sup>70</sup> On Instagram and Twitter, an account called *Hoxhallarë Memes* (Imams Memes) opened and mysteriously disappeared several times over the last years – also in 2019.<sup>71</sup> As the name indicates, the account made jokes of videos by Kosovo imams. Its audience was the ‘cool’ and hipster Prishtina youth. However, some of its followers were Prishtina-based figures of Kosovo’s elites that actively promote a ‘European’-like sense of identity that implies Islamophobic ‘reflexes’.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Arbana Xharra, former editor-in-chief of the widely read daily *Zëri*, could be considered the most explicit representative when it comes to Kosovar Islamophobia. In 2019, she published several anti-Muslim Facebook posts.<sup>72</sup> Scapegoating Albanians in the diaspora, she claimed: “Articles in the Swiss press show how Albanians are very active in Islamist circles calling for Jihad!”<sup>73</sup> (Fig. 12) In 2019, Albanians in Switzerland were also targeted by the public intellectual Blerim Latifi. After Kosovo’s most famous footballer Xherdan Shaqiri won the 2019 UEFA Champions League with Liverpool FC and celebrated this with a social media post including the word *elhamdulillah*, Latifi criticised Shaqiri for “his inability to clearly define the boundaries of his identity” due to his “lack of education” – suggesting that Islam is not ‘really’ Albanian.<sup>74</sup>

Since Islamophobia is also an external threat to Kosovo’s statehood, this report has showed that in 2019 important European right-wing figures used their blurred understanding of Kosovo in order to create white supremacist arguments. In this sense, renowned European actors like Eric Zemmour, Marion Maréchal, Thilo Sarrazin, Heinz-Christian Strache, and Peter Handke can also be included in the Islamophobia network against Kosovo.<sup>75</sup>

70. The account seems to be deleted. (Access date: 26 January 2020).

71. Whereas the account seems to be deleted on Twitter, it appears to exist still as a private account on Instagram. (Access date: 26 January 2020).

72. Arbana Xharra, Facebook, 16 March 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/1080277154/posts/10215239542396771/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Arbana Xharra, Facebook, 17 September 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/1080277154/posts/10216533474904275/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Arbana Xharra, Facebook, 1 November 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/1080277154/posts/10216900105589813/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Arbana Xharra, Facebook, 6 October 2019 (Access date: 26 January 2020).

73. Xharra, Facebook, 1 November 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/1080277154/posts/10216900105589813/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020). The quote has been translated from Albanian into English by the author of the report.

74. Xherdan Shaqiri, Twitter, 1 June 2019, [https://twitter.com/XS\\_11official/status/1134936729473994753](https://twitter.com/XS_11official/status/1134936729473994753), (Access date: 26 January 2020); Ferizaj, (2019b), pp. 81–82.

75. Maxime Macé, “Grand remplacement et Kosovo: le fantasme de Zemmour et Marion Maréchal”; “Österreichs Vizekanzler: Kosovo ist ein Teil Serbiens”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 February 2018, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/oesterreichs-vizekanzler-kosovo-ist-ein-teil-serbiens-15443172.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); “Sarrazin kündigt Berufung gegen Parteiausschluss an”, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 11 July 2019, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/sarrazin-spd-parteiausschluss-1.4520640>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Kraja, “Why Was a Nobel Prize Awarded to a Man Who Celebrated a War Criminal?”, *Washington Post*, 18 October 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/10/18/why-was-nobel-prize-awarded-man-who-celebrated-war-criminal/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

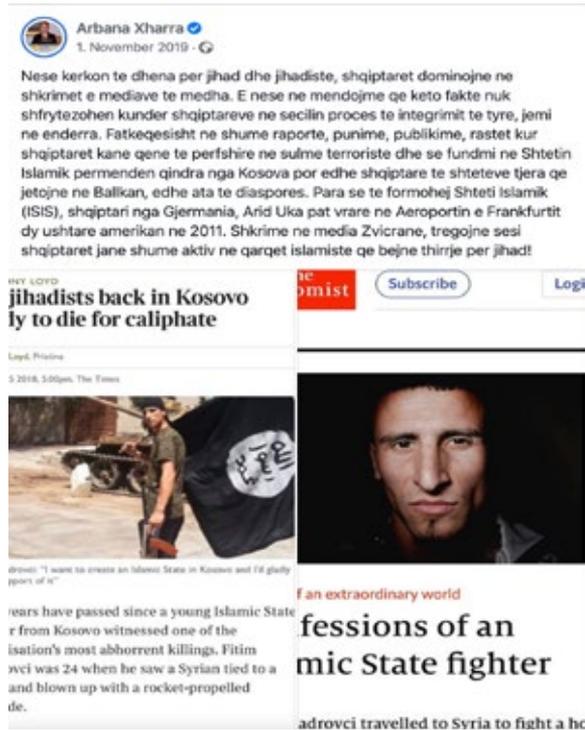


Figure 12: The post by Arbana Xharra conflating Islam and extremism by addressing the Albanian diaspora in Switzerland.<sup>76</sup>

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

A complaint regarding a 2019 *Veriu.info* article that included all the names of the 110 returned citizens from Syria was upheld by the Kosovo Press Council.<sup>77</sup> Given his previous statements that can be found in last year's report, the new government by left-wing Prime Minister Albin Kurti could tackle the Kosovar elite's Islamophobia.<sup>78</sup> Yet, the centre-right coalition partner *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* has already participated in earlier Kosovo governments and acted in a subordinated way with regards to Islamophobic discourse dynamics. This suggests that one should be cautious before stating that the new government will be the first one to fight Islamophobia (within Kosovo's elites).

76. Arbana Xharra, *Facebook*, 1 November 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/1080277154/posts/10216900105589813/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

77. "Vendim i Këshillit të Mediave të Shkruara të Kosovës ndaj ankesës së Vlorë Krasniqit kundër portalit Veriu.info", Këshilli i Mediave të Shkruara të Kosovës, 4 July 2019, [http://presscouncil-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/vendim\\_KMSHK\\_801-2019\\_Vlorë-Krasniqi.pdf](http://presscouncil-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/vendim_KMSHK_801-2019_Vlorë-Krasniqi.pdf), (Access date: 26 January 2020).

78. Ferizaj, (2019a), pp. 510-511.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

For Kosovo, Islamophobia has internal consequences (the policing and sanctioning of those considered threatening to the Euro-Atlantic road map due to their perceived ‘excessive’ Muslimness) and external consequences (posing a threat to Kosovo’s statehood). This constellation put Kosovo-Albanian elites in situations where they tried, too often, to soften Western Islamophobic anxieties by subordinating themselves to Islamophobic discourse dynamics. At the same time, the scope of the danger to Kosovo’s state existence coming from famous European Islamophobes seems to be played down, or even ignored. Hence, this report ends with the following policy recommendations:

- Instead of conceding to Islamophobic discourse dynamics, Albanian political elites should be taking a more ‘unapologetic’ stance regarding their Muslim identity.
- Since Islamophobia is a form of structural racism like anti-Semitism or anti-gypsyism, awareness with regards to this should be raised in journalism, civil society, and institutional matters, i.e. in every public discourse-shaping sphere.
- State institutions should monitor and provide figures with regards to Islamophobia and racism based on internal factors (conceding to Islamophobic discourse dynamics through erasing what is not perceived as ‘European’, i.e. Islam) and external factors (for example Serbia’s derecognition campaign, or the treatment of the Albanian diaspora in the EU).
- European Great Replacement theorists speaking about Kosovo should be countered not by opportunist victimisation but by highlighting the core motivations of the Albanian struggle in former Yugoslavia, i.e. an anti-colonial liberation struggle against an Islamophobic and anti-Albanian racist Yugoslav regime colonising Kosovo.
- If possible, all these steps should be conducted in collaboration with Albania, since this is another Albanian-speaking Muslim-majority country facing similar problems regarding Islamophobia.

## Chronology

- **20.04.2019:** 110 Kosovo citizens returned from Syria.
- **27.05.2019:** A historical mosque (*xhamia e Namazgjahut*) was vandalised in Prizren.
- **01.06.2019:** After Kosovo’s most famous footballer Xherdan Shaqiri won the 2019 UEFA Champions League with Liverpool FC and celebrated this with a social media post including the word *elhamdulillah*, public intellectual Blerim Latifi criticised Shaqiri for “his inability to clearly define the boundaries of his identity” due to his “lack of education”.

- **03.06.2019:** In a widely watched French TV talk show, Eric Zemmour compared Kosovo to the Parisian suburb Seine-Saint-Denis in order to illustrate his vision of the Great Replacement theory.
- **17.06.2019:** In a French talk show, Marion Maréchal used Kosovo for her understanding of the Great Replacement theory: “I don’t want my France to become Kosovo.”
- **04.07.2019:** A complaint regarding a 2019 *Veriu.info* article that included all the names of the 110 returned citizens from Syria was upheld by Kosovo’s Press Council.
- **11.07.2019:** The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published an article on Thilo Sarrazin’s expulsion from the Social Democratic Party of Germany quoting his blurred white supremacist understanding of Kosovo: “The Turks are conquering Germany just as Kosovars conquered Kosovo: through a higher birth rate.”
- **15.07.2019:** Germany’s Federal Minister of Health Jens Spahn signed an agreement helping to overcome the German lack of nurses with his Kosovar counterpart Uran Ismaili in Prishtina. This event highlighted how the Kosovo-Albanian workforce is ‘racialised’ in German-speaking Europe.
- **19.07.2019:** After being summoned by Kosovo’s Special Court investigating the war, former Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj resigned from his post.
- **25.08.2019:** A bribing scandal was revealed involving Serbia, the Central African Republic, and an alleged derecognition of Kosovo by the latter.
- **29.08.2019:** The Islamic Community of Kosovo (*Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës*, BIK) dismissed imam Drilon Gashi for alleged controversial statements regarding Darwin’s evolution theory.
- **06.10.2019:** Albin Kurti’s left-wing *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* won the snap parliamentary elections.
- **10.10.2019:** The Austrian novelist Peter Handke was announced as the winner of the 2019 Nobel Prize in Literature provoking indignation and criticism in the country due to his denial of the genocide in Kosovo.
- **01.11.2019:** The journalist Arbana Xharra claimed via Facebook that “Albanians [in Switzerland] are very active in Islamist circles calling for Jihad!”
- **12.12.2019:** After Peter Handke was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, Kosovo declared him a persona non grata.



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**LITHUANIA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

GIEDRĖ BLAŽYTĖ



## The Author

**Giedrė Blažytė** is a researcher at Diversity Development Group and the Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Institute for Ethnic Studies. Her scientific interests lie in contemporary migration issues related to the topics of family migration, migration and gender, integration of beneficiaries of international protection, irregular migration, and fundamental rights. As a project executor and independent expert, Blažytė has been involved in different projects and (migration) research on a national and international level. Blažytė holds a PhD in social sciences (sociology). Email: [giedre@diversitygroup.lt](mailto:giedre@diversitygroup.lt)

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Giedrė Blažytė: *Islamophobia in Lithuania: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020

## Executive Summary

According to the latest Lithuanian population census of 2011, only 2,727 persons or 0.09% of the total population identify as Sunni Muslims. Despite the fact that Muslims constitute a very small part of Lithuanian society, the public opinion polls show that Muslims are one of the most negatively viewed religious groups in Lithuania. However, significant positive developments regarding public attitudes have been noticed in recent years. This might be influenced by the fact that mostly negative attitudes towards Muslims do not come from personal experience, but are generated by such external factors as mass media and social networks.

During the reported period, a total of 31 criminal offenses were registered on the grounds foreseen under Chapter XXV of the Criminal Code “Crimes and Misdemeanours against a Person’s Equal Rights and Freedom of Conscience”. The Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson received 3 complaints of anti-Muslim discrimination in non-identified areas in 2019.

There were no employment-related incidents regarding Muslims in 2019. There were also no reported discrimination cases on the ground of religion in the area of education. No laws and regulations with Islamophobic arguments or any laws restricting the rights of Muslims in their religious lifestyle were adopted in 2019.

In 2019, three elections took place in Lithuania; however, the discussions on Muslims and their rights did not feature in the political discussion. In general, publicly spread messages during the elections did not contain prejudice towards the Muslim community, but towards the EU and its policies, and particularly related to commitments regarding refugee resettlement/relocation.

Since 2015 and due to the so-called refugee crisis, it was clearly visible that most Islamophobic statements in national media were related to the public discussions of the so-called global refugee crisis and the challenges of the refugees’ integration on national level. During the reported period such messages significantly decreased.

The numbers of reporting and victims of hate speech and hate crime remain low. It is conceivable that due to the ineffective system of reporting and investigating hate speech and hate crimes, these numbers do not correspond to the actual situation. Thus, it is essential not only to ensure systematic support and representation of the victims, but it is also important to improve the effectiveness of the mechanisms that record hate crimes, as well as their investigation. In addition, it is important to carry out monitoring of hate crimes and hate speech in mass media and social networks.

## Santrauka

2011 m. visuotinio gyventojų ir būsto surašymo duomenimis, Lietuvoje gyvena 2727 musulmonai sunitai arba 0.09% visų Lietuvos gyventojų. Nors musulmonų bendruomenė nėra didelė, tačiau visuomenės nuostatų tyrimų rezultatai atskleidžia, kad tai viena nepalankiausiai Lietuvos gyventojų vertinama religinių grupių. Pastaraisiais metais pastebima, kad visuomenės nuostatos tampa palankesnės, o tam galimai įtakos turi sumažėjęs neigiamų naujienų pabėgėlių atžvilgiu srautas žiniasklaidoje. Visuomenės nuostatų tyrimų rezultatai atskleidžia, kad neigiama nuomonė musulmonų atžvilgiu formuojama ne iš asmeninių patirčių, o kuriama tokių išorinių veiksnių kaip žiniasklaida ar socialiniai tinklai.

Per ataskaitinį laikotarpį užregistruota 31 nusikalstama veika pagal Baudžiamojo kodekso XXV skyrių „Nusikaltimai ir baudžiamieji nusižengimai asmens lygiateisiškumui ir sąžinės laisvei“. Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnyba informavo, kad 2019 m. gavo 12 skundų įsitikinimų ir pažiūrų, religijos ir tikėjimo pagrindais, trys iš jų dėl musulmonų diskriminacijos neidentifikuotose srityse.

2019 m. nebuvo užregistruota įvykių, nukreiptų prieš musulmonus darbo rinkoje. Taip pat nepranešta ir apie diskriminacinius atvejus įsitikinimų, pažiūrų, religijos ir tikėjimo pagrindais švietimo srityje. Ataskaitiniu laikotarpiu taip pat neįvyko jokių didelių pokyčių teisingumo srityje.

2019 m. Lietuvoje vyko trijų tipų rinkimai, tačiau diskusijos musulmonų ir jų teisių tema nebuvo politiškai aktualios. Bendrai rinkimų laikotarpiu viešoje erdvėje pasklidusios žinutės buvo susijusios ne su priešišku nusistatymu prieš musulmonų bendruomenę, o prieš ES ir jos įgyvendinamą politiką, ypač susijusią su išipareigojimais dėl pabėgėlių perkėlimo ir jų integracijos.

Nuo 2015 m. dėl vadinamos „pabėgėlių krizės“ buvo pastebima, kad islamofobinės žinutės žiniasklaidoje dažniausiai buvo susijusios su diskusijomis apie pasaulinę pabėgėlių krizę ir pabėgėlių integracijos iššūkius nacionaliniame lygmenyje. Mažėjant pabėgėlių srautams, pastebima, kad 2019 m. tokios informacijos ženkliai sumažėjo.

Aktualių klausimų išlieka nedidelis dėl neapykantos kalbos ir neapykantos nusikaltimų nukentėjusių ir pagalbos besikreipiančiųjų skaičius. Galima manyti, kad dėl veiksmingai šalyje neveikiančios pranešimo apie tokio pobūdžio nusikalstamas veikas ir jų tyrimų sistemos, šie skaičiai neatitinka tikrosios situacijos. Tad būtina ne tik užtikrinti sisteminę pagalbą ir atstovavimą nukentėjusiems asmenims, bet ir tobulinti pranešimų apie nusikaltimus priėmimą bei efektyviau vykdyti neapykantos nusikaltimų tyrimus, o taip pat įgyvendinti nuolatinę šių nusikaltimų stebėseną (monitoringą) žiniasklaidoje ir socialiniuose tinkluose.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Lithuania

**Type of Regime:** Democratic Republic

**Form of Government:** Semi-Presidential System

**Ruling Parties:** *Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjunga* (Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union); *Lietuvos socialdemokratų darbo partija* (Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Political Group) and the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance Political Group (*Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija-Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjunga*)

**Opposition Parties:** *Tėvynės sąjunga-Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai* (Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats), *Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija* (Lithuanian Social Democratic Party), *Liberalų sąjūdis* (Liberals Movement of the Republic of Lithuania)

**Last Elections:** 2019 Presidential Election: *Gitanas Nausėda* won 66.5% of the vote against 33.5% of *Ingrida Šimonytė*; 2016 Legislative Election: Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (54 seats), Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats (31 seats), Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (17 seats), Liberals Movement of the Republic of Lithuania (14 seats), Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance (8 seats), Party Order and Justice (8 seats), Labour Party (2 seats), Political Party “List of Lithuania” (1 seat), Lithuanian Green Party (1 seat) and Lithuanian Centre Party (1 seat). Four seats went to self-nominated candidates.

**Total Population:** 2.8 million (at the beginning of 2019)

**Major Languages:** Lithuanian

**Official Religion:** No official religion

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** In 2019, the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson received 3 complaints of anti-Muslim discrimination in non-identified areas. A total of 16 complaints of discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, convictions, and views were received by the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson in 2019.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** In the period of January-November 2019, a total of 31 criminal offenses were registered on the grounds foreseen under the Chapter XXV of the Criminal Code “Crimes and Misdemeanours against a Person’s Equal Rights and Freedom of Conscience”. Twenty-eight of them were on the grounds foreseen under Article 170 “Incitement against Any National, Racial, Ethnic, Religious or Other Group of Persons” (3 of them were incitement based on religion), and 2 of them on the grounds foreseen under Article 171 “Disturbance of Religious Ceremonies or Religious Celebrations”. There were no registered criminal offenses based on Article 169 “Discrimination on Grounds of Nationality, Race, Sex, Descent, Religion or Belonging to Other Groups” during the reported period.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Roman Catholic (77.3%), Orthodox (4.1%), Old Believers (0.8%), Evangelical Lutheran (0.6%), Evangelical Reformed (0.2%), Other religion (0.9%), No religion (6.1%) (Lithuanian 2011 population census)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** According to the data of the Lithuanian 2011 population census, 2,727 persons identify as Sunni Muslims (or 0.09% of the total population); 400 of the latter identify as ethnic Lithuanians.

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Association Ahmadiyya Lithuania (Asociacija Ahmadija Lietuva); Sunni Muslim Religious Centre (*Lietuvos musulmonų sunitų dvasinis centras*); Islamic Culture and Education Center

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** European Foundation of Human Rights, Human Rights Monitoring Institute, Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR), Lithuanian Red Cross Society

**Far-Right Parties:** N/A

**Far-Right Movements:** N/A

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

According to the latest data of the Lithuanian population census, carried out in 2011, 2,727 persons identify as Sunni Muslims (or 0.09% of the total population); 400 of the latter identify as ethnic Lithuanians.<sup>1</sup> Lithuanian society remains quite homogenous; there are 58,000 foreigners in total living in Lithuania, which is only 2.08% of the total population.<sup>2</sup> However, the recent trends of international migration show that Lithuania is becoming an attractive country of destination for migrants, especially from Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus. The latest data from the Migration Department reveals that in 2019 the number of foreigners in Lithuania increased by 17.5% compared with 2018.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the number of asylum applications has increased by 38.8% during recent years.<sup>4</sup> In 2018, the majority of asylum applicants were from Tajikistan, Russia, Iraq, and Syria.<sup>5</sup> A total of 154 persons were granted asylum in Lithuania in 2018 (136 refugee status, 18 subsidiary protection). Due to the not-so-intense relocation of refugees from Italy, Greece, and Turkey, the number of relocated refugees has decreased – only 4 persons were relocated during the first half of 2019.<sup>6</sup> A total of 493 persons were relocated to the country as of November 2019 (out of 1,077 that had to be relocated by June 2021). There is no breakdown of data according to religion of foreigners migrating to Lithuania.

Intense international migration brought various political and societal challenges, but this is influenced more by public perceptions and attitudes than by the direct challenges of an increasing migrant population. Despite the fact that the number of Muslims in Lithuania is very small, it is one of the religious groups evaluated most negatively by Lithuanian society. The results of a public opinion poll carried out in 2019<sup>7</sup> reveal that social distance (the degree of closeness or alienation of social, ethnic, and religious groups) between Lithuanian residents and Muslims remains

1. “Results of the Population and Housing Census of the Republic of Lithuania”, Statistics Lithuania, <http://statistics.bookdesign.lt/>, (Access date: 10 January 2019).

2. “Migration Yearbook 2018”, Migration Department, [http://migracija.lrv.lt/uploads/migracija/documents/files/Migracij%C5%A1%C4%8Diai/MIGRACIJOS%20METRA%C5%A0TIS\\_2018.pdf](http://migracija.lrv.lt/uploads/migracija/documents/files/Migracij%C5%A1%C4%8Diai/MIGRACIJOS%20METRA%C5%A0TIS_2018.pdf), (Access date: 10 January 2019).

3. “Main Statistical Indicators of Migration in the Republic of Lithuania”, Migration Department, <http://migracija.lrv.lt/statistika/pagrindiniai-migracijos-rodikliai-lietuvos-respublikoje>, (Access date: 10 January 2019).

4. “Main Statistical Indicators of Migration in the Republic of Lithuania”.

5. “Migration Yearbook 2018”.

6. “Main Statistical Indicators of Migration in the Republic of Lithuania”.

7. The public opinion poll took place in March-April 2019. A total of 1,029 Lithuanian residents (15 years of age and older) from 118 sampling points were involved in the survey. The public opinion poll was initiated by the Diversity Development Group, Lithuanian Diversity Charter and Lithuanian Social Research Centre (Institute for Ethnic Studies). The poll was performed by the Gallup poll organisation “Baltic Surveys” (*Baltijos tyrimai*). For more information, see: “Visuomenės nuomonės apklausa”, LSTC, <http://www.ces.lt/veikla-2/ziniasklaidos-stebesena/visuomenes-nuomones-apklausa/>, (Access date: 10 January 2019).

large; however, positive developments are noticed as well. According to the data of the public opinion poll, 35.6% of Lithuanian residents would not like to live in the same neighbourhood with Muslims; 24.5% of them would not like to work with Muslims in the same workplace; and 36.7% of them would not like to rent Muslims an apartment.

Compared with 2015, in 2019, the share of Lithuanian residents who would not like to live in the same neighbourhood with Muslims decreased 22%. It is possible that because of the small Muslim community in Lithuania, the opinion about this group does not come from personal experience, but is generated by external factors. The results of public opinion polls carried out in the period between 2005 and 2019 show that societal attitudes were largely affected by the so-called refugee crisis and its reflections on the local mass media.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

In the period of January-December 2019, a total of 31 criminal offenses were registered on the grounds foreseen under Chapter XXV of the Criminal Code “Crimes and Misdemeanours against a Person’s Equal Rights and Freedom of Conscience”. Twenty-eight of the offences were committed on the grounds foreseen under Article 170 “Incitement against Any National, Racial, Ethnic, Religious or Other Group of Persons” (3 of them were incitement based on religion), and 2 of them on the grounds foreseen under Article 171 “Disturbance of Religious Ceremonies or Religious Celebrations”. During the reported period there were no registered criminal offenses based on Article 169 defining “Discrimination on Grounds of Nationality, Race, Sex, Descent, Religion or Belonging to Other Groups”.

There were two incidents of vandalism in 2019, when the mosque of the city of Kaunas was damaged.<sup>8</sup> The incidents are under investigation; however, the representatives of the mosque did not relate them to actions against the religious group.

On 10 May 2019, the United Nations’ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (hereinafter CERD) issued its concluding observations on the combined 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> periodic reports of Lithuania. One of the recommendations provided by for the CERD Lithuania is related to “a low level of reporting of hate speech and hate crimes, as well as the lack of their registration and effective investiga-

8. Vaida Girčė, “[Isibrovimas į mečetę Kaune: atvyko ir pats Turkijos ambasadorius Lietuvoje]”, tv3.lt, 21 September 2019, <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/lietuva/1013200/isibrovimas-i-mecete-kaune-atvyko-ir-pats-turkijos-ambasadorius-lietuvoje>, (Access date: 13 January 2019); Edita Šileikė, “Vandalai Kauno mečetei padarė tūkstantinę žalą”, kauno.diena.lt, 18 November 2019, <https://kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/kaunas/nusikaltimai-ir-nelaimes/vandalai-kauno-mecetei-padare-tukstantine-zala-940033>, (Access date: 13 January 2019).

tion”.<sup>9</sup> The CERD recommends that “Lithuania should take measures to encourage and facilitate the reporting of hate speech and hate crimes (e.g. by raising public awareness about access to legal aid and available legal remedies, and by ensuring that the perpetrators are adequately prosecuted and punished), to build capacity of law enforcement officers, prosecutors and judges, to collect statistics on investigated cases of hate crimes and incitement to hatred from politicians and from the media, and to enhance the data collection system.”<sup>10</sup>

## Employment

The Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson reports that there were no employment-related incidents that discriminated against Muslims in 2019.<sup>11</sup>

As is stated in the report “Equal Opportunities in the Lithuanian Labour Market: Overview of the Situation”,<sup>12</sup> the number of complaints of discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, convictions, and views submitted to the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson is one of the lowest. According to the results of a public opinion poll carried out in 2019,<sup>13</sup> Muslims are one of the least favoured religious groups in Lithuania. Almost a quarter (24.5%) of the participants of the survey claimed that they would not like to work with a Muslim. In addition, the majority of Lithuanian residents who participated in the survey are against any religious rights to refugees including the establishment of prayer rooms in the workplace (77.5% of respondents); provisions of nutrition based on religion norms (58.7%); and wearing of religious clothing (68.1%). The authors of the aforementioned report note that to provide breaks for prayer and/or to establish a multi-faith prayer room and facilities are among the obstacles that are the easiest to solve; however, they remain among the most sensitive issues, causing many misunderstandings both for refugees and other foreign employees.

## Education

The Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson did not report any cases of possible discrimination on the ground of religion in education in 2019.<sup>14</sup> Islamophobic content was not identified in any curricula, textbooks, or any other education material.

---

9. “EFHR Publishes Translations of the CERD Recommendations”, European Foundation for Human Rights, 17 May 2019, <http://en.efhr.eu/2019/05/17/efhr-publishes-translations-of-the-cerd-recommendations/>, (Access date: 13 January 2019).

10. Ibid.

11. Communication with the representative of the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, 31 December 2019.

12. Skaidrilė Grigaitė-Moclevičienė, “Equal Opportunities in the Lithuanian Labour Market: Overview of the Situation”, *Create Lithuania*, (Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, Vilnius: 2019), [https://www.lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2019/12/lg-situacijos-apzvalga\\_sgm-2019.pdf](https://www.lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2019/12/lg-situacijos-apzvalga_sgm-2019.pdf), (Access date: 13 January 2019).

13. See Footnote 7.

14. Communication with the representative of the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, 31 December 2019.

## Politics

In 2019, three elections took place in Lithuania: the elections for the local government council; elections of the president of the Republic of Lithuania; and the European Parliament elections. Nevertheless, the discussions on Muslims and their rights were not politically prominent. Only few representatives of far-right parties expressed their negative attitudes towards Muslims, but this was more related to the prejudice towards the EU and its policies in general (particularly related to commitments to the refugee resettlement/ relocation) rather than directly targeting the Muslim community. A former candidate for the European Parliament and present member of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania<sup>15</sup> (nominated by Party Order and Justice) Vytautas Kamblevičius stated, "...while living in Lithuania, we cannot obey dictatorship and pressure to import Muslims".<sup>16</sup> Another former candidate to the European Parliament Vytautas Radžvilas (Public Election Committee *Vytautas Radžvilas: Let's Get Back the State!*) expressed his strong disagreement with the EU quotas for the refugee resettlement as it would lead to the shrinking of the Lithuanian nation.<sup>17</sup> These two candidates did not receive the mandatory number of votes and were not elected to the European Parliament.

In general, far-right parties do not occupy an important place in the political arena of the country. However, anti-migrant and xenophobic statements can be sometimes heard from the representatives of mainstream parties as well.

## Media

During the past years it was clearly visible that most Islamophobic statements in the Lithuanian media were related to the public discussions on the so-called global refugee crisis and the challenges of refugee integration on national level. Due to the decline of refugee flows in Europe, the attention to this issue is decreasing in national media as well. While analysing media content focused on Islam/Muslims, it is clear that the published messages are mostly related to (newly arrived) Muslim migrants and their (integration) stories, as well as discussions on public attitudes towards Muslims and other ethnic groups.

The media can also become a channel helping to reveal discriminatory cases. On 29 May 2019, the news media portal "15min" published an article based on

15. Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania is the unicameral parliament of Lithuania.

16. Vytautas Kamblevičius, "Vytautas Kamblevičius. Lietuvos vieta – Tautų Europoje", Delfi, 15 May 2019, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/vytautas-kamblevicius-lietuvos-vieta-tautu-europoje.d?id=81178757>, (Access date: 14 January 2019).

17. Vytautas Radžvilas, "Vytautas Radžvilas. Europos Sąjunga ir Lietuvą išgelbės tik Tiesa", Delfi, 17 May 2019, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/vytautas-radzvilas-europos-sajunga-ir-lietuva-isgelbes-tik-tiesa.d?id=81196711>, (Access date: 14 January 2019).

the complaint of a woman, who is a citizen of Turkey.<sup>18</sup> She approached “15min” to inform them about an incident when the officer of the Migration Board of Vilnius County refused to take a photo for a document, because she refused to remove her hijab in a room full of people. Furthermore, according to the complainant the statutory exceptions were not explained to her.

Delfi, one of the largest news websites, remains open to various blogs and expressions of personal opinion including texts which have no Islamophobic intentions, but contribute to scaremongering and stereotyping (see Politics section).

## Justice System

During the reported period there were two cases related to the religious dietary restrictions in detention centres. On 16 June 2019, the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania (*Lietuvos vyriausiosios administracinės teismas*) adopted the final decision on the case based on a complaint on catering in prison. A convicted individual complained that he had lodged a request to prison authorities to have halal food and noted that is able to understand only Russian or Kyrgyz language. Prison authorities didn't approve the request and answered in the Lithuanian language. Court established that by current Lithuanian legislation and standards prison authorities are not obliged to provide special religious food, but have responsibility to provide food which could be fit to consume for religious persons as possible. In addition, prison authorities are providing vegetarian/vegan food and convicts have possibility to buy food from prison shop. It was established, that person had opportunity to use and buy food from shop and could eat vegetarian/vegan food, thus prison authorities didn't discriminate by religious grounds. But prison authorities were obliged to provide answer in language which convict could understand, thus their answer in Lithuanian language was considered as unlawful.<sup>19</sup>

Another case was identified at the Foreigners Registration Centre in Pabradė. An investigation initiated by the Seimas Ombudsmen's Office revealed that Muslims staying at the centre are not able to receive alternatives to pork dishes. Thus, the Seimas Ombudsman Office recommended ensuring that foreigners have the right to adequate food in accordance with their religious beliefs.<sup>20</sup>

There have not been any laws and regulations with Islamophobic arguments or any laws restricting the rights of Muslims in their religious lifestyle adopted in 2019.

18. Eglė Krikštopaitytė, “Migracijos valdyboje turkės su hidžabu nefotografavo: nesusikalbėjimas ar darbuotojos klaida?”, 15min, 29 May 2019, <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/migracijos-valdyboje-turkes-su-hidzabu-nefotografavo-nesusikalbėjimas-ar-darbuotojos-klaida-56-1151368>, (Access date: 15 January 2019).

19. “Supreme administrative court of Lithuania”, No: 1854-662, 19 June 2019, <https://eteismai.lt/byla/245652486312128/A-1854-662/2019>, (Access date: 10 January 2019).

20. “Seimo kontrolierius: Užsieniečių registracijos centre užsieniečių teisės nėra tinkamai užtikrinamos”, The Seimas Ombudsmen's Office of the Republic of Lithuania, 19 September 2019, <http://www.lrski.lt/naujienos/729-uzsienieci-registracijos-centre-darbuotojai-nemoka-uzsienio-kalb-o-sulaikytos-uzsienieci-seimos-su-mazameciais-vaikais-talpinamos-uz-grot.html>, (Access date: 13 January 2019).

The CERD sees the necessity for Lithuania to bring provisions on reparations of victims of racially motivated crimes in line with EU requirements and recommends “to include compensation to victims of discrimination and incitement to hatred falling under Articles 169, 170 and 171 of the Criminal Code in the draft Law on the Compensation for Victims of Violent Crimes”.<sup>21</sup>

## Internet

As in previous years, the most important concern regarding webpages and initiatives regularly spreading Islamophobic stereotypes lies in the fact that the responsible government institutions and law enforcement agencies do not properly monitor xenophobic statements and initiatives on the Internet. Furthermore, it is observed that people are not willing to approach the responsible institutions because of fear and indifferent attitudes of these institutions towards such type of criminal offences. Consequently, the official numbers of documented Islamophobic and, in general, xenophobic manifestations, as well as the pre-trial investigations related to the mentioned initiatives, are low and apparently do not correspond to reality.

As mentioned in the previous reports, Islamophobic messages can be mostly found on far-right websites, such as *Pro Patria* or *Alkas*. For instance, *Pro Patria* translated an article by William Kilpatrick arguing in favour of the view of Pope Francis’s advocacy for Islam.<sup>22</sup> The article raised the question of whether Pope Francis’s favourable view towards Islam and Muslim migrants could destroy Europe. Both *Alkas* and *Pro Patria* have Facebook profiles. In addition, such Facebook groups as *Lietuva – Šeiminkams*<sup>23</sup> (“Hosts of Lithuania”) or *Pabėgėliams-ne! Demografiniam lietuvių bumui ir šeimos rėmimui -taip!* (“No for refugees! Yes for demographic boom of Lithuanians and family support”)<sup>24</sup> promote negative attitudes towards refugees and migration in general, and continue to exist and spread xenophobic and Islamophobic messages.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

There are no institutions or persons that have fostered Islamophobic campaigns, stirred up debates and/or lobbied for Islamophobic laws. As was mentioned in the Politics section, only a few representatives of far-right parties have expressed their negative attitudes towards Muslims. These opinions were related more to the prejudice towards the EU and its policies in general (particularly related to

21. “EFHR Publishes Translations of the CERD Recommendations”, European Foundation for Human Rights.

22. William Kilpatrick, “Popiežiaus Pranciškaus islamo gynimas gali sugriauti Europą”, *Pro Patria*, 2 February 2019, <http://www.propatria.lt/2019/02/william-kilpatrick-popieziaus.html>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

23. For more information, see: *Lietuva – šeiminkams*, Facebook, [https://www.facebook.com/pg/seimininkai/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/seimininkai/about/?ref=page_internal), (Access date: 21 January 2020)

24. For more information, see: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/992677937419738/about/>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

commitments toward the refugee resettlement/relocation) than directly directed against Muslims community.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

Organisations like the Islamic Culture and Education Center, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, the Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights, the European Foundation of Human Rights, and the Human Rights Monitoring Institute implement various projects and local initiatives to promote dialogue and dispel prejudice. In addition, the Association Ahmadiyya Lithuania has continued to organise clean-ups of the main square in Vilnius after New Year festivities in order to highlight the positive contribution of the Muslim community to society.<sup>25</sup>

The Prosecutor General's Office in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior and the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics implemented the project "Enhancing Response to Hate Crimes and Hate Speech in Lithuania", which focuses on the following three areas: strengthening law enforcement and judicial authorities' capacities; building trust between national public authorities and vulnerable communities; and building capacity on reporting online hate speech.<sup>26</sup>

In 2019, in the frame of this project, a qualitative study on the communities vulnerable to experiencing hate crimes was commissioned. "The study assessed the level of vulnerability, the impact of hate crimes and hate speech, the reasons for not seeking justice, and the needs for protection of five communities: the Jewish and Roma communities, LGBTI, persons of other races, and Muslims living in Lithuania."<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The results of the study reveal that Islamophobic cases are quite rare in Lithuania. However the perceptions of the host society towards Muslims remain negative, furthermore, low numbers of reporting and victims of hate speech and hate crime supposedly do not correspond to the actual situation. Thus, based on the situation described in this report the following recommendations are proposed:

25. "Musulmonų bendruomenė tęsia tradiciją – po Naujųjų sutiktuvų tvarkė Katedros aikštę", Made in Vilnius, 1 January 2020, <https://madeinvilnius.lt/naujienos/gyvenimas/musulmonu-bendruomene-tesia-tradicija-po-naujuju-sutiktuvu-tvarke-katedros-aikste/>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

26. For more information, see: "Projektas 'Atsako į neapykantos nusikaltimus ir neapykantą kurstančias kalbas Lietuvoje stiprinimas'", Lietuvos Respublikos prokuratūra, 21 November 2019, [://www.prokuraturos.lt/lt/projektai/vykdomi-projektai/projektas-atsako-i-neapykantos-nusikaltimus-ir-neapykanta-kurstancias-kalbas-lietuvoje-stiprinimas/6160](http://www.prokuraturos.lt/lt/projektai/vykdomi-projektai/projektas-atsako-i-neapykantos-nusikaltimus-ir-neapykanta-kurstancias-kalbas-lietuvoje-stiprinimas/6160), (Access date: 21 January 2020).

27. For more information, see: "MI study: communities vulnerable to experiencing hate crimes interviewed", Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, 13 January 2020, <https://vrm.lrv.lt/en/news/mi-study-communities-vulnerable-to-experiencing-hate-crimes-interviewed>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

- To carry out awareness-raising campaigns promoting tolerance and understanding of the host society towards different religious groups, national minorities, and migrants including asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection.
- To promote the responsibility of the mass media in the formation of positive attitudes towards Muslims and other religious groups.
- To ensure systematic support and representation of victims of hate speech and hate crime.
- To implement continuous and systematic measures to encourage and facilitate the reporting of hate speech and hate crimes.
- To improve the effectiveness of the mechanisms that record hate crimes and educate those responsible for recognising hate crime.
- To improve the monitoring of hate crimes and incitements to hatred in mass media and social networks.
- To carry out the monitoring of politicians using hate speech, especially during election campaigns.

## Chronology

- **29.05.2019:** An officer of the Migration Board of Vilnius County refused to take a document photo of a woman from Turkey because she refused to remove her hijab in a room full of people. The statutory exceptions were also not explained to the woman.
- **19.06.2019:** The final decision of the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania based on a complaint on catering in prison was issued. The established facts prove that the complainant had conditions to eat according to his religious beliefs and there was no information that he was discriminated on religious grounds.
- **28.08.2019:** Lithuania's National Land Service gave the Vilnius Sunni religious community the right to use an 8,4000-square metre land plot free of charge for a mosque in the Liepkalnis area of Vilnius.
- **06.09.2019:** The report of Seimas Ombudsmen's Office on the investigation in the Foreigners Registration Centre was issued. The Seimas Ombudsmen's Office revealed that Muslims staying at the centre are not able to receive alternative to pork dishes.
- **21.09.2019:** First incident of vandalism against the mosque in the city of Kaunas.
- **18.11.2019:** Second incident of vandalism against the mosque in the city of Kaunas.



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**MALTA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

SARA EZABE MALLIUE



## The Author

**Sara Ezabe Malliue** is a lawyer. She holds a Master of Advocacy degree and is currently reading for a Master in Human Rights Law & Practice at the University of Malta. She completed a leadership course at the University of Cambridge, UK as a recipient of an award by Queen Elizabeth II. Ezabe Malliue has been researching hate speech online and conducted a research project entitled “Negotiating Peace in the Ambit of Freedom of Speech” (ELSA, Malta 2016) to highlight the importance of creating policies to tackle hate speech. She is the co-founder of the campaign “Redefining Us” which was created with the aim of combating discrimination and hate speech, and to raise awareness about religious and ethnic minorities in Malta. For this, she was awarded the Young Impactful Politician Award by the Junior Chamber International (JCI) Malta. Ezabe Malliue contributes to a local newspaper where she shares her reflections on being a Maltese Muslim and on other issues faced by minorities. Email: saraev96@gmail.com

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Sara Ezabe Malliue: *Islamophobia in Malta: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

In 2019, Malta was shocked with the controversial ongoing case where two Maltese soldiers are charged with the murder of Ivorian migrant Lassana Cisse in what seems to have been a racially motivated attack. This sparked a debate on racism and xenophobia in the country. Malta remained on the route of the global circulation of Islamophobic statements and images. Such materials were often translated from foreign sources and adapted to the local context by ‘patriots’ –or, more correctly, far-right parties.

The ongoing establishment of far-right parties espousing Islamophobic and xenophobic views is on the rise. This was especially evident during the European Parliament elections, where candidates from two different parties ran. The compilation of this report is based on information primarily from the Internet, which includes websites of Islamophobic groups, the media, and also social media. Together with this, studies and reports conducted by European organisations and agencies were also taken into consideration. Some of the publications quoted in the report are from 2019 and others predate this year.

The author also took into account personal encounters with Muslims in Malta, both Maltese Muslims and foreign Muslims and their experiences and recommendations. In brief, the most prominent points discussed in this report include the Islamophobic statement by the Guardian of Future Generations, the murder of Ivorian migrant Lassana Cisse, and the ongoing rise of the new far-right party *Ghaqda patrijotti Maltin* (Maltese Patriot Association), which contested the European Parliament elections in May 2019. Another point is the rise of Islamophobic and hateful comments and memes on the Internet, especially on social media. Publications and reports in Malta which show statistical data are very sparse. There is little research by Maltese institutions on Islamophobia. There is an evident need for additional research and policies in Malta, especially by government entities. In closed groups, the Muslim community complains about unemployment as a result of the headscarf and other discrimination that the community encounters. On a national level, other than the publications and initiatives carried out by NGOs.

## Sommarju Eżekuttiv

Fl-2019, Malta kienet ixxukkjata bil-każ kontroversjali, fejn żewġ suldati Maltin qed jiġu akkużati bil-qtil tal-immigrant Ivorjan Lassana Cisse, f'dak li jidher li kien attack b'motiv ta' mibeda razzjali. Dan qanqal dibattitu dwar ir-razziżmu u l-ksenofobija fil-pajjiż. Malta kompliet fil-proċess ta' ċirkolazzjoniglobali ta' 'dikjarazzjonijiet u stampi Islamofobiċi. Materjali bħal dawn spiss ġew tradotti minn sorsi barranin u ġew adattati għall-kuntest lokali minn «patrijotti» - jew, b'mod aktar korrett, minn partiti tal-lemin estrem.

L-istabiliment kontinwu ta' «partiti tal-lemin estrem li jesponu fehmiet Izlamofobiċi u ksenofobiċi qieghed jiżdied speċjalment waqt l-elezzjonijiet tal-Parlament Ewropew, fejn hemm kandidati minn żewġ partiti differenti li ikkontestaw u gabu ammont sostanzjali ta' voti. Il-kumpilazzjoni ta' dan ir-rapport hija bbażata fuq informazzjoni primarjament mill-Internet, li tinkludi websajts ta' gruppi Izlamofobiċi, informazzjoni u artikli mil-midja, kif ukoll tal-midja soċjali. Gie ukoll ikkunsidrat studji u rapporti mmexxija minn organizzazzjonijiet u aġenziji Ewropej. Uħud mill-pubblikazzjonijiet ikkwotati hawn huma mill-2019 u oħrajn min snin preċeduti. L-awtur qies ukoll laqgħat personali ma 'Musulmani f'Malta, kemm Musulmani Maltin kif ukoll Musulmani barranin u l-esperjenzi u r-rakkomandazzjonijiet tagħhom. Fil-qosor, l-aktar punti prominenti diskussi f'dan ir-rapport jinkludu d-dikjarazzjoni Islamofobika mill-Gwardjan tal-Ġenerazzjonijiet Futuri, il-qtil ta' Lassana Cisse, u l-ammont ta' voti li gabu l-partiti li kkontestaw l-elezzjonijiet tal-Parlament Ewropew f'Mejju 2019. Punt ieħor huwa ż-żieda ta' kummenti u memes fuq il-midja soċjali li jxerdu l-mibegħda, speċjalment fuq il-midja soċjali. Publikazzjonijiet u rapporti f'Malta li juru statistika huma skarsi ħafna. Ftit hemm riċerka minn istituzzjonijiet Maltin dwar l-Izlamofobija. Il-komunità Musulmana tilmenta fi gruppi magħluqa speċjalment minhabba li l-pjattaformi għal-dan huma skarsi. Fuq livell nazzjonali, minbarra l-publikazzjonijiet u l-inizjattivi mwettqa minn NGOs, l-isforzi magħmula mill-Koordinatur tal-Kummissjoni Ewropea David Friggieri huma forsi l-iktar dokumentati.

## Country Profile EIR 2019

**Country:** The Republic of Malta

**Type of Regime:** Parliamentary Republic

**Form of Government:** Parliamentary System

**Ruling Parties:** Labour Party and Nationalist Party

**Opposition Parties:** *Alleanza Bidla*, Democratic Alternative, *Moviment Patrijotti Maltin*

**Last Elections:** Labour Party won by a majority of 54.83% (39 seats), Nationalist Party holds 30 seats.

**Total Population:** 460,297 (2017) (Eurostat)

**Major Languages:** Maltese and English

**Official Religion:** Catholicism

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** N/A

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** 71% of Maltese respondents thought that discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin was widespread. (ENAR Shadow Report 2013-2017)

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Roman Catholicism 93.9% (*MaltaToday* survey)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 0.3% of the overall Maltese population (*MaltaToday* Survey)

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** World Islamic Call Society and *Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Malta*

**Main NGOs combating Islamophobia:** Aditus, Integra, People for Change Foundation

**Far-Right Parties:** Imperium Europa

**Far-Right Movements:** *Moviment Patrijotti Maltin*

**Far Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

The recent Eurobarometer published in September 2019 on integration in the EU shows that many citizens in Malta still have a perception that there are high levels of discrimination on the basis of skin colour, ethnic origin, and religion or belief.<sup>1</sup> Specifically on the integration of migrants, more than half of the participants of the Eurobarometer on integration of immigrants, responded that immigration from outside the EU is a problem in Malta.<sup>2</sup> As a result, this has an effect on the integration of migrants in society, frequently leading to discrimination in the community.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

There are no official statistics on hate crime published in 2019 or recent years in relation to physical attacks specifically related to Islamophobia. However, one of the most shocking developments in 2019, was the racially motivated killing of Lassana Cisse Souleymane and the wounding of two other African migrants in Hal Far on 6 April. More worrying, two members of the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM) have been arraigned in relation to this murder. The NCPE (National Commission for Promotion of Equality) in response to this said that all cases of racism, discrimination, and intolerance are an affront to a democratic society and as such they should be treated with the utmost seriousness. The NCPE envisaged to strengthen its reach through the establishment of a Human Rights and Equality Commission (HREC).<sup>3</sup> This has created national recognition of the high levels of intolerance, and public figures have been reminding the public that hate has no place in Malta, and have expressed the hope that maximum efforts will be made to combat racism, xenophobia, and discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

### Employment

Discrimination of migrants in places of employment has always been a problem, and studies by the UNHCR have noted this many times in reports. Problems occur

1. "Discrimination in the European Union", European Commission Public Opinion, September 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/special/surveyKy/2251>, (Access date: 15 December 2019).

2. "Integration of immigrants in the European Union", European Commission Public Opinion, April 2018.

3. "Press Statement: Need for Soul-Searching after Racially Motivated Murder", National Commission for the Promotion of Equality, April 2019, [https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/News\\_and\\_Events/Press\\_Releases/2019/Press\\_Statement\\_murder\\_race.pdf](https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/News_and_Events/Press_Releases/2019/Press_Statement_murder_race.pdf), (Access date: 12 December 2019).

4. "PR: UNHCR Deeply Perturbed That Murder of Lassana Cisse Was Racially Motivated", UNHCR Malta, 20 May 2019, [www.unhcr.org/mt/4364-pr-unhcr-deeply-perturbed-that-the-murder-was-racially-motivated.html](http://www.unhcr.org/mt/4364-pr-unhcr-deeply-perturbed-that-the-murder-was-racially-motivated.html), (Access date: 22 December 2019).

in the process of being issued the adequate work permits, in the workplace, and not being offered employment following job interviews.<sup>5</sup>

A more recent study, compiled with the help of Jobsplus, the Malta Employers Association (MEA), the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), and African Media Association Malta (AMAM),<sup>6</sup> identified specific challenges employers face, including the cost of work permits. It also encouraged site-specific language courses and cultural training for those who employ refugees, as well as the development of appropriate tools to bridge the gap between refugees and employers. It also noted that female refugees especially struggled to get jobs.

Whilst the aforementioned policy is targeted toward ensuring access to English and Maltese language classes this was further highlighted in relation to sources which would assure that migrants have access to learning their rights and obligations under Maltese law. This would ensure that they are not discriminated, and if they face such discrimination, they are informed of the adequate mechanisms and tools for reporting such discrimination, as well as being aware of their rights. There were also calls to establish a body to assess and recognise the skills of refugees who do not have recognised certificates or refugees who no longer have the certificates in their possession.

The report also revealed that those interviewed as part of the research said they were discriminated against for religious and cultural reasons, often feeling like they were not shortlisted for an interview because of their last name. The employers remarked that they are discouraged from employing refugees due to colleagues not being welcoming or customers submitting complaints. This is not only limited to refugees but of course extends to all migrants. In this regard, the UNHCR Malta, when commenting on the work being undertaken by the government in this regard, also urged it, to ensure that public policy and targeted measures support these efforts and the institutionalisation of new measures, as their success will ultimately be in the best interest of everyone.<sup>7</sup>

## Education

As of the September 2018 academic year, Mariam Al Batool School, which offered primary and secondary education for Muslim students, closed its doors for secondary education because of financial difficulties. Imam Mohammed El Sadi, the most known imam and a leader in the Muslim community in Malta, requested that Islam

---

5. Daphne Cassar, "The Existence of Discriminatory Attitudes on Refugees Who Live and Work in Malta", TVM, 30 October 2018, <https://www.tvm.com.mt/mt/news/jezisti-agir-diskriminatorju-kontra-xi-refugiati-li-jghixu-ujahdmu-malta-il-unhcr/>, (Access date: 4 January 2020).

6. "Employers Struggle with Paperwork for Employing Refugees in Malta – UN", The Times of Malta, 3 December 2019, <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/employers-struggle-with-paperwork-for-employingrefugees-in-malta-un.754570>, (Access date: 3 January 2020).

7. "Together a UNHCR Report on Employment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Malta", UNHCR, December 2019, [https://www.unhcr.org/mt/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/12/UNHCR-Employment-report\\_WORKING-TOGETHER\\_web.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/mt/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/12/UNHCR-Employment-report_WORKING-TOGETHER_web.pdf), (Access date: 4 January 2020).

religion lessons be provided in government schools in the absence of an Islamic school in Malta. To this day, most Muslim students sit for Ethics lessons at secondary school level instead of Catholicism lessons. However, students in primary school do not have an alternative to the lessons on Catholicism. This also follows a controversy in 2017 regarding Islam religion lessons in public schools.<sup>8</sup> Presently a voluntary programme is being designed to introduce religion teachings on Islam in government schools; however, it is still in its infancy.

There has been no curriculum material reported as Islamophobic in content. Inclusion has been encouraged by educators in the last few years. However, there is a need for educators to be informed about Islam and Muslims, as such information is not provided to them and they struggle to deal with pupils in their classes who practice Islam.

## Politics

In the 2019 MEP elections, Norman Lowell's far-right party emerged as Malta's strongest third party in the elections with more than 8,000 votes.<sup>9</sup> Together with the anti-immigrant *Moviment Patrijotti Maltin*, far-right voters in Malta stand at 3.5%.<sup>10</sup> Unless this is countered by strong political will for integration, from the other two parties, the growth of the far right may become a permanent fixture in Maltese politics.



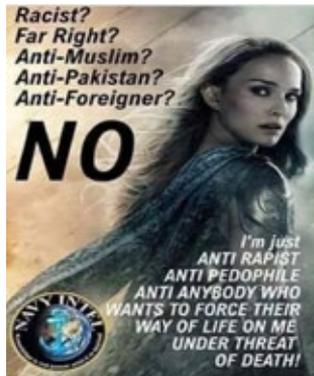
**Figure 1:** Promoting burqa ban and criticising the most popular political parties in Malta for allowing such choices.<sup>11</sup>

8. Sara Ezabe Malliue, "Islamophobia in Malta: National Report 2018", *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2019), <http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Malta.pdf>, (Access date: 22 January 2019).

9. James Debono, "Resizing Norman Lowell: Far Right Candidate Gets 3% But Leads Small Parties", *Malta Today*, [https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/europe-2019/95285resizing\\_norman\\_lowell\\_far\\_right\\_candidate\\_gets\\_3\\_but\\_leads\\_small\\_parties#.XkGYFi2ZNNQI](https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/europe-2019/95285resizing_norman_lowell_far_right_candidate_gets_3_but_leads_small_parties#.XkGYFi2ZNNQI), (Access date: 27 December 2019).

10. Ibid.

11. Moviment Patrijotti Maltin, Facebook, 3 August 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/patrijottmalti/>, (Access date: 4 January 2020).



**Figure 2:** Circulating false information regarding Islam on 'Ghaqda Patrijotti Maltin'.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, the Guardian for Future Generations Maurice Mizzi has hit out at irregular immigration in Malta, arguing that Muslims are “taking over” and insisting the country should stop migrants from entering.<sup>13</sup> “Mr Mizzi’s declaration contradicts the former Prime Minister’s statement about the need for more workers, irrespective of religion, origin or colour.”<sup>14</sup> Mizzi who has headed the government-appointed Guardian commission since it was reconstituted in 2017, returned to the issue unprompted later in the interview, repeating his view that Muslims were taking over by a demographic shift, raising fears of fundamentalists “Sharia law” ’punishments, and insisting children born to migrants should not be given Maltese citizenship. NGOs immediately demanded that the commissioner be dismissed. He went on to say,

“We should stop these people coming from abroad without a passport, with their children and with a different religion .We are living in a Catholic country, and when I die, I want to die in a Catholic country. At the moment, there are so many Muslims coming – they’re all having nine babies, next to our two – and they will take over eventually.”<sup>15</sup>

This was also the view shared by the mayor of a locality where numerous people from different nationalities reside. Alfred Grima, the mayor of Saint Paul’s Bay, has stated that if his locality had to serve as a pilot project for integration in Malta, it would result in a failure. He also expressed anti-immigrant sentiments and concluded that integration in Malta has failed.<sup>16</sup>

12. Ibid.

13. Philip Leone Ganado, “Maurice Mizzi’s Anti-Muslim Tirade Sparks Calls for Dismissal”, Times of Malta, 26 May 2019, <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/guardian-for-future-generations-launches-anti-muslim-tirade.710971>, (Access date: 30 January 2020)

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Albert Gauci Cunningham, “F’dari hemm il-bieb bieb niddecidi jien min bidhol, l-istess pajjizna” , Illum Newspaper, 7 October 2019, [http://www.illum.com.mt/ahbarijiet/politika/57092/sindku\\_laburista\\_jisaq\\_linte-grazzjoni\\_falliet?fbclid=IwAR0PICPyHlkShSH26-qIHPS3woN6ZJncqoZu6LgZnGdgG9LflQrWGFVnwLE#.XkNVLC2ZnQL](http://www.illum.com.mt/ahbarijiet/politika/57092/sindku_laburista_jisaq_linte-grazzjoni_falliet?fbclid=IwAR0PICPyHlkShSH26-qIHPS3woN6ZJncqoZu6LgZnGdgG9LflQrWGFVnwLE#.XkNVLC2ZnQL), (Access date: 20 December 2019).

## Media

Lovin Malta, *MaltaToday*, and *Times of Malta* are amongst the media outlets which encourage inclusion and integration of Muslims in Malta. As a newspaper, *Times of Malta*, has blocked the comments section when reporting on sensitive matters such as immigration and Muslims to avoid racist and Islamophobic comments. Furthermore, Lovin Malta creates content which challenges the perception of Maltese people about Muslims in a positive way. On 16 March 2019, *MaltaToday* published the reflections of Ibtisam Sadegh, a Maltese Muslim. This interview highlights a number of encounters by Ibtisam as she grew up in a predominantly Catholic country and she interestingly asserts her identity as being both Maltese and Muslim.<sup>17</sup>

## Justice System

International human rights monitoring bodies reiterated their concerns about existing gaps in national criminal codes in addressing hate crime and hate speech. The ECRI expressed its concerns that the criminal code in Malta<sup>18</sup> does not contain provisions that criminalise “the creation or leadership of a group which promotes racism or support for such a group” and “participation in its activities”.<sup>19</sup> Maltese authorities were urged to add to the criminal code “incitement to discrimination; defamation; public dissemination, public distribution, production or storage, with a racist aim, of written, pictorial or other material”.<sup>20</sup> However, to date the criminal code has not been amended to include these recommendations and under Article 82A of the criminal code<sup>21</sup>, only incitement to racial hatred is included.

## Internet

The Internet is the most prevalent space for Islamophobic comments. (Figures 3 & 4) Social media pages such as that of the *Ghaqda Patrijotti Maltin* continue to serve as a platform for Islamophobic comments and posters.<sup>22</sup> It is very difficult to monitor these platforms and to hold people responsible for their online comments and the fake news which is spread (and is not monitored by any institution). Hate speech is codified under Maltese Criminal Law Article 82A (1) which includes “written or printed material” and on the basis of religion, amongst others. However, case law is sparse on this subject although hate speech is always on the rise. One of the most im-

17. “Growing up Muslim in Malta. But People Still Ask ‘Where Are You Really From?’”, Ibtisam Sadegh, 16 March 2019, [https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/93548/growing\\_up\\_muslim\\_in\\_malta\\_but\\_people\\_still\\_ask\\_where\\_are\\_you\\_really\\_from#.Xm84by2ZNQI](https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/93548/growing_up_muslim_in_malta_but_people_still_ask_where_are_you_really_from#.Xm84by2ZNQI) (Access date: 15 January 2020)

18. “ECRI Report on Malta (fifth monitoring cycle)”, Council of Europe, ECRI, 2018, <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-malta/16808b592b>, (Access date: 20 December 2019).

19. “Fundamental Rights Report 2019”, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2019-fundamental-rights-report-2019\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-fundamental-rights-report-2019_en.pdf), (Access date: 3 January 2019).

20. The laws of Malta, Chapter 8 of the Laws of Malta, Criminal code, Article 82A.

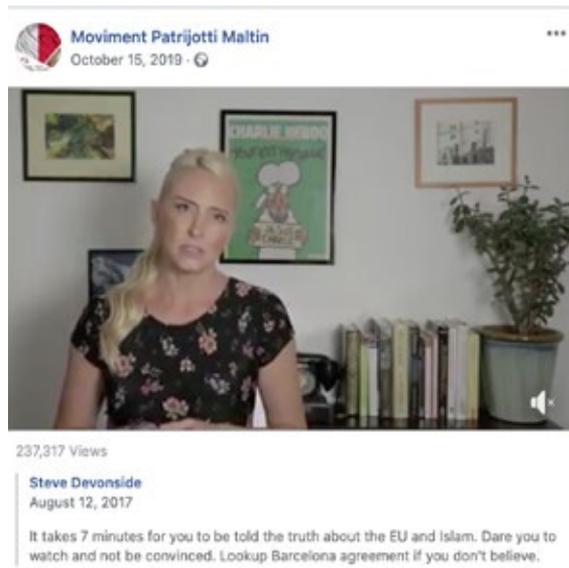
21. Ibid.

22. Sara Ezabe Malliue, “Islamophobia in Malta: National Report 2018”.

portant campaigns has been the Council of Europe’s “No Hate Speech Movement”.<sup>23</sup> On the website for this campaign the reporting procedures of the respective party countries are included to facilitate reporting.



**Figure 3:** Maltese Patriot Movement Calling for the Burqa Ban and complaining that political parties are not taking adequate measures for such ban.<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 4:** Circulating false information on Islam.<sup>25</sup>

23. “No hate speech, Youth Campaign”, Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/no-hate-campaign>, (Access date: 3 January 2020).

24. Moviment Patrijotti Maltin, Facebook, 16 November 2019.

25. Ibid. 15 October 2019.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

As outlined in the section on politics, the primary foundation of the Islamophobia network is the *Għaqda Patrijotti Maltin* movement. Another group is *Imperium Ewropa*, which shares the same far-right ideology, and supports fascism and nationalism. However, in the last three to four years, *Għaqda Patrijotti Maltin* has taken the lead with its Facebook page and presence on social media. Although, this might not seem like an extensive network, the geographical size of Malta should also be taken into consideration, together with its population. This group has organised protests all across the country. Moreover, Alex Pisani and Henry Battistino, the moderators and leaders of this movement, are responsible for the organisation of such events and sharing material, which is then further circulated and shared.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

The most prominent and active groups in Malta which create initiatives and events to combat discrimination, racism, and Islamophobia are the following: People for Change Foundation (Pfc), Integra, NCPE, aditus foundation, and the Jesu-it refugee services. The NCPE is the governmental agency for equality; however, it focuses more on gender equality than on interfaith issues. NGOs in Malta focus primarily on racism and discrimination faced by foreigners (immigrants & refugees) rather than by Maltese Muslims. Some of the events which dealt indirectly with addressing Islamophobia are discussed below. Among them, one of the most prominent was “Youth Not Status”, organised by the aditus foundation. The Ahmadiyya Muslim community together with ‘Għaqda Nanniet’ grandparents’ association organised an event on 29 December 2019, which brought together Christians and Muslims. The aim of this event was to underline the shared values of solidarity and peace, and fostering respect and love in the community which can overcome racism and intolerance.<sup>26</sup> A similar gathering was organised on 2 June 2019, whereby the Muslim community shared a meal with the President of Malta George Vella.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

As evident from the above research, which includes informal interviews with Muslims, newspaper research, and statistics, Malta is very underdeveloped on this matter

26. Liam Carter, “Muslims and Christians in Malta Organise a Joint Initiative for People Who Are Living in Solitude”, TVM, 29 December 2019, <https://www.tvm.com.mt/mt/news/insara-u-musulmani-fmalta-jinghaqdu-biex-iferrhu-lil-min-jinsab-wahdu/>, (Access date: 6 January 2020).

27. Luisa Apap, “President Vella Shares Meal with Muslim Community”, Newsbook, 2 June 2019, <https://newsbook.com.mt/en/president-vella-shares-meal-with-muslim-community/>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

and requires research and policies to counter Islamophobia. Muslims in Malta feel the lacuna left by the failure of politicians and equality bodies to address the situation. In the current global anti-Muslim climate, the development of mechanisms to counter hate are crucial. Moreover, adequate screening of social media pages, and a safe and user-friendly reporting system are also very important. Creating space for dialogue is essential to countering Islamophobia together with awareness and education about Islam to help civil society identify what is real and what is fake, and to overcome the barriers Muslims face on a daily basis. Moreover, this would also help overcome prejudice and encourage viewing Muslims beyond stereotypes, as individuals.

There is a need to distinguish Islamophobia from other discriminatory ideologies and to map out its seriousness. This will also require an observatory authority that can monitor and record Islamophobic incidents – at the moment, it is very difficult to establish clear figures. A clear policy framework is also important for educators and schools to ensure that there is uniformity and an inclusive environment for students. This can be extended to all areas. Awareness and knowledge of Islam is pivotal for everyone, including journalists, politicians, and civil servants. Further recommendations include:

- - Setting up alternative mechanisms to encourage victims to report hate crime and hate speech incidents, such as third-party reporting systems or dedicated telephone lines.
- - A mechanism for collecting disaggregated data on hate crime incidents, including hate speech, on the ground of religion.
- - Authorities need to press ahead with and intensify training for police, prosecutors, and judges in order to ensure a more effective fight against Islamophobia.
- - The adoption of a strategy for the integration of all Muslims in the community as soon as possible, along with a clear message to the public that integration is a two-way process for both Muslims and the majority population.
- - Authorities must organise a campaign to raise awareness among the public about Islam and Muslims.
- - Policy documents and formal statistics about the Muslim population in Malta, both foreign and Maltese, are necessary.

## Chronology

- **16.03.2019:** *MaltaToday* published the reflections of Ibtisiam Sadegh, a Maltese Muslim.
- **06.04.2019:** Lassana Cisse was murdered.
- **25.05.2019:** MEP elections. Far-right parties increased the number of voters.

- **26.05.2019:** Guardian for Future Generations Maurice Mizzi speaks out against irregular immigration to Malta.
- **02.06.2019:** The Muslim community shared a meal with President of Malta George Vella.
- **29.12.2019:** A Christmas dinner took place bringing together Christians and Muslims.



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**MONTENEGRO**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

AMINA ŠEMSOVIĆ



## The Author

**Amina Šemsović** has a BA (University of Novi Pazar) and an MA (University of Kragujevac) in English Language and Literature. Her civic activism earned her a scholarship for the European Regional Master's Programme in Democracy and Human Rights (joint degree) at the University of Bologna and the University of Sarajevo. After her graduation in 2016, she gained extensive experience in the field of human rights through numerous training programs, projects, and summer schools. In 2018, she was awarded the Fellowship at the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights. As a representative of the Bosniak and Muslim minority in Serbia, she spent a month in Geneva, where she participated in several UN bodies including the 11<sup>th</sup> session of the Forum on Minority Issues. Email: amina\_sems@hotmail.com

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Amina Šemsović: *Islamophobia in Montenegro: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraktli & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

Due to the advanced EU integration processes, the position of minorities including the Muslim community has been significantly improved. Montenegro has introduced many laws that should provide the full extent of social, political, and economic rights to minorities. On the other hand, the country has a fragile economy and poor rule of law followed by a deep political crisis.

After the alleged coup in 2017 amid the country's accession to NATO, this year was followed by the unrest caused by the newly introduced Law on Freedom of Religion or Beliefs. The law was created to regulate or redefine legal relations between the state and religious institutions, including the redefinition of the ownership of many properties owned or claimed by religious communities. The new law requires that religious institutions must have clear evidence of ownership of the properties they claim belong to them. While all religious communities supported the law, the Serbian Orthodox Church believes that the state only wants to dispute its holdings and has expressed strong disapproval. This dispute led to violent behavior in the parliament and protests in Montenegro as well as in neighboring Serbia.

This ongoing dispute between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the government (ruling party) delivered many Islamophobic statements. The Muslim community actually took on the role of bystander on the issue. The dispute polarized the debate, leaving the Muslim community in the middle. The law brought positive changes but it did not deal with the long-awaited restitution of property lost during the Communist era. The Islamic community claims that it has lost the most compared to all other religious communities in Montenegro. The Muslim community's fear of becoming collateral damage in this dispute was justified after repeated instances of anti-Muslim speech and threats were made in the parliament by pro-Serbian politicians.

The passing of aforementioned law was the highlight event on Montenegrin political scene in 2019. The law was passed and tensions in the country are still high. Islamophobic incidents are still a sporadic occurrence, but strong negative sentiment towards the Muslim community has become stronger and more visible.

## Izvršni rezime

Zahvaljujući evropskim integracijama, položaj manjina se znatno poboljšao. Crna Gora je usvojila mnoge zakone koji manjinama pružaju zaštitu te praksu društvenih, političkih i ekonomskih prava. S druge strane, državu već duže prati siromašna ekonomija i duboka politička kriza. Nakon navodnog puča 2017-te godine prilikom prijema u NATO, ovu godinu su pratili burni događaji povodom usvajanja Zakona o slobodi vjeroispovjesti.

Zakon je trebao regulisati legalno-pravne odnose između države i vjerskih zajednica, uključujući i pravo na imovinu. Sve vjerske zajednice su podržale zakon, dok se Srpska Pravoslavna Crkva jako protivila tvrdeći da im država ovim zakonom želi oduzeti svu imovinu. Ovaj konflikt je doveo do protesta širom države i nasilnog ponašanja u Parlamentu, kako u Crnoj Gori tako i u Srbiji.

Iako je ceo spor bio između Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve i vladajuće partije iznedrio je puno islamofobičnih izjava. Ceo slučaj je bio jako polarizovan, imali smo samo dve suprostavljene strane, onu koja podržava zakon i onu koja se istom jako protivi iako je u realnosti Islamska zajednica bila u sredini. Ova zajednica tvrdi da je u poređenju sa ostalim vjerskim zajednicama najviše izgubila tokom komunizma a strah njenih predstavnika da Muslimani mogu biti kolateralna šteta u ovom konfliktu je kasnije opravdan. Islamofobične izjave i jako zabrinjavajuće pretnje su upućene Muslimanima u crnogorskom Parlamentu bez ikakvih legalnih posledica.

U protekloj godini ovaj zakon je bio epicenter svih dešavanja. Zakon je izglasan, tenzije u državi su i dalje velike. Islamofobični incidenti su još uvek sporadična pojava ali negativan stav prema Muslimanima postaje jači i vidljiviji.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Montenegro

**Type of Regime:** Democratic Republic

**Form of Government:** Parliamentary Republic

**Ruling Parties:** Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS)

**Opposition Parties:** Democratic Front Party, Democratic Montenegro, Socialist People's Party, Social Democratic Party, Democratic Alliance

**Last Elections:** 2016 Parliament Elections: Democratic Party of Socialists won 41,4% of votes (36 seats in parliament), Democratic Front won 20.1% of votes (18 seats), Key Coalition won 11% (9 seats).

2018 Presidential Elections won by Former Prime Minister Milo Đukanović of the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists in the first round.

**Total Population:** 629,364 (based on the latest estimates by the United Nations, 2019)

**Major Languages:** Montenegrin (national and official), Serbian, Bosnian, Albanian, Croatian (in official use)

**Official Religion:** No official religion

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** Montenegro has reported information on hate crimes to the ODIHR in previous years (the data for 2019 is not published yet). Besides the numbers, no additional information is available. Montenegro's Criminal Code contains a general penalty enhancement and a substantive offence provision. Hate crime data is collected by the Montenegrin Prosecutor's Office and the Supreme Court. Data on hate crime is not publicly available. There are no statistics on Islamophobia available.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** In 2019, 80 cases were reported to the Ombudsman (24 were based on discrimination in employment; 2 of these were based on nationality and 1 on religion). In its "Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourth to Sixth Periodic Reports of Montenegro," the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) expressed concern about the violence against Roma people and the absence of updated and comprehensive disaggregated data on hate crimes.

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** According to the *Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in Montenegro 2011*, Montenegro's 118,477 Muslims make up 19.11% of the total population.

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Islamic Community, Bosniak Forum

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** Islamic community is the most important institution for Muslim community and its most relevant representative, however it doesn't monitor or collect any data on anti-Muslim hate crimes or speech. Moreover, it does not have any initiatives or projects dealing with Islamophobia

specifically. It is important to add that Islamic community has unique status of religious institution, it doesn't belong to NGO or state sector. Ministry of human and minority rights, a state institution deals with human rights in general. It collaborates with Islamic community and other minority representatives successfully, and it had many policies and initiatives that were beneficial for Muslim community but so far it did not recognize Islamophobia as problem that should be addressed. Same goes for local or international NGOs present in Montenegro.

**Far-Right Parties:** The Democratic Front is a coalition of several right-wing parties that at the moment forms the opposition. Although they describe themselves as a center-right coalition, their narrative promotes Serbian nationalistic ideology, and they openly support The Hague-convicted war criminals like Radovan Karadžić. They have the full support of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro and in Serbia as well as the support of far-right parties from Serbia.

**Far-Right Movements:** *Ravnogorski pokret (Ravnogorski movement)* which is forbidden by the government

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

According to the latest census, Muslims constitute 19.11% of the total population which makes them the largest minority in Montenegro. The Muslim community is divided into few ethnic and national groups: Bosniaks, Albanians, Gorani, Roma, Ashkali, etc. Some of them identify themselves by religion rather than by ethnicity or nationality, and vice versa.

Muslims predominantly live in northwestern municipalities that belong to Sandžak (and those close to the Albanian border). Islamophobia in Montenegro has deep historical roots inspired by mythological narratives. Throughout history Muslims are presented as people who betrayed their own nation and faith by converting to Islam during the Ottoman era, therefore they don't belong to Montenegro anymore and must be expelled or banished as Ottomans were.

In comparison to other ex-Yugoslavian countries, the potential conflict in Montenegro is not among different ethnic groups but among people belonging to the same ethnicity with different political choices. The rising problem is that minorities prevail on certain state issues and consequently become a target for those who disagree. According to the last events when Muslims were the target of hate speech and threats by pro-Serbian right-wing politicians we can state that Florian Bieber's study on Montenegrin minorities is as relevant today as it was in 2002. In the study, he concluded, "Despite a hostile climate towards Bosniaks in Sandžak during the early 1990s, especially in the Serbian part of the region, relations never deteriorated to the degree of outright violence against minorities in Montenegro. Frequently the minorities of Montenegro, both Bosniaks and Albanians, have been the target of either pro-Yugoslav parties in Montenegro or representatives of the former governing parties and other nationalist forces in Serbia."<sup>1</sup>

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

The local parliament of Berane, one of the largest cities in the northeastern part of Montenegro, decided to revoke the authorization of the Islamic cemetery in that city.<sup>2</sup> The cemetery was managed by the Islamic community, which had full authority over the property. The decision stirred unrest among the Muslim community. The official statement by the local parliament stated that the city acted upon

---

1. Florian Bieber, "The Instrumentalization of Minorities in the Montenegrin Dispute over Independence", European Center for Minority Issues, [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/34196/brief\\_8.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/34196/brief_8.pdf), (Access date: 2 February 2020).

2. "Crnogorska IZ traži poništenje odluke o oduzimanju mezarja", AlJazeera Balkans, 17 September 2019, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/crnogorska-iz-trazi-ponistenje-odluke-o-oduzimanju-mezarja>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

the existing law on public properties voted by the entire current Montenegrin government including the Bosniak political party and the major political representative of Bosniak Muslims in Montenegro.<sup>3</sup> The law on public property qualifies cemeteries as public property, and as a result the Public Utility Service manages them and all burial ceremonies. Meanwhile, the city makes all decisions regarding the property itself.

On the other hand, representatives of the Islamic community claim this property was taken from them despite the fact that it was the only property left in their possession. Rifat Fejzić, the grand mufti of the Islamic community in Montenegro, explained that the Islamic community requested a different solution or, at least, for the local parliament to postpone the decision for a series of reasons.<sup>4</sup> Firstly, the city of Berane has a long history of discrimination against the Muslim community and therefore the situation is more complex and sensitive than it seems. The city has destroyed almost all Islamic symbols for the last 50 years, including the Central Mosque where now you can find a private building and an old Muslim cemetery that was located where the Central Bus station is today.<sup>5</sup> The present cemetery according to the Islamic community is the last symbol of the city's Islamic identity. There is a strong belief the decision is for the purpose of assimilating the Muslim community since the number of Muslims has largely decreased over the years. Fejzić also raised concerns that in the official document regarding the decision of the local parliament, no Islamic burial ceremonies or any related terminology is mentioned.<sup>6</sup> There is also a financial side to the story that was not properly regulated. Namely, the Islamic community has invested a large amount of money into this property and will not receive any compensation. Fejzić announced that the community will definitely file an appeal against the decision, stating the decision shows clear animosity towards the city's Muslim residents.<sup>7</sup>

## Employment

Montenegro's high unemployment rate remains the same. It is not possible to uncover whether Islamophobia-based discrimination exists in the employment sphere since information is not publicly available - only statistical data is available. Based on the latter, there is certainly discrimination present but the information does not list the grounds of the alleged discrimination.

3. Lela Šćepanović, "Čije je muslimansko groblje u Beranama", *Slobodna Evropa*, 23 October 2019, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/islamska-zajednica-groblje-berane/30230806.html>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

4. Ibid.

5. "Odluka o groblju u Beranama je akt raspirivanja mržnje", *Islamska zajednica u Crnoj Gori*, 4 November 2019, <http://www.monteislam.com/novosti/odluka-o-groblju-u-beranama-je-akt-raspirivanja-mrznje>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

6. Lela Šćepanović, "Čije je muslimansko groblje u Beranama".

7. "Odluka o groblju u Beranama je akt raspirivanja mržnje", *Islamska zajednica u Crnoj Gori*.

It is important to mention that the government has developed a range of strategies and policies promoting social inclusion and equality including the “Strategy for Improving the Position of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro (2016-2020)”.<sup>8</sup> The main goal of the strategy is to reduce the long-endured discrimination of the Roma and Egyptian communities in the employment sector but also in other social and legal areas.

## Education

History textbooks remain the weakest point within the education sphere - as everywhere else in the region. Educational gaps are being created by to the lack of all “potentially” dangerous content that has been practically erased from education. The Centre for Civic Education states that the restrictions placed on society to comprehend and evaluate wars and conflicts that happened throughout Montenegrin history (Ottoman period, Yugoslavian civil wars etc.) based on facts, further encumbers the already arduous process of facing the past.<sup>9</sup>

All minorities have the legal right to receive education in their mother tongue. The Bosniak Council complains that Bosniak Muslims haven't enjoyed this right since there is an obvious lack of willingness for this project to be implemented. A report prepared by the Human Rights Ombudsman of Montenegro states the following: “It is essential to strengthen the role of national councils, their consultative and proposing function in all matters of interest to the minority groups and to encourage additional financial support for the realization of the projects like bilingual minority education in Montenegro and other activities.”<sup>10</sup>

## Politics

Although the dispute regarding the Law on Freedom of Religion or Beliefs was between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the state, right-wing politicians - as the main supporters of the Serbian Orthodox Church - used the opportunity to deliver highly Islamophobic hate speech in the parliament. The Serbian Church has found its most vociferous ally in the Democratic Front, apolitical party which is known for its anti-Muslim narratives.<sup>11</sup> On 20 December, MP Andrija Mandić, one of the leaders of Democratic Front, delivered a speech in parliament where he strongly “advised” Muslims not to vote for the proposed law, otherwise they would suffer

---

8. Maja Kostić Mandić, “Country report on nondiscrimination-Montenegro 2019”, European Commission, p. 63.

9. I. Radonjić, T.Milaš and M. Vukanović, “Montenegrin Textbooks: What do they conceal and reveal about the contemporary history of Montenegro”, Centre for Civic Education, p. 26, <http://media.cgo-cce.org/2016/06/cgo-cce-sto-skrivaju-i-otkrivaju-cg-udzbenici-o-savremenoj-istoriji-cg.pdf>, (Access date: 14 February 2020).

10. Zaštitnik ljudskih prava i sloboda, “Izveštaj o radu za 2018 godinu”, Podgorica, [https://www.ombudsman.co.me/docs/1554124685\\_final-godisnji-izvjestaj-2018.pdf](https://www.ombudsman.co.me/docs/1554124685_final-godisnji-izvjestaj-2018.pdf), (Access date: 14 February 2020).

11. Amina Šemsović, “Islamophobia in Montenegro: National Report 2018”, *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2018), p. 582.

horrific consequences.<sup>12</sup> Mandić, who has always been an admirer of Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić, added, “Do not go down this path or else the Mountain Wrath<sup>13</sup> will really happen...and we do not want that to happen. Your vote will directly influence the future of the Orthodox Church in Montenegro, do not do that. Go and consult with your religious leaders and then come back. Horrible things might occur here.”<sup>14</sup> He concluded, “There are more hidden weapons in Montenegro than anywhere else; the weapons that will be unburied as soon as the first drop of blood falls. We will not seek justice through the legal system, but rather personally knock on the doors of those who did us injustice. That is the message you have to understand.”<sup>15</sup>

Besides Mandić, his colleague MP Milan Knežević, who received a 5-year imprisonment sentence back in May for his involvement in the alleged coup attempt, said that this is nothing but a “blasphemous mob’s hunt for the Lord” and those who vote for this law “will for sure be doomed by Saint Basil and Saint Peter.” At the end, Vera Bulatović, also known for her earlier anti-Muslim statements, stated that it is a “holy honor to be a Serb...we will relentlessly defend our Church and its Cross.”

One week later, during the voting of the law in parliament, many MPs from the Democratic Front, including Mandić and Knežević, were arrested for a short time due to the violent behavior and offence of their political counterparts.<sup>16</sup> After their release, the aforementioned politicians traveled to Belgrade and had a meeting with the leader of the Orthodox Church in Serbia, Patriarch Irenej, who blessed their further fight and urged them to defend the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro.<sup>17</sup>

It is worrisome and alarming that the threats targeting Muslims and Islamophobic speech did not find a place in either the local or regional media. Besides the Islamic community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, condemnation by official institutions was withheld.

12. Andrija Mandić prijeto u Skupštini: Strašne će se stvari desiti u Crnoj Gori”, N1, 20 December 2019, <http://ba.n1info.com/Regija/a399055/Andrija-Mandic-prijeti-u-Skupstini-CG.html>, (Access date: 13 February 2020).

13. The Mountain Wreath is an epic written in verse as a play and it is considered a masterpiece of Serbian and Montenegrin literature. The Muslim community claims it draws on violent Islamophobic sentiment and is notable for its celebration of ethnic cleansing. The poem’s main theme is a subject of significant political and ideological debate. The author of this 200-year-old poem is Montenegrin ruler Petar II Petrović-Njeogoš, a historical figure that plays a significant role in Montenegrin but also Serbian identity. The Mountain Wreath was memorized and quoted by the radical Serb nationalists of the 1990s.

14. “Nemiri u Crnoj Gori: Usvojen zakon o slobodi vjeroispovjesti”, AlJazeera Balkans, 27 December 2019, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/nemiri-u-crnoj-gori-usvojen-zakon-o-slobodi-vjeroispovjesti>, (Access date: 15 February 2020).

15. Ibid.

16. “Mandiću, Zogoviću i Kneževiću zadržavanje od 72 sata”, CDM, 27 February 2019, <https://m.cdm.me/hronika/mandicu-zogovicu-i-knezevicu-zadržavanje-do-72-sata/>, (Access date: 15 February 2020).

17. “Blagoslov za odbranu SPC: Mandić i Knežević na prijem kod srpskog patrijarha Irineja”, Novosti, 25 February 2019, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/planeta.300.html:838221-Blagoslov-za-odbranu-SPC-Andrija-Mandic-i-Milan-Knezevic-kod-srpskog-patrijarha-Irineja>, (Access date: 16 February 2020).

These developments attest to the fact that the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, with its base in Belgrade, represents the backbone of the nationalistic idea of a Great Serbia. As stated in the “Islamophobia in Montenegro: National Report 2018”, this institution spreads nationalism and represents real threat to democratic values in regional countries.<sup>18</sup> Montenegrin President Milo Đukanović has dismissed accusations that the government is planning to “rob” the Serbian Orthodox Church of its assets by saying, “There is no intention on the side of Montenegro to take away a meter of space from anyone, but [the country] also does not intend to let anyone steal what is state property. The Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro is trying to maintain the infrastructure of a Greater Serbia, in which it believes.”<sup>19</sup>

Among other events and incidents that raised tensions in the country, in the context of Islamophobia, it is important to mention that on 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, Radovan Karadžić participated in a public event, specifically a lecture followed by discussion, in Podgorica via telephone. The newspaper *The Guardian* wrote, “The incident came just two months after Karadžić had his sentence for genocide and other crimes in the 1990s increased to life behind bars by appeal court judges in The Hague. Karadžić’s lawyer Peter Robinson confirmed that his client joined a public discussion held in Podgorica about political issues in the region, including the role of NATO.”<sup>20</sup>

The event was organized and hosted by the Serbian House,<sup>21</sup> an institution that was established in 2017 and supported by the Serbian government including Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić himself.

In May, regarding the welcoming of two new members (of Muslim faith) into the Executive Board for Minority Issues, Milutin Đukanović, a politician from the Democratic Front, said to the press that Muslim community members are in charge of millions in state funds and as a result Christian community is damaged.<sup>22</sup>

## Media

The media in Montenegro is highly politicized but hate speech towards religious groups remains a rare occurrence. On the other hand, it is worrisome and alarming that the Muslim-targeted threats and anti-Muslim speech that occurred in

---

18. Amina Šemsović, “Islamophobia in Montenegro: National Report 2018”, *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2018), p. 582.

19. “Montenegro President Rebuffs Serbian ‘Church Property Theft’ Claim”, *Balkan Insight*, 18 June 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/18/montenegro-president-rebuffs-serbian-church-property-theft-claim/>, (Access date: 28 January 2020).

20. “Radovan Karadžić investigated for taking part in event from prison cell”, *The Guardian*, 7 May 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/07/radovan-karadzic-investigated-for-taking-part-in-event-from-prison-cell>, (Access date: 28 January 2020).

21. “O Nama”, *Srpska Kuca*, <https://srpskakucacg.me/o-nama/>, (Access date: 28 January 2020).

22. “Đukanović: Pripadnici islamske vjeroispovjesti upravljaju milijardama na štetu pravoslavne većine”, *Vijesti*, 07 November 2019, <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/politika/dukanovic-pripadnici-islamske-vjeroispovjesti-upravljaju-milijonima-drzavnog-novca-na-stetu-pravoslavne-vecine>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

Parliament at the end of the year did not find a place in either local or regional media. In general, traditional and electronic media described it as “a heated debate” of no importance.

## Justice System

According to the Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights, there are no major changes in the justice system in Montenegro and “the long duration of judicial proceedings and requirements for reconsiderations of judicial rulings are the most frequent reasons for citizens’ addressing the Ombudsman.”<sup>23</sup>

There is still no insight in the cases regarding discrimination, hate speech, or hate crimes. There is statistical data in the reports by the Ombudsman but besides the numbers, no further elaboration is provided. The Ombudsman’s report on discrimination states that in the period from 1 January to 31 July 2019 there were 80 cases of discrimination.<sup>24</sup> The numbers were similar to those in previous years when the institution recorded 82 cases. Regarding the transparency of other official institutions on the matter of discrimination and hate speech, the Ombudsman points out that “the law is not continuously enforced and there are no records in form of electronic databases available to the state authorities, necessary for the consideration of discrimination as a phenomenon.”<sup>25</sup>

The end of 2019 was followed by unrest not only in Montenegro but also in other countries in the region (Serbia) due to the Law on Freedom of Religion or Beliefs that should have been voted in the Montenegrin Parliament. The draft on the law was introduced in May and raised strong disapproval from various political actors especially those close to the Orthodox Serbian Church. Namely, the law was created to regulate or redefine legal relations between the state and religious communities, institutions, and organizations, including the redefinition of the ownership of many properties owned or claimed by religious communities. The law obliges each religious institution to show evidence of ownership for claimed properties.

The law triggered accusations by the Serbian Orthodox Church that it is only a pretext for disputing its property holdings. It created a huge dispute between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the state that culminated in verbal and physical violence in Parliament. As the *Balkan Insight* explains, “The Serbian Orthodox Church is the largest denomination in multi-ethnic Montenegro, but its relations with the coun-

23. “Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights in Montenegro”, Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms of Montenegro (Ombudsman), Podgorica, [http://www.ombudsman.co.me/docs/1517484847\\_protector-upr29-mnee-main.pdf](http://www.ombudsman.co.me/docs/1517484847_protector-upr29-mnee-main.pdf), (Access date: 20 January 2020).

24. “Izveštaj o zaštiti od diskriminacije sa stanovišta djelovanja institucije zaštitnika ljudskih prava i sloboda u Crnoj Gori”, Zaštitnik ljudskih prava i sloboda Crne Gore (Ombudsman), Podgorica, [http://www.ombudsman.co.me/docs/1574422728\\_izvjestaj-za-prvih-sedam-mjeseci-2019.-godine.pdf](http://www.ombudsman.co.me/docs/1574422728_izvjestaj-za-prvih-sedam-mjeseci-2019.-godine.pdf), (Access date: 20 January 2020).

25. “Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights in Montenegro”, Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms of Montenegro (Ombudsman), Podgorica, [http://www.ombudsman.co.me/docs/1517484847\\_protector-upr29-mnee-main.pdf](http://www.ombudsman.co.me/docs/1517484847_protector-upr29-mnee-main.pdf), (Access date: 20 January 2020).

try's pro-Western government have always been poor. The government considers the church hostile to the independence of the country, and generally too pro-Serbian and pro-Russian. The church accuses the government of routinely trying to undermine it and strip the country of its Serbian heritage."<sup>26</sup>

The political and religious leaders of the Muslim community remained silent and supportive of the law although restitution of the property taken during the Communist era is not mentioned as expected. Imam Dzemal Redzemetovic, a consultant of the Islamic community, stated that the heated debate over this law polarized the public between those who oppose and those who support it, but in reality the Islamic community is in the middle and this brings about the fear of becoming collateral damage.<sup>27</sup> He explained that the Islamic community has regulated legislation over its property and considers this law as a positive change, but it has unquestionably suffered the heaviest damage in comparison to other religious communities since vast property was taken away from it in the last 100 years.<sup>28</sup>

Due to the sensitive nature of the entire situation, the government requested the opinion of the Venice Commission. The commission, among the positive remarks, emphasized that the state has the right to impose strict conditions on the use of property in order to protect cultural heritage. It added the following: "The authorities explained that the transfer of the property of religious buildings and lands will not affect in principle the use that is made by the religious community of the property in question. This, in the Commission's view, constitutes an important guarantee that the religious communities may pursue their religious activities in those edifices in line with their right to freedom of religion."<sup>29</sup>

## Internet

In the online sphere the pro-Serbian website *ins4s.com* continues to share hate speech and nourish negative sentiments towards other ethnic groups, especially Albanian and Bosniak Muslims. Headlines from 2019 include: "Base of ISIS Is in Kosovo Not Bosnia"<sup>30</sup>; "There Are No Bosniaks or Sandzak, Muslims Are

26. "Montenegro President Rebuffs Serbian 'Church Property Theft' Claim", Balkan Insight, 29 June 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/18/montenegro-president-rebuffs-serbian-church-property-theft-claim/>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

27. "Katolička i islamska zajednica ne negoduju protiv zakona o vjerskim slobodama u Crnoj Gori", AlJazeera Balkans, 12 January 2020, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/video/katolicka-i-islamska-zajednica-ne-negoduju-protiv-zakona-o-vjerskim-slobodama-u-crnoj-gori>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

28. "Katolička i islamska zajednica ne negoduju protiv zakona o vjerskim slobodama u Crnoj Gori", AlJazeera, 12 January 2020, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/video/katolicka-i-islamska-zajednica-ne-negoduju-protiv-zakona-o-vjerskim-slobodama-u-crnoj-gori>, (Access date: 15 February 2020).

29. "Montenegro - Opinion on the draft Law on Freedom of Religion or Beliefs and legal status of religious communities", Venice Commissions, 22 June 2019, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=C-DL-AD\(2019\)010-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=C-DL-AD(2019)010-e), (Access date: 5 February 2020).

30. "Leglo Islamske države na Balkanu je na KiM, a ne u BiH", in4s.net, 2 December 2019, <https://www.in4s.net/leglo-islamske-drzave-na-balkanu-je-na-kim-ne-u-bih/>, (Access date: 29 January 2020).

Serbs”<sup>31</sup>; “There Is Ongoing Genocide of Serbian Identity in Montenegro”<sup>32</sup>; “UN’s Says-There Was No Genocide in Srebrenica”.<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that this website has lately become a mainstream site within the Serbian community since its name stands out on the webpage of the Serbian House mentioned in the previous chapter.<sup>34</sup>

Reports indicate that certain media in Montenegro have occasionally resorted to sensationalism, publishing material that could be considered to constitute hate speech.<sup>35</sup> The Internet is increasingly used for the transmission of such material.<sup>36</sup> For instance, EUROPOL published a report entitled “European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report in 2018”<sup>37</sup> that was quoted in Montenegrin portals as well as in Serbian and Croatian ones but with false figures and sensational headlines. The website *volimpodgoricu.me* published an article with the following headline “Jihadist Are Planning Massacre in the Balkans.”<sup>38</sup> The article quoted a few lines from the EUROPOL report, but besides those all other information was misleading and false. The website claimed that there are 40,000 terrorists from the Balkan countries including “Montenegrin Islamists”<sup>39</sup> who fought in Syria and that they are now on their way back home, most of them coming from Kosovo and Bosnia (countries with the largest Muslim communities).

In the EUROPOL report there is no number of 40,000 or information about which Balkan countries have the largest number of terrorists fighting in the Middle East. Similar articles and headlines with EUROPOL as the main reference first appeared in Serbian media. Later, when the British newspaper *The Times* published an interview with Fitim Lladrovci, a terrorist from Kosovo, where he expressed his loyalty to DAESH<sup>40</sup> Montenegrin websites like *INS4S.net* and *Slobodacg.me*

31. “S.Selimović: Nema Bošnjaka i Sandzaka, Muslimani su Srbi”, in4s.net, 31 May 2019, <https://www.in4s.net/salih-selimovic-nema-bosnjaka-i-sandzaka-muslimani-su-srbi/>, (Access date: 29 January 2020).

32. “Popović: Serbs in Montenegro are under genocide of their identity”, in4s.net, 19 February 2019, <https://www.in4s.net/popovic-u-crnoj-gori-se-sprovodi-identitetski-genocid-nad-srbima/>, (Access date: 29 January 2020).

33. “UNPF’s commandir says there was no genocide in Srebrenica”, in4s.net, 25 October 2019, <https://www.in4s.net/komadant-unprofora-u-bosni-u-srebrenici-nije-bilo-genocida/>, (Access date: 29 January 2020).

34. “O Nama”, Srpska Kuca.

35. “ECRI report on Montenegro”, Council of Europe, <https://rm.coe.int/second-report-on-montenegro/16808b5942>, (Access date: 5 February 2020).

36. Ibid.

37. “Terrorism situation and trend report 2019”, EUROPOL, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2019-te-sat>, (Access date: 5 February 2020).

38. “Shocking: Jihadist are planing massacre in the Balkans!”, VolimPodgoricu.me, 30 June 2019, <https://volimpodgoricu.me/2019/06/30/zastrasujuce-dzihadisti-spremaju-krvoprolice-na-balkanu/>, (Access date: 05 February 2020).

39. “Montenegrin islamists are not in big numbers but are great danger”, VolimPodgoricu.me, 10 April 2019, <https://volimpodgoricu.me/2019/04/10/crnogorski-islamisti-malobrojni-ali-opasni-povratnici-iz-sirije-su-tempirana-bomba-evo-sta-moze-biti-okidac-video/>, (Access date: 5 February 2020).

40. “ISIS jihadist back in Kosovo readz to die for caliphate”, *The Times*, 5 October 2018, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/isis-fighters-return-to-kosovo-with-a-new-mission-v75gx0hs9>, (Access date: 8 February 2020).

reported this interview with the headline “Kosovo Is Part of the Islamic State.”<sup>41</sup> These articles are highly biased towards the Muslim community, especially the Albanian Muslim minority.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The Serbian Orthodox Church remains the main actor in inciting national/religious hostilities and hatred. There have been no legal consequences for such behavior as of yet. With the full support of neighboring Serbia and its Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church of Montenegro enjoys huge public support. The political party Democratic Front positioned itself as a defender of the Church and Serbian identity, and its politicians were the most vocal Islamophobes in Parliament.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

There are no NGOs or any initiatives dedicated to the suppression and monitoring of hate and hostilities against Muslims in Montenegro. Islamic community is the most important institution for Muslim community and its most relevant representative, however it doesn't monitor or collect any data on anti-Muslim hate crimes or speech. Moreover, it does not have any initiatives or projects dealing with Islamophobia specifically. It is important to add that Islamic community has unique status of religious institution, it doesn't belong to NGO or state sector. Ministry of human and minority rights, a state institution deals with human rights in general. It collaborates with Islamic community and other minority representatives successfully, and it had many policies and initiatives that were beneficial for Muslim community but so far it did not recognize Islamophobia as problem that should be addressed.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This report concludes that negative sentiments towards the Muslim community regardless of ethnic origins (Bosniaks, Albanians, Roma, etc.) is getting stronger and more visible. Hate speech should not be ignored: it is a step towards physical violence and often leaves emotional and psychological constraints such as behavioral changes, withdrawal, damaged self-confidence, and social consequences such as resentment, migration, and restricted social activities. Furthermore, hate speech is punished under Articles 370 and 443 of the Criminal Code. However, no instance of Islamophobic hate speech has ever gone before a court. For example, the Serbian Orthodox Church and its representatives have a long record of serious incitement to religious

---

41. Maja Nikolić, “Kosovo nije dio tzv. islamske države”, Raskrinkavanje.me, 20 November 2011, <https://www.raskrinkavanje.me/analiza/kosovo-nije-dio-tzv-islamske-drzave>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

and ethnic hatred but no charges have ever been pressed. Very serious threats were heard in parliament by Democratic Front MPs, yet they were treated as misdemeanors and condemned only by few.

Montenegro has introduced many strategies and laws that protect minorities in every possible way. This very well-structured legal framework on hate crimes and speech must be put into practice.

In order for civic society and organizations to tackle the issue of Islamophobia or any other hate crimes, the collection of data is of crucial importance and should therefore be made public. It is strongly recommended that authorities increase transparency and make this information available. The ODIHR also states that Montenegrin police does not have guidelines, policies, or databases to record hate crimes.<sup>42</sup> Creating clear guidance and policies for the institutions in charge would be another recommendation, along with additional training on the proper classification and collection of data.

## Chronology

- **25.05.2019:** Milutin Đukanović, a politician from the Democratic Front, stated to the press that the Muslim community members are in charge of millions in state funds and that the Christian community is damaged as a result.
- **16.09.2019:** The City Council in Berane revoked the authorization of the city's Muslim cemetery.
- **26.12.2019:** Islamophobic hate speech and threats delivered by several MPs, among them MP Andrija Mandić, MP (Democratic Front). He strongly "advised" Muslims not to vote for the proposed law, otherwise horrific consequences will happen to them. He concluded, "There are more hidden weapons in Montenegro than anywhere else; the weapons that will be unburied as soon as the first drop of blood falls. We will not seek justice through the legal system, but rather personally knock on the doors of those who did us injustice. That is the message you have to understand."

42. "ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting", OSCE ODIHR, <https://hatecrime.osce.org/montenegro>, (Access date: 15 March 2020).



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**THE NETHERLANDS**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

AMINA SMITS AKILMA



## The Author

**Amina Smits Akılma** is a PhD candidate at the Department of Islamic Studies, Institute of Social Sciences at Istanbul 29 Mayıs University, Istanbul. She graduated from the Institute of Alliance of Civilizations at Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation University in Istanbul, where she wrote a critique on Edward Said's *Orientalism* in light of Ottoman-European relations as her thesis. Born and raised in Belgium, she graduated there from the Department of Islamic and Arabic Studies, Faculty of Arts at the Catholic University Leuven. Smits Akılma's fields of study and research interests are Orientalism, Occidentalism, Islamophobia, Islamic religious education (especially in non-Islamic countries), Islamic theology (*Kalaam*), and sociology of religion. Besides Dutch as her native language, she speaks Turkish and English on a native level, and reads French and Arabic. Email: aminasmits@gmail.com

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Amina Smits Akılma: *Islamophobia in the Netherlands: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

This report deals with Islamophobic events in the Netherlands that occurred in 2019. Attacks against mosques continue to be frequently reported. While officially the numbers of complaints on discrimination and Islamophobia have decreased, research by Meld Islamofobie illustrates that this is not because of a change in mentality, but rather stemming from the reluctance of the victims to press charges due to a lack of trust in the establishment.

At the same time a trend of normalisation concerning Islamophobic discourse seems to be developing, alongside an ever-growing polarisation. PVV's Islamophobic statements started to find their way to other parties only to resonate there. Another far-right party, the newly founded FvD, becomes increasingly more popular. This observation is also supported by Meld Islamofobie's aforementioned report, stating that the *real* Islamophobia doesn't lie with violent acts, but with everyday remarks and statements by others often not even recognized as such.

The year 2019 was marked by reports by the AIVD on Salafism and Jihadis, causing unrest within governments on both local and national level, and in society within the communities of both Muslim and non-Muslim citizens as the first felt stereotyped and judged, whereas the latter were fed with fear by reports that later turned out to have hardly any bearing. This is in sharp contrast to the AIVD's statement that attacks by "lone wolves" on Muslims are quite possible, which hardly led to any reaction by the government. In August, the burqa ban started to be implemented. Several other bills limiting Islamic practices were filed but weren't able to pass the House of Representatives.

## Samenvatting

Dit rapport bespreekt de Islamofobische gebeurtenissen in Nederland die plaatsvonden in 2019. Aanvallen op moskees worden nog steeds regelmatig gerapporteerd. Hoewel officieel het aantal klachten over discriminatie en Islamofobie is gezakt, illustreert onderzoek door Meld Islamofobie dat dit niet komt door een mentaliteitsverandering, maar voortspringt uit de tegenzin van slachtoffers om een klacht in te dienen wegens gebrek aan vertrouwen in het huidige etablissement.

Tegelijkertijd is lijkt zich ook een trend van normalisatie zich te ontwikkelen wat betreft het Islamofobische discours, bezijden een steeds groeiende polarisatie. PVV's Islamofobische uitingen begonnen hun weg te vinden naar andere partijen om daar weer geresoneerd te worden. Een andere extreem-rechtse partij, het recent gestichte FvD, wordt steeds meer populair. Deze observatie wordt tevens ondersteund door het eerder vermeldde onderzoek van Meld Islamofobie, dat constateert dat de *echte* Islamofobie niet ligt in gewelddadige handelingen, maar in alledaagse opmerkingen en uitdrukkingen, die door anderen vaak zelfs niet als zulk beschouwd worden.

2019 was een jaar gemarkeerd door rapporten van de AIVD over Salafisme en Jihadisme, die onrust veroorzaakten binnen zowel regionale als nationale regeringen en binnen de samenleving, bij zowel Moslims als niet-Moslims, aangezien de eerste zich gestereotypiseerd voelden en beoordeeld, terwijl de laatste gevoed werd met angst door rapporten die later bleken weinig of geen waarheid te bevatten. Dit in scherp contrast met de AIVD's verklaring dat aanvallen door 'eenzame wolven' vrij mogelijk zijn, dat amper tot enige reactie van de overheid heeft geleid. In Augustus ging de Boerka-ban van start. Verscheide andere wetsvoorstellen die Islamitische praktijken limiteerden werden ingediend maar slaagden er niet in de Tweede Kamer te passeren.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** The Netherlands

**Type of Regime:** Parliamentary representative democracy, constitutional monarchy, and a decentralised unitary state

**Form of Government:** Constitutionally consists of the king and the cabinet ministers; the king's role is limited to the formation of government.

**Ruling Parties:** People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), Christian Democrats (CDA), D66 party, and the faith-based party Christian Union (*ChristenUnie*)

**Opposition Parties:** Far-right Party for Freedom (PVV), Greenleft (*Groenlinks*), Party for the Animals (PvD), Labour Party (PvdA), far-right Forum for Democracy (FvD)

**Last Elections:** 2019 Provincial Elections: in terms of seats, the new far-right party FvD of Thierry Baudet became the biggest party in three provinces, getting almost double the votes as the PVV. 2019 European Elections: the PvdA gained 6 seats, doubling the number of its seats since the last elections, while the VVD gained 4. The FvD, again, came out as the true victor of these elections by winning 3 seats as well, despite being a brand-new party (by comparison, the PVV gained 0 seats).

**Total Population:** 17,282,163 (in 2019)

**Major Languages:** Dutch

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** Official statistics illustrate a drop of religious discrimination reports. According to Meld Islamofobie, however, the reason for this drop is the lack of willingness to file a report mainly because of the lack of proof and/or cooperation by the police, making the victims of discrimination believe that their filing a report has no use whatsoever. According to the report, 84% of the participants were not willing to file a report. While it is usually men who are stopped by the police, it is women who are insulted on the streets, especially the covered ones. Among women wearing the niqab, 42% have been spat on, beaten, or kicked on the streets.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** According to the latest reports released in April 2019, there is a 6% drop of reports on discrimination. When discrimination occurs, it is usually based on race and/or skin colour (51%). In North Holland, however, there is a 7% rise in reports, with 6% of all reports relating to anti-Semitism (8% of all reports in the Netherlands).

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Christianity (40%), No religion (53%), Islam (5%), Judaism (0.1%).

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 825,000 (5% of Dutch population, Source: CBS)

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** *Contactorgaan Moslims en Overheid* (CMO); *Unie van Marokkanse Moskeeorganisaties in Nederland* (UMMON); *Stichting Platform Islamistische Organisaties Rijnmond* (SPIOR); *Samenwerkingsverband Islamitische Organisaties Regio Haaglanden* (SIOR-H); *Islamitische Stichting Nederland- ISN-DIYANET*; *Raad van Marokkaanse Moskeen Nederland* (RMMN); *Stichting Milli Gorus Netherlands*; *Stichting Islamitische Centrum Nederland* (Suleymanci Movement); *Al Nisa*; *Mind Nederland*; *Fahm Instituut*.

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** *Meld Islamofobie*, *Collectief tegen Islamofobie*, SPIOR, *Republiek Allochtinie*, *Geloven In Samenleven*, Religion Research, Mind Nederland, *Al Nisa*

**Far-Right Parties:** PVV, FvD

**Far-Right Movements:** Voorpost, Identitair Verzet, Pegida.nl, Erkenbrand

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** In 2019, the Party for the Animals submitted a new bill proposal to have slaughter without sedation completely banned by law, but it didn't pass the Chamber of Representatives. In 2018, there were already restrictions set in place saying that if an animal is not insensitive to pain within 40 seconds of slaughter, it must be shot.
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** On 26 June 2018, the Dutch Senate approved the bill "Partial Prohibition of Face-Covering Clothing." The ban went into effect in August 2019.
- **Prayer Ban:** None. It depends on local decision since the European Court of Justice ruled in March 2017 that employers can restrict their staff displaying visible religious symbols, including taking time off for prayers.

## Introduction

Islamophobia is still on the rise in the Netherlands. While official discrimination reports make no mention of a serious increase, other reports available on Muslims simply show they do not *report* the discrimination they face. At the same time, most reports mention that the Dutch society (both native Dutch citizens and those with a migrant background) senses that the polarisation in the Netherlands is growing ever larger, with less people bothering to listen to other opinions and even mentioning *hating* those who think differently. Especially with reports on Salafism, on the one side, and the discussion on *Zwarte Piet* (a character accompanying/serving Saint Nicholas according to Dutch folklore, traditionally black because he is said to be a Moor coming from Spain), native Dutch feel everything that is “typically Dutch” is being attacked and threatened, risking to be completely wiped away, while those with a migration background, and particularly important for our report here, of Muslim background, feel that they are constantly being stereotyped, labelled, misrepresented, and unheard. Interestingly enough, most people claimed to think that this increase in polarisation is caused by media and social media in particular.

On the other hand, the Dutch Constitution stresses the right of freedom of religion, precisely because of the conflicts and wars it experienced hundreds of years ago. Because of this, Dutch Muslims are able to have their own private schools, build mosques (that actually look like mosques), even have the call to prayer - rights that are often declined (or cancelled even) by many surrounding countries. Attempts to minimize or completely ban these rights are regularly made, especially by the far right (such as a ban on the call to prayer, religious slaughter, religious education, etc.) but time and again are criticised by the Council of State, stating that they are in conflict with the constitution. Yet, while the National Security Service has reported that there is a rather high possibility of aggression against Muslims by extreme right-minded, so-called lone wolves, more energy is spent on the rumoured radicalisation of Muslims, youth in particular, and on “fighting Salafism”, despite statistics illustrating that only a very low percentage of Muslims adhere to Salafism, and the fact that, more importantly, Salafism is for many of its followers just an ultra-orthodox religious movement, not to be confused with Jihadism.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

On 16 January, a fascist provocation took place in The Hague. At the time an in-fo-night on the extreme right and its newest branch, the alt right, which has started to spread its influence from the United States to Europe, was taking place in The

Hague. Several white supremacist symbols and stickers with Islamophobic slogans were attached to the walls of the venue.<sup>1</sup>

On 3 March 2019, a banner with insulting phrases was placed on a window frame of the As-Sunnah Mosque in The Hague. According to the chairman of the board, Abdelhamid Taheri, the banner was hung right before the morning prayer and wrote things as “The Qur’an is poison” and “Prophet Mohammad is a p\*\*phile”. Next to the banner was a mannequin dressed in “Arab clothes”, half uncovered and with a beard and a baby doll attached to his crotch. According to Taheri, the mannequin was to represent the prophet Mohammad having intercourse with a baby. The group Pegida, which fights against Islam, claimed responsibility for the act via a tweet posted by frontman Edwin Wagenveld. Pegida itself claimed that they didn’t attach anything to the mosque itself but to its front and therefore to a public area. The organisation stated it was angry that their requests to demonstrate in front of mosques in The Hague were continuously being denied and that the municipality was not up for a “constructive conversation” regarding a solution to the “demonstration problem”. Taheri decided to file an official complaint against Pegida. Several mosque organisations such as Moskee Alert, RMMN, and Milli Görüş have denounced Pegida’s action.<sup>2</sup> On the website al-Yaqeen, Taheri expressed his concerns about this and similar attacks and wondered what needs to happen before the governments acts to stop this Islamophobia.<sup>3</sup> A couple of months later, Taheri to step down from his position as chairman of the As-Soennah Mosque organisation. In his statement he wrote that since 2002 he has defied and fought xenophobia and other kinds of intolerance but that in the societal, political, and media spectra anti-Muslim sentiment has become socially acceptable.<sup>4</sup>

On 8 April, several mosque-goers were beaten by a father and son in Waddinxveen. A 15-year-old youth attending the mosque was sworn at, threatened, and beaten. The victim fled into the mosque. The perpetrators chased the boy and knocked the door violently. When the people in the mosque opened the door, the perpetrators again spouted racist remarks, and attacked, threatened, and abused several others present.<sup>5</sup>

1. “Fascistische provocatie in Moerwijk”, Krapuul, 22 January 2019, <https://www.krapuul.nl/nieuws/2733112/fascistische-provocatie-in-moerwijk/>, (Access date: 13 March 2020).

2. Roemer van Oordt, “Pegida plaatst Mohammed als pop met baby in kruis voor moskee As-Soennah”, Republiek Alloctonie, 3 March 2019, <http://www.republiekalloctonie.nl/blog/nieuws/pegida-plaatst-mohammed-als-pop-met-baby-in-kruis-voor-moskee-as-soennah/>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

3. Stichting Al-Soennah, “Moslimgemeenschap aangevallen door neonazi’s”, Al Yaqeen, 3 March 2019, <https://al-yaqeen.com/nieuws/moslimgemeenschap-aangevallen-door-neonazis/>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

4. Team Al Yaqeen, “Abdelhamid Taheri stopt als bestuursvoorzitter”, Al Yaqeen, 18 October 2019, <https://al-yaqeen.com/nieuws/abdelhamid-taheri-stopt-als-bestuursvoorzitter/>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

5. “Burgemeester over mishandeling bij moskee Waddinxveen: ‘Dit is heel erg’”, RTL Nieuws, 18 April 2019, <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/artikel/4670576/burgemeester-over-mishandeling-bij-moskee-waddinxveen-dit-heel-erg/>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

On 23 April, a man in Leeuwarden went to the local mosque, placed a couple of garbage bags in front of it and lit them on fire, fleeing the scene immediately. A couple of minutes later a passer-by noticed the fire and warned the imam. Later, the court ruled that he had caused great fear among the local Muslim community, and that the mosque had witnessed a significant decrease in attendance despite the extra measures of precaution that were being taken. The man has been sentenced to 36 months of imprisonment, of which 14 months are conditional, and has been fined 1,300 euros.<sup>6</sup>

In June, a protest movement in Nijmegen called “Nijmegen Rechtsaf” hung a huge banner to protest against the arrival and the speech of the Indonesian Minister of Religion at Radboud University. The topic of the conference was moderate Islam. According to the movement, the minister does not represent moderate Islam as a minister of a country where certain Sharia-related laws are applied. In general, however, the minister is not viewed as promoting extremism.<sup>7</sup>

On 22 June, the mayor of Eindhoven gave the order to break up an illegal demonstration held in the vicinity of the Al-Fourqaan Mosque. Pegida is not allowed to hold any demonstration next to or in the vicinity of a mosque. When the demonstrators resisted 12 suspected Pegida members were arrested. During the demonstration, eggs and allegedly rocks were thrown, but nobody was injured.<sup>8</sup>

On 16 June, Sunday, the Nasser Mosque in Veenendaal was soiled by unknown attackers. No slogans were left on the walls, but sanitary pads and faeces were smeared over the mosque. The last attack on the mosque took place in 2010.<sup>9</sup>

On 16 September, anti-Islamic posters and banners were hung on the Abou Bakr Mosque in Almere. Only the previous week, the mosque had been mentioned in a research by the NRC and “Newshour” on the influence of Salafists on Islamic education in the Netherlands. The posters contained texts such as “No Mosque” and “Stop child abuse, stop Islam”.<sup>10</sup> (Fig. 1)

6. “Celstraf voor brandstichting moskee Leeuwarden”, NOS, 3 October 2019, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2304522-celstraf-voor-brandstichting-moskee-leeuwarden.html>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

7. Stephen Friedrichs, “Nijmegen Rechtsaf protesteert tegen komst ‘omstreden’ minister naar Radboud Universiteit”, de Gelderlander, 19 June 2019, <https://www.gelderlander.nl/nijmegen/nijmegen-rechtsaf-protesteert-tegen-komst-br-omstreden-minister-naar-radboud-universiteit-a70da0eb/>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

8. “Pegida-aanhangers opgepakt bij manifestatie”, Politie, 22 June 2019, <https://www.politie.nl/nieuws/2019/juni/22/09-pegida-aanhangers-opgepakt-bij-manifestatie.html>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

9. Jaap Rademaker and Jesse Reith, “Veenendaalse moskee beklad met maandverband en smerigheid: ‘Werk van een gek’”, Algemeen Dagblad, 17 July 2019, <https://www.ad.nl/veenendaal/veenendaalse-moskee-beklad-met-maandverband-en-smerigheid-werk-van-een-gek-a91a0eb2/?referrer=http://www.republiekallochtonie.nl/blog/achtergronden/haatincidenten-gericht-tegen-moskeeen-historisch-overzicht-en-update-van-de-lijst-november-2019>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

10. “Posteractie tegen Abou Bakr moskee”, Omroep Flevoland, 16 September 2019, <https://www.omroepflevoland.nl/nieuws/174175/posteractie-tegen-abou-bakr-moskee>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).



**Figure 1:** Poster with the writing “No Mosque” placed on the Abou Bakr Mosque in Almere on 16 September.<sup>11</sup>

In October, head imam of the Blue Mosque in Nieuw-West, Yassin Alforkani, decided to file a complaint regarding a threat posted on Twitter. In reaction to a video of a man waving a knife while screaming in a church, a user stated: “I’ll try this in the Blue Mosque tomorrow”. Alforkani stated that they took this threat very seriously, as ever since they had decided to support the call to prayer with speakers, they’ve had to endure more unpleasantness – up to that point limited to swearing.<sup>12</sup> On 8 November, the mosque was to make its first call to prayer supported by speakers; however, the cables were cut off – the how, why, and when is still a mystery.<sup>13</sup>

At the end of the same month, the extreme-right organisation Rechts In Verzet announced they would be demonstrating for two days in a row to protest against the building of a new mosque in Enschede. The group initially intended to protest one day, but as they intended to hold speeches and organise a protest march as well, but were not allowed to do so on Saturday as on that day the streets are usually too crowded and busy, they requested an extra day. Pegida had previously placed crosses on the construction site.<sup>14</sup>

On 12 November, the Turkish-Dutch Eyüp Sultan Mosque in Zeist received a threatening letter depicting a man hanging from the gallows with the word “ISLAM” written next to it. It was the first time they had received a threat. The board immediately

11. Ibid.

12. Bas Soetenhorst, “De Blauwe Moskee in Nieuw-West doet aangifte na bedreiging”, *Het Parool*, 29 October, 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/de-blauwe-moskee-in-nieuw-west-doet-aangifte-na-bedreiging-badd4e4a/>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

13. “Kabel doorgeknijpt, gebedsoproep Blauwe Moskee Amsterdam mislukt”, *NOS*, 8 November 2019, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2309565-kabel-doorgeknijpt-gebedsoproep-blauwe-moskee-amsterdam-mislukt.html>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

14. Wilco Louwes, “Vrijdag én zaterdag demonstraties tegen bouw moskee in Enschede”, *Tubantia*, 22 October 2019, <https://www.tubantia.nl/enschede/vrijdag-en-zaterdag-demonstraties-tegen-bouw-moskee-in-enschede-a98cad-b2/?referrer=https://www.google.com/>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

filed a complaint.<sup>15</sup> A couple of days later, mosques in Vlissingen and Oosterhout received the same letters. The initial reaction of the Moroccan Al-Mohsin Mosque in Oosterhout was to ignore the letter, as they are used to unpleasant reactions. This changed when they heard of the same letter being sent to several other mosques. The sender used the same fake post address and the name “Kick out”. No comments were made by politicians to denounce the threats nor was the person behind the letters found.

## Employment

According to research by the Social and Cultural Planning Bureau (SCP), 83% per cent of Dutch citizens with a migrant background feel at home in the Netherlands. However, only 42% feel like they can truly be themselves, with 29% proclaiming that they feel discriminated on a weekly basis and 41% on a monthly basis. A couple of years ago, according to a report again by the SCP, 25% of the population with a migrant background claimed to have experienced discrimination in a period of a year. Twenty to forty per cent of those looking for work experienced discrimination during their search, while two out of three Muslims reported having faced discrimination at least once during a period of 12 months. At the same time, the report showed that the willingness to report discrimination has significantly decreased. Especially the amount of complaints filed to the police has decreased by 40% in a period of four years.<sup>16</sup>

Research by the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and the University of Utrecht (UU) that was shared by the Platform Integration and Society (KIS) showed that the chance of a jobseeker with a non-Western migrant background being approached is 40% less than the chance of a native Dutch jobseeker. Especially those of Turkish, Moroccan, or Antillian descent are being discriminated by employers. Jobseekers can do very little to improve their chances, the research states – this is up to the government and employers.<sup>17</sup>

Another research by the Central Plan Bureau (CPB) states that citizens with Antillian, Turkish, and Moroccan migrant backgrounds respectively earn 31%, 26% and 31% less than native Dutch citizens. Over the past fifteen years, this wage gap hasn't changed much. With women of Turkish descent, the hourly wage is up to 29% lower. This difference in wages is partly attributed to the difference in level of education. While other factors such as choice of study, social networks, type of jobs, etc.

---

15. “Lugubere vondst in brievenbus Zeister moskee: dreigbrief met getekende galg”, De Kanttekening, 12 November 2019, <https://dekanttekening.nl/nieuws/lugubere-vondst-in-brievenbus-zeister-moskee-dreigbrief-met-getekende-galg/>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

16. Ewoud Butter, “29% van Nederlanders met migratieachtergrond ervaart wekelijks discriminatie”, Republiek Allochtonie, 23 June 2019, <http://www.republiekallochtonie.nl/blog/achtergronden/29-van-nederlanders-met-migratieachtergrond-ervaart-wekelijks-discriminatie>, (Access date: 5 February 2020).

17. “Kans dat sollicitant met niet-westerse achtergrond wordt benaderd is 40% kleiner”, Kennisplatform Integratie & Samenleving, 18 July 2019, <https://www.kis.nl/artikel/kans-dat-sollicitant-met-niet-westerse-achtergrond-wordt-benaderd-40-kleiner>, (Access date: 8 February 2020).

have an effect, discrimination on the labour market is of great importance as well. According to the bureau, steps need to be taken to fight this discrimination. Furthermore, youth of migrant background should be better guided during their selection of field of study, and better informed of the labour market perspectives and policies developed to stop dropping out of school.<sup>18</sup>

Another sample test by the Inspection of Social Matters and Employment found that most employment agencies are still willing to discriminate upon the demand of their clients. Four out of 10 agencies accepted the request not to send candidates of foreign descent. In January, the television programme “Radar” had already revealed that there is a large-scale discrimination within the media sector, causing the giants within the sector to send their employees to an anti-discrimination course.<sup>19</sup>

## Education

At the end of March, the intelligence service AIVD published the results of its yearly report, stating, “The AIVD concluded that promoters of radical Islam manage to position themselves within the range of education for young Muslims. Here, especially the after-school classes in Arabic and Islam come to mind... These look simple and innocent. However, we are of the opinion that children and adults become estranged from society because of the content of this education and might possibly be obstructed in their participation in society. This is caused by intolerant and anti-democratic thoughts belonging to the initiators”.<sup>20</sup> This statement caused much confusion and worry amongst mosques and their respective congregations as the AIVD spoke in generalisations and did not make clear where exactly the problem lies, which schools or mosques are dubious, etc. When asked for more information, the intelligence service talked about Salafist influence. This itself caused protest as Salafism is just another word for Orthodoxy, something which is allowed in the Netherlands within the right of religion. Earlier in the year, a similar vagueness caused problems when it came to the issue of the Cornelius Haga Lyceum, referring to Salafist influence, when in fact it was a couple of radical hate preachers that caused concern.<sup>21</sup>

In the same month, the AIVD published another report related to Islamic education, this time concerning a private high school in Amsterdam, namely Cornelius Haga Lyceum. The high school opened its doors in 2017 and is the first

18. “CPB: Migratieachtergrond voorspelt nog steeds een lager inkomen”, NU, 12 July 2019, <https://www.nu.nl/economie/5932509/cpb-migratieachtergrond-voorspelt-nog-steeds-een-lager-inkomen.html>, (Access date: 22 February 2020).

19. “Nog steeds werken veel uitzendbureaus op verzoek mee aan discriminatie”, De Limburger, 12 July 2019, [https://www.limburger.nl/cnt/dmf20190712\\_00114294/nog-steeds-werken-veel-uitzendbureaus-op-verzoek-mee-aan-discriminatie%2022/02/2020](https://www.limburger.nl/cnt/dmf20190712_00114294/nog-steeds-werken-veel-uitzendbureaus-op-verzoek-mee-aan-discriminatie%2022/02/2020), (Access date: 8 February 2020).

20. Vera Spaans, “Blauwe Moskee bezorgd om waarschuwing AIVD”, Het Parool, 2 April 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/blauwe-moskee-bezorgd-om-waarschuwing-aivd-b4054c45/>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

21. Vera Spaans, “Blauwe Moskee bezorgd om waarschuwing AIVD”, Het Parool, 2 April 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/blauwe-moskee-bezorgd-om-waarschuwing-aivd-b4054c45/>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

of its kind in Amsterdam, combining Islamic education with the official Dutch curriculum. The municipality of Amsterdam, politicians, intelligence services, etc., have all been very outspoken on the matter. Accusations varied from influencing students with Salafi ideas, personal ties with violent extremists from the Caucasus, and anti-democratic and “Salafi-dominated” education. Upon publication, the municipality demanded the immediate resignation of the head of the school Soner Atasoy, and the alderman Marjolein Moorman.<sup>22</sup> Even the premier, Mark Rutte, stated that he “wouldn’t send his child there”.<sup>23</sup> After the report, the inspectorate managed to find hardly any evidence at all or at best some indirect evidence that has been known for years. Minister Grapperhaus stated that there were signals but no offenses, and definitely no creation of a “parallel society” and of countering integration. The only real issues were financial mismanagement, the authoritative and provoking leadership of the principal, and a lack of expertise and experience within the board. This Islamic school has been unwanted by both regional and national governments and these developments make Dutch Muslims stigmatised, have decreased their faith in the government while further polarisation is lurking around the corner.<sup>24</sup> Upon the release of the report, the House of Representatives immediately demanded an explanation from the minister of continued education, the minister of justice security, and the minister of integration.<sup>25</sup>

In April, the school decided to sue the municipality for refusing permission to expand. The Amsterdam education councillor Marjolein Moorman, however, refuses to discuss new lodging until the current head of the school, Söner Atasoy, resigns and a decent interim principal takes the lead.<sup>26</sup> A couple of days later, Atasoy leaked a letter sent by the Minister of Continued Education Arie Slob in which he threatened to use the Bibob test, a highly unusual thing as the test normally is used to block criminal enterprises and shell companies, in order to make sure the school isn’t using money for illegal activities.<sup>27</sup> In June, the Council of State announced that the school wasn’t going to get new subsidies to open new schools as there is no

---

22. Ruben Koops, “Banden tussen Cornelius Haga Lyceum en terreurgroep”, *Het Parool*, 7 March 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/banden-tussen-cornelius-haga-lyceum-en-terreurgroep-ba3a0286/>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

23. Tobias den Hartog, “Rutte over Haga Lyceum: ‘Ik zou m’n kind er niet heen sturen’”, *Het Parool*, 8 March 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/rutte-over-haga-lyceum-ik-zou-m-n-kind-er-niet-heen-sturen-b63e56b2/>, (Access date: 22 February 2020).

24. Romer van Oordt, “Case Haga: overheid zet vertrouwen van Nederlandse moslims op het spel”, *Republiek Allochtonie*, 22 June 2019, <http://www.republiekallochtonie.nl/blog/achtergronden/case-haga-overheid-zet-vertrouwen-van-nederlandse-moslims-op-het-spel>, (Access date: 8 February 2020).

25. ANP, “Kamer lucht hart over Cornelius Haga Lyceum”, *Het Parool*, 14 March 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/kamer-lucht-hart-over-cornelius-haga-lyceum-bfde07b1/>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

26. “Cornelius Haga slaapt gemeente voor de rechter”, *Het Parool*, 13 April 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/cornelius-haga-slaapt-gemeente-voor-de-rechter-b60c1e4f/>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

27. David van Unen, “Minister dreigt Cornelius Haga met Bibob”, *Het Parool*, 20 April 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/minister-dreigt-cornelius-haga-met-bibob-b59b7cd6/>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

indication that there is a need for them.<sup>28</sup> Just days after the inspectorate released its statement clearing the school from the accusations made by the AIVD, a video was released of a teacher showing the video of a renowned hate imam to his students in class. The teacher in question was suspended and even though Atasoy declined Salafi thought was being taught at the school (the video was about bullying), the event sparked a second inspection.<sup>29</sup> In July, the AIVD itself this time was investigated due to its report on the Cornelius Haga Lyceum by the Supervisory Committee of the Intelligence and Security Services (CTIVD). AIVD head Dick Schoof admitted that he underestimated the social impact of this report and the service didn't control the social dynamics sufficiently nor did it pay enough importance to the feelings of the Muslim community. According to him, however, it was not their decision to go public with the report but the municipality's.<sup>30</sup> Minister Slob warned the board of the school to appoint a new head for the school by 14 October or state financing would be cut as of 1 December. As the school didn't manage to do so, all subsidies were indeed cut off.<sup>31</sup> The school then turned to the Council of State, which came together in an emergency procedure on the matter and declared that the minister is not allowed to cut off finances in this manner.<sup>32</sup>

In November 2019, a mother of Moroccan descent contacted the primary school De Notenkraker to ask whether or not there was an empty slot and if her daughter could join the third grade. When the mother suspected something strange going on, she decided to email the school again, this time under a false "Dutch" name, upon which she immediately received the reply that her daughter could start after the Christmas holidays. When emailing them again under her real name to see if there were any developments, she again was told that there were no empty slots available. The mother has filed a complaint on the grounds of discrimination and the chair of DENK, a Dutch political party founded by Tunahan Kuzu and Selçuk Öztürk, called out for more inspections of schools.<sup>33</sup>

28. Bas Soetenhorst, "Rechter blokkeert uitbreidingsplannen Haga Lyceum", *Het Parool*, 6 June 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/rechter-blokkeert-uitbreidingsplannen-haga-lyceum-bd2bfc9/>, (Access date: 25 February /2020).

29. Bas Soetenhorst, "Haga Lyceum schorst docent na tonen filmpje radicale internetprediker", *Het Parool*, 21 June 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/haga-lyceum-schorst-docent-na-tonen-filmpje-radicale-internetprediker-b15e54d6/>, (Access date: 25 February 2020); Bas Soetenhorst, "Nieuw onderzoek naar Haga Lyceum", *Het Parool*, 2 July 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/nieuw-onderzoek-naar-haga-lyceum-b0eea3d6/>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

30. Bas Soetenhorst, "AIVD nu zelf onder de loep om Haga Lyceum", *Het Parool*, 3 July 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/aivd-nu-zelf-onder-de-loep-om-haga-lyceum-b877dc5a/>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

31. Hanneke Keultjes, "Slob dreigt financiering Haga Lyceum per 1 december te stoppen", *Het Parool*, 15 October 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/slob-dreigt-financiering-haga-lyceum-per-1-december-te-stoppen-b4bb4666/>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

32. Hanneke Keultjes, "Minister mag financiering Haga Lyceum niet volledig stopzetten", *Het Parool*, 22 November 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/nederland/minister-mag-financiering-haga-lyceum-niet-volledig-stopzetten-b-7fee153/>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

33. "Aangifte discriminatie tegen basisschool: 'Nederlands kind is welkom, Marokkaans kind niet', AT5, 25 November 2019, <https://www.at5.nl/artikelen/198462/aangifte-discriminatie-tegen-basisschool-nederlands-kind-is-welkom-marokkaans-kind-niet>, (Access date: 22 February 2020).

## Politics

At the end of January, the mayor of Amsterdam Femke Halsema admitted that the chance of an attack on a mosque exists and that the municipality has taken extra protective measures. At the same time, she has decided to take measures against Salafist schools and wants more control of Qur'an schools, while adding that she wishes to prevent the development of anti-Dutch sentiment and anti-democratic thoughts.<sup>34</sup> In August, Wilders shared a picture depicting statistics regarding a research conducted by a PVV investigator illustrating the percentage of people viewing Islam as not belonging in the Netherlands. (Fig. 2) According to the statistics, a large percentage of most parties' voters agree with this statement.<sup>35</sup> The poll was conducted by Maurice de Hond, a professional pollster. It is, however, unclear, what part(s) of society the participants represent and how many people participated in this poll. In September, de Hond published another poll result stating that 59% of voters are against all schools with any kind of religious foundation and that 70% are against Islamic schools. Furthermore, 85% agreed with the statement "It is bad for integration in the Netherlands if children with an Islamic background attend an Islamic school". Again, the same lack of details applies.<sup>36</sup>



**Figure 2:** Chart released on 23 August by the PVV showing the percentage of voters who agree that Islam doesn't belong in Dutch society, polling conducted by polling company Onderzoek Maurice De Hondt. According to their poll, the majority of voters of almost all parties agree with this statement.<sup>37</sup>

According to the periodical publication of the AIVD published in June 2019 polarisation between groups is increasing, not only between left and right, but also between people with different opinions. Extreme right-minded people find each other in an online environment where the anti-Islamic discourse is every-growing and

34. Michiel Couzy, "Gemeente: reële kans op aanslag moskee", Het Parool, 25 January 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/gemeente-reele-kans-op-aanslag-moskee-b7d04a00/>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

35. Geert Wilders, Twitter, 23 August 2019, <https://twitter.com/geertwilderspvv>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

36. "Wekelijkse stemming", Peil.nl, 15/09/2019, <https://home.noties.nl/peil/wekelijkse-stemming/>, (Access date: 1 April 2020).

37. Geert Wilders, Twitter, 23 August 2019.

radicalising. Attacks such as the one in New Zealand will continue to appeal to the extreme-right scene in Europe. Its wing in the Netherlands, according to the National Security Service, is fragmented, but the threat from “lone actors” or “smaller networks” is possible. Furthermore, the AIVD claims that the Salafi figures add to the polarisation and radicalisation, especially amongst children and youth, via extra-curricular education and classes. When it comes to far-right extremism, the threat is caused by “lone wolves”, but when it comes to Jihadi terrorism, while claiming themselves that the amount of attacks is low in the West, the threat level remains at 4 (5 being the highest) as “the intention for attacks continue to exist”, coming both from DAESH and Al-Qaeda as from individuals and loose Jihadi networks.<sup>38</sup>

In the next issue, the AIVD again stated that a right-wing terrorist attack by a loner in the Netherlands is possible. It based this statement on the possibility that a Dutch (Internet) loner might radicalise and “commit a crime inspired by right extremism” and stated that the right-extremist groups are “marginal and not violent”. There are signals on radicalising people with a right-extremist orientation and because of this, the AIVD stated that the possibility of someone causing an attack cannot be excluded.<sup>39</sup>

On 28 September, Geert Wilders posted a drawing of a mugshot of a man with a beard and turban with the text “Murderer. Name: Mohammad”.<sup>40</sup> A week earlier, he called all Muslims to “choose freedom” and leave Islam.<sup>41</sup>

On 21 October, Wilders expressed his dismay about the Blue Mosque’s decision to start the call to prayer with speakers. He tweeted: “Close all the screaming hate palaces. Do it in Saudi Arabia. But not here. This is our country and Islam doesn’t belong in the Netherlands.”<sup>42</sup> (Fig. 3) Femke Halsema, the mayor of Amsterdam, claimed it was unnecessary to have the call to prayer reinforced by speakers, finding it outdated; however, she didn’t intend to apply a sound limit, as it would mean having to do the same thing with the church bells.<sup>43</sup> Later, she suggested having the

38. “Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland van NCTV nr 50”, Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, 24 June 2019, <https://www.aivd.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/06/24/dreigingsbeeld-terrorisme-nederland-van-nctv-nr-50>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

39. “Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 51 December 2019”, 9 December 2019, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2019/12/09/tk-bijlage-rapport-dreigingsbeeld-terrorisme-nederland-51>, (Access date: 20 February 2020).

40. Geert Wilders, Twitter, 28 September 2019, <https://twitter.com/geertwilderspvv>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

41. Geert Wilders, Twitter, 21 September 2019, <https://twitter.com/geertwilderspvv>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

42. Teunis Dokter, “Geert Wilders frontaal in de aanval tegen ‘gillend haatpaleis’ de Blauwe Moskee, eist directe sluiting,” *De Daghelijke Standaard*, 22 October 2019, <https://www.dagelijkestandaard.nl/2019/10/geert-wilders-frontaal-in-de-aanval-en-eist-sluiting-van-gillend-haatpaleis-de-blauwe-moskee/>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

43. Ruben Koops, “Halsema vindt versterkte gebedsoproep Blauwe Moskee niet van deze tijd”, *Het Parool*, 29 October 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/halsema-vindt-versterkte-gebedsoproep-blauwe-moskee-niet-van-deze-tijd-b7658e06/>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

call to prayer in Dutch and not in Arabic as is customary, a comment that cost her a lot of criticism.<sup>44</sup>



**Figure 3:** Wilders criticism on the call to prayer on 28 September: “Close all the screaming hate palaces. Do it in Saudi Arabia. But not here. This is our country and Islam doesn’t belong in the Netherlands.”<sup>45</sup>

In the beginning of December, Wilders addressed Americans at the David Horowitz Freedom Center, warning them against the threat of Islam, telling them that it won’t be long before Islam conquers the USA as it conquered Europe, and that Americans are to be resilient and fight Islam.<sup>46</sup> He also called for the closing of all Islamic schools, saying Islam is an ideology of suppression that definitely shouldn’t be put in the heads of children.<sup>47</sup> At the end of the same month, he called his followers to organise another cartoon contest depicting the prophet Muhammad. He claimed his aim was to expose the cowardice of the government when it comes to freedom of speech, as the Pakistani government refused to arrest preacher Khadim Hussain Rizvi who had threatened to decapitate Wilders on Twitter, whereas his call had become world news in only a matter of hours. He claimed he intended to hold this contest back in August 2019 but forfeited because of security reasons.<sup>48</sup>

## Media

In January, the website Nieuwwij.nl published a report on the usage of the word “Muslim” in four mainstream newspapers. According to the researcher, Tayfun Balçık, most of the time, no matter what newspaper you read, *De Telegraaf* (conservative and populist), *Algemeen Dagblad* (neutral and populist), *NRC* (left liberal), or *de Volkskrant* (centrist), entering the word “Muslim” in the search bar results in articles mentioning “terrorist Muslims”. (Fig. 4)

44. Bas Soetenhorst, “Kritiek op Halsema: ‘Gebedsoproep moet in Arabisch’”, *Het Parool*, 31 October 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/kritiek-op-halsema-gebedsoproep-moet-in-arabisch-b6259b39/>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

45. Teunis Dokter, “Geert Wilders frontaal in de aanval tegen ‘gillende haatpaleis’ de Blauwe Moskee, eist directe sluiting,” *De Dagerijkse Standaard*.

46. Geert Wilders, Twitter, 12 December 2019, <https://twitter.com/geertwilderspvv>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

47. Geert Wilders, Twitter, 11 December 2019, <https://twitter.com/geertwilderspvv>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

48. “Wilders provoceert weer met cartoonwedstrijd van profeet Mohammed”, *Bladna*, 30 December 2019, <https://www.bladna.nl/wilders-cartoonwedstrijd-profeet-mohammed,28367.html>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

De Telegraaf	de Volkskrant	NRC	Algemeen Dagblad
In totaal <b>102 berichten</b> met 'terreur'.	In totaal <b>98 berichten</b> met 'terreur' in de berichtgeving	In totaal <b>98 berichten</b> met 'terreur'.	In totaal <b>75 berichten</b> over 'terreur'
<b>101 berichten</b> direct of indirect over 'moslimterreur' (van groepen als IS, Hamas, Islamitisch Jihad, Hezbollah, Taliban of Al Qaeda)	<b>80 berichten</b> direct of indirect over 'moslimterreur' (van IS, HAMAS, Hezbollah, Taliban, Al Qaeda, Oeigoeren)	<b>88 berichten</b> direct of indirect over 'moslimterreur' van (IS, Al Qaeda, Taliban, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, Hezbollah, Oeigoeren)	<b>69 berichten</b> direct of indirect over 'moslimterreur' van groepen zoals hiernaast vermeld.
<b>3 berichten</b> met 'terreur' van de Iraanse staat	<b>6 berichten</b> met 'terreur' van extreemrechtse groepen zoals NSU	<b>6 berichten</b> met 'terreur' van de PKK	<b>4 berichten</b> over 'extreemrechts terreur' van groepen zoals de NSU of Grijsse Wolven
<b>3 berichten</b> met extreemrechtse 'terreur' van groepen zoals de NSU of de Grijsse Wolven	<b>5 berichten</b> met 'terreur' van de PKK	<b>5 berichten</b> met extreemrechts 'terreur'	<b>2 berichten</b> met 'terreur' van de Koerdische PKK.
<b>3 berichten</b> met 'extreemlinkse terreur' van bijvoorbeeld de Koerdische PKK.	<b>5 berichten</b> met 'terreur van het Iraanse regime in de regio'	<b>1 bericht</b> met 'terreur' van het Iraanse regime	
	<b>3 berichten</b> met 'extreemlinkse terreur'		

Periode: 1 november 2018 t/m 7 januari 2019

**Figure 4:** Table showing number of articles published by the four main newspapers writing on terrorism in different contexts, most of them directly or indirectly discussing "Muslim terror". De Telegraaf has a total of 102 articles on 'terror', 101 of them directly or indirectly on 'Muslimterror', de Volkskrant has a total of 98 articles on 'terror', 80 of them directly or indirectly on 'Muslimterror', NRC has a total of 98 articles on 'terror', with 88 of them directly or indirectly on 'Muslimterror' and Algemeen Dagblad has a total of 75 articles on 'terror', with 69 of them directly or indirectly on 'Muslimterror'<sup>49</sup>

When focusing instead on the usage of "terrorism", almost all articles popping up (spanning a publication period of roughly two months) dealt directly or indirectly with "Muslim terror" by groups such as al-Qaeda, DAESH, Hezbollah, or Islamic Jihad, while only 3-5 articles were about extreme left or right terrorism, creating the perception that Muslims are indeed more inclined to terrorist attacks. However, as the author points out, a lot of these articles were about certain countries' internal politics and not about actual "terrorist attacks". Especially the newspaper *de Telegraaf* goes very far in its thought association of Islam and terrorism: 99% of its articles on terrorism are related to "Muslim terror".<sup>50</sup>

When the editors of these newspapers were asked their opinion on this research, they all reacted dismissively and claimed the research wasn't worth much. *De Volkskrant's* editor in chief *Philippe Remarque* stated:

"It is logical that the words 'Muslim' and 'terror' are often combined in our reporting because these events are in the news. It doesn't say anything about our attitude towards Muslims. Had Balçık tallied the words 'sexual abuse' and 'Catholic church' in the last couple of years, he would sure have found a correlation as well. Would he conclude that we report negatively and one-sidedly about Catholics?"<sup>51</sup>

Confronted with Remarque's criticism, Balçık stated, "Interesting comment from a newsmaker. As if there is no editorial line in which news is prioritised and what is called 'terrorism' and what isn't. 'News' isn't objective but is always a selective representation of events." He continued, "When I would analyse the reporting about Christians or Catholics, I would tally all reporting about that group, including about Christian political par-

49. Geert Wilders, Twitter, 11 December 2019, <https://twitter.com/geertwilderspvv>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

50. Tayfun Balçık, "99% kans dat De Telegraaf moslims aan terreur koppelt", 8 January 2019, *Nieuw Wij*, <https://www.nieuwwij.nl/media/99-kans-dat-de-telegraaf-moslims-aan-terreur-koppelt/>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

51. Ibid.

ties, Christmas, Easter, churches, etcetera. Would ‘sexual abuse’ then top the topics list?”<sup>52</sup>

Elske Schouten, deputy editor-in-chief of the *NRC* stated, “I am sure that on our cultural, economics and sports pages, people of a variety of religious paths play a role. We only make their religion explicit when it is relevant, which is usually not the case.”<sup>53</sup> To which Balçık pointed out that when something positive happens, it’s attributed to one particular person but when something bad happens all of a sudden, religion becomes relevant and they mention “Muslims”. These are the double standards that are our source of concern.<sup>54</sup>

However, a month later, Balçık published a new research on the news coverage of acts of discrimination towards Muslims, Jews and homosexuals, spanning a period of three months. *De Telegraaf* published five articles concerning this topic, which form 0.7% of all articles related to Muslims. The *NRC*, with 28 articles forming about 4.2% of all articles, focused the most on this matter. One of the topics dealt with in these articles is whether or not fighting for DAESH and becoming a Jihadi gives the Dutch government the right to revoke the Dutch citizenship of the people involved. While other newspapers dealt with it in a brief and strict matter, the *NRC* devoted a whole page on the matter analysing the pros and cons, and even went as far as to label the decision to revoke citizenship as discrimination. Terms such as Muslim hate, Islamophobia, and anti-Islam are most recurring in the *NRC*. Yet, anti-Semitism is mentioned almost 8 times as much. *De Telegraaf* and *AD* are also much more inclined consciously or subconsciously to use a “us/them” attitude in their reporting by using phrases such as “original inhabitants”, “the West”, “the Jewish-Christian culture” and “the free/modern world”. These type of articles formed roughly 15% of all news on Muslims, whereas in the *NRC* there were about half as many.<sup>55</sup> (Fig. 5)

	Antisemitisme/anti-Joods/Jodenhaat	Homofobie/anti-homo/homohaat	Islamofobie/anti-Islam/anti-moslim/moslimhaat
De Telegraaf	15	1	6
AD	8	7	1
De Volkskrant	68	14	4
NRC	78	10	11
<b>Totaal</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>

**Figure 5:** Table showing number of articles written on anti-Semitism, homophobia, or Islamophobia by the four main Dutch newspapers. *De Telegraaf* published 15 articles on Anti-Semitism, 1 on homophobia and 6 on Islamofobia, *Algemeen Dagblad* (*AD*) published 8 articles on Anti-Semitism, 7 on homophobia and 1 on Islamofobia, *De Volkskrant* published 68 articles on Antisemitism, 14 on homophobia and 4 on Islamofobia and *NRC* published 78 articles on Antisemitism, 10 on homophobia and 11 on Islamofobia.<sup>56</sup>

52. Martijn De Koning, “De profilering van ‘moslim-achtigen’ in de media”, *Nieuw Wij*, 12 February 2019, <https://www.nieuwwij.nl/opinie/de-profilering-van-moslim-achtigen-in-de-media/>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

53. Ibid.

54. Frederike Geerdink, “Frederike Geerdink: Muslims Systematically Framed Negatively in Dutch Newspapers”, *Index on Censorship*, 30 January 2019, <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2019/01/frederike-geerdink-muslims-framed-negatively-dutch-newspapers/>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

55. Tayfun Balçık, “NRC maakt van ‘de moslims’ het minst een probleem”, *Nieuw Wij*, 26 February 2019, <https://www.nieuwwij.nl/media/nrc-verrassend-genuanceerd-over-moslimberichtgeving/>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

56. Martijn De Koning, “De profilering van ‘moslim-achtigen’ in de media”, *Nieuw Wij*, 12 February 2019, <https://www.nieuwwij.nl/opinie/de-profilering-van-moslim-achtigen-in-de-media/>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

Halfway through 2019, the NRC and “Newshour” conducted research on course material used by some fifty so-called radical Islamic mosque schools. Their definition of “radical”, however, remains unclear as well as their criteria for the selection of these particular schools. According to them, children are taught to resist the principles of equality and liberty, and that it is their duty as good Muslims to leave the Netherlands and move (back) to a Muslim country. In reaction, the VVD and ChristenUnie said that the inspectorate should focus more on whether the children are motivated to resist Dutch society. Both parties suggested a change of law allowing the inspection to act and intervene when faced with such cases in informal education. The CDA, SP, and D66 also joined the protest and stated that there “should never be a place for indoctrination of children with disgusting, degrading ideas” and that “the cabinet should do everything within its might to banish such practices”.<sup>57</sup>

In March, the Social and Cultural Planning Bureau published a report entitled “Citizen Perspectives 2019”. In it, it stated that 75% of Dutch citizens think that differences of opinion on social matters and issues are increasing. Most of the people attribute this increasing polarisation to mentality and society, and to media in particular, especially social media. The biggest “conflict”, according to those asked, is between “native” Dutch and those with a migrant background. While official numbers dismiss the statement that polarisation has increased, the Dutch are thoroughly convinced of this. Sixteen per cent agreed with the statement, “There are people who I have started to hate because of the position they take and their viewpoints”. Seventy per cent also agreed with the statement that the Internet and social media increase polarisation, while 50% blamed the increase in polarisation on the traditional media. Furthermore, the SCP claims that it is mostly younger people who agree with these statements rather than elders.<sup>58</sup>

At the end of September, the organisation Meld Islamofobie (Report Islamophobia) published a report entitled “Everyday Islamophobia”. The aim of this report was to analyse the data sent in by participants who directly or indirectly experienced Islamophobia and discrimination because of their religion. Ninety-one per cent of participants reported direct Islamophobia, in other words having taken place directly against the person, and only 9% mentioned indirect Islamophobia, like discriminating articles, comments made by a politician, etc. These indirect events, while not the focus of the research, can lead to direct events. Over 70% of the participants consider themselves “religious” to “very religious”, with half of the participants having external signs such as hijab or a beard, indicating that their discrimination

57. Olaf Heyblom, “Salafistische moskeescholen: ongelovigen verdienen doodstraf”, *Het Parool*, 10 September 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/nederland/salafistische-moskeescholen-ongelovigen-verdienen-doodstraf-bf09dfda/>, (Access date 19 February 2020).

58. “SCP: Nederlanders hebben gevoel dat polarisatie toeneemt”, *NOS*, 29 March 2019, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2278034-scp-nederlanders-hebben-gevoel-dat-polarisatie-toeneemt.html>, (Access date: 23 February 2020).

is not only restricted to open manifestation of their beliefs, with 10% perceiving themselves as “little religious” or “not at all religious”. The aim of the research was to illustrate how widespread Islamophobia is on a daily basis, and that it often goes unnoticed and yet has a deep effect on Muslims. According to the majority of the participants, Islamophobia is a recurring event in the Netherlands and has increased over the past couple of years. Participants with direct experiences on average feel less safe in the Netherlands than those with indirect experiences. In both groups, however, the sense of safety has decreased over the past years. More than half of those with indirect experiences feel “rather free” or “completely free” to be Muslims in the Netherlands, whereas almost half of those with direct experiences claimed feeling “not free” or “completely not free” to practice their religion. Again, half of the participants are “worried” to “very concerned” something might happen to them because of being Muslim. Seventy per cent of this group is “worried” to “very worried” about the future of the Netherlands in this respect. Seventeen per cent of the participants indicated having been stopped by the police and 8% stated that the police had been to their homes asking them about their religious identity. It also becomes clear that Islamophobia manifests itself in all aspects of life and areas of society, that it can be both implicit and explicit, and that it has an institutional dimension. Forty per cent indicated having faced Islamophobia *more than 5 times* during 2018, meaning that at least 1,008 Islamophobic incidents took place in 2018, numbers that never pop up in the official statistics of the anti-discrimination bureaus. Eighty-four per cent of the participants were not prepared to file an official complaint, the main reasons being “nothing will be done about it anyway”, “not being important enough” or “too little evidence”. The report further showed that a lot of the incidents on a (nearly) daily basis are implicit, and a lot of the incidents include behaviour that “officially” isn’t regarded as Islamophobia or discrimination and is thus minimalised and not taken serious by others. While it is usually men who are stopped by the police, it is women who are insulted on the streets, especially the covered ones. Forty-two per cent of women who wear a niqab have been spat on, beaten, or kicked on the streets.<sup>59</sup>

Later in 2019, in a book entitled *Is Something Going to Come out of the Islam Debate?* Fifteen different prominent participants such as Ewoud Butter (founder of [republiekallochtonie.com](http://republiekallochtonie.com)) and Joram van Klaveren (former PVV member and Muslim revert) answered this question. The aim of the two editors-in-chief, Jan Jaap de Ruiter and Gert Jan Geling, was to represent a variety of opinions, from Salafists and Islamists to ex-Muslims and Islam critics in order to come up with a book reflecting this debate from different perspectives. However, the lack of Muslimah thinkers caused strong criticism - the only woman contributing to the book being the infa-

---

59. “Meld Islamofobie presenteert nieuw rapport: Alledaagse Islamofobie in Nederland een verkennend onderzoek”, Meld Islamofobie, 27 September 2019, <https://www.meldislamofobie.org/meld-islamofobie-presenteert-nieuw-rapport-alledaagse-islamofobie-in-nederland-een-verkennend-onderzoek/>, (Access date: 08 February 2020).

mous Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali-born Dutch citizen who has received international attention because of her harsh critique on Islam, especially voiced in her collaboration with filmmaker Theo van Gogh in the making of the movie “Submission”, which consists of a critique on Islam’s treatment of women. Especially the fact that the *Islamdebat* (Islam debate) often focuses on women within Islam, their position, issues such as gender equality, hijabi, etc. made it troublesome for the book to lack the voices of the women who so often form the center of this debate.<sup>60</sup> Another argument is that the term “Islamdebat” itself is problematic. It is argued that the two editors-in-chief are actually unsuited and not up for a job as nuanced and delicate as this, namely debating Islam and Muslims in the Netherlands. Kamel Essabane, philosopher and scholar of religion, was just one of the many who declined to contribute to the book. He claimed that the editors are in fact against orthodoxy and view it as something that should be fought against within the borders of the law and that a “liberal Islam” should be promoted. To them, Islam is inherently the opposite of the West, ignoring both Western Muslims who don’t fit under these labels and the rich variety within Islam itself.<sup>61</sup>

### Justice System

In January, a man was fined 350 euro for refusing to be served by a woman with a headscarf at a supermarket, where he stated he was a “Dutchman and wanted to be served by a Dutchman/-woman”. The actual incident took place in August of the previous year upon which the woman took matters to court. In January, she was found to be within her rights, even though the man claimed it was all a misunderstanding.<sup>62</sup>

In May, the PVV presented a ban on several Islamic expressions, such as the building of mosques and the printing of the Qur’an. While the Council of State claimed that the “Islam ban” was not only in conflict with the constitution itself, but undermined the oldest Dutch constitution, referring to a speech held by Willem van Oranje where he expressed his dismay with kings who undermine the freedom of religion. Geert Wilders, however, claimed that the freedom of religion is not on the line, but that the aim of the ban was to redefine Islam which he claims is a “totalitarian conquest ideology”. This way Muslims would lose some of their constitutional privileges, amongst which the right to prayer in temples. The Council of State claimed this to be unlawful as a whole population group was to be withheld from its

60. Theo Brand, “Moslima’s ontbreken in bundel over ‘het islamdebat’”, *Nieuw Wĳ*, 30 August 2019, <https://www.nieuwwij.nl/actueel/moslimas-ontbreken-in-bundel-over-het-islamdebat/>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

61. Theo Brand, “De zin en onzin van het Islamdebat”, *Nieuw Wĳ*, 10 October 2019, <https://www.nieuwwij.nl/actueel/de-zin-en-onzin-van-het-islamdebat/>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

62. Tom Lallemand, “Man (78) krijgt boete omdat hij kassierster zonder hoofddoek wil”, *Scepter*, 20 January 2019, <https://scepter.net/2019/01/man-78-krijgt-boete-omdat-hij-kassierster-zonder-hoofddoek-wil/>, (Access date: 13 February 2020).

fundamental rights in a discriminatory way, thus conflicting with the constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights. The PVV again claims that it is Islam that damages the core elements of a democratic constitutional state, as according to them Islam knows no principle of equality and is inherently discriminatory towards women, all non-Muslims, and non-heterosexuals. The party is determined to go through to the Second Chamber with the proposed ban.<sup>63</sup>

Also in May, the Party for the Animals submitted a new proposal to have religious slaughter without sedation banned by law. The Council of State stated that this ban is a much too far-reaching limitation of the freedom of religion. The party intended to take the proposal to the Chamber of Representatives. The party submitted a similar bill in 2012.<sup>64</sup>

In July, police advisor Carel Boers handed in his resignation as advisor to the police. In his resignation letter he stated that there are many issues within the police and that the head of police is ethically and morally off the right track. Especially topics such as Islamophobia and intimidation against women are topics that are not being dealt with. When he tried to change the current state of affairs, he was pertinently ignored, leading to his dismay and disappointment and his eventual resignation.<sup>65</sup> After the publication of the article dealing with his resignation, hundreds of reactions, some of sympathy, some sharing their own experiences, popped up from many members of the largest police syndicate, the NPB. When a police officer was asked about discrimination of Muslims, she simply replied that she had no experience on the matter, as there are barely any Muslims working in the police. The previous chief of police Gerard Bouman mentioned in 2015 on a blog of the police's intranet that there were many unsettling signals about police officers talking about those "f\*\*ing Muslims" and that they "should light the mosques on fire and get it over with". According to Bouman, this is daily police talk. Members of the House of Representatives demanded the minister of justice take action against these kinds of practices as they are completely unacceptable. Especially the selective deafness of the head of police forms a serious source of concern. The head of the NPB Jan Struijs claimed that the ever-growing polarisation had managed to creep into the police department as well.<sup>66</sup> When DENK party member Farid Azarkan filed a petition to receive detailed information on Islamophobia and discrimination, the head of

---

63. Jules Ortjens, "Raad van State vernietigend over anti-islamwet van PVV", *Trouw*, 6 May 2019, <https://www.trouw.nl/politiek/raad-van-state-vernietigend-over-anti-islamwet-van-pvv-b6163c78/>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

64. "Advies: géén verbod op ritueel slachten", *De Telegraaf*, 10 May 2019, <https://www.telegraaf.nl/nieuws/3595622/advies-geen-verbod-op-ritueel-slachten>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

65. "Top politie kijkt weg bij wangedrag en intimidatie", *Algemeen Dagblad*, 13 July 2019, <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/top-politie-kijkt-weg-bij-wangedrag-en-intimidatie-aa576f135/>, (Access date: 23 February 2020).

66. Marcel Haenen, "Kamerleden willen dat Grapperhaus misstanden bij politie aanpakt", *de Limburger*, 14 July 2019, [https://www.limburger.nl/cnt/dmf20190714\\_00114540/kamerleden-willen-dat-grapperhaus-misstanden-bij-politie-aanpakt](https://www.limburger.nl/cnt/dmf20190714_00114540/kamerleden-willen-dat-grapperhaus-misstanden-bij-politie-aanpakt), (Access date: 22 February 2020).

the Ministry of Justice Ferd Grapperhaus replied that he was not able to provide Azarkan with the desired information, as the usual period did not suffice to gather this information.<sup>67</sup>

Starting 1 August, the wearing of a burqa and niqab in public spaces is forbidden by law. The ban is valid in places such as public transportation (buses, trams, trains, etc.), hospitals, and schools. Those who violate the ban are to be fined 150 euro and the government expects the employees where the public bans are valid to address people actively when they are violating the ban. If the violator refuses to take off the burqa or niqab, the police can be called for backup. However, a lot of vagueness exists regarding the exact rules and enforcement of the ban and many instances, such as academic hospitals, refuse to enforce it as they are not willing to call the police. Municipalities such as that of Rotterdam, Utrecht, and Amsterdam have stated that due to a scarcity of police they are prioritising other matters, and are not willing to send out police for this matter. The public transportation companies are not particularly happy about stopping their vehicles when the ban is violated as they fear the police won't show up when asked for backup and it can directly cause problems for the employees. The Rotterdam party NIDA has indicated its willingness to pay the fines whenever one is given.<sup>68</sup> In the aftermath of the initial implementation, many misunderstandings have occurred with the law being enforced (or trying to be) at places not necessary. Simultaneously, an increase of incidents against veiled women (regular or niqab) has been noticed, acts of discrimination ranging from being sworn at to being spit on, and being threatened to have the veil pulled off their heads. The government simply replied that sooner or later an evaluation would be done but that for now the ban was to remain intact.<sup>69</sup> Tendayi Achiume, reporter to the UN who was in the Netherlands to research on how the country deals with discrimination, came to the conclusion that the ban caused more harm than it did good, and that it does not suit a society priding itself on its promotion of equality of men and women, as the ban gives the image that women with facial coverings are dangerous, leading to even further polarisation. According to Achiume, Dutch society is very Islamophobic, even though it likes to think of itself as very tolerant. She claims that Islam is repetitively being mirrored, even in the Dutch parliament, as inherently opposing Dutch identity. It is precisely because of this self-perception of being tolerant

67. "Uitstelbrief Kamervragen over moslimfobie en intimidatie bij de politie", Rijksoverheid, 8 August 2019, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/08/08/uitstelbericht-kamervragen-over-moslimfobie-en-intimidatie-bij-de-politie-denk>, (Access date: 22 February 2020).

68. "Boerkaverbod gaat in, maar niemand wil handhaven. Gaat het werken?", Hart Van Nederland, 31 July 2019, <https://www.hartvannederland.nl/nieuws/2019/boerkaverbod-gaat-in-maar-niemand-wil-handhaven-gaat-het-werken/>, (Access date: 5 February 2020).

69. Cyril Rosman, "Drie weken boerkaverbod: drie incidenten en geheime cijfers", Algemeen Dagblad, 26 August 2019, <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/drie-weken-boerkaverbod-drie-incidenten-en-geheime-cijfers-a41c3c0b/>, (Access date: 5 February 2020).

that further improvements are being blocked. According to Achiume, in many areas of life, be it political or social discourse, and even law enforcement, the message is projected that the real Dutch are white and of Dutch descent.<sup>70</sup>

## Internet

According to the General Intelligence and Security Service's report extreme-right groups such as Pegida, Identair Verzet, Rechts in Verzet, NVU, Erkenbrand, and Voorpost are usually active on the large platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The growth of right-extremist content is said to have stagnated on their own websites, as is the short-lived boost in their followers. However, the focus seems to be shifting to international alternative forums, platforms, and chat apps such as 4Chan, 8kun, and EndChan, where a lot of right-extremist content is being shared, creating an international community. They use Gab (instead of Twitter), Minds and VKontakte (instead of Facebook), Telegram (instead of WhatsApp) and Bitchute (instead of YouTube) as these are less restrictive in their policy when it comes to violent or extremist content than Facebook, Twitter, or Google. However, especially after the attack in Christchurch, New Zealand there is a growing social and political pressure to remove far-right extreme content.<sup>71</sup>

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

For many years now Geert Wilders is the first name to pop up in one's mind when Islamophobia is discussed in the Netherlands. Originally a member of VVD and mentor of the current Prime Minister, in 2004, he founded his own party Groep Wilders (Group Wilders), which later on developed into PVV (Party for Freedom). His criticism of Islam and his Islamophobic views have been being voiced ever since 9/11, but he had started expressing his concerns on "Muslimextremism" as early as 1999. It is mainly this that caused him to leave the VDD and produce his film *Fitna*. In 2019, he made several Islamophobic statements that haven't wavered from his statements over the years.

A rather new player in the field is Thierry Baudet's FvD (Forum for Democracy). Originally founded as a think tank and turned into a party in 2016, it participated in the 2017 general elections, where it won 2 seats. In the 2019 provincial elections, the party won 86 seats across the 12 provinces. In South Holland, North Holland, and Flevoland it became the largest party, doubling the number of votes for the PVV. A

---

70. Pieter Van Berkel, "VN: 'Nederland is islamofob en racistisch'", Scepter, 9 October 2019, <https://scepter.net/2019/10/vn-nederland-is-islamofob-en-racistisch/>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

71. "Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 51 December 2019", Rijksoverheid, 9 December 2019, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2019/12/09/tk-bijlage-rapport-dreigingsbeeld-terrorisme-nederland-51>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

third of the voters voted for the PVV in 2017.<sup>72</sup> The FvD claims the source of unrest in the Middle East is structural as the surrounding countries refuse to recognise Israel as a state. It also expressed its unwavering support to Israel as, according to the party, it is a successful business partner and a democracy. It also supports Bashar Al-Assad in the Syrian Civil War. The party wants the Netherlands to withdraw from the EU, restrict migration, and enshrine into law the preservation of Dutch culture while restricting Islamic practices.<sup>73</sup> An interesting note is that both parties openly support Israel and Jews, while many of their far-right followers are in fact anti-Semitic.

In 2018, Haaretz showed from a review of tax forms from the San Francisco Jewish Federation that the federation donated money to the PVV.<sup>74</sup> In 2019, a ban on donations coming from outside of the EU was established. While it is a general ban, it mostly affected the PVV, as in the past couple of years it has received about 150,000 euro from the U.S. David Horowitz Freedom Center. Donations from within the EU are still allowed but every euro needs to be accounted for.<sup>75</sup>

The main Dutch Islamophobic organisations and movements are Pegida and Identitair Verzet, the Dutch wing of the pan-European Identitarian movement. They were classified by the German government as right-wing extremists in 2019.<sup>76</sup> Pegida too, is pan-European with German roots, and stands for *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident). As is clear from the name, the movement's main - if not only - concern is Islam and its so-called threat to Western civilisation. It was founded in 2014, with its Dutch offshoot being founded in 2015. The head of Pegida Nederland is Edwin Wagenveld.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

According to a report entitled “The Social State of the Netherlands 2019” published by the Social and Cultural Planning Bureau (SCP), Dutch citizens witness

72. Ben Margulies, “Why Europe should worry about Thierry Baudet”, The London School of Economics and Political Science, 20 March 2019, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2019/04/24/why-europe-should-worry-about-thierry-baudet/>, (Access date: 1 April 2020).

73. “European Union Elections: A Breakdown of Europe’s Nationalist Parties” TRT World, 22 May 2019, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/european-union-elections-a-breakdown-of-europe-s-nationalist-parties-26867>, (Access date: 1 April 2020).

74. Allison Kaplan Sommer, “From Project Veritas to the Tea Party San Francisco Jewish Federation Also Funding Far-Right Fringe Groups, Not Just Canary Mission”, Haaretz, 10 October 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-sf-jewish-federation-funded-far-right-groups-as-well-as-canary-mission-1.6547447>, (Access date: 1 April 2020).

75. Laurens Kok, “Verbod op buitenlandse gift politieke partijen”, Algemeen Dagblad, 25 January 2019, <https://www.ad.nl/politiek/verbod-op-buitenlandse-gift-politieke-partijen-ae3be101/>, (Access date: 1 April 2020).

76. “Identitäre Bewegung als rechtsextrem eingestuft”, Deutsche Welle, 11 July 2019, <https://www.dw.com/de/identit%C3%A4re-bewegung-als-rechtsextrem-ingestuft/a-49551518>, (Access date: 1 April 2020).

and experience an increase in conflict between population groups, as indicated by a growing sense of “social unease” and “by the amount in which one perceives the world as formed by conflicts and the we/them relations”. When asked where they perceive the most conflicts, 69% of the people answered between native citizens and those with a migrant background. Whereas in 2012, 32% of the people perceived a large conflict between eight different population groups, 43% perceived it in 2019.<sup>77</sup>

In reaction to all the commotion elicited by the publication of the aforementioned reports on the alleged radicalisation of Islamic education and the Cornelius Haga High School, integration expert Walter Palm published an essay warning people of the danger Muslims are currently in, as the Netherlands is in the grip of Islamophobia. When the PvdA and the VVD wanted to limit the constitutional freedom of religious schools, he says, the government should have extended its hand to the Muslim community and explicitly expressed the fact that Muslims belong in the Netherlands, and should have fought for upholding the constitution rather than implementing laws that conflict with the latter. Palm, who was an integration expert for several ministers from 1982 up to his retirement in 2017, claims that Muslims have continuously been discriminated against. He claims to be worried about how politics deal with Muslims, referring to how many Jews in pre-war Germany underestimated the anti-Semitism. Hitler applied the salami tactics, a divide and conquer process and alliances used to overcome opposition. Gradualness, he says, causes abnormal things such as anti-Semitism and Islamophobia to be regarded as normal in time. Furthermore, he writes how the Netherlands has been in the grip of a “mass hysteria” since 9/11. He stresses that most of the actions taken by the government, such as refusing “hate-imams”, the burqa ban, cancelling citizenship of Jihadis with a double passport, etc. are measures that illustrate both that Islamophobia is a constant in Dutch politics and, at the same time, are counter-productive as they give Muslim society the signal that “we are against you”, which doesn’t help when you want to battle radicalisation. Palm claims that in order to battle radicalisation Muslims are needed, and that many of them are against radicalisation and are deeply saddened whenever a terrorist attack takes place.<sup>78</sup>

The MKB-Limburg kicked off a pilot project called “Inclusive Workfloor Midden-Limburg” to increase diversity in the workplace. It aims to change the insight and attitude of employers of small and medium-sized companies, making them

---

77. “De sociale staat van Nederland 2019”, Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 10 September 2019, [https://www.scp.nl/Publicaties/Alle\\_publicaties/Publicaties\\_2019/De\\_sociale\\_staat\\_van\\_Nederland\\_2019](https://www.scp.nl/Publicaties/Alle_publicaties/Publicaties_2019/De_sociale_staat_van_Nederland_2019), (Access date: 20 February 2020).

78. Bas Soetenhorst, “Integratie-expert: Nederland is in de greep van islamofobie”, Het Parool, 20 September 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/nederland/integratie-expert-nederland-is-in-de-greep-van-islamofobie-b5400ac8/>, (Access date: 20 February 2020).

aware of the advantages a diverse personnel could bring with it.<sup>79</sup> Amsterdam has decided to use “mystery guests” to fight discrimination. Organisations that are found to differentiate between potential employees will be publicly shamed.<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

During a thorough investigation into the status quo of Islam and Muslims in the Netherlands in 2019 one word in particular kept popping up: *polarisation*. This word itself forms the perfect summary of the crisis in the West regarding Islam at the moment. Each passing day, the gap between Muslims and non-Muslims seems to be getting larger, with Muslims getting more and more tired of being misunderstood, mis- or underrepresented, otherised, being used as a topic for political gain, etc. On the other hand, non-Muslims, native Dutch citizens in particular, are facing a fear against the unknown, insecurity about the future, and a feeling that they have to compromise too much on their own culture.

What is even more interesting is that both sides seem to put the blame on media and social media in particular. With the situation being thus, it seems advisable for the government to conduct further research on this topic and investigate how this process can be reversed, and how media and social media can be used to promote true liberalism within the country where everyone is free to be themselves without this being a source of hate and intolerance against the other. In order to do so, it is important to get to the bottom of what exactly is the cause of this growing sense of intolerance and hate towards the opposite “pole”, what is it that makes people feel uneasy with the presence or the attitude of the other.

As the study of Meld Islamofobie illustrated very clearly, most Muslims simply mention the discrimination they face, but do not file complaints because they believe they cannot prove anything, won't be listened to, or taken seriously by the authorities. This in itself is very alarming and summarises the ever-growing polarisation and lack of mutual understanding in the Netherlands. The fact that a citizen of a certain country does not feel supported enough to ask for his rights and protest when discriminated, or worse even, develops this “what can we do about it, anyway?” attitude shows a very severe flaw in the country's way of governing, especially a country like the Netherlands which bases its constitution primarily on the equality of all citizens and secondarily on the freedom of religion. It is also disturbing to see that the police force with a lack of Muslim officers is renowned for its Islamophobic attitude. A lot of Muslims experience types of discrimination that might not even be identified as “real discrimination” as they manifest themselves on a regular basis and in a subtle

79. “Kick-off pilot ‘Inclusieve werkvloer Midden-Limburg’”, MKB Limburg, <https://www.mkb limburg.nl/nieuws/persbericht-kickoff-pilot-ainclusieve-werkvloer-middenlimburg/>, (Access date: 20 February 2020).

80. Michiel Couzy, “Mystery guests ingezet tegen arbeidsdiscriminatie”, Het Parool, 15 January 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/mystery-guests-ingezet-tegen-arbeidsdiscriminatie-b7c7993b/>, (Access date: 20 February 2020).

way, such as being excluded from groups because wearing a hijab makes them “different” or being told they “speak very good Dutch” despite being a third-generation migrant – in other words, daily occurrences that subtly suggest that they are not full-fledged Dutch citizens.

On the other hand, consciously or subconsciously, governmental institutions seem to feed this idea of Muslims not really being “authentic” Dutch citizens by their actions and statements. While the growing popularity of populist extreme-right ideas and parties such as PVV is worrying indeed, the real issue lies with the non-extreme-right parties that seem to participate in this anti-Muslim racism, making this more acceptable and widespread, instead of curbing this kind of behaviour and intolerant speech. A perfect example of this is Prime Minister Mark Rutten’s statement that he “wouldn’t send his kid there” when asked about the Hagia Cornelius High School, while as the head of the country his job was to defend the rights of Muslims, allowing them to have their own type of education as long as they are approved by the inspection - which was the case - even if it doesn’t match his own educational philosophy. This seems to be an attitude imitated by many politicians: as soon as there is a situation somehow related to Islam or Muslims, many politicians stand up and unite to openly criticise the opposite side rather than taking a neutral position and trying to get to the root of the problem without turning it into an “us-them” situation. Another instance that seems to feed the fear and spread it even further is the secret service, stressing the possibility of a Jihadist attack and the so-called growing influence of Salafism in the Netherlands, with several schools being targeted for being a source of hate speech against “the West”. The fact of the matter is that there is no solid proof for any of these topics leading to the agency itself being investigated. But the damage is done: the idea of Salafism taking over the Netherlands has taken the country in its grip and has become the cause of many attacks on Muslims and Islamic institutions.

Based on this report and the aforementioned remarks, three suggestions for policies can be made:

Education is still excessively one-sided. Muslims feel under- and misrepresented. Islam consists of many different religious groups, sects, schools of thought, ranging from ultra-orthodox to ultra-liberal and reformist, yet the only school that comes to mind nowadays due to excessive media coverage is Salafism (even Sunnism and Shiism have been banished to the background). Islam needs to be stripped bare of all layers of fear and prejudice and shown in all its diversity. It is also necessary to teach history in a more intercultural and borderless way, to illustrate how religions and cultures interflow, and how they have affected one another throughout the ages, be it the Ottoman-Dutch Alliance or the Arab-Muslim contributions to science.

Secondly, non-Muslims need to be made aware that asking questions like “Why hide your hair? You’re much prettier without a headscarf!”, “Aren’t you hot in those clothes?”, “Aren’t you thirsty (during Ramadan)?” and other comments that stress

Muslims' otherness are very bothersome and unnecessary, and that Muslims have identities and personalities that stretch way beyond their religious identity. While extreme-right groups are indeed a relatively real threat and governments should take the necessary precautions, as Meld Islamofobie's report shows, it is the hidden Islamophobia that is especially unsettling.

Thirdly, it also needs to be understood by both the people and the authorities in general that, even though the Netherlands is a secular country, for many Muslims their God and the afterlife are very real and that actively limiting them from performing their religious duties (ban on headscarf, not being able to pray at work, etc.) causes severe unhappiness, stress, and even depression for Dutch Muslim citizens, actively handicapping them from functioning properly within society. It is also this factor that discourages young Muslims from pursuing a higher education as most of them know (or believe) there won't be a workplace willing to employ them if they do so.

## Chronology

- **March 2019:** The intelligence service AIVD published the results of its yearly report stating that Salafist ideology is being taught in some after-school classes, triggering several Islamophobic acts towards Islamic institutions.
- **March 2019:** The AIVD published a report stating that Salafist thought is being taught in the newly founded Cornelius Haga High School, causing a crisis that reached national levels.
- **03.03.2019:** A banner with insulting phrases was placed on a window frame of the As-Sunnah Mosque in The Hague.
- **22.03.2019:** Geert Wilders calls out to close all Islamic schools.
- **08.04.2019:** Several people attending a mosque were beaten by a father and son in Waddinxveen.
- **16.05.2019:** The Nasser Mosque in Veenendaal was soiled by unknown attackers.
- **09.06.2019:** The PVV presented a ban on several Islamic expressions, such as the building of mosques and the printing of the Qur'an (anti-Islam law).
- **13.07.2019:** Police coach Carel Boers resigned after years of duty due to issues such as Islamophobia and intimidation against women not being dealt with by the relevant authorities.
- **01.08.2019:** The ban against the burqa and niqab in public spaces is implemented. The ban is valid in places such as public transportation, hospitals, and schools.
- **16.09.2019:** Anti-Islamic posters and banners were hung on the Abou Bakr Mosque in Almere.

- **25.09.2019:** The Party for the Animals submitted a new proposal to have religious slaughter without sedation banned by law.
- **12-14.11.2019:** Several mosques received a threatening letter depicting a man hanging from the gallows with the word “ISLAM” written next to it.
- **30.12.2019:** Geert Wilders called out to his followers to organise another cartoon contest depicting the prophet Muhammad.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**NORTH  
MACEDONIA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

ORHAN CEKA



## The Author

**Orhan Ceka** is a PhD candidate in the Law and Politics Program at the University of Graz, working on the governance of Islam in the Balkans. Ceka has an MA degree in Democracy and Human Rights from the University of Bologna/Sarajevo with a focus on the identity of Balkan Muslims. He conducted studies for his MA on public policy at Sabanci University, Istanbul. Ceka has worked at the Southeast European University, the Centre for Southeast European Studies (CSEES) at the University of Graz, and Sabanci University, and was the director of the Liberal Alternative Institute in Tetovo, North Macedonia. His research interests focus on the fields of politics of religion, identity politics, Balkan Muslims, and religious institutions, movements, and organizations. Email: orhanceka@yahoo.com

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Orhan Ceka: *Islamophobia in North Macedonia: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraktli & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

Although 2019 was a year of presidential elections, ethnic and religious incidents as a result of election campaigns were not reported, and an ethnic Macedonian was supported and promoted as a common presidential candidate by both Macedonian and Albanian political parties (SDSM and DUI respectively). Stevo Pendarovski won the elections with a combination of Macedonian and Albanian votes. This comes as a change because usually around elections ethnic- and religious-based incitements skyrocket. Electoral campaigns were a way for the then ruling political party VM-RO-DPME (up to 2016) to instigate hatred, to further divide the country, and to portray an image of intolerance amongst the communities living in the country.

Religious intolerance in North Macedonia although decreasing compared to several years ago when ethnic and religious intolerance and hatred went hand in hand, is still present in new and more sophisticated forms. Compared to the previous year when there were burning of mosques, in 2019, such incidents were not reported. However, religious and ethnic affiliation have been causes of stirring up a number of very harsh Islamophobic verbal attacks and have provided the basis for discrimination on several levels of public life.

Even if they might seem minor, certain visible incidents took place in 2019 such as the Islamophobic post of an army member in response to the New Zealand shooting; the hateful reactions towards the opening of the Ali Pasha Mosque, an Ottoman era mosque, in Ohrid; the petition of non-Muslim residents in Strumica to lower the volume of the *adhan*; the many harsh and Islamophobic reactions of a journalist and a left-wing politician on the political engagement of a hijab-wearing activist within the framework of the ruling political party, SDSM; and the ongoing discrimination towards the students of the Islamic religious high schools (madrasas) who are still not allowed to continue on to university education at any national public or private university except for the Faculty of Islamic Sciences.

Similar to the previous year when a hijab-wearing woman was not allowed to enter a restaurant in Skopje, an ethnic Albanian Muslim was refused service in a restaurant in Prilep. The Commission on Anti-discrimination and the Office of the Ombudsman haven't published any reports as of yet related to this and other cases of Islamophobic incidents.

Several local human right NGOs in the country have pioneered the fight against discrimination on religious grounds and have been vocal in reporting cases of hate speech based on affiliation with the Islamic faith. Unfortunately, Muslim organizations overall and the Islamic Community of North Macedonia have not decisively positioned themselves as protectors of the rights of Muslims in the country.

## Извршно резиме

Иако 2019 година беше изборна година за претседателски избори, не беа пријавени етнички и религиозни инциденти како резултат на изборни кампањи, а етнички Македонец беше поддржан и промовиран како претседателски кандидат и од македонските и од албанските политички партии (СДСМ и ДУИ) како заеднички кандидат. Истиот победи на изборите со комбинација на македонски и албански гласови. Ова доаѓа како промена затоа што обично околу изборите етничките и религиозните инциденти беа нормална појава, што беше начин за тогашната владејачка политичка партија ВМРО-ДПМНЕ (до 2016 година) да поттикне омраза и дополнително да ја подели земјата и да прикаже слика за нетолеранција меѓу заедниците кои живеат во земјата.

Религиозната нетрпеливост во земјата сè уште е присутна во нови и пософистицирани форми иако се намалува во однос на пред неколку години кога етничката и верската нетолеранција и омразата одеа рака под рака. Споредено со претходната година кога имало палење џамии, во 2019 година не се пријавени вакви инциденти. Сепак, религиозната и етничката припадност се причините за разгорување на некои многу груби исламофобични вербални напади и биле основа за дискриминација на повеќе нивоа на јавниот живот.

Колку и да изгледа незначаен бројот на инциденти, сепак неколку видливи инциденти се случиле во текот на 2019 година, како што е исламофобичниот пост на припадник на армијата во однос на пукањето во Нов Зеланд; реакциите кон отворањето на џамијата Алипаша, џамија од Отоманска ера во Охрид; петиција на немуслиманските жители во Струмица да го намалат гласот на езанот во маалската џамија; многуте остри и исламофобични реакции на новинар и левоориентиран политичар за политичкиот ангажман во рамките на владејачката политичка партија, СДСМ, на активистка која носи хиџаб; и тековната дискриминација кон учениците од исламските верски средни училишта, медреси, на кои сè уште не им е дозволено да го продолжат своето универзитетско образование на кој било јавен или приватен универзитет во земјата, освен Факултетот за исламски науки.

Слично како претходната година кога на жена со хиџаби не и беше дозволено да влегува во ресторан во Скопје, на етнички Албанец и муслиман му било одбиено служење во ресторан во Прилеп. Комисијата за антидискриминација и Канцеларијата на народниот правобранител сè уште не објавија никакви извештаи поврзани со овој и другите случаи на исламофобични инциденти.

Неколку локални невладини организации од областа на човековите права во земјата беа пионери на борбата против религиозната дискриминација

и беа гласни во известувањето за случаи на говор на омраза врз основа на припадност кон исламската вера. За жал, муслиманските организации и Исламската заедница на Северна Македонија не се позиционираа себеси како заштитници на правата на муслиманите во земјата.

## Përmbledhje ekzekutive

Megjithëse viti 2019 ishte vit zgjedhor për Zgjedhjet Presidenciale, incidentet etnike dhe fetare si rezultat i fushatave zgjedhore nuk u raportuan, dhe një maqedonas etnik u mbështet dhe u promovua si kandidat presidencial nga partitë politike maqedonase dhe shqiptare (LSDM dhe BDI) si kandidat i përbashkët. Si rrjedhojë, ai fitoi zgjedhjet me një kombinim të votave maqedonase dhe shqiptare. Kjo vjen si një ndryshim sepse zakonisht rreth zgjedhjeve numri i incidenteve me bazë etnike dhe fetare rritej jashtëzakonisht, dhe e gjithë kjo ishte një mënyrë që partia politike qeverisëse në atë kohë VMRO-DPMF (deri në 2016) të nxiste urrejtje dhe të përçajë më tej vendin dhe të jep një imazh të jotolerancës në mesin e komuniteteve që jetojnë në vend.

Jotoleranca fetare në vend, edhe pse në rënie krahasuar me disa vite më parë kur jotoleranca dhe urrejtja etnike dhe fetare shkonin krah për krah, është akoma e pranishme në forma të reja dhe më të sofistikuara. Në krahasim me një vit më parë kur kishte djegie të xhamive, në vitin 2019 incidente të tilla nuk janë raportuar. Sidoqoftë, përkatësia fetare dhe etnike kanë qenë shkaqe të nxitjes së disa sulmeve verbale islamofobike dhe kanë qenë baza për diskriminim në disa nivele të jetës publike.

Edhe pse numri mund të mës jetë i madh, disa incidente shumë të dukshme kanë ndodhur gjatë vitit 2019 siç është posti islamofobik i një anëtareje të ushtrisë lidhur me të shtënat në Zelandën e Re; reagimet plot urrejtje ndaj hapjes së Alipasha xhamisë, një xhami e epokës osmane në Ohër; peticion i banorëve jo-muslimanë në Strumicë për të ulur zërin e ezanit; reagimet e shumta të ashpra dhe islamofobike të një gazetari dhe një politikani të majtë për angazhimin politik të një aktivisteje me shami/hixhab brenda partisë politike në pushtet, LSDM; dhe diskriminimi i vazhdueshëm ndaj studentëve të shkollave të mesme fetare islamike, medreseve, të cilëve ende nuk u lejohej të vazhdojnë arsimin e tyre universitar në universitetet publike ose private, përveç Fakultetit të Shkencave Islame.

Ngjashëm me vitin e kaluar kur një grua me hixhab nuk lejohej të hynte në një restorant në Shkup, një shqiptari etnik dhe myslimani i'u refuzua shërbimi në një restorant në Prilep. Komisioni për Anti-diskriminim dhe Zyra e Avokatit të Popullit nuk kanë publikuar ende ndonjë raport që lidhet me këtë dhe raste të tjera të incidenteve islamofobike.

Disa OJQ lokale të së drejtës së njeriut në vend kanë qenë pioniere në luftën kundër diskriminimit në baza fetare dhe kanë qenë të zëshme në raportimin e rasteve të gjuhës së urrejtjes bazuar në përkatësinë fetare, gjegjësisht besimin islam. Fatkeqësisht, organizatat muslimane në përgjithësi dhe Bashkësia Fetare Islame e Maqedonisë së Veriut nuk e kanë pozicionuar veten si mbrojtës të të drejtave të myslimanëve në vend.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** North Macedonia

**Type of Regime:** Unitary parliamentary republic

**Form of Government:** Parliamentary Republic

**Ruling Parties:** Coalition of Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) and Democratic Union of Albanians (DUI) (leftist), and Alternativa

**Opposition Parties:** The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and Coalition “For a better Macedonia” (right-wing), Alliance for Albanians (AA), Besa Movement, Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA)

**Last Elections:** 2016 Parliamentary Elections (VMRO DPMNE: 51 seats [39.4%]; SDSM: 49 seats [37.9%]; DUI: 10 seats [7.5%]; Besa Movement: 5 seats [5%]; Alliance for Albanians: 3 seats [3%]; DPA: 2 seats [2.7%]). The current government coalition is leftist.

**Total Population:** 2,022,547 (2002 Census)

**Major Languages:** Macedonian and Albanian

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism). The constitution lists five religious groups: the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Religious Community in Macedonia, the Catholic Church, the Evangelical Methodist Church, and the Jewish Community.

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** N/A

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** N/A

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Macedonian Orthodox 64.8%, Muslim 33.3%, other Christian 0.4%, other and unspecified 1.5% (2002 est.)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 700,000 (33.3%) according to 2002 Census (Macedonia 2017 International Religious Freedom Report)

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Islamic Religious Community of Macedonia

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of North Macedonia, NGO Legis

**Far-Right Parties:** N/A

**Far-Right Movements:** N/A

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

The year 2019 was yet another election year for North Macedonia with presidential elections taking place. Unlike other years, however, there were not any reported incidents of discrimination on ethnic or religious grounds, which especially during the rule of the VMRO-DPMNE was a common card used by the political parties in government. Not only did the country not face incidents of ethnic and religious nature as a result of the elections, but interestingly it was the first time that an ethnic Macedonian candidate, Stevo Pendarovski, was supported and promoted by both an ethnic Macedonian party (SDSM) and ethnic Albanian party (DUI). As a result, with both Macedonian and Albanian votes, Pendarovski won the presidential elections with a small margin against a very nationalistic opponent.

This is not to say that religious intolerance is not present in the country, but rather that it manifests and reflects itself in ways that are more sophisticated and indirect. In comparison to the previous and earlier years when ethnic and religious hatred and incidents were far more present, in 2019, there were no major incidents reported. However, Islamophobia has surfaced in several cases of verbal attacks and in several other cases of discrimination based on religious affiliation on different levels of public life.

When reporting on cases of Islamophobia it is very difficult to make a distinction between ethnic and religious hatred and discrimination because the two in many cases go hand in hand unless there is an explicit case that targets religious manifestation only. In the Republic of North Macedonia religious and ethnic differences almost coincide,<sup>1</sup> and in many cases interethnic incidents also portray or are aided by interreligious intolerance, and vice-versa. Thus many cases of ethnic hatred have elements of Islamophobia as well. A more recent incident of the amalgamation of ethnic and religious belonging and the consequent incitement of Islamophobic sentiments is the anti-Turkish narratives which are often cited when there is a hate speech towards either mosque-building or the Muslim presence in the country and the Ottoman past. This particular type of Islamophobia targeting Turks and the Ottoman past is not only present amongst non-Muslims but also among Muslim intellectuals who in their self-portrayal as westernized elites reject any Islamic heritage and reflect very negative and Islamophobic sentiments towards Turkey and the Ottoman past. On that note, during election campaigns there is a regular Islamophobic narrative towards the Besa Movement, an Albanian political party, which is constantly accused of having an Islamic background and being financed by foreign states.

1. The majority of Albanians are Muslim, while the majority of Macedonians are Orthodox, thus the interethnic intolerance in many cases reflects interreligious intolerance. Turks and Bosniaks are generally Muslims as well. Thus any type of discrimination targeting these ethnic groups has elements of Islamophobia as well.

Leading up to the writing of this report, extensive research was conducted on the reported cases and incidents related to Islamophobia and particularly into the reports of the Office of the Ombudsman, the Commission for Prevention of Discrimination, and media reports. Furthermore, the author relied on contacts with NGOs and their reports, and discussions with religious institutions, organizations, and individuals that have helped in finding cases with subtle nuances of discrimination based on religious belief. Information was gathered in the local languages spoken by the Muslim communities in the country.<sup>2</sup>

## **Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events**

### **Physical and Verbal Attacks**

Very often there is a strong link between ethnic and religious discrimination in North Macedonia, specifically since certain ethnicities such as Albanians, Turks, and Bosniaks are at the same time for the most part Muslim. In many cases there is a combined xenophobia when it comes to such individuals who are both ethnically and religiously discriminated. Muslim women that wear the hijab are more easily the targets of Islamophobia; for Muslim men, the religious identifiers are less prominent. Speaking in an ethnic language might be a way of detecting that one belongs to a specific ethnic group or to a religious group. On that note, the case with Ezcan Alioski, a member of the North Macedonian national football team, who was expelled from a restaurant in his hometown of Prilep for speaking Albanian, can possibly have more than an ethnic layer to it. The employees of the restaurant, after hearing Alioski talking to his parents and relatives in Albanian, told them to leave with the explanation that all tables are reserved and there is no place in the restaurant. The football player explained this event as follows: “I experienced being undesirable in the restaurant La Strada in Prilep, just because my family and I spoke Albanian. I am a member of the Macedonian national team and I do my best in every match for this country, honestly and from the bottom of my heart. But I certainly don’t see why I don’t have the right to speak to my family in my mother tongue. I really feel very ashamed.”<sup>3</sup>

A similar case occurred in 2018 in Skopje at the restaurant Portofino Osteria and Bar that refused service to a customer due to her hijab. Her case was closed in early 2019 when the Commission for Protection against Discrimination as a state body confirmed discrimination based on religion and religious beliefs, and de-

---

2. All translations in the current report from local languages (Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish, and Bosnian) into English have been made by the author.

3. “Македонскиот репрезентативец Алиоски избркан од прилепски ресторан”, Civil Media, 13 June 2019, <https://civilmedia.mk/makedonskiot-representativets-alioski-izbrkan-od-prilepski-restoran/>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

manded that the restaurant ceases such practice or it will face further prosecution from the authorities?.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 1:** Tittle of an article in Ina Online reads, Police with inspectors go to the mosque in Strumica to lower the volume of the *adhan*.<sup>5</sup>

Another incident occurred in Strumica, but this time it was a petition by the local non-Muslim residents against the Islamic call to prayer, *adhan*, at the local mosque. The police of Strumica in cooperation with the Inspectorate of the Living Environment entered the neighborhood of the Turks in Strumica, as the citizens of

4. “Државата потврди дискриминација кај скопски ресторан кој не и дозволи на муштерика со хиџаб да седне на маса”, Religija Mk, 25 January 2019, <http://religija.mk/drzavata-potvrdi-diskriminacija-kaj-skopski-restoran-koj-ne-i-dozvolni-na-mushterika-so-hidzab-da-sedne-na-masa/>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

5. “Policia me inspektorë shkon në xhaminë e Strumicës për t'a ndalë zërin e lartë të ezanit (VIDEO)”, Ina Online, 13 September 2019, <https://ina-online.net/policia-me-inspektore-shkon-ne-xhamine-e-strumices-per-ta-ndale-zerin-e-larte-te-ezanit-video/>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

this city complained with a petition against the high volume of the call to prayer from the mosque of this neighborhood. The Municipality of Strumica made a request for intervention on the grounds that it received hundreds of complaints from local residents.<sup>6</sup> This undertaking, however, was not well received and around 300 Muslims came out to the streets to protest,<sup>7</sup> especially since there is also a church in the same neighborhood, but the local residents of the Muslim community have never reported a problem with it. To calm the citizens, the authorities said they would seek meetings with religious leaders to resolve the issue.

## Employment

In 2019, there weren't official reports of Muslims being discriminated in the process of employment or at workplaces, at least in official channels. This doesn't mean that there wasn't discrimination based on religious affiliation in the hiring process or during employment but rather that the problem is very difficult to document given that direct proof relating to such discrimination cannot be inferred. This is especially true in relation to women who wear a hijab who are often refused employment because of their visible Islamic appearance. Many Islamic organizations believe that such cases exist and such discrimination has occurred in 2019 in the education or healthcare sector with job rejections following after interviews.

On a positive note, compared to previous years more hijab-wearing Muslim women can be seen employed in state institutions, schools, and hospitals. This is an improvement compared to the last several years. The Office of the Ombudsman hasn't published their report for 2019 yet, although even last year when there was a reported case, the report didn't mention it. This was mainly due to the fact that no visible and direct evidence was present as to make the claim that employment was refused due to the wearing of the hijab.

In terms of rights to observe their religion at the workplace, Muslim employees are given free days for religious holidays according to the legal regulations of North Macedonia for national holidays where Eid-al Fitr is considered to be a national holiday for all citizens of North Macedonia while Eid-al Adha is a religious holiday only for Muslims, who are exempt from work on both these days. However, there are no legal means to have shorter working hours during Ramadan or to be exempt from working during the Jummah prayer. There are some reported cases where the employer would not allow the employee to observe the Jummah prayer or any prayer.

---

6. "Policia me inspektore shkon ne xhamine e Strumices per ta ndale zerin e larte te ezanit (VIDEO)", Ina Online, 13 September 2019, <https://ina-online.net/policia-me-inspektore-shkon-ne-xhamine-e-strumices-per-ta-ndale-zerin-e-larte-te-ezanit-video/>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

7. "Инцидент во Струмица: Струмичките муслимани ќе ја запалат црквата ако се забрани прегласното ечење на оцата (ВИДЕО)", Promotor, 13 September 2019, <https://promotor.mk/incident-vo-strumica-strumichkite-muslimani-kje-ja-zapalat-crkvata-ako-se-zabrani-preglasnoto-echenje-na-odzata-video/>, (Access date: 13 March 2020).

Most of these cases are with Muslim employers who feel that because they are Muslim themselves they are allowed to limit the religious rights of members of their own faith community. Only in rare cases have such incidents been reported when the employer is a non-Muslim.<sup>8</sup>

## Education

While there were no cases where textbooks or teaching material had any type of Islamophobic content, within the education sector the issue of Islamic high schools (madrasas) was once more a contested topic. The students of Isa Beu madrasa in Skopje, both the male and female sections, seem to be the most discriminated category of students in the Republic of North Macedonia in 2019. According to official data, about 1,000 students attending these madrasas do not have the opportunity to enroll in private and public universities in the Republic of North Macedonia as the law on the state exam does not recognize this category of students as eligible to take the state exam.<sup>9</sup> The state exam regulations recognize all types of high school students as eligible with the sole exemption of the students who have graduated from the Islamic religious high schools. Without the state exam, students cannot enroll in university studies.

Apropos the inability of madrasa graduates to enroll for university studies, the Education Office of the University of Tetova provided the following explanation for TV Shenja:

“Based on this legal provision, students who do not successfully pass the state *Matura* will not have the right to apply and enroll in first cycle studies. [...] The status of the madrasa in our country is not legally defined and is not part of the education system, so we estimate that for this reason the state *Matura* exam cannot be applied for them. Under current law, unfortunately these students will not meet the criteria for application in the first cycle studies if they do not pass the state *Matura* exam, unless by the end of the registration period another decision is brought by the relevant institutions of the country or a solution is found by the parties involved.”<sup>10</sup>

According to information that was gathered by the Almakos news portal up to and including 23 September 2019, no madrasa graduate has been admitted to any of the public or private educational institutions in North Macedonia, with the exception of the Faculty of Islamic Sciences in Skopje.<sup>11</sup>

8. Interviews conducted with several employees by the author.

9. “Nxënësit e medresesë kategoria më e diskriminuar në Maqedoni, MASH nuk kanë përgjigje”, Almakos, 2 April 2019, <https://www.almakos.com/nxenesit-e-medresese-kategoria-me-e-diskriminuar-ne-maqedoni-mash-nuk-kan-pergjigje/>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

10. Ibid.

11. “SKANDAL: Asnjë medresant nuk pranohet në universitetet publike dhe private në Maqedoni!”, Almakos, 23 September 2019, <https://www.almakos.com/skandal-asnje-medresant-nuk-pranohet-ne-universitetet-publike-dhe-private-ne-maqedoni/>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

In response to the problems that the madrasas are facing, the Minister of Education Arbër Ademi gave the following statement,

“The other part of the promise that must be fulfilled soon is the institutionalization of the high school of the madrasa ‘Isa Beu’ and in the coming days, together with the working groups that will be assigned by the IRC [Islamic Religious Community], we will review those legal provisions in fact, to propose a law prepared by us and to draft, in the best possible way, that draft law that meets the needs and requirements of the IRC, as the founder of the madrasa, but also of the entire Muslim community here in our country.”<sup>12</sup>

The head of Islamic Religious Community, Sulejman Rexhepi, responding to the promise of the minister of education of the Republic of North Macedonia showed hopefulness stating that this issue is moving towards resolution, expressing his conviction that the issue will be resolved quickly and that next year the madrasas will no longer face this problem.<sup>13</sup> It is certain that we will revert to this issue in next year’s report to examine whether it has been resolved as without a doubt it is a clear discrimination of the right of education of those students who decide to graduate from religious high schools.

## Politics

In the political context, several issues have sparked discussions and, on several occasions, there have been clear Islamophobic political incidents.

Several arguments and clashes took place in 2019 between the Islamic Religious Community (IRC) of North Macedonia, the institution representing Muslims in the country, and the authorities and the NGO sector. The issue of waqfs is an ongoing struggle for the IRC: it has made claims over properties that still haven’t been returned to the institution by the state and has demanded their return through the denationalization process. So far, 15 percent of the property has been returned, 30 percent has been repaid with bonds, and 55 percent of the property is awaiting a decision. At the same time, there is also property that the state has refused to return.<sup>14</sup> The IRC claimed that they perceive the fact that the state does not return their property as Islamophobia. Moreover, they made it clear to the government that confiscating someone else’s property was an act of robbery, and that selective treatment of religious communities in the denationalization process was discrimination.

12. “(VIDEO) Premtohet zgjidhje e çështjes së mospranimit të medresantëve”, Shenja TV, 1 October 2019, <https://shenja.tv/video-premtohet-zgjidhje-e-ceshtjes-se-mospranimit-te-medresanteve/>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

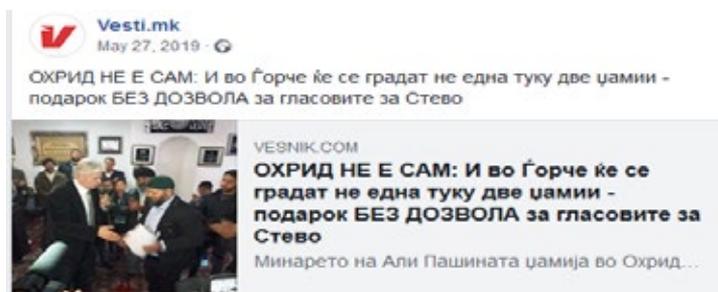
13. Ibid.

14. “ИВЗ обвинува за исламофобија оти државата не ѝ го враќа имотот”, Mak Fax, 26 March 2019, <https://makfax.com.mk/makedonija/%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%B7-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%83%D0%B2%D0%B0-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%BE%D1%84%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B8-%D0%B4%D1%80%D0%B6%D0%B0/>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).



**Figure 2:** Ali Pasha Mosque before and after reconstruction.<sup>15</sup>

The reconstruction of the Ali Pasha Mosque in Ohrid was a major issue in the city of Ohrid with several protests, petitions, and citizen initiatives against it and especially against the reconstruction of a 32-meter-high minaret, noting that it would dominate the Old Bazaar and completely change the view of that part of the city. In addition to the minaret, construction activities were disputed in the immediate vicinity of the building, which the Ohrid-based Citizens' Association *Sovest* (Consciousness) claimed had historical layers of artifacts and archeological remains long before the mosque was built. Despite the minaret, which they claimed was never 32 meters high, they opposed the demolition of all historical landmarks and debris during the reconstruction of the mosque's courtyard. After several protests, as well as filed charges against state institutions for conducting reconstruction with incomplete documentation, a minaret mosque of 24 meters height was built as a compromise solution. As a final result, the reconstructed Ali Pasha Mosque in the Old Bazaar in Ohrid was solemnly opened in November 2019 in the presence of believers of the Islamic faith, the mufti of the IRC, as well as the Deputy Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey Ahmet Misbah Demircan.<sup>16</sup>



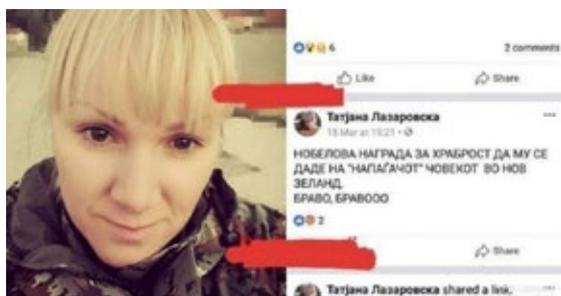
**Figure 3:** Facebook post states, "Ohrid Is Not Alone- In Gjorce Not One but Two Mosques Will Be Built without Permission as Presents of the Votes for Stevo."<sup>17</sup>

15. "Денес свечено отворање на Алипашината џамија", Ohrid Net, 28 November 2019, <http://ohridnet.com/vesti/ohrid/20354-denes-svecheno-otvoranje-na-alipashinata-dzamiya>, (Access date: 7 January 2020).

16. "Пресечена црвената лента за Алипашината џамија", Religija, 28 November 2019, <http://religija.mk/prsechena-crvenata-lenta-za-alipashinata-dzamiya/>, (Access date: 7 January 2020).

17. Vesti.mk, Facebook, 27 May 2019, <https://hi-in.facebook.com/www.Vesti.mk/posts/1588273904640289>, (Access date: 30 March 2020).

Continuing the discussion on mosque building, an article on the web portal Vesnik, with the presumptuous title “Ohrid Is Not Alone - In Gjorce Not One But Two Mosques Will Be Built Without Permission as Presents of the Votes for Stevo” discussed the promised mosque by the current mayor of Gjorce Petrov, Aleksandar Naumovski, for the votes of the Roma from Dame Gruev. To show how alarming the situation is, the article went on to emphasize that in the Skopje municipality of Gjorce Petrov, not one but two mosques will be built, which are intended for two different groups that perform different rituals.<sup>18</sup> It further noted that there have been similar attempts to build a mosque in the Roma neighborhood in the Dame Gruev in the past, but they did not find support from the then local government led by the VMRO-DPMNE which demolished the building as it was an illegal construction.



**Figure 4:** Facebook post of Tatjana Lazarovska, a member of the North Macedonian army, stating, “The Nobel Prize for the courage should be given to the shooter in New Zealand. Bravo, Bravo!”<sup>19</sup>

One of the most shocking Islamophobic incidents came from a member of the army of the Republic of North Macedonia. A disciplinary procedure was initiated against a professional soldier, Tatjana Lazarovska, after she spread hate speech through Facebook with the call to give a Nobel Prize to the New Zealand terrorist who killed 50 Muslims. The army of the Republic of North Macedonia issued a statement that the most severe punishment was proposed, namely termination of her engagement in the army.<sup>20,21</sup>

18. “ОХРИД НЕ Е САМ: И во Ѓорче ќе се градат не една туку две џамии - подарок БЕЗ ДОЗВОЛА за гласовите за Стево”, Vesnik, 27 May 2019, <https://vesnik.com/node/24948>, (Access date: 7 January 2020).

19. “Плусинфо: Поради говор на омраза Татјана Лазаровска ќе лета од АРМ”, MMS, 26 March 2019, <https://mms.mk/63408/%D0%BF%D0%BB%D1%83%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%BE%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%80-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D0%BC%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%98%D0%B0/>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

20. “Плусинфо: Поради говор на омраза Татјана Лазаровска ќе лета од АРМ”, MMS, 26 March 2019, <https://mms.mk/63408/%D0%BF%D0%BB%D1%83%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%BE%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%80-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D0%BC%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%98%D0%B0/>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

21. “Застрашувачки говор на омраза”, Slobodna Evropa, 26 March 2019, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%88%D1%83%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%87%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%80-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D0%BC%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B0-/29842958.html>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

After numerous reactions by the public, academia, and institutions that called for sanctions and punishment for the incitement of Islamophobia and hate, Lazarovska's profile is no longer on Facebook.

On a positive note however, a Muslim woman that sparked interest in the political sphere and the public was Mersiha Smailovikj, a gender equality activist. Smailovikj has become known to the public as an activist and the president of the NGO Legis (Skopje), and was very active in assisting refugees and migrants passing through North Macedonia at the beginning of the so-called refugee crisis. She was part of the SDSM's Labor and Social Policy Committee, and was listed as a part of the cabinet of President Stevo Pendarovski.<sup>22</sup> Around the end of 2019, in a televised debate she mentioned that she wanted to take her activism to another level, that is, to become part of parliament where she could more actively advocate for gender equality and women's representation in politics.<sup>23</sup> She is one of the rare, if not the only, hijab-wearing political activists that has been endorsed by a political party in North Macedonia, which also happens to be the ruling party and a leftist one. If Smailovikj makes it to the ballot and reserves a seat as an MP, she will be the first hijab-wearing member of the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia.

## Media

A case of a journalist inciting Islamophobia was reported by the NGO Civil which reacted to a Twitter post by the journalist Ljupco Zlatev who used the fire at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris to spread Islamophobia on social networks.<sup>24</sup> Zlatev posted a photo of the cathedral on fire on his Twitter account, accompanied by the question: "Is radical Islamism attacking Europe again?"<sup>25</sup>

In reaction, the NGO Civil stated, "The fire that engulfed Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris was used by far-right provocateurs as a pretext to spread anti-Islamic hatred and conspiracy, even after officials said they were rejecting arson as the cause. Some of the conspiracies went so far as to compare the blaze to the 9/11 attacks, despite the fact that there is no evidence whatsoever that the fire was intentional, much less an attack on Catholicism."<sup>26</sup>

22. "ЌЕ ЈА ОТВОРИ ЛИ ПЕНДАРОВСКИ ВРАТАТА ЗА МИГРАНТИТЕ: АКТИВИСТКА ЗА ПРАВАТА НА МИГРАНТИТЕ ДЕЛ ОД КАБИНЕТОТ НА ПЕНДАРОВСКИ", Infomax, 14 May 2019, <https://infomax.mk/wp/%D1%9C%D0%B5-%D0%B3%D0%B8-%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8-%D0%BB%D0%B8-%D0%BF%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%B7%D0%B0/>, (Access date: 20 March 2020).

23. "Смаиловик: Би сакала да станам дел од парламентот за подобро дејствување за родовата еднаквост", Lokalno, 25 December 2019, <https://lokalno.mk/smailovik-bi-sakala-da-stanam-del-od-parlamentot-za-podobro-dejstvuvane-za-rodovata-ednakvost/>, (Access date: 20 March 2020).

24. "Цивил' реагира дека Љупчо Златев го злоупотребил пожарот во Нотр Дам за ширење исламофобија", Faktor, 16 April 2020, <https://faktor.mk/civil-reagira-deka-ljupcho-zlatev-go-zloupotrebil-pozarot-vo-notr-dam-zashirenje-islamofobija/>, (Access date: 2 January 2020).

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.



**Figure 5:** Twitter post of journalist Ljupcho Zlatev with a caption “Is radical Islamism attacking Europe again?”<sup>27</sup>

On another note, in the wake of the news from the Council of Europe on the decision for the start of the negotiations for the EU accession of North Macedonia and Albania, the media used the opportunity to stir discussions and debates as to the reasons why the country hasn't received a green light for accession negotiations. Even though internally the political discussions did not even mention the Muslim populations of the two countries being the reason for not receiving the green light, the media used the debates beyond the country to instigate the theory that Muslims living in the country are to be blamed for not starting the negotiations for EU accession.

Such news was not necessarily limited to the decision of the European Council on starting the negotiation process for accession, but was extended to Macron's veto. These debates were present even before, as is the case with the article in InfoMax citing the Greek newspaper *Kathimerini* with the title “Katimerini: Macron Doesn't Want Macedonia in EU Because of Its Muslim Population.”<sup>28</sup> While the tone in the article itself is more critical towards the stance of the EU leaders such as Macron and Merkel, the title promotes a debate that might instigate more Islamophobia towards the Muslim population rather than criticizing the Islamophobic sentiments of Marine Le Pen or the AFD in Germany.

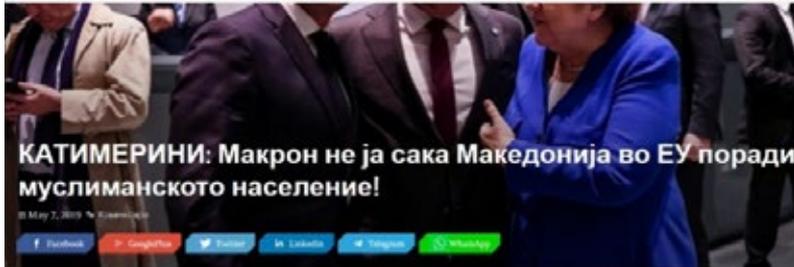
At the time in October 2019 when Macron led the opposition at the European Council and became the reason for halting the process of starting the EU accession negotiations for Albania and North Macedonia,<sup>29</sup> these types of discussions resur-

27. Ibid.

28. “КАТИМЕРИНИ: Макрон не ја сака Македонија во ЕУ поради муслиманското население!”, Infomax, 7 May 2019, <https://infomax.mk/wp/%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BD-%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D1%98%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8/>, (Access date: 2 January 2020).

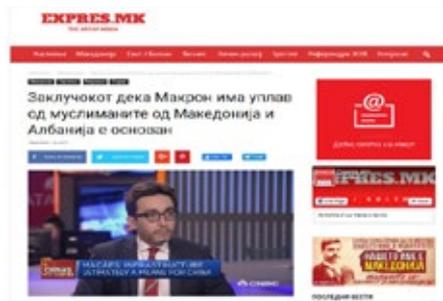
29. “EU Failure to Open Membership Talks with Albania and North Macedonia Condemned”, The Guardian, 18 October 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/18/eu-refusal-to-open-talks-with-albania-and-north-macedonia-condemned-as-historic-mistake>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

faced with the intent to put the blame for Macron's decision on the Muslim population rather than on the state, government, or European politics.



**Figure 6:** Title in the newsportal Infomax reads, “Katimerini: Macron Doesn’t Want Macedonia in the EU Due to Its Muslim Population.” 7 May 2019.<sup>30</sup>

Two such articles came up around a month after the halt of the process. One in *Expres* with the title “The Conclusion That Macron Has a Fear of Muslims from Macedonia and Albania is Well Founded” claimed that the argument that the real reason for the blockade of Macedonia and Albania by French President Macron is related to the Muslims in these two countries may be well founded quoting a source that said that even though Macron is not a vulgar Islamophobe, he may think that Europe is in danger of being absorbed by Islam.<sup>31</sup>



**Figure 7:** Title in the newsportal Expres reads, “The Conclusion That Macron Has a Fear of Muslims from Macedonia and Albania is Well Founded.” 14 November 2019.<sup>32</sup>

The other article with a similar undertone was published on *Shilo Magazine*, a news portal of Macedonians living in Australia,<sup>33</sup> with the title “Macron Fears the Islam in Albania, Macedonia and Bosnia???” The article points out that French foreign policy seems motivated by fears that Europe may be overtaken by Islam by allowing

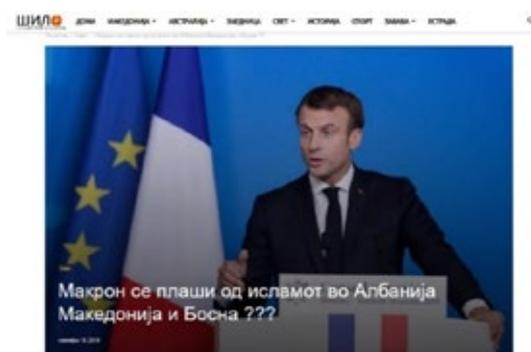
30. Ibid.

31. “Заклучокот дека Макрон има уплав од муслиманите од Македонија и Албанија е основан”, *Expres*, 14 November 2019, <https://expres.mk/zakluchokot-deka-makron-ima-uplav-od-muslimanite-od-makedonija-i-albanija-e-osnovan/>, (Access date: 2 January 2020).

32. Ibid.

33. Macedonians living in Australia are considered to have more animosity than those living in the homeland towards other ethnic groups in North Macedonia, especially Albanians who are predominantly Muslim.

Muslim-majority countries to become full EU members. The article further stated that Macron obviously does not want to let a Muslim vote or veto in the premises of the European Council,<sup>34</sup> which should be reserved only for a select few, implying mainly Christian nations.



**Figure 8:** Title in the newsportal Shilo Magazine reads, “Macron Fears the Islam in Albania, Macedonia and Bosnia???” 18 November 2019.<sup>35</sup>

Since following the European Council decision a debate over Muslims being the reason for not receiving a green light for EU accession negotiations were not present in the political discourse, articles such as the abovementioned open up unnecessary doors for Islamophobia to emerge among ordinary citizens which might at one point even come to influence public policy and political agendas.

The last point on media coverage and Islamophobia is a news article by the newspaper *Vesnik* that spread fear among non-Muslims in the country with the catchy title “In 20 Years Muslims Will Be More Numerous in Macedonia.”<sup>36</sup> The article quoting some world estimates on the rise of the Muslim population globally poses the question of whether in the case of the Balkans and in North Macedonia in particular the trend of the diminishing of the Christian population and the increase of the Muslim population will occur in the same projected trajectories or will happen faster. Based on birth rate statistics, the article claims that such a fast trend of substitution of Christians with Muslims will happen in North Macedonia given that in 2017, in the Skopje region alone (the city of Skopje plus Aracinovo, Kondovo, Petrovec, Ilinden, and Saraj) 46.5% of newborns were Macedonian and 39% of newborn babies were Albanian. Furthermore, if the babies from the Muslim families of Roma, Turks, and Bosniaks are added, in a maximum period

34. “Макрон се плаши од исламот во Албанија Македонија и Босна???”, Shilo Magazine, 18 November 2019, <https://shilomagazine.com.au/2019/11/18/%d0%bc%d0%b0%d0%ba%d1%80%d0%be%d0%bd-%d1%81%d0%b5-%d0%bf%d0%bb%d0%b0%d1%88%d0%b8-%d0%be%d0%b4-%d0%b8d1%81%d0%b-%d0%b0%d0%bc%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b2%d0%be-%d0%b0%d0%bb%d0%b1%d0%b0%d0%b-d%d0%b8%d1%98%d0%b0/>, (Access date: 2 January 2020).

35. Ibid.

36. “За 20 години муслиманите ќе бидат најбројни во Македонија”, *Vesnik*, 4 February 2019, <https://vesnik.com/node/3336>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

of one generation (or in 20 years), North Macedonia will be a predominantly Muslim country.<sup>37</sup>



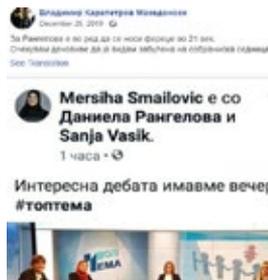
**Figure 9:** Facebook share of the article "In 20 Years Muslims Will Be More Numerous in Macedonia" by a right-wing page (8 March 2019).<sup>38</sup>

## Internet

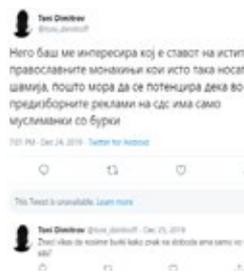
### Internet



**Figure 10:** Dimitar Apasiev's original Facebook post "there is no left-wing government in the world that has not banned wearing the headscarf/hijab! A left-wing feminist throws the headscarf with indignation, as a victory over patriarchal morality, and does not wear it."<sup>39</sup>



**Figure 11:** Facebook post of Vladimir Karapetrov "For Rangelova it's ok to wear burqa (ferexhe) in the 21st century. I am expecting to see her in hijab these days presenting in the Parliament session."



**Figure 12:** Tweet by Toni Dimitrov "I wonder what is the stance on the Orthodox nuns who also wear scarves, because it has to be noted that in the pre-election campaign of the SDSM there are only Muslim women with burqas."<sup>40</sup>

A social media storm was stirred up around the political engagement of Mersiha Smajlovikj, the activist already mentioned above, in the framework of the activities of the SDSM, the ruling political party in the country. Maybe the harshest and most

37. Ibid.

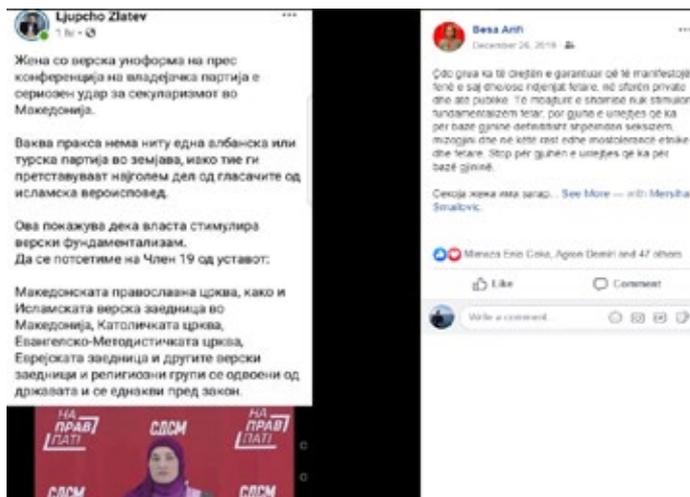
38. Makedonija, Facebook, 8 March 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/196280740558278/posts/1063200343866309/>, (Access date: 27 February 2020).

39. "Апасиев: Само нашиве NGO-Соросписки 'феминистки' го бранат ова религиозно затуцување", Republika Online, 25 December 2019, <https://republika.mk/vesti/makedonija/apasiev-samo-nashive-ngo-sorospiski-feministki-go-branat-ova-religiozno-zatucuvanje/>, (Access date: 17 January 2020).

40. Toni Dimitrov, Twitter, 24 December 2019, [https://twitter.com/toni\\_dimitroff/status/1209534644644913153](https://twitter.com/toni_dimitroff/status/1209534644644913153), (Access date: 30 April 2020).

Islamophobic reaction came from Dimitar Apasiev, an academic and a member of Levica, a more radical left-wing political party in North Macedonia, who claimed in a Facebook post that “there is no left-wing government in the world that has not banned wearing the headscarf/hijab! A left-wing feminist throws the headscarf with indignation, as a victory over patriarchal morality, and does not wear it. Only our NGO-Sorospi “feminists” are defending this religious seduction of women, which - let us remind you - was banned by Kemal Ataturk in secular Turkey. Our post-war Yugoslav authorities also banned wearing headscarves immediately after the liberation.”<sup>41</sup> His attacks are not just personal as can be seen on the post, but lash out against the exercise of the religious freedom of a woman to wear a hijab which as a politician and academic, he strongly and hatefully opposes.

On a similar note, hate speech towards wearing a hijab was further present both on Facebook and Twitter. Namely, someone named Vladimir Karapetrov reacted harshly to Mersiha’s presence in a TV discussion with Daniela Rangelova, an opposition MP, stating, “For Rangelova it’s ok to wear burqa (*ferexhe*) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I am expecting to see her in hijab these days presenting in the Parliament session.” A tweet on the same issues notes, “I wonder what is the stance on the Orthodox nuns who also wear scarves, because it has to be noted that in the pre-election campaign of the SDSM there are only Muslim women with burqas.”<sup>42</sup>



**Figure 13:** Facebook post: Besa Arifi’s reaction to Ljupcho Zlatev’s hate speech-filled post on Facebook, stating that “Hijab doesn’t stimulate religious fundamentalism, but the gender-based hate speech for sure spreads sexism, misogyny, and in this case religious and ethnic intolerance.”<sup>43</sup>

41 “Апасиев: Само нашиве NGO-Соросписки ‘феминистки’ го бранат ова религиозно затуцување”, *Republika Online*.

42. Toni Dimitrov, Twitter, 24 December 2019, [https://twitter.com/toni\\_dimitroff/status/1209534644644913153](https://twitter.com/toni_dimitroff/status/1209534644644913153), (Access date: 30 April 2020).

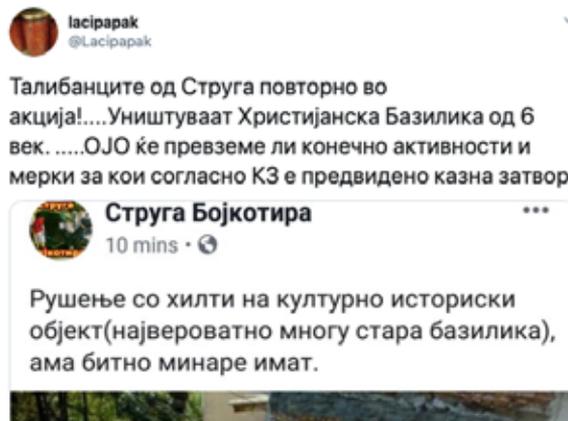
43. Besa Arifi, Facebook, 26 December 2019, [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10157409362251348&cid=742041347](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10157409362251348&cid=742041347) (Access date: 30 April 2020).

A reaction to such attacks on Smailovikj's political engagement as a hijab-wearing woman, came from Prof. Besa Arifi, a counselor of the prime minister and the president, and a prorector and assistant professor of criminal law at Southeast European University in Tetovo.

In support of Smailovikj, on her Facebook profile she stated,

“every woman has a guaranteed right to manifest her religion and/or her religious feelings, both in the private and the public sphere. Hijab doesn't stimulate religious fundamentalism, but the gender-based hate speech for sure spreads sexism, misogyny, and in this case religious and ethnic intolerance. Stop gender-based hate speech.”<sup>44</sup> (Fig. 13)

Her reaction was particularly directed at Ljupcho Zlatev, a journalist of TV Sitel, who in his original post claimed that “a woman with a religious uniform at a press conference of the ruling party is a serious hit to secularism in Macedonia. Such a practice cannot be found in an Albanian or Turkish political party in the country, although they represent most of the Muslim voters. This shows that the government stimulates religious fundamentalism.”<sup>45</sup>



**Figure 14:** A tweet by an ethnic Macedonian on the renovation of a mosque, “The Talibans of Struga in Action Again! Destroying a Christian Basilica from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century”<sup>46</sup>

The Islamophobia present in the Internet and social media also pinpoints the fact that much of the hate towards Muslims is also ethnic hate and xenophobia. In the case of the mosque renovation efforts, social media platforms presented tools to express Islamophobic sentiments. Such a case is a Facebook post sharing a photo of work in progress around mosque facilities with the caption “The Talibans of Struga

44. Ibid.

45. Ljupcho Zlatev, Facebook, 26 December 2019, [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=2913655382001239&id=100000704185638](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=2913655382001239&id=100000704185638) (Access date: 30 April 2020).

46. Lacipapak, Twitter, 31 May 2019, <https://twitter.com/lacipapak/status/1134386613356847104>, (Access date: 27 March 2020).

in action again!” (Fig. 14) The shared post states that what is being ruined might be a very old basilica but that the important thing is that they [Muslims] get a minaret.<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 15:** A tweet by an ethnic Macedonian stating, “Just as a reminder, Islam, the Ottomans, were occupiers of territories. In today’s time, as Greeks are claiming thousands of years property, what are the Muslims looking for in Macedonia? Their occupation and mosque to be recognized?”<sup>48</sup> (left)

**Figure 16:** A response to the tweet in Fig. 14, “You ruined Macedonia, may you be damned, for two years you have done more harm than the Turks that ruled us more than 500 years; they were rulers, we were slaves, what are we now can someone tell us? Beats me that we have chosen ourselves, for two years drained the country...”<sup>49</sup> (right)

Similarly, an Islamophobic tweet claimed that “Islam, the Ottomans, were occupiers of territories. In today’s time, as Greeks are claiming thousands of years property, what are the Muslims looking for in Macedonia? Their occupation and mosque to be recognized?”<sup>50</sup> (Fig. 15) In line with the thought of Muslims and Turks as occupiers another tweet makes a comparison between the rule of the current government and Ottoman rule by stating that “for two years [they, i.e. the current government] have done more harm than the Turks that ruled us [Macedonians] more than 500 years; they were rulers, we were slaves, what are we now can someone tell us?”<sup>51</sup> (Fig.16)

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

While there are numerous Islamic organizations, most of them are quite silent when it comes to Islamophobia. Most Islamic religious organizations such as the Youth Islamic Forum, Merhamet, Vision M, to name a few, work on education of young Muslims on religious practices and on becoming professionals in their field, or tackle the issue of humanitarian work. In 2019, there wasn’t any significant and visible effort made by such organizations to organize more public debates on Islamophobia, workshops for Muslims to be able to detect when discrimination based on religious

47. Ibid.

48. Mirce Acev, Twitter, 24 May 2019, <https://twitter.com/acevmir/status/1131914640026292225>, (Access date: 27 March 2020).

49. Lacipapak, Twitter, 31 May 2019.

50. Mirce Acev, Twitter, 24 May 2019.

51. Lacipapak, Twitter, 31 May 2019.

affiliation happens, or any other education and raising awareness initiatives on fighting Islamophobia.

However, organizations that work on human rights as their core work, in many instances appear to raise a voice when there is an incident that has Islamophobic elements, and are also contacted by Muslims who feel that they need to report an incident. The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of North Macedonia is one such organization.<sup>52</sup> With its online reporting platform, *Zlostorstva od Omraza (Hate Crimes)*,<sup>53</sup> it has established itself as the medium through which individuals are able not only to report cases of discrimination, be it as a victim or a witness, but also to be aided through the whole process.

The NGO Civil, as an advocate of free speech and of the fight against discrimination, has proved to be a platform in 2019 that has been active in calling out cases that were in one way or another contributing to inciting Islamophobia, especially in the context of media.

And, of course, the NGO LEGIS has for years been active especially in indirectly fighting against Islamophobia. LEGIS was also the strongest advocate of migrant rights during the period of the Balkan Route “refugee crisis” and continues to do so to this day with the continuous incoming refugees. One of its founding members, Mersiha Smajlovikj, has been a very vocal advocate against cases of Islamophobia, especially those related to hijab-wearing Muslim women.

In addition to the NGO sector, several media outlets have also been vocal when it comes to the concerns of the Muslim community in North Macedonia and the possible discrimination that affects them. For example, the news portal Almakos and TV Shenja have been particularly active in raising awareness and providing coverage of the problem with the recognition of the diplomas of the madrasa graduates by the state and their inability to enrol for university studies at national universities.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

As evidenced in this report, the number of incidents has not been high and it hasn't led to any major physical incidents targeting people, or the demolition or attacks of religious buildings and mosques. The sentiments stemming either directly as expressions of hatred towards Muslims or indirectly through interethnic intolerance, have had consequences in terms of the refusal to offer services in restaurants, petitions to lower the volume of *adhan*, the open promotion and support of anti-Muslim actions by a soldier, attacks on a hijab-wearing political activist only because of her mani-

52. The official website of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of North Macedonia, <http://mhc.org.mk/?locale=mk>, (Access date: 27 March 2020).

53. Please refer to <http://www.zlostorstvaodomraza.mk/> for unofficial (and in some cases, unverified) cases of discrimination based on religion from 2013 onwards.

festation of religion through her dress code, the possible discrimination in employment, and the discrimination in education opportunities for the students graduating from Islamic high schools for university entrance. No action was taken against hate speech towards Muslims on the Internet by state institutions although the statements were made publicly and by journalists and politicians.

Islamophobia and religious hate speech are sometimes very difficult to be documented, even more so when there isn't any national strategy to fight them or statistical data provided by state institutions. In order to increase efforts to fight Islamophobic incidents in the country, the following policies are recommended:

- Islamophobia should be included as part of hate speech and hate crime in national legislation.
- A record of cases and incidents related to Islamophobia should be regularly updated and published by the Ministry of Interior and other relevant institutions.
- Islamophobic statements on social media should be criminally charged and fined given that such statements have been made and no action has been taken towards the individuals behind them.
- The Office of the Ombudsman should work more extensively in encouraging members of the Muslim community in North Macedonia to report cases of Islamophobia and explain the reporting requirements.
- Reporting platforms created by NGOs should make Islamophobia a specific category within the reporting options in order to get a clearer picture of incidents related to it, rather than using "religious belief" as a general category.
- In an effort to fight this phenomenon, Muslim NGOs should focus their work on educating Muslim youth and the community on what Islamophobia is, how to detect it, and how and to whom to report it. Unless Muslims understand the nature of Islamophobia, they will not be aware of it and will not report the incidents when they occur.
- The Islamic Community of North Macedonia should take more initiative in not only fighting for the rights of Muslims but also in creating channels and platforms for the detection of Islamophobia, and advocate and react on an institutional level against statements, incidents, and cases that are either present in the media or are gathered by the imams.
- A possible network of imams against Islamophobia could potentially provide a platform for Muslims to report cases of discrimination based on religious affiliation and of hate speech/crime nationwide.
- Positive discrimination practices should be implemented in the employment and education sectors so as to allow more hijab-wearing Muslim women to be present both in schools and in state institutions.

## Chronology

- **15.03.2019:** Tatjana Lazarevska, a member of the army, posted on Facebook: “A Nobel Prize for courage should be given to the shooter in New Zealand. Bravo, Bravo!” The army of the Republic of North Macedonia has suspended the soldier for spreading religious hate and has taken measures.
- **13.06.2019:** A member of the Macedonian national football team was refused service in a restaurant in Prilep because he spoke Albanian, one of the major languages of Muslims in North Macedonia.
- **13.09.2019:** Police with inspectors went to the mosque in Strumica to lower the volume of the *adhan*.
- **24.12.2019:** Islamophobic reaction from Dimitar Apasiev, an academic and a member of Levica, a radical left political party in North Macedonia, towards a hijab-wearing political activist.
- **26.12.2019:** Ljupcho Zlatev, a journalist of TV Sitel, stated that a woman with religious attire at a press conference of the ruling party is a serious hit to secularism in Macedonia. He stated that such a practice cannot be found in an Albanian or Turkish political party in the country, although they represent most of the Muslim voters. This, he claimed, shows that the government stimulates religious fundamentalism.



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**NORWAY**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

VEMUND AARBAKKE



## The Author

**Vemund Aarbakke** is an assistant professor at the Department of Political Sciences, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. He holds a PhD in history from the University of Bergen, Norway where for many years he was associated with the Centre of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies. His publications are mainly related to minorities and Islam in the Balkans, but occasionally he also pursues issues related to his native Norway. Email: [vaarbakk@polsci.auth.gr](mailto:vaarbakk@polsci.auth.gr)

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Vemund Aarbakke: *Islamophobia in Norway: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

Islam does not have a long historical presence in Norway. It started with labour migration in the late 1960s. After restrictions on labour migration in 1975, most new arrivals were due to family reunion and, in recent years, increasingly to refugees. The Norwegian discourse on immigration is mainly framed as a question of “integration”. This, however, presupposes a model of integration that is much stricter than the social organisation in the immigrants’ countries of origin. Hostile behaviour towards Muslim and their perceived lack of adjustment to Norwegian norms occurred repeatedly in 2019. The critique comes mainly from marginal right-wing groups, but some members of the populist Progress Party are also flirting with the xenophobic and anti-Muslim segments of society, and the central leadership does not always take a clear stand to impose its avowed line of tolerance. There was much discussion about the need for an Action Plan against hostility towards Muslims based on the model of the Action Plan against Anti-Semitism from 2016. The Socialist Left Party was the first party to take an initiative in late March. The prime minister remained uncommitted for a long period, although she made advances to Muslim voters with her greeting in connection with the celebration of Eid al-Fitr in early June. The terror attack on the Al-Noor Mosque on 10 August changed the political climate and led to a commitment for a dedicated Action Plan to be realised in 2020. The aforementioned terror attack also led to a more detailed discussion about the terror threat from the extreme right. Some of the usual actors on the right continued with slurs against Muslims. Related to the latter, prosecution of the most egregious cases led to convictions for hate speech according to §185 of the penal code. Both the state and civil society seem to be on the offensive to counter negative trends.

## Kortfattet Sammendrag

Islam har ingen lang historie i Norge. Det begynte med arbeidsinnvandring sent på 1960 tallet. Etter innvandringsstoppen i 1975 har det hovedsakelig dreid seg om familiegjenforening og flyktninger. Ankomsten av nye flyktninger de siste årene har ført med seg store utfordringer. Den norske diskursen om innvandring dreier seg i vesentlig grad om integrering. Dette forutsetter imidlertid en integreringsmodell som er mye strammere enn den sosiale organiseringen i flyktingenes opprinnelsesland. Fiendtlige holdninger overfor muslimer og anklager om manglende tilpasning til norske normer kan spores i løpet av hele året. Det oppsto en diskusjon om nødvendigheten av en handlingsplan mot muslimhat etter samme modell som handlingsplanen mot antisemittisme fra 2016. Etter at regjeringen først satt på gjerdet, førte angrepet på Al-Noor moskéen 10 august etter hvert til at regjeringen forpliktet seg til en handlingsplan. Terror angrepet på Al-Noor moskéen førte også til en mer detaljert diskusjon om terror trusselen fra det ekstreme høyre. Mange av de sedvanlige aktørene fortsatte sine insinuasjoner mot muslimer. I denne sammenheng førte de mest graverende tilfellene til domsfellelser etter §185 i straffeloven angående hatefulle ytringer. Det virker som om både staten og sivilsamfunnet er kommet på offensiven for å snu negative tendenser.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Norway

**Type of Regime:** Constitutional monarchy

**Form of Government:** Parliamentary democracy

**Ruling Parties:** Erna Solberg's Cabinet, centre right coalition of Conservative Party and Progress Party. Joined by the Liberal Party in January 2018 and the Christian Democratic Party in January 2019. The Progress Party left the coalition in January 2020.

**Opposition Parties:** Labour Party, Centre Party, Socialist Left Party, Liberal Party (until January 2018), Christian Democrats (until January 2019), Green Party, Red Party.

**Last Elections:** 2017 Parliamentary Elections (Labour Party: 49 seats, Conservative Party: 45 seats, Progress Party: 27 seats, Centre Party: 19 seats, Socialist Left Party: 11 seats, Liberal Party: 8 seats, Christian Democrats: 8 seats, Green Party: 1 seat, Red Party: 1 seat)

**Total Population:** 5,356,789 (as of 20 November 2019)

**Major Languages:** Norwegian (*bokmål* and *nynorsk*), Sami

**Official Religion:** No official religion. Historically, the official religion was the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Norway. The Church of Norway is an independent legal entity, rather than a branch of the civil service, effective from 1 January 2017. The church remains funded by the state. Other registered religious and life stance communities such as Islam also receive state funding on the basis of membership.

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** From 2006 the Norwegian Police register statistics for "hate crimes" in BL/STRASAK. These are crimes based on race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. There are no overall figures for 2019 at present. The complaints to the police in western Norway almost doubled last year from 43 cases in 2018 to 78 in 2019, but it is not clear how many were related to religion. Hateful comments about Islam on social media such as Facebook abound.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** The Norwegian Police register statistics for "hate crimes" in BL/STRASAK. There were 373 registered cases of hate crimes related to race or ethnicity for 2017.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** The figures for those who are registered in religious communities are: Lutheran Church (70%), other Christian denominations (8.3%), Islam (3.98%).

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** There are no official statistics for the total number of Muslims in Norway. A conservative estimate lists a little above 200,000 which corresponds to 4% of the population. Official statistics include only members of religious communities that receive government subsidy. In 2018, there were 175,507 registered Muslims (up from 166,861 in 2018), which

amount to 25.9% of the members of religious communities outside the Church of Norway.

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** The Islamic Council Norway (IRN) has been the largest umbrella organisation in Norway. In April 2018, the IRN broke off its relations with the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities in Norway (STL), which was established in 1996. This led other Muslim organisations in Norway, with strained relations with the IRN, to join the STL. These were the Muslim Dialogue Network (including the Pakistan World Islamic Mission in Oslo and Rabita) and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Norway.

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** Norwegian Centre Against Racism, Minotenk, Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities

**Far-Right Parties:** There are no far-right parties of any significance. The third largest party in parliament, the Progress Party, should rather be called moderate right-wing populist and self-identifies as a libertarian party. Several leading party members, however, frequently make statements that target immigrants and Muslims.

**Far-Right Movements:** There are some very small groups on the right that make a lot of noise on media such as Facebook: Stop Islamisation of Norway (SIAN) and Nordic Resistance Movement (NMB),

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** None that are known. Earlier someone like Anders Breivik was referred to as a lone wolf, but after the attack on the Al-Noor Mosque it has been acknowledged that there are certain forums on the Internet that make up small hate groups.

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None (depends on local decision)
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** On 5 June 2018, the parliament passed a bill banning clothing covering the face during classes at educational institutions as well as day-care centres, which included face-covering Islamic veils such as the burka and niqab. There is no ban of wearing them outside class.
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

Norway does not have a significant historical Muslim population. They are immigrants that came in different waves and, even in a Scandinavian context, they made an impact later than in the neighbouring Denmark and Sweden. The first wave generally came as labour migrants who were later reinforced by family reunion. In recent years, many have come as refugees from countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, and Somalia. The Norwegian state has mainly classified them as migrants and according to country of origin. There has not been a separate category for “Muslims” in the state bureaucracy. Muslim religious communities receive state subsidies on the basis of membership, like other religious and life stance communities. The treatment of Muslims is conditioned both on attitudes in Norwegian society and the Norwegian state model. Religion may play a role in popular attitudes, but the state is quite robust in exercising equality before the law. Political discussion about migrants/Muslims often centres on the mantra of “integration.” The Norwegian state model presupposes a much larger degree of conformity in the population than immigrants are used to from their countries of origin. This entails a stronger pressure to adjust to Norwegian culture from what you have in less uniform and homogeneous societies. From a practical point of view “integration” is also a question of acquiring the necessary skills demanded in an advanced economy. Scepticism towards Muslims is lower in Oslo, where they have greater experience of interaction with Muslims, than in other parts of the country with less direct experience. The Muslims in Norway do not represent a uniform group and differ considerably according to place of origin and time of arrival.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

The most prominent event of 2019 was by far the armed assault on the Al-Noor Islamic Centre Mosque in Bærum near Oslo by the 21-year-old, right-wing extremist Philip Manshaus. Before going to the mosque he shot his sister, who had been adopted from China as an infant, in a racially motivated murder. He entered the mosque by shelling a glass door, armed with a shotgun, two rifles, a nail gun, and bulletproof vest. His equipment also included a GoPro camera intended for live streaming on social media, but this failed. He was fortunately disarmed by some of the senior Muslims present before he could inflict much damage. The event spurred a massive public debate. Apparently Philip Manshaus identified with extreme right ideology and had lauded Brenton Tarrant, the perpetrator of the Christchurch massacre in New Zealand on 15 March, in an online forum shortly before the assault.<sup>1</sup> His

---

1. The crime was covered in all major newspapers. For example, see: Andreas Økland, “Kommentar: Moskéangrepet i Bærum. Vi må ta et nådeløst oppgjør med hatet”, *Dagbladet*, 11 August 2019, <https://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/vi-ma-ta-et-nadelost-oppgjor-med-hatet/71478918>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

actions are interpreted as being part of a transnational subculture of right-wing extremism, which is mostly played out in anonymous online forums. The event should consequently not only be viewed in a local context.<sup>2</sup> It should also be mentioned that the latest assessment by the Norwegian Police Security Service considers terrorist acts by individuals of extreme right or extreme Islamist ideology to be a national threat.<sup>3</sup>

The second event that attracted the most publicity was the public burning of the Koran by Lars Thorsen of SIAN (Stop the Islamisation of Norway) at a demonstration in the city of Kristiansand. The burning was clearly conceived as a provocation towards Muslims and led to several reactions. The burning of the Koran “stunt” had been announced well in advance and was met by a counter-demonstration attended by several hundred people who wanted to display their disgust but also included violent elements. SIAN had initially obtained permission for the demonstration, but the police recalled it when they learned about the planned burning of the Koran. The incident led to many commentaries in the press. The demonstrators invoked the principle of “freedom of speech”, but the police cut short the demonstration with the rationale that the burning of the Koran could be a fire hazard.<sup>4</sup> The action of SIAN was generally condemned. Rune Berglund Steen of the Anti-Racist Centre commented that it could be viewed as hateful utterance, and consequently be punishable, but stressed that this was a case for the judiciary.<sup>5</sup>

The formal complaint by the Pakistani authorities to the Norwegian ambassador and the burning of the Norwegian flag by demonstrators in Pakistan complicated the matter further. This gave ammunition to those who claim that Norway is not standing up to Islamic pressure from countries that have a very different value system.<sup>6</sup> As usual a plethora of anti-Muslim comments could be found on Internet forums.

## Employment

For the population as a whole, the employment rate in the age group 20-66 is 76.2%. It increases to 78.5% when not counting the immigrant population. The overall figures for immigrants are 66.6%, while for people originating from Asia and

2. Iselin Frydenlund, Torkel Brekke, Cathrine Thorleifsson and Sindre Bangstad, “Vi kan ikke fullt ut forstå hat og vold mot muslimer hvis vi bare ser dette som lokale fenomener | Fire forskere - Islamofobi som globalt fenomen”, *Aftenposten*, 16 August 2019, <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/debatt/i/e8yPdR/vi-kan-ikke-fullt-ut-forstaa-hat-og-vold-mot-muslimer-hvis-vi-bare-ser-dette-som-lokale-fenomener-fire-forskere>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

3. “Nasjonal trusselvurdering 2020”, Politiets sikkerhetstjeneste, 4 February 2020, <https://pst.no/alle-artikler/trusselvurderinger/nasjonal-trusselvurdering-2020/>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

4. Trym Mogen, “SIAN-demonstrasjon - Hadde blitt revet i filler”, *Dagbladet*, 16 November 2019, <https://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/hadde-blitt-revet-i-filler/71827874>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

5. Rune Berglund Steen, “Kan det være hatefullt å brenne en bok? Svaret er ja – det KAN være det”, *Antirasistisk.no*, 27 November 2019. Later, Lars Thorsen was sentenced to 30 days unconditional imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 NOK for hate speech according to §185 of the penal code.

6. Vebjørn Selbekk, “Vebjørn Selbekk ut mot Solberg: – Står med lua i hånda hos islamistene. Et av verdens mest ufrie land vil belære oss om yttringsfrihet og blasfemi”, *VG*, 26 November 2019, <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/meninger/i/vQdg5B/vebjoern-selbekk-ut-mot-solberg-staar-med-lua-i-haanda-hos-islamistene>, (Access date: 5 March 2020).

Africa they drop to 58.0% and 51.4% respectively.<sup>7</sup> The immigrants have lower participation in the workforce than the overall population, but higher than many other OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries. There are large differences between persons depending on countries of origin, time of residence in Norway, reason for migration, and sex. Refugees with low education level and short residence in Norway are employed below average. In other cases, the immigrants were more prone to being overqualified for their job.<sup>8</sup> The government also wanted to take measures to avoid discrimination in housing, as many immigrants live in rented accommodation.<sup>9</sup>

## Education

In late September, the Minister of Education and Integration Jan Tore Sanner announced that the next state budget would include measures for strengthening the education in public schools against hate speech and Muslim hatred. The new curriculum would make the students better prepared to face the challenges of the digital age with fake news and hate speech on social media.<sup>10</sup>

## Politics

In politics there is a basic left-right division where the left is more positive to immigrants and Muslims, but also has the strongest demand for Muslims to adopt to the Norwegian way of life and the values of social democracy. The right has a more laissez-faire attitude to detailed regulations of integration, but also harbours many who are more sceptical to immigrants and Muslims. Special mention should be made of the Progress Party (PP). The PP favours a very restrictive policy towards immigration and is often referring to the immigrants' negative influence on Norwegian values. In 2019, this was highlighted by an article by the PP leader Siv Jensen on what she termed "covert Islamisation" (*snikislamisering*). In the introduction, she wrote, "If we accept that persons refuse to shake hands with the opposite sex, then we accept preferential treatment based on religion. This is covert Islamisation."<sup>11</sup> Jensen stressed that she had also previously warned against accepting preferential treatment that runs contrary to the Norwegian way of life. She mentioned the recent visit by the Iranian foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif who would not shake hands

---

7. "Sysselsetting Blant Innvandrere, Registerbasert", Statistic Norway, 2 March 2020, <https://www.ssb.no/innvregsys/>, (Access date: 5 March 2020). Latest figures from 5 March 2019.

8. "Integrerings- og mangfoldsdirektoratet", Sysselsetting blant innvandrere, 6 February 2019.

9. "Regjeringens handlingsplan mot rasisme og diskriminering på grunn av etnisitet og religion 2020-2023", Regjeringen.no, 11 December 2019, <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/regjeringens-handlingsplan-mot-rasisme-og-diskriminering-pa-grunn-av-etnisitet-og-religion-2020--2023/id2681929/>, (Access date: 5 March 2020).

10. Andreas W. H. Lindvåg, "Budsjettekkasje: Sanner styrker skoletiltak mot hatprat og muslimhat", Vårt Land, 30 September 2019, <https://www.vl.no/nyhet/budsjettekkasje-sanner-styrker-skoletiltak-mot-hatprat-og-muslimhat-1.1593559>, (Access date: 10 March 2020).

11. Siv Jensen, "Dette er snikislamisering", Dagbladet, 2 September 2019.

with the leader of the Parliament's Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs since she is a woman. She considered it even worse in cases where Norwegian citizens refuse to shake hand with the opposite sex. To accept this would be to reverse the accomplishments in securing equality of the sexes. Bad customs and preferential religious treatment should not be accepted in the name of understanding. This had nothing to do with freedom of religion, which is a private matter, but with adjusting to the requirements of society at large. She maintained that people who cannot relate to the opposite sex in the workplace have a problem that is their own responsibility.<sup>12</sup>

The PP has a problem, however, in distinguishing between what is indeed immigrants' lack of acceptance of Norwegian values and what is simply anti-Muslim ranting by some of its members. The party treads a difficult balance between satisfying its voter base and keeping a distance from the party's more xenophobic followers. Siv Jensen has tried to curtail the most egregious elements within her ranks. For example, the prominent local PP politician in Drammen, Ole Hovengen, was suspended for six months after being active on the Facebook pages of SIAN.<sup>13</sup>

Siv Jensen's article provoked a strong response from Abid Raja of the Liberal Party. He claimed that some ministers in the cabinet attempted on purpose to portray immigrants as a negative influence on Norwegian society. He confronted the unfortunate, in his opinion, use of the word "covert Islamisation" and wanted PM Erna Solberg to take a clearer position against its use by certain PP politicians (Siv Jensen and Sylvi Listad), which he found indecent, and against the ultra-right propaganda of some PP politicians. He was in particular concerned about the effect on children. However, he also appreciates that PP Minister of Justice Jøran Kalmyr condemned hatred towards Muslims in Norway. He mentioned on a personal note his difficult journey from conservative Muslim values to the liberal values he embraces today.<sup>14</sup> This, in turn, resulted in a reaction from Siv Jensen because some of his characterisations alluded exactly to the far-right elements that the PP tried to keep at a distance. It should be mentioned that when the PP exited the government in January 2020, this was partly related to disagreements concerning the repatriation of Norwegian women and children who had joined ISIS in Syria.

## Media

In general, the media attempt to present a balanced picture of issues related to Muslims, often within the context of migration and integration. Certain issues divide

12. Ibid.

13. "Lokal Frp-topp suspendert etter kommentarer på SIAN-side", *Dagbladet*, 11 October 2019, <https://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/lokal-frp-topp-suspendert-etter-kommentarer-pa-sian-side/71697257>. (Access date: 5 March 2020).

14. Abid Raja, "Kjære statsminister, dette aksepterer jeg ikke. Nok er nok. Det stinker av Frps retorikk", *Aftenposten*, 17 September 2019, <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/debatt/i/9vnbol/kjaere-statsminister-dette-aksepterer-jeg-ikke-nok-er-nok-det-stinker-av-frps-retorikk-abid-raja>, (Access date: 7 March 2020).

opinions. The most prominent discussions in the media in 2019 concerned questions related to the possible need for a dedicated Action Plan against hate speech targeting Muslims. This became more pressing after the attack on the Al-Noor Mosque in August, which led to extensive soul-searching about what had gone wrong. Another issue that received a lot of attention was the question of allowing the return of Norwegian women and children trapped in Syria after joining ISIS. Lastly, we have the many discussions related to Muslim reservations against shaking hands with women. The Socialist Left Party took the lead in putting the need for a dedicated Action Plan against Muslim hatred on the agenda in late March. The Labour Party soon followed suit. This was meant to be based on the same model as the Action Plan against Anti-Semitism from 2016.<sup>15</sup> The government was more reserved and asserted that measures against Muslim hatred would be sufficiently covered in the upcoming Action Plan against Racism and Discrimination. After the attack on the Al-Noor Mosque on 10 August, the political climate changed and the government became open to a dedicated Action Plan against Muslim hatred.<sup>16</sup> The massive condemnation of the terrorist attack put the government under pressure.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, certain circles continued with hateful utterances against Muslims.<sup>18</sup> The question of reservations against men and women shaking hands appeared once more in the media when Crown Prince Haakon visited the Al-Noor Mosque on 22 August. As a gesture of solidarity towards the community he extended his hand to shake hands with a woman, but his hand remained in the air for a few seconds with no sign of reciprocity. This resulted in a storm on social media as some perceived it as disrespect towards the future king. Others stressed that he came as a guest, so he might as well follow the customs of the place he visited.<sup>19</sup> Siv Jensen of the Progress Party was in particular critical to the acceptance of what she called “foreign” customs, thus framing Islamic practice as alien.<sup>20</sup> Similar comments were made when Iranian Foreign Minister

15. Andreas W. H. Lindvåg, “Religioner settes opp mot hverandre og det skjer her hjemme”, Vårt Land, 7 April 2019. This was followed by a proposal in parliament for a dedicated Action Plan against Islamophobia on 7 June 2019. For more information, see: “Representantforslag 164 S”, Stortinget, (2018-2019), <https://www.stortinget.no/globalassets/pdf/representantforslag/2018-2019/dok8-201819-164s.pdf>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

16. Jens Marius Sæther, “Terrorforsker Bjørge: – Regjeringen må lage en handlingsplan mot islamofobi”, Dagsavisen, 11 August 2019, <https://www.dagsavisen.no/nyheter/innenriks/terrorforsker-bjorge-regjeringen-ma-lage-en-handlingsplan-mot-islamofobi-1.1566410>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

17. Martine Aurdal, “En ny, farlig form for rasisme”, Dagbladet, 15 August 2019, <https://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/en-ny-farlig-form-for-rasisme/71485946>, (Access date: 21 February 2020).

18. Line Fransen, “Terrorangrepet mot Noor-moskéen - Muslim-frykt og hat etter terroren”, Dagbladet 19 August 2019, <https://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/muslim-frykt-og-hat-etter-terroren/71496152>, (Access date: 22 February 2020).

19. Helene H. Rossholdt, “Besøket i Bærum-moskeen - Derfor ville hun ikke håndhilse”, Dagbladet, 27 August 2019, <https://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/derfor-ville-hun-ikke-handhilse/71519666>, (Access date: 3 March 2020).

20. Frank Ertesvåg and Håkon F. Høydal, “Frp-Siv\_ Snikislamisering å godta nekt av håndhilse.” VG, 2 September 2019, <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/50wqz1/frp-siv-snikislamisering-aa-godta-nekt-av-haandhilse>, (Access date: 3 March 2020).

Mohammad Javad Zarif did not shake hands with the prime minister and two other women politicians on his state visit to Norway.<sup>21</sup> While some of the comments could be characterised as negative slurs against Muslims, it also led to reactions by people with solid democratic credentials. Some women clearly perceived the refusal to shake hands with women as a regress in the hard-won struggle for equality and as totally unacceptable in Norwegian society.<sup>22</sup>

## Justice System

Norway is not a litigating society to a degree that applies to many other countries. However, the justice system should guarantee a fair trial to Muslims who take recourse to it. Hate crimes are litigated according to §185 (hateful statements) and §186 (discrimination) of the penal code. In some instances, Norwegian legal practice may alienate Muslims. Norwegian hate speech regulations make a general distinction between attacks on a religious group or religious individuals, and attacks on religious beliefs that are generally permitted.<sup>23</sup> In this matter, Norway is aligned in practice with other western countries since this distinction is generally applied to hate speech.

In 2019, the question of legality occurred in connection with the Koran burning in Kristiansand. In short, while it is not illegal to burn the Koran per se, the question arose whether it was done in such a fashion that it fired up hatred towards Muslims. As the police on duty had problems with knowing exactly when to intervene, the police authorities issued a new directive in the aftermath of the events.<sup>24</sup>

Two verdicts against hate speech in June 2019 were finally confirmed in the Supreme Court on 29 January 2020. A woman in her seventies was sentenced to 14 days in jail for writing the following in the Facebook-group “We who support Sylvi Listhaug” when addressing the social commentator Sumaya Jirde Ali, “You damn black offspring, go back to Somalia and stay there you corrupt cockroach.” The woman claimed that the statement was political, but the Supreme Court decided unanimously that it was punishable as hate speech according to §185 of the penal code.<sup>25</sup> The other case concerned a man in his fifties who was sentenced to pay a fine

21. “Irans utenriksminister ville ikke ta kvinner I hånden”, VG, 22 August 2019, <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/kJyKlQ/irans-utenriksminister-ville-ikke-ta-kvinner-i-haanden>, (Access date: 5 March 2020).

22. Heidi V. Pedersen, “Håndhilsingsdebatten ingen ba om – Ytring”, NRK, 3 August 2019, <https://www.nrk.no/ytring/handhilsingsdebatten-ingen-ba-om-1.14680106>, (Access date: 3 March 2020).

23. Sindre Bangstad, “Complicating Hate Speech Matters”, *The Immanent Frame*, 25 January 2019. For more information, see: Olav Elgvin and Jon Rogstad, “Religious Threats and Institutional Change in Norwegian Mass Media”, ed. Fredrik Engelstad, Håkon Larsen, Jon Rogstad and Kari Steen-Johnsen, *Institutional Change in the Public Sphere: Views on the Nordic Model*, (Warsaw, Poland: 2017), p. 161–178.

24. “Politidirektoratet justerer operasjonsordre”, Politiet.no. 26 November 2019, <https://www.politiet.no/aktuelt-tall-og-fakta/aktuelt/nyheter/2019/11/26/politidirektoratet-justerer-operasjonsordre/>, (Access date: 15 February 2020).

25. “Anke over Gulating lagmannsretts dom 19. juni 2019”, Norges Høyesterett, HR-2020-184-A, (sak nr. 19-104841STR-HRET), 29 January 2020, <https://www.domstol.no/globalassets/upload/hret/avgjorelser/2020/januar-2020/hr-2020-184-a.pdf>, (Access date: 11 February 2020).

of 12,000 NOK for two comments in the closed Facebook group “The fatherland above all.” In one comment that targeted Muslims he wrote, “I guess that it is better that we remove these rats from the face of the earth by ourselves!!” The man claimed that it should be regarded as legitimate criticism of religion, but the Supreme Court disagreed.<sup>26</sup> Other cases are currently in the court system and indicate a more determined prosecution of hate speech.

When it comes to concrete cases of discrimination there were no cases brought before the Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Tribunal based on religion in 2019, as compared to 7 concerning Muslims in 2018.<sup>27</sup>

## Internet

The Internet remains the forum where you can find the most egregious commentaries. This is partly due to the nature of the medium and easy access. After the Al-Noor incident another issue under discussion was the question of closed Internet forums by right-wing extremists. The Facebook entry of the local PP politician in Drammen, Ole Hovengen, ranks amongst the most publicised examples. He compared the hijab of the Somali Marian Husein with the uniform of the Nazi SS.<sup>28</sup> When Philip Manshaus carried out his terror attack on the al-Noor Islamic Centre he attempted to transmit it live on Facebook, and failed only because of inadequate technology.<sup>29</sup>

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The main figures in the Islamophobia network are largely the same as the previous year. A new trend is the emergence of extreme right terror. In mainstream politics, the Progress Party struggles with threading the fine line between legitimate criticism of Islam and projecting anti-Muslim stereotypes. The very small parties the Alliance and Independence Party have an ethnocentric profile and are sceptical towards Islam. The outright hostile groups include: People’s Movement Against Immigration (fmi.no); Stop the Islamisation of Norway (sian.no); Democrats in Norway (demokraten.no); Norwegian People’s Party (norskfolkeparti.no); Pegida Norway (Facebook); and Norwegian Defence League (Facebook). The most profiled actor remains Human Rights Service (HRS) led by Hege Storhaug, who publishes the state-funded

---

26. “Anke over Agder lagmannsretts dom 24. juni 2019”, Norges Høyesterett, HR-2020-185-A, (sak nr. 19-111561STR-HRET, 29 January 2020, <https://www.domstol.no/globalassets/upload/hret/avgjorelser/2020/januar-2020/hr-2020-185-a.pdf>, (Access date: 11 February 2020).

27. “Diskrimineringsnemnda avgjør diskrimineringsklager”, Diskrimineringsnemnda, <http://www.diskrimineringsnemnda.no/nb/innhold/side/vedtak>, (Access date: 11 February 2020).

28. Hege Breen Bakken, “Drammen FrP burde ha reagert overfor Hovengen”, Drammens Tidende, 16 October 2019, <https://www.dt.no/leder/meninger/politikk-og-samfunn/drammen-frp-burde-reagert-overfor-hovengen/o/5-57-1240802>, (Access date: 11 February 2020).

29. “Dagbladet mener: Ekstremismen er ikke ansiktsløs”, Dagbladet, 17 August 2019, <https://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/ekstremismen-er-ikke-ansiktslos/71497271>, (Access date: 12 February 2020).

blog rights.no. She continues with her mixture of slanted news; however, more voices have expressed their disapproval in 2019.<sup>30</sup>

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

The dominant discussion in 2019 was the question concerning the need for a dedicated Action Plan (*Handlingsplan*) against Islamophobia. This would be based on the model of previous plans against anti-Semitism and hate speech. It was first debated if there was a need for a dedicated plan against Islamophobia, or if it could be subsumed under other plans covering racism and hate speech. The SV became the first political party to call for a national Action Plan against Islamophobia or hatred towards Muslims in its party conference on 30 March. The Labour Party followed suit two weeks later.<sup>31</sup>

In this matter, 10 August was a watershed when it came to confronting hostility towards Muslims. PM Erna Solberg declared that she was open to a dedicated Action Plan against hatred towards Muslims, although there was as yet no decision and it could also be part of a more general initiative.<sup>32</sup> Finally, towards the end of August, the government announced that it scheduled a dedicated Action Plan targeting hostility towards Muslims. Work on an Action Plan against racism and discrimination had been in the works since February, but after advice from civil society actors it was decided that the Muslims would have a dedicated Action Plan. This plan would be ready some time in 2020. The Minister of Justice Jøran Kallmyr stressed that the goal was to prevent harassment of Muslims and that everybody should have the right to exercise their religion in peace without fear. He stressed that they avoided the term “Islamophobia” since it was a question of hostility and hatred towards Islam and not a phobia.<sup>33</sup>

“The Government’s Action Plan against Racism and Discrimination on the Basis of Ethnicity and Religion 2020-2023” appeared on 11 December. It was backed by a unified parliament and was generally well received by civil society. The plan ded-

30. Runa Fjellanger, “AUF-leder ut mot Human Rights Service: – Kutt støtten, Erna”, VG, 12 August 2019, <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/b5ey2q/auf-leder-ut-mot-human-rights-service-kutt-stoetten-erna>, (Access date: 15 February 2020).

31. Andreas W. H. Lindvåg, “Religioner settes opp mot hverandre og det skjer her hjemme”, Vårt Land, 7 April 2019, <https://www.vl.no/nyhet/religioner-settes-opp-mot-hverandre-og-det-skjer-her-hjemme-1.1462087>, (Access date: 15 February 2020).

32. Johan Falnes and Kristian Skårdalsmo, “Solberg åpen for handlingsplan mot muslimhat”, Dagsavisen, 12 August 2019, <https://www.dagsavisen.no/nyheter/innenriks/solberg-apen-for-handlingsplan-mot-muslimhat-1.1566480>, (Access date: 13 February 2020).

33. Xueqi Pang, “Nå kommer regjeringens handlingsplan mot muslimhat. Torsdag ettermiddag varslet kulturminister Trine Skei Grande (V) at Norge får egen handlingsplan mot muslimfiendtlighet i 2020”, Vårt Land, 22 August 2019, <https://www.vl.no/nyhet/na-kommer-regjeringens-handlingsplan-mot-muslimhat-1.1572856>, (Access date: 15 February 2020).

icated ample space to questions concerning Muslims and noted the rise of hostility towards Muslims in recent years.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

As always the integration of migrants in Norwegian society is a work in progress. I can be generous with my recommendation. We should all look forward to how we can improve society. Change and adaption is often a good thing and desirable. I may remind readers that change was a prominent slogan in the election campaign of U.S. President Barack Hussein Obama. Native Norwegians should realise that changes in the composition of Norwegian society may have many positive sides. It is important to recognise that the kind of conformity and homogeneity created by the ideals of social democracy are not always necessary or even desirable. A positive and constructive approach to the integration of our new citizens can only benefit society as a whole. For minorities in general, adaptation is a key to the success of their group existence. While keeping key aspects of their traditions, Muslims should take notice of areas where lack of adjustment to Norwegian norms will put them at a disadvantage and try to adapt even if it appears counter-intuitive at first. We can observe state initiatives to improve the situation by the announced Action Plan against Muslim hate. It depends, however, on the willingness of people to support it. The Progress Party, in particular, should be more careful and avoid statements that typecast Muslims. On the other hand, those who criticise the Progress Party also need to thread carefully in each instance where there is disagreement. We need a serious discussion about changes that occur in Norwegian society. The situation will not improve by opponents typecasting each other.

## Chronology

- **08.01.2019:** The state prosecutors of Oslo indicted two ethnic Norwegians who had distributed anti-Muslim brochures on 20 July 2018 for violating §185 of the penal code concerning hate speech. There was one conviction (6 November 2019).
- **30.03.2019:** The SV became the first political party to call for a national Action Plan against Islamophobia or hatred towards Muslims in its party conference. Other parties would follow suit in the course of the year.
- **29.05.2019:** The Labour Party, Oslo branch, raised a demand of at least 40% women quota for leading positions in religious communities that receive public funding. Minister of Children and Family Affairs Kjell Ingolf Ropstad (KrF) warned that this could infringe on freedom of religion.
- **04.06.2019:** PM Erna Solberg sent her regards to Norwegian Muslims in connection to Eid al-Fitr in a Facebook video (*God Id- Id Mubarak!*). This led to several negative reactions in the commentaries.

- **10.07.2019:** The Organisation Against Public Discrimination (OMOD) criticised the decision by the relevant state organ (*Diskrimineringsnemnda*) against reservations toward shaking hands with women.
- **10.08.2019:** The right-wing extremist Philip Manshaus assaulted the Al-Noor Islamic Centre Mosque outside Oslo. He was fortunately disarmed before he could inflict much damage. The event spurred a massive public debate.
- **11.08.2019:** PM Erna Solberg, Minister of Education and Integration Jan Tore Sanner, MP Abid Raja, and the local mayor Lisbeth Hammer Krogg attended the Al-Noor Mosque's Eid al-Adha celebration.
- **26.08.2019:** The fact-checking Faktisk.no confronted claims that there is no hostility towards Muslims in Norway. It concluded that Muslims are indeed prone to be exposed to hateful speech.
- **02.09.2019:** Feature article in major newspaper VG by the leader of PP Siv Jensen entitled "This Is Stealthy Islamisation." In the article, she criticised what she perceived as inappropriate Islamic influence on Norwegian society.
- **17.09.2019:** Feature article in major newspaper *Aftenposten* by vice-speaker of parliament Abid Raja confronting the rhetoric of the Progress Party.
- **10.10.2019:** Faktisk.no pointed out incorrect claims in an article about migrants' rights to social benefits.
- **11.10.2019:** Prominent local Progress Party politician, Ole Hovengen, suspended for being active on SIAN Internet pages.
- **16.11.2019:** Leader of SIAN Lars Thorsen burnt the Koran during a public rally in Kristiansand.
- **11.12.2019:** The government presented the "Action Plan against Racism and Discrimination Based on Ethnicity and Religion."
- **19.12.2019:** The Norwegian Police Security Service warned that extreme right terror was on the rise in 2019.



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**POLAND**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

ANNA PIELA



## The Author

**Anna Piela** is a visiting scholar at Northwestern University in Evanston, USA. She has previously worked as a research consultant with the Muslim Women's Council, Bradford. In 2010, she was awarded a PhD in Women's Studies by the University of York, UK. Her monograph titled *Wearing the Niqab: Fashioning Identity among Muslim Women in the UK and the US* is out in 2020. She has recently published an article on the niqab in the UK in the *Journal of American Academy of Religion*. She is also contributing to a research project on the identities of Polish female Muslim converts in the UK and Poland, recently funded by the Polish National Centre for Science (NCN).

Her first monograph titled *Muslim Women Online: Faith and Identity in Virtual Space*, and several of her articles for academic journals including *New Media and Society*, *Feminist Media Studies*, *HAWWA: Journal of Women in the Middle East and Islamic Cultures*, and *Contemporary Islam* focus on gender, Islam, and online communities. She recently contributed a chapter about Poland to the Routledge Handbook on Religion and Journalism.

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Anna Piela: *Islamophobia in Poland: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

From this report's perspective, the year 2019 was defined by a few key events that had a bearing on levels of Islamophobia in Poland. These include the assassination of the Gdansk Mayor Pawel Adamowicz, an advocate of refugees (January); the violent ripples in Poland of the terrorist attack on the mosque in Christchurch in which 51 people were fatally shot (March); and the European elections (May) and the parliamentary elections (October), both won by the governing right-wing Law and Justice. The results of a December survey conducted by the main Polish pollster CBOS which reveal that 47% of respondents dislike Islam, as opposed to only 17% respondents being comfortable with it, and 14% having personally met a Muslim, are therefore not a surprise. Islamophobia networks span Polish political, media, and economic elites as well as a section of the Catholic clergy, including the hierarchs, who often spread their prejudice bolstered by the prestigious office they hold. State-controlled media, traditionally held in high regard in Poland, previously safeguarded by the currently politicised National Board for Radio and Television, continue to distribute content strongly framed by anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, and anti-LGBT prejudice. Ignorance regarding Islam among Polish youth is caused by a lack of provision of education about all religions. Recommendations regarding protection of minorities made this year by international bodies such as the United Nations Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) are unlikely to be earnestly addressed by the current government, as they are in stark opposition to the ruling party's political programme.

## Streszczenie

Wydarzeniami definiującymi rok 2019 w Polsce, z perspektywy tego Raportu, były zamach na prezydenta Gdańska Pawła Adamowicza, gwałtowne echa zamachu na meczet w Christchurch, w którym zamordowane zostały 51 osoby, oraz wybory do parlamentów europejskiego i polskiego, w których wygrała dotychczas rządząca, prawicowa, populistyczna partia Prawo i Sprawiedliwość. Nie są więc niespodzianką wyniki sondażu przeprowadzonego przez CBOS w grudniu 2019, które pokazują, że aż 47% Polaków nie toleruje islamu i jego wyznawców, jedynie 17% akceptuje ich, a tylko 14% zna osobiście osobę wyznania muzułmańskiego. Polska sieć islamofobii oplata polskie elity polityczne, medialne i gospodarcze, a także sporą część katolickiego kleru. Ich uprzedzenia, przedstawiane jako patriotyzm, są wspierane powagą urzędów politycznych i wysokich stanowisk. Media państwowe, tradycyjnie w Polsce szanowane, po utracie niezależności gwarantowanej uprzednio przez obecnie upolitycznioną Krajową Radę ds. Radiofonii i Telewizji nadają przekazy nacechowane silnymi uprzedzeniami wobec islamu, muzułmanów, oraz wielu innych mniejszości, szczególnie żydowskiej i osób LGBT. Brak nauczania religii uwzględniającego religie poza katolicką przyczynia się do kontynuacji niewiedzy na temat islamu wśród polskiej młodzieży. Rekomendacje Komisji ds. Eliminacji Dyskryminacji Rasowej ONZ zostaną najprawdopodobniej zignorowane przez polski rząd, ponieważ reprezentują wartości przeciwne tym wyrażanym przez program polityczny partii rządzącej.

## Country Profile EIR 2019

**Country:** Poland

**Type of Regime:** Democratic republic

**Form of Government:** Semi-presidential system

**Ruling Parties:** PiS – Law and Order (right-wing, national-conservative, Christian Democratic)

**Opposition Parties:** PO – Civic Coalition (centre-right)

**Last Elections:** 2017 Presidential Election: Andrzej Duda, the right-wing candidate, won 51.55% of the vote against the centre candidate Bronisław Komorowski's 48.45%.

2019 Legislative (Parliamentary) Election: Law and Order: 235 seats; Civic Coalition (centre-right): 134 seats; Democratic Left Alliance (centre-left): 49 seats; Polish People's Party (agrarian, conservative): 30 seats; Confederation Liberty and Independence (far-right, populist): 11 seats; German Minority: 1

**Total Population:** 38.45 million (in 2015)

**Major Languages:** Polish

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** Officially, according to the numbers provided by the Ministry of Interior and Administration, in 2019, 36 hate crimes were committed based on the target's Muslim faith, and 58 hate crimes were committed based on the target's ethnicity that might be linked to Islam (Arabs, Chechens, Turks). The real numbers are likely to be 20 times higher: 720 and 1,160 respectively according to the Ombudsman's Office.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** Racist hate crime based on skin colour was put at 176; based on ethnic background at 655; based on religion at 83; and on sexual orientation at 4. Again, the realistic numbers are 3,520, 13,100, 1,660, and 80 respectively.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Christianity (88.6%) Jehovah's Witnesses (0.34%), Buddhism (0.04%), Islam (0.013%), Indigenous religion (0.01%), and Judaism (0.004%) (2011 based on GUS 2013)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** Depending on sources between 10,000 and 25,000 (Newsweek 2016; Newsweek 2015) (less than 0.1%)

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** The Muslim Religious Association (*Związek Muzułmanów Polskich*) and the Muslim League in the Polish Republic (*Liga Muzułmańska RP*)

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** The Polish Ombudsman's Office, Never Again Association, Centre for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behaviours, Hate Stop, *Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego*, Center for Research on Prejudice

**Far-Right Parties:** Confederation Liberty and Independence (*Konfederacja Wol-*

*nosc i Niepodleglos*), National Movement (*Ruch Narodowy*), National Revival of Poland (*Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski*)

**Far-Right Movements:** All-Polish Youth, National-Radical Camp, Christus Rex, Pride and Modernity (*Duma i Nowoczesność*)

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** National-Radical Camp

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

Speaking out in defence of ethnic, religious, and sexual minority rights in Poland carries considerable risks, as demonstrated by the fatal stabbing of the Mayor of Gdańsk Paweł Adamowicz on 14 January 2019. Adamowicz was, among others, a staunch advocate of minorities, including immigrants and refugees. He held a deep belief that refugees, as victims and survivors of warfare, deserve support and assistance.<sup>1</sup> During a conference devoted to refugees held in the Vatican in December 2016, he directly challenged the Law and Justice Government in respect to their refusal to receive refugees from Syria and other countries: “I’m standing here before you deeply ashamed. I am ashamed, because I come from a country which does not want to accept refugees... despite declared Christian values it spreads the fear of refugees... this division is painful and unnecessary.”<sup>2</sup> Adamowicz named and shamed Polish politicians he saw as hypocritical and responsible for these divisions: President Andrzej Duda, the then Prime Minister Beata Szydło, and the Law and Justice Chairman Jarosław Kaczyński. Adamowicz was attacked by Polish radical conservative media.<sup>3</sup> The circumstances of his death mirror those of the British politician Jo Cox, the Labour Party MP stabbed and shot by a far-right supporter on 16 June 2016, in the run-up to the Brexit referendum.<sup>4</sup> Several Polish commentators believe that while Adamowicz’s assassin was a long-time criminal, the assassination was politically motivated (immediately after the stabbing, he directed grievances related to his incarceration at Civic Platform, Adamowicz’s party).<sup>5</sup> Notably, two weeks before Adamowicz’s assassination, the Gdańsk district prosecutor’s office dismissed an investigation regarding fake “death certificates” issued in Adamowicz’s name (as well as mayors of ten other cities) by All-Polish Youth who opposed the signing of a declaration of collaboration “for the purpose of a friendly welcoming of immigrants”. Polish Muslims were among the mourners during an interfaith service commemorating Adamowicz on 20 January 2019.

1. “Paweł Adamowicz o zobowiązaniach wobec uchodźców - przypominamy mocne słowa z Watykanu”, Gdansk.pl, 23 January 2019, <https://www.gdansk.pl/wiadomosci/pawel-adamowicz-o-zobowiazaniach-wobec-uchodzcow-przypominamy-mocne-slowa-z-watykanu,a,136361>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

2. “Europe: Refugees Are Our Brothers and Sisters – 10 December 2016”, Youtube, 9 December 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eko3JEAGoFg&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eko3JEAGoFg&feature=emb_logo) (8:51), (Access date: 26 January 2020).

3. Piotr Olejarczyk, “Prezydent Adamowicz: pomoc uchodźcom to nasz moralny obowiązek”, Onet.pl, 19 June 2017, <https://trojmiasto.onet.pl/prezydent-adamowicz-pomoc-uchodzcom-to-nasz-moralny-obowiazek/478371z>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); for examples of commentators gloating about the assassination see: “Braun ostro po śmierci prezydenta Gdańska. „Żałuję, że Paweł Adamowicz nie stanie przed sądem ludzkim” [“I regret that Paweł Adamowicz won’t face the earthly court”] Bibula.pl, 15 January 2019, <http://www.bibula.com/?p=106234>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

4. Ian Cobain, “Jo Cox Killed in ‘Brutal, Cowardly’ and Politically Motivated Murder, Trial Hears”, The Guardian, 14 November 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/14/jo-cox-killed-in-politically-motivated-murder-trial-thomas-mair-hears>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

5. “Atak na Pawła Adamowicza. ‘Nie trzeba być pisowskim czy antypisowskim, żeby być politycznym’”, TOK-FM, 14 January 2019, <http://www.tokfm.pl/Tokfm/7,130517,24360916,atak-na-pawla-adamowicza-nie-trzeba-byc-pisowskim-czy-antypisowskim.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

The Polish Ombudsman Adam Bodnar addressing the National and Ethnic Minorities Parliamentary Commission in February 2019 evaluated hate crime levels in Poland as “very high”. In particular, he highlighted that the prosecutors refuse to investigate a third of the total reported hate crimes, and the category of hate crime against people of minority national and ethnic characteristics is often acted upon ineffectively or “inactively”.<sup>6</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in Poland, a powerful organisation that would be in a position to issue effective challenges against the unfolding atmosphere of hate and fear of difference, sends out mixed messages. It continues to celebrate the Day of Islam in January, every year. It is themed after the title of the letter by the Papal Board for Inter-religious Dialogue to mark the end of Ramadan. Simultaneously, it fails to acknowledge the problems faced by Muslims living in Poland (such as those described in this and the previous reports). For example, in its analysis marking the 2019 Day of Islam, eKAI – the site of the Polish Catholic News Agency which represents the Episcopate (the collective body of bishops) – stated that “in Poland, Muslims can practise their religion without any hindrance”.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 1:** Too many mosques? A controversial poster advertising the Day of Islam in the Catholic Church. Right-wing sites criticised the “overload” of mosques that overshadow St. Mary’s Church in Krakow.<sup>8</sup>

Simultaneously, on 26 January, the Never Again Association appealed to the Church for condemnation of xenophobic attacks on Muslims in Poland, perhaps

6. “RPO: liczba przestępstw z nienawiści utrzymuje się na bardzo wysokim poziomie”, Polsat News, 18 February 2019, <https://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2019-02-18/rpo-liczba-przestepstw-z-nienawisci-utrzymuje-sie-na-bardzo-wysokim-poziomie/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

7. “Muzułmanie w Polsce”, eKai.pl, 15 January 2019, <https://ekai.pl/muzulmanie-w-polsce-2/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

8. “Zamieszanie wokół plakatu promującego Krakowski Dzień Islamu w Kościele Katolickim. Archidiecezja ‘wyraża ubolewanie’”, Gazeta Krakowska, 23 January 2020, <https://gazetakrakowska.pl/zamieszanie-wokol-plakatu-promujacego-krakowski-dzien-islam-u-w-kościele-katolickim-archidiecezja-wyraża-ubolewanie/ar/c13-14735594>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

recognising its passive stance on the matter.<sup>9</sup> Further, the RCC as an institution very often ignores hate speech voiced by individual priests, bishops,<sup>10</sup> and Catholic media outlets such as the infamous Radio Maryja run by Father Tadeusz Rydzyk that spews hatred against Muslims and refugees.<sup>11</sup> Other publications such as the Catholic weekly *Gosc Niedzielny* (Sunday Guest) spread falsehoods about Islam and treat Muslims in a patronising manner.<sup>12</sup> This unwillingness to acknowledge anti-Muslim prejudice and incidents indicates that the collaborative undertakings such as the celebrations of the Day of Islam are somewhat tokenistic. The RCC has an immense cultural influence on Polish society. It is impossible to discuss Islamophobia in Poland without considering the ubiquitous institution whose significance transcends religious practice and belief – the RCC sets the personal routines, social expectations, aspirations, and attitudes to difference for many, if not most, Poles.

In December 2019, the Centre for Research on Public Opinion issued the results of the latest survey on Polish attitudes to Islam and Muslims.<sup>13</sup> Forty-five per cent of respondents declared a negative attitude to Islam, while only 17% declared a positive attitude to this group. Only 14% of respondents said they personally knew a Muslim. People representing left-wing sympathies, with better education levels, and living in cities are more likely to see the possibility of peaceful coexistence with Muslims. People representing right-wing sympathies, with lower education levels, and living in smaller towns and villages are more likely to predict “conflict with Muslims” as inevitable and based on differing value systems. Ironically, 63% of respondents see Muslims as intolerant towards other cultures and religions.<sup>14</sup> Although in the aftermath of Mayor Adamowicz’s assassination the anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim discourse in the world of mainstream Polish politics was somewhat toned down, it was only a temporary change. Piotr Pytlakowski, a

9. Stowarzyszenie Nigdy Więcej, “O agresji wobec muzułmanów – raport na Dzień Islamu w Kościele”, NGO.pl, 25 January 2019, <https://publicystyka.ngo.pl/o-agresji-wobec-muzulmanow-raport-na-dzien-islam-u-w-kościele-286133>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

10. Jarosław Makowski, “Kościół stał się przestrzenią dla szerzenia nienawiści, ksenofobii i nacjonalizmu”, Newsweek.pl, 31 March 2016, <https://www.newsweek.pl/opinie/kosciol-stal-sie-przestrzenia-dla-szerzenia-nienawisci-i-ksenofobii/73x8bl9>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

11. Piotr Głuchowski and Jacek Hołub, “Prezisie, pan jest inny, niż te szcujnie pokazują Miłe chwile Kaczyńskiego z Rydzykiem”, Wyborcza.pl, 24 October 2019, <https://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/7,127290,25343236,imperator-sekretu-ojca-rydzyka-mile-chwile-kaczyńskiego-z.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

12. Marcin Jakimowicz, “Jezus u bram islamu”, Gosc.pl, 11 November 2019, <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/5981041.Jezus-u-bram-islam-u>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Karol Wilczyński, “Kłamstwem nikogo nie nawrócicie. O ‘ewangelizacji’ muzułmanów według ‘Gościa Niedzielnego’”, Magazynkontakt.pl, 19 November 2019, <https://magazynkontakt.pl/klamstwem-nikogo-nie-nawrociecie/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

13. “Postawy wobec islamu i muzułmanów”, CBOS, December 2019, [https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2019/K\\_148\\_19.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2019/K_148_19.PDF), (Access date: 26 January 2020).

14. Ibid.

*Polityka* publicist wrote in August 2019 that in Poland “the pre-pogrom climate is becoming more intense.”<sup>15</sup>

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

The official hate crime statistics regarding incidents where Muslims were targeted continue to be low. In response to my public information request regarding hate crimes in 2019, the Ministry of Interior and Administration asserted that in 2019, 934 investigations in cases involving hate crime were conducted, as opposed to 1,124 such investigations in 2018.<sup>16</sup> Of those, according to the numbers provided by the ministry, 36 were committed based on the target’s Muslim faith and 58 hate crimes were committed based on the target’s ethnicity that might be linked to Islam (Arabs, Chechens, Turks).<sup>17</sup> The Ombudsman’s Office, in conjunction with the Organisation for security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), conducted a research project which shows that hate crime in Poland is heavily under-reported (only 5% of those targeted report hate crime to the police).<sup>18</sup> Therefore, it appears that in order to obtain a realistic picture of hate crime in Poland, the official statistics would have to be multiplied by 20. Based on the prognosis suggested by the research commissioned by the Ombudsman’s Office, these numbers are likely to be: 18,680 hate crimes in total; 720 hate crimes against Muslims, and 1,160 hate crimes against ethnicities commonly linked to Islam. This so-called dark number is a more realistic assessment of hate crimes against Muslims.

In February 2019, Ombudsman Adam Bodnar presented Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki with recommendations regarding strategies for combatting hate speech and hate crime. The recommendations belonged to two categories: those related to “propagation of totalitarian regimes” and hate speech/hate crime related to individual characteristics such as body ability, age, and sexual and gender identities (religion and race are already constitutionally protected characteristics, at least

15. Piotr Pytlakowski, “W Polsce narasta atmosfera przedpogromowa”, *Polityka.pl*, 5 August 2019, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/1917660,1,w-polsce-narasta-atmosfera-przedpogromowa.read?> (Access date: 26 January 2020); Zagner Agnieszka “W Polsce rośnie liczba napaści na muzułmanów”, *Polityka.pl*, 26 January 2019, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1780002,1,w-polsce-rosnie-liczba-napasci-na-muzulmanow.read>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

16. Freedom of Information Request response (private email communication), Department of Security, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, 31 January 2020.

17. Freedom of Information Request response (private email communication), Department of Security, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, 14 February 2020. Inexplicably, hate crimes against Catholics were given as 43 – the highest on the list and up from only 8 in 2018.

18. “Jedynie 5% przestępstw motywowanych nienawiścią jest zgłaszanych na policję - badania RPO i ODIHR/OBWE”, Biuro Rzecznika Praw Obywatelskich, 2 July 2018, <https://rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/jedynie-5-przestepstw-motywowanych-nienawiscia-jest-zglaszanych-na-policje-badania-rpo-i-odihrobwe>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

in theory). The Ombudsman also recommended a special task force to investigate Internet-based hate speech and a large diversity and inclusivity training programme for different groups. However, the response of the government was “disappointing”, according to the Ombudsman.<sup>19</sup> The response focused primarily on the increased penalization for propagation of totalitarian regimes, and the other proposals were assessed as “outside the scope of operation” of the cross-departmental task force founded by Prime Minister Morawiecki.

The waters are muddled by conservative Catholic organisations such as *Ordo Iuris* which manipulate hate crime statistics by claiming that Christians (usually assumed to be Catholics) are often the subjects of increasing harassment in Poland, failing to mention that most (35 out of 39) incidents classified by OSCE as “biased against Christians” are crimes against property (for example, theft from a church) and out of the remaining, 4 crimes involve bodily injury targeting Jehovah’s Witnesses.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, according to the report submitted in 2019 to the United Nations Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) by the Polish Ombudsman, “Since 2016, Muslims have been the group most frequently targeted by hate crime in Poland.”<sup>21</sup> The official Polish delegation claimed that the Polish government opposes discrimination but could not quote any examples of politicians challenging hate speech. In the 29 August final remarks, CERD requested an additional report from Poland which is a highly unusual measure indicating an urgent need for addressing hate crime arising in Poland.<sup>22</sup>

## Employment

In 2018, the Ombudsman’s Office commissioned a report<sup>23</sup> on the relationship between the labour market and religious identity in Poland. Published in December 2018, it illustrates a fraught situation for visibly religious participants in the labour market. Touched upon in the 2019 report, it remains the most up-to-date analysis

19. “MSWiA: trwają prace nad zastrzeżeniem prawa za propagowanie faszyzmu i nawoływanie do nienawiści”, Biuro Rzecznika Praw Obywatelskich, 13 May 2019, <https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/trwaja-prace-nad-zastrzezeniem-prawa-za-propagowanie-faszyzmu-i-nawolywanie-do-nienawisci>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

20. Anna Mierzyńska, “Manipulacje *Ordo Iuris*. ‘W Europie rośnie zagrożenie przestępstwami wobec chrześcijan’. Sprawdzamy” OKO Press, 24 November 2019, <https://oko.press/manipulacje-ordo-iuris/>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

21. “Komitet ONZ badał wykonanie przez Polskę Konwencji ws. likwidacji wszelkich form dyskryminacji rasowej”, Biuro Rzecznika Praw Obywatelskich, 7 August 2019, <https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/komitet-onz-zbada-wykonanie-przez-polske-konwencji-ws-likwidacji-wszelkich-form-dyskryminacji-rasowej>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

22. Marta K. Nowak, “ONZ chce od Polski dodatkowego sprawozdania z walki z rasizmem. ‘Uznano, że sytuacja jest niepokojąca’”, OKO Press, 6 September 2019, [https://oko.press/jak-polska-walczy-z-rasizmem/?fbclid=IwAR1iM9Yuc0foQywPzfT4UOgd7\\_zdTslaHjR7HjBFTS9eQf4eNCZ084hzfo](https://oko.press/jak-polska-walczy-z-rasizmem/?fbclid=IwAR1iM9Yuc0foQywPzfT4UOgd7_zdTslaHjR7HjBFTS9eQf4eNCZ084hzfo), (Access date: 24 January 2020).

23. Elżbieta Ciżewska-Martyńska, Marcin Jewdokimow, Mustafa Switar and Bartłomiej Walczak, “Rynek pracy a równe traktowanie ze względu na wyznanie. Raport z badania”, (Warsaw University, Warsaw: 2018), [https://siecobywatelska.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Raport\\_rynek-pracy-a-r%C3%B3wne-traktowanie-ze-wzgl%C4%99du-na-wyznanie.pdf](https://siecobywatelska.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Raport_rynek-pracy-a-r%C3%B3wne-traktowanie-ze-wzgl%C4%99du-na-wyznanie.pdf), (Access date: 24 January 2020).

of the topic that draws heavily on interviews with members of religious minorities living in Poland. Muslim respondents indicated a variety of areas where Polish labour law does not ensure equal treatment of employees. One of them is religious holidays such as Eid, when it is entirely up to the employer whether the employee can take a day off. One strategy to address this is to take a sick day. On the whole, however, Muslims seek employment in workplaces that explicitly embrace diversity – for example, progressive foundations, community centres, Muslim organizations, or with Muslim employers who are more likely to accept the requirements of the Islamic religious calendar.<sup>24</sup> Muslim respondents also report that refugees and immigrants are frequently scammed by employers who prey on those who may fear deportation or imprisonment by the authorities, even if such fears are unfounded.<sup>25</sup> Some Muslim respondents indicate that attitudes to diversity are slowly changing thanks to the rise of the corporate work culture where the upper management is often recruited globally. On the whole, however, they feel they do not have access to effective tools, in legal terms, to fight religion-based discrimination in the workplace which affects the reporting rates – many people choose to ignore it or find another job.<sup>26</sup> Muslim organisations on the other hand, tend to network with the Ombudsman’s Office, various associations providing legal aid, and “left-wing politicians”<sup>27</sup> who support them in discrimination cases. Needless to say, Polish right-wing media eagerly deny any workplace discrimination against Muslims. In an article denouncing the policies of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) addressing discriminatory practices against Muslims (which the author called “alleged discrimination”), PCh24.pl, a right-wing, nationalist website quoted Marek Jurek, a Polish member of the European Parliament, who said that “discriminated against groups are artificially constructed in an attempt to take over control and disassemble the nation states.”<sup>28</sup>

The Ombudsman’s Office’s report cited here demonstrates that the problem of religion-based discrimination in the Polish workplace exists, but since no data is being collected, it is difficult to assess the scale of the problem, and, consequently, effectively address it.

## Education

In addition to the fact that there is no coherent effort to educate Polish students about faiths other than Catholicism (during 12 years of primary and secondary education, only 1 religious education [RE] lesson is devoted to non-Christian religions,

24. Elżbieta Cizewska-Martyńska et al., “Rynek pracy”.

25. Ibid., p. 95.

26. Ibid., p. 100.

27. Ibid., p. 102.

28. For more information, see: “Nowa ‘misja’ Komisji Europejskiej. Będzie walczyć z dyskryminacją muzułmanów”, PCh24.pl, 27 March 2019, <https://www.pch24.pl/nowa-misja-komisji-europejskiej--bedzie-walczyz-z-dyskryminacja-muzulmanow,67134,i.html>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

with 2 RE lessons taught per week),<sup>29</sup> the entire educational system tends to rely on memorisation of information rather than fostering independent, critical thinking. Polish students are more likely to be tested on the types of natural resources in the Middle East, rather than learn about the effects that drilling for oil has on the local communities.<sup>30</sup> They are not encouraged to comprehend the relationships between current neo-colonialist politics, including U.S. (and Polish) military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, the profitable contracts awarded to Western companies, and the civil wars tearing apart countries such as Iraq and Syria. The teaching of world history is often concluded at 1989, leaving no scope for the development of understanding of geopolitical reasons that led, for example, to recent waves of refugees fleeing conflict in the Middle East.

There are few independent analyses of representations of Islam in Polish textbooks and the existing ones are outdated. They point out that the often negative representations focusing on conflicts involving the West and the Islamic world and ignoring the positive relationships are particularly dangerous as they are sanctioned by the curriculum.<sup>31</sup> Sometimes schools invite independent external educators to run seminars for their students and teachers (two examples of such initiatives are the “Culture of Islam +” [*W kregu kultury islamu +*] series run by UNESCO and its affiliates, and training delivered by Anna Wilczyńska) but welcoming such initiatives may carry a considerable risk for school administrators. In 2019, the dismissal of the head teacher of the primary school in Dobczyce (in the Lesser Poland region) was a result of her school receiving two Algerian students who briefly taught the students Arabic language and Algerian culture as part of the AIESEC programme. The regional department of education concluded that the head teacher “failed to ensure the pupils’ psychological and physical wellbeing... given that the volunteers were not from countries from within the Anglo-Saxon region.”<sup>32</sup> Notably, the official in charge of the department of education responsible for this dismissal, Barbara Nowak, was cited in the *Brown Book* published by the Never Again Association that documents hate crime.<sup>33</sup> In her 2018 speech addressing secondary school students in Krakow,

29. “Zmierimy to, jak uczyliśmy o uchodźstwie i islamie [WYWIAD]”, *Islamista.pl*, 20 June 2019, <https://islamistablog.pl/2019/06/20/zmienmy-to-jak-uczylimy-o-uchodzstwie-i-islamie-wywiad/>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

30. Dorota Wodecka, “Alina Czyżewska: Władza należy do narodu, tylko nikt nas nie uczy z niej korzystać”, *Wyborcza.pl*, 14 December 2019, <https://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/7,124059,25510652,alina-czyzewska-wladza-nalez-y-do-narodu-tylko-nikt-nas-nie.html>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

31. Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska “Wizerunek islamu w Polsce na przykładzie podręczników szkolnych” [in:] *Islam i obywatelskość w Europie*, ed. K. Górak-Sosnowska, P. Kubicki and K. Pędziwiatr, (Warszawa: 2006).

32. Olga Szpunar, “Dyrektorke szkoły grozi zwolnienie. Bo studenci z Algierii uczyli dzieci pisać po arabsku”, *Wyborcza.pl*, 26 February 2019, <https://krakow.wyborcza.pl/krakow/7,44425,24493245,przerwana-lekcja-tolerancji.html>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

33. Stowarzyszenie Nigdy Więcej, “O agresji wobec muzułmanów – raport na Dzień Islamu w Kościele”, NGO.pl 25 January 2019, <https://publicystyka.ngo.pl/o-agresji-wobec-muzulmanow-raport-na-dzien-islam-u-w-kościele-286133>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

she encouraged them to “defend Europe from Islam” like the school’s patron, King Jan III Sobieski. This call did not go unanswered; it was undoubtedly the lack of education about Islam and Muslims, coupled with such dehumanising discourse that led students to stage an execution at their Tarnow secondary school using a replica of the gun used by the terrorist who carried out the attack on the Christchurch mosque. The head teacher, responding to the media uproar, denied that the students meant any harm or offense.<sup>34</sup> Subsequently, however, educators Anna and Karol Wilczyński, conducted training for teachers at that school to address the need for countering stereotypes about Islam.<sup>35</sup>

## Politics

The Helsinki Foundation’s analysis of the 2018 local election campaign demonstrated the persistence of anti-Muslim themes in campaign media and other materials.<sup>36</sup> The European parliamentary elections in May 2019 and the Polish parliamentary elections in October 2019 were not infused with xenophobic messages to such an extent as the 2018 local elections, possibly due to legal challenges issued by the Ombudsman and warnings by the United Nations’ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) who noted that anti-Muslim and anti-refugee hate speech flows from the very top of the Polish government.<sup>37</sup> The statements quoted by CERD were those of Jarosław Kaczyński, the chairman of Law and Justice, and other top politicians from 2015–2017.

In November 2019, another Law and Justice politician, the Catholic activist Dominik Tarczyński, a member of parliament representing the Lublin district, expressed statements similar to his party colleagues’ in his interview for Al Jazeera TV.<sup>38</sup> He stated, “We don’t want Poland to be taken over by Muslims, Buddhists (sic) or anybody else... and nobody will ever force us to receive Muslims, Buddhists, and non-believers in huge numbers... For me, a multicultural society is not a worthwhile value... it is not a virtue. The Christian culture, the Roman law, the Greek philoso-

34. Angelika Pitoń, “Uczniowie zainscenizowali egzekucję, pozwali z repliką broni zamachowca. Tak wyglądały dni otwarte w szkole”, *Wyborcza.pl*, 9 May 2019, <https://krakow.wyborcza.pl/krakow/7,44425,24765428,uczniowie-zainscenizowali-egzekucje-pozwali-z-replika-broni.html>. (Access date: 24 January 2020).

35. Renata Radłowska, “Przemysł islam razem z muzułmanami. ‘Rethinking Islam’”, *Wyborcza.pl*, 16 May 2019, <https://krakow.wyborcza.pl/krakow/7,44425,24789185,przemysl-islam-razem-z-muzulmanami-rethinking-islam.html>. (Access date: 24 January 2020).

36. Helsinska Fundacja Praw Człowieka, “Raport z monitoringu – migranci, uchodźcy i ksenofobia w kampanii wyborczej 2018”, *hfhf.pl*, December 2018, <http://www.hfhf.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Raport-monitoring-mowy-nienawiści-w-kampanii-wyborczej.pdf>. (Access date: 24 January 2020).

37. Marta K. Nowak, “ONZ chce od Polski dodatkowego sprawozdania z walki z rasizmem. ‘Uznano, że sytuacja jest niepokojąca’”, *OKO Press*, 6 September 2019, [https://oko.press/jak-polska-walczy-z-rasizmem/?fbclid=IwAR1iM9Yuc0foQywPzfT4UOgd7\\_zdTslaHjR7HjBFTS9eQf4eNCZ084hzfo](https://oko.press/jak-polska-walczy-z-rasizmem/?fbclid=IwAR1iM9Yuc0foQywPzfT4UOgd7_zdTslaHjR7HjBFTS9eQf4eNCZ084hzfo). (Access date: 24 January 2020).

38. “Polish MP: ‘For Me, Multiculturalism Is Not a Value’”, *Aljazeera*, 9 November 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/upfront/2019/11/polish-mp-multiculturalism-191108202121337.html>. (Access date: 24 January 2020).

phers, these are virtues.”<sup>39</sup> Elsewhere in the interview, he stated that most terrorists were Muslim. He also repeated many other stereotypes about Muslims and refugees which the interviewer challenged as untrue.<sup>40</sup> While Tarczyński ostensibly spoke as an individual, the actions of the Law and Justice government in their previous terms reflect these sentiments, and the election of Law and Justice in October 2019 suggests that the policies in the areas of diversity, including fighting xenophobia and racism, will be actively hindered.

## Media

TVP Info, the main mouthpiece of the Law and Justice Government, remains decidedly anti-Muslim in its coverage. Out of the 31 articles from 2019 discussing Islam and Muslims, only 7 presented this topic in a neutral manner. The remaining 23 articles focused on anti-Christian prejudice in Muslim countries, and sported alarmist headlines about growing Muslim populations and crimes committed by Muslims in Western Europe. Headlines such as “3 Million Muslims in the UK”, “Muslims in France Demand Introduction of Shari’a Law”, and “The Most Popular Name in Oslo is Not Olaf” are typical of the site. In an article from 15 December about the Islamic summit in Malaysia, published on tvp.info, the author writes about an “imaginary problem of Islamophobia”, clearly uninterested in discussing attacks on Muslim which happened in Poland and were documented by the Ombudsman’s office, the *Brown Book*, the Helsinki Foundation, and other human rights NGOs. TVP Info is also silent about repressions against Uyghur Muslims in China and Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. Those could certainly be described as Islamophobia, but, unsurprisingly, TVP Info does not cover these incidents.

The infamous Radio Maryja/Telewizja Trwam pair constituting the “media empire of Father Tadeusz Rydzyk” also engages in fearmongering against Muslims. In April 2019, they ran an interview with an academic about harassment of Christians in Muslim countries,<sup>41</sup> a theme which is rapidly gaining traction in Poland.

---

39. Aldona Brauła, “Poseł PiS w telewizji Al Jazeera. Nie powstrzymał języka”, O2.pl, 8 November 2019, <https://www.o2.pl/artykul/posel-pis-w-telewizji-al-jazeera-nie-powstrzymal-jezyka-6443899971307137a>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

40. Robert Stefanicki, “Ostre przesłuchanie Dominika Tarczyńskiego w Al-Dżazirze. ‘Nie chcemy, by muzułmanie i buddyści przejęli Polskę’”, Wyborcza.pl, 10 November 2019, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,25395687,ostre-przesluchanie-dominika-tarczyńskiego-w-al-dżazirze-nie.html>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

41. “Tylko U Nas] Dr. Ł. Fryderek: W Krajach Muzułmańskich Niezmiennie Trwają Prześladowania Chrześcijan”, RadioMaryja.pl, 20 April 2019, <https://www.radiomaryja.pl/informacje/tylko-u-nas-dr-l-fryderek-w-krajach-muzułmańskich-niezmiennie-trwają-prześladowania-chrześcijan/>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).



**Figure 2:** “Muslims in France Demand the Introduction of Shari’a Law”. In the caption, TVP Info used the offensive term ‘mahomedans’ rather than ‘Muslims’.<sup>42</sup>

The distribution of coverage is predictable: liberal and progressive outlets, such as the *Polityka* and *Newsweek* weeklies, the *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily, and many local newspapers tend to provide more informative, balanced, and neutral content about Islam in Poland and across the globe. Examples of headlines include “Uyghurs Are Facing Cultural Exterminations: Confidential Chinese Documents Leak Out” (*Gazeta Wyborcza*),<sup>43</sup> “What Propels the Islamic Revolution Today” (*Polityka*),<sup>44</sup> “Will the Fires of the Notre Dame Cathedral and the Al-Aqsa Mosque Give Christians and Muslims a New Chance for Collaboration?”<sup>45</sup> (*Newsweek*), “On Saturday Muslims Will Be Demonstrating at the Liberty Square” (*Głos Wielkopolski*),<sup>46</sup> and “Polish Muslims Are Welcoming the 1441 Lunar Year” (Radio Białystok).<sup>47</sup>

42. “Muzułmanie we Francji żądają wprowadzenia szariatu”, TVP info, 24 September 2019, <https://www.tvp.info/44540074/muzułmanie-we-francji-zadaja-wprowadzenia-szariatu>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

43. Maria Kruczkowska, “Ujgurom grozi kulturowe ludobójstwo. Nowy przeciek tajnych chińskich dokumentów”, *Wyborcza.pl*, 25 November 2019, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,25447682,ujgurom-grozi-kulturowe-ludobojstwo-nowy-przeciek-chińskich.html>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

44. Łukasz Wojcik, “Co dziś napędza islamską rewolucję”, *Polityka.pl*, 29 January 2019, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/swiat/1780054,1,co-dzis-napedza-islamska-rewolucje.read>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

45. Craig Considine, “Czy pożary w katedrze Notre Dame oraz meczecie Al-Aksa dały chrześcijanom i muzułmanom nową szansę współpracy?” *Newsweek.pl*, 18 May 2019, <https://www.newsweek.pl/swiat/pozar-notre-dame-i-meczecie-al-aksa-to-szansa-na-pojednanie/yvn0030>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

46. “Poznań: W sobotę 30 marca muzułmanie będą manifestować na placu Wolności”, *Głos Wielkopolski*, 27 March 2019, <https://gloswielkopolski.pl/poznan-w-sobote-30-marca-muzułmanie-beda-manifestowac-na-placu-wolnosc/ar/14000121>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

47. “Polscy muzułmanie rozpoczęli 1441 rok według kalendarza księżycowego”, *Radio Białystok*, 31 August 2019, <https://www.radio.bialystok.pl/wiadomosci/index/id/173054>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

## Justice System

After Mayor Adamowicz's death, MPs requested a report from the Ministry of Justice about statistics regarding hate crime, specifically how many cases are reported, what types of crimes are identified, investigated, prosecuted, what are the sentencing trends, and how many cases are dismissed and settled. Importantly, the Ministry of Justice is preparing to amend Article 53 of the Criminal Code, in order to change the directives regarding sentencing – the circumstances of the crime, such as religious motivations, will influence the sentence.<sup>48</sup> However, lawyers argue that further changes are needed, in particular setting out a legally binding definition of hate speech; the introduction of penalties for membership in organisations inciting or promoting racial hatred; and an amendment to Articles 119, 256, and 257 of the Criminal Code to extend the catalogue of protected characteristics (to include body ability, sexual identity, gender identity, etc.).<sup>49</sup> It is yet to be known what and when any changes are going to be introduced.

In 2019, sentencing pertaining to Islamophobic hate speech and crime varied, based on the type of court and case. While violent crime involving breach of bodily integrity tends to be prosecuted and convicted<sup>50</sup> (although, as the case of the Indian student battered on the commuter train in July in Gdansk demonstrates victims are still turned away from filing witness statements at police stations for reasons as flimsy as the lack of a translator),<sup>51</sup> hate speech is more tolerated by courts which are sometimes lenient in their sentencing. In June 2019, the District Court in Warsaw dismissed the case against Michal Lisiecki, the former chairman of PMPG Polskie Media SA, publisher of the two prominent Polish weeklies *Wprost* and *do Rzeczy*. He was prosecuted after he tweeted on 7 April 2017: “A truck [driven by a terrorist – AP] hit the crowds in Stockholm – let 10 x that many Muslim heads be cut down #toothforatooth”.<sup>52</sup> Such an act is classified as “inciting racial hatred”. The case was

48. Agata Łukasiewicz, “Co Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości robi z mową nienawiści”, RP.pl, 17 April 2019, <https://www.rp.pl/Prawo-kanne/304169927-Co-Ministerstwo-Sprawiedliwosci-robi-z-mowa-nienawisci.html>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

49. Ibid.

50. Michalina Bednarek, “Skazany za użycie i okrzyki ‘je...ać islam’. Dzięki pasażerze tramwaju mężczyzna nie uniknął kary”, *Wyborcza.pl*, 29 June 2019, <https://katowice.wyborcza.pl/katowice/7,35063,24946661,skazany-za-uzycie-i-okrzyki-je-ac-islam-dzieki-pasazerce.html?fbclid=IwAR2bu-97q48fKJLt9eiYy-caYTP8oI5LiLPx-wLIA2y29OfOXW2710YIGFc>, (Access date: 24 January 2020); Piotr Żytnicki, “Kopali i obrażali adwokata, bo myśleli, że jest Arabem. Ale był Polakiem”, *Wyborcza.pl*, 27 June 2019, <https://poznan.wyborcza.pl/poznan/7,36001,24940945,kopali-i-obrazali-adwokata-bo-mysleli-ze-jest-arabem-ale.html?fbclid=IwAR3voLY-qScNmETKva0bMhiG0zRtdej9t2piO32u0AutNpylyOscqwNe-8>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

51. Maciej Deja, “Gdańsk. Pobił Hindusa w SKM-ce, bo myślał, że to Arab”, *Wp.pl*, 8 July 2019, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/gdansk-pobil-hindusa-w-skm-ce-bo-myslal-ze-to-arab-6400495583213697a>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

52. Zuzanna Bukłaha, “Akt oskarżenia przeciwko wydawcy ‘Wprost’ i tygodnika ‘Do Rzeczy’. Za ścinanie ‘islamskich głów’”, *Wyborcza.pl*, 7 February 2019, [https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,24437189,akt-oskarzenia-przeciwko-wydawcy-wprost-i-tygodnika-do-rzeczy.html?fbclid=IwAR325SGBh4BM\\_nOyB6dywvq11XBkW-w6fbr8BvONXM2UyuiKGOke5pxLLt\\_4](https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,24437189,akt-oskarzenia-przeciwko-wydawcy-wprost-i-tygodnika-do-rzeczy.html?fbclid=IwAR325SGBh4BM_nOyB6dywvq11XBkW-w6fbr8BvONXM2UyuiKGOke5pxLLt_4), (Access date: 24 January 2020).

dismissed conditionally for a year (which means that it may be reopened if the accused reoffends) and Lisiecki was ordered to pay 15,000 PLN to the Fund in Aid of the Victims of Crime,<sup>53</sup> managed by the Minister of Justice.<sup>54</sup> The accused's legal team suggested "minimal public harm", but this is a questionable argument, considering the social standing of Lisiecki who, after resigning as chairman, is still on the board of the PMPG Polskie Media SA. The irony of the sentence is based on the fact that Zbigniew Ziobro, the current Minister of Justice, is known for his anti-Muslim sentiments – in 2016, he said in an interview that if in 2015 his party (Law and Justice) had not won the elections, there would be "Islamic areas" in Poland already, referring to the more open attitude to receiving refugees represented by Law and Justice's political opponent, the Civic Platform.<sup>55</sup> Further, it was a Law and Justice 2018 campaign video, praised by Beata Mazurek, the Law and Justice spokesperson, that was reported by the Ombudsman to the prosecutor's office for inciting racial hatred against Muslims. The prosecutor declined to investigate, but after the Ombudsman's appeal, the Warsaw District Court ordered the prosecutor to undertake an investigation.<sup>56</sup>

This incident is particularly alarming in light of the November 2019 arrest of two individuals by the Internal Security Agency (*Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego*), the Polish counterterrorism agency. The two men plotted a terror attack involving explosives targeting Polish Muslims. They were inspired by attacks in Norway in 2011 and New Zealand in 2019.<sup>57</sup> As seen in the next section, Lisiecki was only one prominent example of a "wall of hate" that is the Polish far-right Internet, and such a lenient sentence is no doubt an encouraging sign for Islamophobia actors.

## Internet

Anti-Muslim hate speech is ubiquitous on the Polish Internet. It is spread by both so-called common people as well as members of political and media elites, such as Lisiecki. What is particularly alarming is the degree to which it is harnessed to propel and fuel careers of ostensibly mainstream politicians. In other words, Islam-

53. "Sąd umorzył postępowanie ws. tweeta Lisieckiego o 'ścinaniu islamskich głów'", *Press.pl*, 13 June 2019, [https://www.press.pl/tresci/57565,sad-umorzyl-postepowanie-ws\\_-tweeta-lisieckiego-o-\\_scinaniu-islamskich-glow](https://www.press.pl/tresci/57565,sad-umorzyl-postepowanie-ws_-tweeta-lisieckiego-o-_scinaniu-islamskich-glow), (Access date: 24 January 2020).

54. "Fundusz Sprawiedliwosci", <https://www.funduszsprawiedliwosci.gov.pl/pl/o-funduszu-sprawiedliwosci/>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

55. "Gdyby w Polsce był inny wynik wyborów, to już byłyby tworzone dzielnice islamskie", *Wprost.pl*, 8 August 2016, <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/10018340/gdyby-w-polsce-byl-inny-wynik-wyborow-to-juz-bylyby-tworzone-dzielnice-islamskie.html>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

56. "Konwencje, nielegalne reklamy i kontrowersyjny spot. Miliony na kampanię PiS", *TVN24.pl*, 1 March 2019, <https://konkret24.tvn24.pl/polityka,112/konwencje-nielegalne-reklamy-i-kontrowersyjny-spot-miliony-na-kampanie-pis,913896.html>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

57. "ABW zatrzymała dwie osoby podejrzewane o szykowanie ataków na muzułmanów", *PAP.pl*, 13 November 2019, <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C541517%2Cabw-zatrzymala-dwie-osoby-podejrzewane-o-szykowanie-atakow-na-muzulmanow>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

ophobic sympathies can be transformed into political capital at the governmental level, which has been described by Monika Bobako in her incisive analysis.<sup>58</sup> This is illustrated by a campaign of Islamophobic hate waged by the Szczecin alderman Robert Matecki (Law and Justice). The Centre for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behaviours, one of the key Polish anti-discrimination NGOs, reported him to the prosecutor’s office for a “systemic program of slandering Muslims.”<sup>59</sup> Remarkably, Matecki is also a former collaborator of the then Justice Minister Patryk Jaki – he was “confidentially” contracted to manage social media for the Ministry of Justice.<sup>60</sup> The titles of Facebook pages he founded or managed as an administrator include “No to Islamisation of Poland”, “Army of Patriots”, “Our Homeland, Poland”, “Right-Wing Szczecin”, “Right-Wing Internet”, “I Support the Law and Justice Government”, “I’m a Pole”, and “I Don’t Want Islamisation of Poland”. Examination of the posted content reveals offensive memes focusing on Muslims and refugees, and a database of crimes committed by Muslims and refugees in Germany (ostensibly as evidence for keeping Muslims and refugees out of Poland). All the tropes of anti-Muslim and anti-refugee discourses are reflected visually, including Poles as defenders of weakened Europe, Germany overrun by Muslims, and sexualised imagery of German women wearing simultaneously revealing “folksy” clothing and burka-type clothing that conceals the face but reveals the cleavage. Below is a selection of images posted on the “No to Islamisation of Poland” group in which Matecki was involved.



**Figure 3:** This image references the Volkswagen logo changed here to include the Islamic star and crescent as a sarcastic symbol of “Islamised” Germany.<sup>61</sup>

58. Monika Bobako, *Islamofobia jako technologia władzy. Studium z antropologii politycznej* [Islamophobia as technology of power. A study in political anthropology], (Krakow: Universitas, 2017).

59. Jolanta Kowalewska, “Kierował akcją systemowego znieważania’ Będzie zawiadomienie do prokuratury na radnego PiS”, *Wyborcza.pl*, 24 June 2019, <https://szczecin.wyborcza.pl/szczecin/7,34939,24930980,bedzie-zawiadomienie-do-prokuratury-na-radnego-pis-dariusza.html>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

60. *Ibid.*

61. Nie Dla Islamizacji Polski, Facebook, 4 October 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/niedlaimamizacji.poland/photos/a.460112287504274/830584690457030/?type=3&theater>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).



**Figure 4:** A cartoon-style drawing of a fearful brown-skinned man with a beard and a turban, followed by a lighter-skinned man in a knight's helmet, carrying a sword.<sup>62</sup>



**Figure 5:** A woman with a covered face as a deviant object on the spoof cover of *Playboy* magazine. The goat at the center of the “O” in “PLAYBOY” has connotations of zoophilia, and is a reference to a common Polish expletive singling out Middle Eastern men.<sup>63</sup>

This dark corner of Facebook also demonstrates that anti-Muslim attacks, such as the one in Christchurch, cause ripples in such faraway countries as Poland. The Polish right-wing activists expressed their praise and admiration for the terrorist who executed 51 Muslims at the mosque. The comments related to the attack harvested by Anna Mierzyńska from OKO Press include “Everyone is tempted to do the same”.<sup>64</sup> The traffic increased as a growing number of websites was blocking the terrorist’s manifesto. Polish nationalist websites and their Facebook profiles, including National Media (*Media Narodowe*) and Independence March (*Marsz Niepodleglosci*), enthusiastically encouraged their audiences to download and read the manifesto. Admiring commenters, as Mierzyńska noted, were often ordinary Polish men. In the torrent of hateful expletives regarding the New Zealand victims quoted in the article,

62. Nie Dla Islamizacji Polski, Facebook, 24 November 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/niedlaislamizacji.poland/photos/a.460112287504274/660750404107127/?type=3&theater>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

63. Nie Dla Islamizacji Polski, Facebook, 2 October 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/niedlaislamizacji.poland/photos/a.460112287504274/487648651417304/?type=3&theater>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

64. Anna Mierzyńska, “Szacun dla gościa’ – polscy nacjonalisci o mordercy 50 osób w Nowej Zelandii”, OKO Press, 17 March 2019, <https://oko.press/polscy-nacjonalisci-o-mordercy-50-osob-w-nowa-zelandia/>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

one stood out in the context of the attempt to conduct an anti-Muslim terrorist attack described earlier in this report: “in my view, this guy will have copycats”.<sup>65</sup>

It was undoubtedly these types of comments that Poznan imam Youssef Chadid referred to when speaking about support among some Poles for the Christchurch terrorist. He made this observation during the demonstration “Hello Brother Hello Sister” in remembrance of the victims of the attack. He was immediately attacked by the Law and Justice alderwoman Lidia Dudziak who demanded that Chadid apologise for his statement. She claimed he had no right to accuse Polish people because he is a “guest in Poland” and made untrue statements that Christians are the main target of Islamist terrorism.<sup>66</sup> The alderwoman’s position represents wilful ignorance of the facts,<sup>67</sup> namely that Muslims are the most likely group to be victims of terrorist attacks today.

Individual Catholic priests sometimes openly express Islamophobic views online without repercussions from the hierarchy or the Polish legal system. For example, Fr. Tomasz Brusy, a vicar at the Gostyn Parish and former mentor in the Catholic Youth Association, is known for distributing far-right content on his social media profiles. One of the articles he shared was titled “Europe Can’t See That It’s Subject to the Worst Kind of Slavery – Islam”.<sup>68</sup>

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Central figures in the Polish Islamophobic networks simultaneously traverse far-right media outlets, think tanks, social media, and traditional institutions like the state and the Church. The institutional anchoring provides financial stability, while tailored messaging ensures support of the public across different age groups and other socioeconomic characteristics. In 2019, it appears that the individuals active in Polish Islamophobic networks largely shifted their focus to harassing the LGBT community and climate change activists. Occasional Islamophobic outbursts often pepper their anti-LGBT tirades. Rafał Ziemkiewicz, a right-wing publicist, wrote that “[a strong church] is the final bulwark against our transformation into a rainbow brothel with a prospect of a hostile Islamic takeover, just as in the West.”<sup>69</sup>

---

65. Ibid.

66. Tomasz Nyczka, “Radna PiS Lidia Dudziak: Poznański imam powinien przeprosić”, *Wyborcza.pl*, 2 April 2019, <https://poznan.wyborcza.pl/poznan/7,36001,24607131,radna-pis-lidia-dudziak-poznanski-imam-powinien-przeprosic.html>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

67. Jack Herrera, “Most Terrorist Victims Are Muslims”, *PSMag.com*, 18 March 2019, <https://psmag.com/news/most-terrorist-victims-are-muslim>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

68. Piotr Żytnicki, “Ksiądz Tomasz Brusy wspiera homofobiczną akcję ‘Gazety Polskiej’”, *Wyborcza.pl*, 19 July 2019, <https://poznan.wyborcza.pl/poznan/7,36001,25009108,ksiazd-tomasz-brusy-popiera-homofobiczna-akcje-gazety-polskiej.html>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

69. Rafał Ziemkiewicz, “Trąd u Ołtarza”, *Interia.pl*, 17 May 2019, <https://fakty.interia.pl/opinie/ziemkiewicz/news-trad-u-oltarza,nId,2995509>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

At the conference 4<sup>th</sup> European Congress for Defending Christians, preying on the irrational fear of Islam replacing Christianity in Europe, the editor-in-chief of the right-wing weekly *doRzeczy* Paweł Lisicki delivered a speech titled “The Future of Europe? Between the Caliphate and Homoland”, combining Islamophobia and anti-LGBT prejudice. Lisicki is also a staunch critic of Pope Francis and those sections of the Catholic Church’s hierarchy he considers too engaged in inter-religious dialogue.<sup>70</sup> He represents a local variety of sedevacantism, a movement that denounces the Pope.

The person more resonating with Lisicki’s sympathies would be Roman Kneblewicz, an openly fascism-admiring Polish Catholic priest representing a mix of extremist views against Muslims, refugees, and LGBT people. He was invited to deliver the Lent retreat in the London parish of Finchley (where many Poles reside and attend church), but his visit was cancelled due to protests.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, what is worth noting is the potential future impact of Janusz Korwin-Mikke, a former member of the European Parliament, who is currently a member of Parliament (since November 2019) and the chairperson of the populist Confederation for Liberty and Independence party, known for extremely chauvinistic and xenophobic views.<sup>72</sup> Seen by many as a bizarre element of the Polish political scene, regularly running in presidential elections and amassing marginal support, he has recently increased his influence especially among digitally literate, unemployed Polish males aged 18-24. Korwin-Mikke is active on YouTube and in the weekly *Najwyższy Czas!* (*High Time!*) where he regularly spouts Islamophobic views.<sup>73</sup> His election gives him a platform for future antics in the parliament.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

The state educational system continues to fail to provide factual and objective information on Islam with the exception of specialised and elite university programmes. Progressive media, as mentioned in the Media section of this report, and other civil society actors are left to make up for these shortcomings, and while they are only able to address them individually, rather than systemically, they provide a valuable public

70. Radio WNet, “Lisicki: Co łączy papieża Franciszka z typową lewaczką - Antje Jackelén? NOWA KSIĄŻKA LISICKIEGO”, Youtube, 5 October 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBZgL0-l6uI>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

71. “Roman Kneblewski – An Ultra-Nationalist, Anti-Migrant and Anti-LGBT Activist in Finchley”, Faith-Matters.org, 13 March 2019, <https://www.fait-matters.org/2019/03/13/roman-kneblewski-an-ultra-nationalist-anti-migrant-and-anti-lgbt-activist-in-finchley/>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

72. “Uprzedzenia, Strach, czy Niewiedza?”, Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej, January 2016, <https://interwencjaprawna.pl/docs/ARE-116-uprzedzenia-mlodych-polakow.pdf>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

73. Asmeredakcja, “Musimy się zdecydować: walczymy czy poddajemy się muzułmanom? - Janusz Korwin-Mikke”, Youtube, 6 June 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsdvTuXB0yo>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

service, especially in urban areas. Anna Wilczyńska, a specialist in Arab studies who runs the Islamista.pl blog, reviews children's literature that introduces Muslims and refugees. Her recommendations include *Who Are They, Those Muslims?* by Zuzanna Pol, an accessible book that introduces young readers to Islam and clarifies stereotypes, and *Nabu's Journey*, Jarosław Mikołajewski's book about a refugee girl that involves the young reader in the creation of the outcome for the heroine.

As mentioned in the Education section, educational initiatives that aim to deliver culturally sensitive training about Islam are funded by global organisations (UNESCO, AIESEC) and local activists such as Anna and Karol Wilczyński. These valuable initiatives do not however have the impact necessary to transform Polish attitudes to Islam that are often rooted in a lack of knowledge and interaction with Muslims. Mainstream educational institutions such as libraries, museums, and art centres actively educate their target groups about Islam. An example is the annual celebration of the Christian-Muslim dialogue held by the Centre of Modern Art in Toruń<sup>74</sup> in collaboration with the Doha Association from Katowice. Commercial training about Islam delivered by specialist foundations, such as El-Karama, are worthy of note.<sup>75</sup> These programmes of study are aimed at particular vocational groups, such as uniformed forces and commercial firms.

During its term, the Law and Justice government has systematically removed funds from third-sector organisations who rely on state funding and whose mission is in opposition to its ideology. One such organisation was Refugee.pl which provided assistance to refugees.<sup>76</sup> This does not bode well for the civil society organisations that promote peaceful coexistence with Muslims in Poland. For the time being, the best institutional allies of Muslims in Poland are the Ombudsman who is active in tracing and challenging discriminating practices; progressive media which carry out the task of educating the public about Islam; and NGOs such as the Never Again Association, Centre for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behaviours, Hejt Stop, and others who keep records of hate crime and the legal processes that follow reporting.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This report illustrates some trends in Islamophobia in Poland in 2019. First, it demonstrates how terrorist attacks are indeed fuel for hate speech and hate crime. It appears that it does not matter whether the attack was carried against Muslims or by Muslims; as long as the attack can be framed as part of the conflict

---

74. Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej, "Orient Express: Sztuka Dialogu", CSW.torun.pl, 23 January 2019, <https://csw.torun.pl/ksiazki/orient-express-sztuka-dialogu-30944/>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

75. "Szkolenia", El-Karama.pl, <http://el-karama.pl/szkolenia/>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

76. Anna Kiedrzynek, "PiS mrozi trzeci sektor. 'Wymiana elit to też wymiana organizacji pozarządowych'", Newsweek.pl, 3 October 2019, <https://www.newsweek.pl/polska/spoleczenstwo/pis-mrozi-trzeci-sektor-wymiana-elit-to-tez-wymiana-organizacji-pozarządowych/3dbp87z>, (Access date: 24 January 2020).

between Islam and the West, tensions and harassment are on the rise. Second, it shows that Islamophobia constitutes political capital, as individuals known for their anti-Muslim and anti-refugee prejudice were successful in the European and parliamentary elections. They are supported by a strong nativist faction within the Catholic Church. Finally, perhaps due to the legal challenges by the Ombudsman and reprimands of the Polish state by the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), as well as a shift of the attention of far-right networks to LGBT issues, the Islamophobic framing of campaign material was less intense in 2019 than in previous years. The policy recommendations made in previous reports remain unaddressed.

This year's recommendations are drawn from the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination's final remarks from 29 August 2019:

- Increased funding for the Ombudsman's Office.
- A guaranty of independence for the judiciary and prosecutors.
- Combatting racist hate speech and incitement of violence, in particular by public condemnation of hate speech by public figures and the media, organising campaigns, promoting tolerance, and understanding and combatting prejudice against minorities, migrants, and refugees.
- Delegalizing groups promoting racial and national hate speech and hate crime.
- Sending a strong anti-hate message to the media.

The policy recommendations made in the last three reports have, regretfully, been ignored.<sup>77</sup> We restate them here.

- The report recommends that in order to tackle the problem of Islamophobia at the root, scholarship-based multi-religious education be introduced into the Polish education system. The confessional, insular Catholic instruction currently delivered in Polish schools does not promote interfaith understanding or openness to difference that flows from the knowledge of other faith traditions.
- This report recommends that specialist, externally delivered training be delivered to police officers (especially those interacting with those reporting hate crime), border guards, and prosecutors to recognise better and address hate crime including crime based on religious belonging.
- In order to challenge Islamophobia and other forms of racism in Poland, at least minimally, the recognition at the highest level of the state that such issues exist is first and foremost necessary.

77. Pędziwiatr and Konrad, "Islamophobia in Poland: National Report 2016", *European Islamophobia Report 2016*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (Istanbul, SETA: 2017), <http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/POLAND.pdf>. (Access date: 9 January 2019); Anna Piela and Anna Łukjanowicz, "Islamophobia in Poland: National Report 2017", *European Islamophobia Report 2017*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (Istanbul, SETA: 2018), <http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Poland.pdf>, (Access date: 9 January 2019).

- It is also necessary to significantly strengthen widely understood anti-discrimination policies in the whole country. The dissolved governmental Council for Fight Against Racism and Xenophobia should be reinstated or a new body should be created to address the issues of racism and xenophobia at the highest level and to overlook the policies undertaken to tackle these phenomena.
- Hate speech, contrary to what many right-wing organisations state, does not equal freedom of speech. There cannot be any tolerance of hate speech and all forms of hate crimes should be punished with outmost severity.
- A new mechanism of collecting data on hate crimes should be put in place.
- State institutions in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders (in particular within academia and the non-governmental sector) should identify some of the key issues of xenophobia and racism in the country and in cooperation with these stakeholders fight to build a more tolerant and inclusive society.
- Media organisations that advocate hate crime, including Islamophobic crime, and engage in hate speech ought to have their public funding cut, if they receive any. This recommendation should be legislated as soon as possible.

## Chronology<sup>78</sup>

- **27.02.2019:** A primary school head teacher was suspended and dismissed from work for inviting two Algerian students (as part of the AIESEC exchange programme) to tell students about their country and teach rudimentary Arabic phrases. The educational authorities explained that the disciplinary action was taken because the head teacher by inviting the Algerians into the school “did not ensure the students’ safety”. Previously the school hosted students from India and China without any repercussions.
- **23.03.2019:** Jacek Międlar, a former Catholic priest and a far-right activist, published a YouTube video praising Brent Tarrant, the terrorist who murdered 49 Muslims praying in mosques in Christchurch in New Zealand on 15 March 2019.
- **02.04.2019:** A Law and Justice Alderwoman, Lidia Dudziak, verbally attacked the Polish imam Yousse Chadid who criticised support expressed by some Polish people for the Christchurch massacre.
- **16.04.2019:** In a Telewizja Republika interview Ryszard Czarnecki, a member of the European Parliament (Law and Justice), suggested that

---

78. The author of this report would like to acknowledge the assistance of *Stowarzyszenie Nigdy Wiecej* (Never Again Association), the publisher of the *Brunatna Księga* (Brown Book), in the collation of this incident list.

Muslims caused the Notre Dame Cathedral fire “as for them it’s a form of conquering Europe”.

- **09.05.2019:** During open days at a vocational high school, six students staged an execution with a replica of a gun used by the killer at the Christchurch mosque in March. They photographed themselves with the gun replica which bore the Islamophobic statements written on the gun used in the actual terrorist attack: “kebab remover” or “Tours 732” (referring to the Battle of Poitiers). One of the photographs documenting the incident recorded a student pretending to shoot another in the back of the head.
- **26.05.2019:** The captain of the Polish national volleyball team Michal Kubiak made a racist statement about the Iranian volleyball team and the Iranian nation during an interview for the Prawda Siatki programme published on YouTube.
- **July 2019:** Three kebab restaurants were vandalised. The owner of one of them, a Polish Syrian Kurdish man, had been harassed by unknown perpetrators writing racist expletives on his properties.
- **07.07.2019:** An Indian student was violently beaten up by a man on a commuter train. The perpetrator shouted “F\*ck Arabs”.
- **02.08.2019:** A male attacked a Muslim woman wearing a hijab and her 3-month-old son. The perpetrator violently pushed the stroller, and shouted racist slogans and death threats to the woman. He was subsequently arrested and the investigation is ongoing.
- **03.08.2019:** A group of 20 males vandalised a kebab restaurant which employed Turkish nationals. The attack involved throwing stones and bottles, and shouting racist slogans. The restaurant owner had his leg broken by the attackers.
- **26.08.2019:** A large group of men attacked a small group of Turkish students. Amidst taunts regarding their ethnicity and religion, the perpetrators threatened the students, who had been volunteering with a children’s non-profit organisation, with a machete.
- **21.09.2019:** Four men verbally attacked and physically injured a kebab restaurant employee who was from Bangladesh.
- **20.10.2019:** A Muslim woman was attacked by a group of people while on a tram. The attackers tried to tear off her headscarf and verbally abused her.
- **30.11.2019:** A man of mixed Polish-Arab heritage was violently attacked while at a Poznan nightclub. The perpetrator broke his jaw and the victim had to undergo complex surgery. The victim’s family stated that the police was uncooperative when the victim attempted to file a report, and only after the media became involved, the police became more active in pursuing the perpetrator.



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**ROMANIA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

BOGDAN GHENEA



## The Author

**Bogdan Ghenea** is a research consultant specialising in human rights, migration/asylum, employability, and labour markets. He holds a Master's degree in European and Romanian Politics from the University of Bucharest. Since 2010, he has written multiple shadow reports on racism and discrimination for the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) and has collaborated with the Asylum Research Centre on writing country and thematic reports. Ghenea has provided research and expert advice on employability and labour markets for clients such as Airbus and Total. Email: bogdan.ghenea@gmail.com

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Bogdan Ghenea: *Islamophobia in Romania: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

Almost 65,000 Muslims live in Romania accounting for 0.34% of the total population. The presence and integration of Muslims in Romania remains an issue that draws minor interest on the political and public agenda.

Although no significant incidents regarding Muslims and immigrants have been recorded in Romania during 2019, Islamophobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric was present, especially in nationalist and Christian Orthodox media outlets. Activities in cyberspace of anti-Islam activists and sympathisers of extremist political parties had low visibility during the reporting period. Hate speech directed at Muslims was recorded, although to a lesser extent than in previous years.

Hate crimes and cases of incitement to hatred remain underreported. Few official complaints have been made compared to the large number of people reportedly experiencing incidents of racial/ethnic or religious discrimination. Still, there is no systemic data collection regarding hate crimes and other types of violence directed at immigrants or Muslims by the Romanian authorities.

The most significant development affecting Muslims during the reporting period was the final rejection by parliament of the legislative proposal to ban face covering with any material that prevents physiognomic recognition in educational institutions. Of note was also the absence of migration and integration of foreigners from the platforms of most political parties that ran for the European Parliament 2019 elections.

## Sumar

Aproape 65.000 de musulmani trăiesc în România, reprezentând 0,34% din totalul populației. Prezența și integrarea musulmanilor în România rămâne, ca și în cazul imigrației în ansamblu, o problemă marginală pe agenda politică și publică. Deși în anul 2019 nu s-au înregistrat incidente semnificative cu privire la musulmani și imigranți, retorica anti-imigrație, și ostilitatea față de musulmani a continuat să fie prezentă, în special în mass-media naționalistă și creștin ortodoxă.

În spațiul online, vizibilitatea activiștilor anti-Islam și a simpatizanților partidelor politice extremiste a fost redusă pe durata perioadei raportate. Au fost înregistrate cazuri de discurs instigator la ură direcționat împotriva musulmanilor, însă într-o manieră redusă comparativ cu anii anteriori.

Infracțiunile motivate de ură și cazurile de incitare la ură rămân insuficient raportate. Au fost făcute puține plângeri oficiale în comparație cu numărul mare de persoane care susțin că se confruntă cu incidente de discriminare rasială / etnică sau religioasă. În continuare, la nivelul autoritatilor nu există un sistem unitar de colectare a datelor privind infracțiunile motivate de ură și alte tipuri de violență îndreptate împotriva imigranților sau musulmanilor.

Cel mai important eveniment care a afectat musulmanii în perioada de raportare, a fost respingerea definitivă de către Parlament a propunerii legislative de a interzice acoperirea feței cu orice material care împiedică recunoașterea fizionomică în instituțiile de învățământ. De menționat este și lipsa din programele electorale ale majorității partidelor politice participante la alegerile din 2019 pentru Parlamentul European a migrației și integrării străinilor ca teme de interes.

## Country Profile EIR 2019

**Country:** Romania

**Type of Regime:** Republic

**Form of Government:** Unitary semi-presidential republic

**Ruling Parties:** National Liberal Party – PNL (Liberal)

**Opposition Parties:** Social Democratic Party – PSD (Social Democratic); The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats – ALDE (Liberal)

**Last Elections:** 2019 Presidential Election (Klaus Iohannis of PNL – National Liberal Party won with 66.09% of votes against Viorica Dancila of PSD – Social Democratic Party 33.91%); 2016 Legislative Election (PSD: 221 [Centre-Left], PNL: 99 [Centre-Right], USR: 43 [Centre-Right], UDMR: 30 [Centre-Right], ALDE: 29 [Centre-Right], PMP: 20 [Centre-Right], Minorities: 17); 2019 European Parliamentary Election (PNL: 10 MEP mandates, PSD: 9, USR-PLUS 2020 Alliance [Centre-Right]: 8, ProRomania [Centre-Left]: 2, PMP: 2, UDMR: 2)

**Total Population:** 20,121,641 (2011 census)

**Major Languages:** Romanian (official) 85.4%, Hungarian 6.3%, Romani 1.2%, Other 1%, Unspecified 6.1% (2011 est.)

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** A 2019 survey from the National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD) revealed that 68% of Romanians have a lack of trust in relation to people of Muslim faith, and 62% of those interviewed think that Muslims are potentially dangerous. Around 39% of the respondents would not accept having a Muslim relative, 28% would not accept having a Muslim friend, and 19% would not accept a Muslim co-worker.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** There are no designated procedures for recording hate crimes by the Romanian police. Consequently, criminal offenses committed with a bias motivation cannot be identified through the system. According to the National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD), in 2018, there were 822 petitions registered, out of which the largest number of petitions received were on the grounds of belonging to a social category (302) and the smallest numbers were on grounds of HIV status (4), with no cases on the ground of race. There were 11 petitions submitted on the grounds of religion and beliefs. The NCCD found discrimination in 97 cases, out of which only one was on grounds of religion and beliefs.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Eastern Orthodox (86.45%), Roman Catholic (4.6%), Reformed Protestants (3.19%)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 0.34%

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Romanian Muftiyat, Diyanet Foundation

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** *Centrul Cultural Islamic “Islamul azi”* (The Islamic Cultural Centre “Islam Today”), *Liga Islamica si Culturala din Romania* (The Islamic and Cultural League in Romania), The Coalition for the Rights of Migrants and Refugees (CDMiR), ActiveWatch

**Far-Right Parties:** The New Right Party – PND (*Partidul Noua Dreaptă*), United Romania Party - PRU (*Partidul Romania Unita*)

**Far-Right Movements:** N/A

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** The legislative proposal for banning face covering with any material that prevents the recognition of physiognomy in educational institutions launched in December 2017, after being rejected by the Chamber of Deputies in April 2018, was further submitted to the senate for deliberation. In March 2019. The senate decided to terminate the legislative procedure with a definitive rejection.
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

Romania features mostly as a country of emigration, registering a population decrease of 6% since 2007, the third highest decrease in the European Union.<sup>1</sup> Romania had the fifth largest emigrant population in member countries of the OECD.<sup>2</sup> The presence and integration of immigrants in Romanian society remains marginal in the political and public debates.

According to the 2011 census there were 64,337 registered Muslims in Romania that make up under 1% of the total population. Most Muslims in Romania live in urban settlements (49,795) with the Turks and Tartars being the largest Islamic communities. A total of 20,561 Turks and 14,376 Tartars live in urban areas, whereas 6,342 Turks and 5,684 Tartars are registered in the villages of southern Romania. Most Muslims are located in the county of Constanta (43,279) and Bucharest (9,037).

Islam is one of the 18 registered religious denominations specified in Romanian law.<sup>3</sup> In the last census, Muslims accounted for 0.34% of the population.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the small number of immigrants living in Romania, some hostility towards Muslims and anti-immigrant rhetoric were present, albeit sporadically, in the public sphere during the year. The results from a survey published by the National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD) were released in February 2019, and revealed that 68% of Romanians have a lack of trust in relation to people of Muslim faith, while 62% of those interviewed think that Muslims are potentially dangerous. Around 39% of the respondents would not accept having a Muslim relative, and 28% would not accept having a Muslim friend, and 19% would not accept a Muslim co-worker.<sup>5</sup>

In an article in Al Jazeera, however, it is noted that as opposed to other countries in Eastern Europe “Romanian Muslims say their experience has largely been one of peaceful coexistence<sup>6</sup>.” Vlad Stoicescu, a Romanian journalist who coor-

1. It is estimated that around 3.4 million Romanian citizens are living and working abroad. “Cum au ajuns românii pe locul doi în lume la emigrație, Motive și Consecințe”, *Adevarul*, 16 August 2017, [https://adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/cum-ajuns-romanii-locul-doi-in-lume-emigratie-motive-consecinte-1\\_599473bc5ab6550cb80c2cdc/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/cum-ajuns-romanii-locul-doi-in-lume-emigratie-motive-consecinte-1_599473bc5ab6550cb80c2cdc/index.html), (Access date: 20 December 2019).

2. Based on 2015/16 data. “Talent Abroad: A Review of Romanian Emigrants”, OECD Publishing, 2019, [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/talent-abroad-a-review-of-romanian-emigrants\\_bac53150-en#page28](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/talent-abroad-a-review-of-romanian-emigrants_bac53150-en#page28), (Access date: 11 December 2019).

3. “Legea nr. 489/2006 - libertatea religioasă și regimul general al cultelor”, *LegeAZ*, <https://legeaz.net/monitor-ul-oficial-201-2014/legea-489-2006-libertatea>, (Access date: 1 December 2019).

4. “2011 Recensământul despre Religie”, National Institute for Statistics, October 2013, [http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/publicatii/pliante%20statistice/08-Recensamintele%20despre%20religie\\_n.pdf](http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/publicatii/pliante%20statistice/08-Recensamintele%20despre%20religie_n.pdf), (Access date: 10 December 2019).

5. “Sondaj de opinie la nivel național privind nivelul discriminării în România și percepțiile actuale asupra infracțiunilor motivate de ură”, National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD), February 2019, [https://main.components.ro/uploads/1d3a0bf8b95391b825aa56853282d5da/2019/02/Sondaj\\_de\\_opinie\\_NoIntoHate\\_2018.pdf](https://main.components.ro/uploads/1d3a0bf8b95391b825aa56853282d5da/2019/02/Sondaj_de_opinie_NoIntoHate_2018.pdf), (Access date: 11 December 2019).

6. “Romania, a Beacon of Coexistence for Muslims in Eastern Europe”, Al Jazeera, 20 August 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/romania-beacon-coexistence-muslims-eastern-europe-190819101957640.html>, (Access date: 20 December 2019).

dinates an investigation about religious cults in Romania, stated that the Muslim community in southern Romania is well-integrated and while anti-Islamic discourse is present among some nationalist intellectuals, among ordinary people it is seldom heard.<sup>7</sup>

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

Based on the sources consulted, no information on racially motivated violence and incidents directed at Muslims could be found during the reporting period. There is no systemic data collection regarding hate crime and hate speech by the Romanian authorities.

The Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) mentions in their 2019 report the shortcomings of the Romanian system's capability of data collection on hate speech and hate-motivated crimes in a systematic manner.<sup>8</sup> The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (EU-FRA) also noted that Romania's law enforcement agencies have not recorded the bias motivations of hate crimes.<sup>9</sup>

Civil society groups and international expert organisations assess that hate crime is generally underreported by victims due to a lack of trust in the willingness or ability of the authorities to investigate these cases effectively.<sup>10</sup> Moreover the lack of understanding among police officers regarding what a hate crime is and how to investigate the bias motive of a crime contributes to underreporting. Criminal law action is very rarely taken against hate crimes, and provisions on racist motivation as aggravating circumstances are also rarely applied.

The OSCE ODIHR's reporting on hate crime in Romania notes that law enforcement agencies have not recorded the bias motivations of hate crimes.<sup>11</sup> The last available data was for 2018 and revealed there were only 2 hate crimes recorded by the police and 2 ensuing prosecutions. It also noted that the UNHCR reported an incident against asylum seekers, who were subjected to racist and xenophobic insults,

7. Ibid.

8. "Report on Romania (Fifth Monitoring Cycle)", European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), 5 June 2019, <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-romania/168094c9e5>, (Access date: 20 December 2019)

9. "Hate crime recording and data collection practice across the EU", European Fundamental Rights Agency, 2018, p. 78, [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2018-hate-crime-recording\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-hate-crime-recording_en.pdf), (Access date: 20 December 2020).

10. "Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities", Council of Europe, 16 February 2018, p. 22, <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-opinion-on-romania-adopted-on-22-june-2017/168078af76>, (Access date: 20 December 2019).

11. Data on Romania's hate crime reporting to the OSCE ODIHR is available at: "Hate Crime Reporting", OSCE, 2018, <http://hatecrime.osce.org/romania>, (Access date: 20 December 2019).

being kicked and pushed by a group in a park, which was coded by the OSCE as bias against Muslims.<sup>12</sup>

While in 2018 the debate around the adoption of the UN Global Compact for Migration sparked small protests directed at immigrants in general, in 2019 there were no significant anti-Muslims/immigration protests or campaigns recorded.

## Employment

No significant developments with regard to the employment of Muslims were reported during the period under investigation. In the last data available (for 2018), the NCCD registered 365 petitions about access to employment. In 9 of these cases, fines were issued, while another 10 received a warning. However, the data is not disaggregated by criteria such as ethnic origin or religion.<sup>13</sup>

According to figures issued by the official Labour Inspection institution during 2019, the number of foreign workers in Romania has increased significantly in comparison to earlier years, reaching a total of 39,129. According to the same information, the largest number of foreign workers in Romania are of Turkish citizenship, with 4,499 active employees. This number has increased from 2013 to 2019 by 1,000.<sup>14</sup>

In previous years the main risks faced by foreign workers in Romania were related to exploitation and differential treatment.<sup>15</sup> There have been reports of behaviour related to individual employment contracts (not having a contract, having fewer working hours registered in the contract or lower payment recorded in the contract, not being paid for overtime work or delays in receiving their salary) or cases of exploitation (for instance, having to work for longer than 12 hours per day with no weekly rest days). Job scarcity, low wages, lack of language proficiency, and lack of recognised academic degrees and other certifications<sup>16</sup> often result in unemployment or employment without a legal contract and its related benefits and protections. No further developments were observed in 2019.

---

12. Ibid.

13. "Annual Report 2018", National Council for Combating Discrimination, 2019, [https://main.components.ro/uploads/1d3a0bf8b95391b825aa56853282d5da/2019/05/Raport\\_de\\_activitate\\_CNCD\\_2018\\_var\\_online.pdf](https://main.components.ro/uploads/1d3a0bf8b95391b825aa56853282d5da/2019/05/Raport_de_activitate_CNCD_2018_var_online.pdf), (Access date: 20 January 2020).

14. "Cati muncitori straini are OFICIAL Romania. Cifra s-a dublat in ultimii sapte ani", Wall Street, <https://www.wall-street.ro/articol/Careers/244095/cati-muncitori-straini-are-oficial-romania.html>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

15. "Studiu - integrarea refugiatilor in Romania (sinteza raportului)", Consiliul National Roman pentru Refugiati, 2018, pp. 3-4, <http://cnrr.ro/index.php/ro/blog-ro-2/integrare/358-studiu-integrarea-refugiatilor-in-romania-sinteza-raportului>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

16. Victoria Cojocaru, "Raport de Evaluare a Sistemului National de Integrare a Beneficiarilor de Protectie Internationala Romania", Centrul Pentru Inovare Publică, 2019, p. 31-32, <http://www.inovarepublica.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Romania-National-Report-2018-Raport-de-evaluare-a-sistemului-na%C8%9Bional-de-integrare-a-beneficiarilor-de-protect%C8%9Bie-interna%C8%9Bional%C4%83-Rom%C4%83nia.pdf>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

## Education

The education system in Romania guarantees a high degree of support for minority languages. In 2011, Romania adopted an education law which provides tuition for a minimum number of pupils in minority languages at various levels.<sup>17</sup> The only educational institution for the training of imams in Romania is the Kemal Atatürk National College in Medgidia, where a theological profile class operates.<sup>18</sup> Turkey offers scholarships for graduates of the college but due to the shrinking number of Muslims in Romania very few apply.<sup>19</sup>

Discrimination in educational institutions is rarely observed due to the small number of Muslims. During the reporting period there were no recorded cases of discrimination of Muslims in education. However, an incident was recorded where during a radio show, the vice-dean of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at the University of Bucharest made inappropriate statements related to his views on the condition of women in Islam, and intimate relationships in general. He stated that Islam views women as an object used only for the pleasure of men and advised a caller to pray so that her daughter would separate from a Muslim man with whom she was in a relationship. The radio channel was sanctioned by the National Audiovisual Council, and the chancellor of the University of Bucharest has publicly requested the vice-dean's dismissal.<sup>20</sup> A few days after the initial event, the vice-dean publicly addressed his initial declarations without apologising or detaching himself from his initial opinion.<sup>21</sup> On the same day, he quit his position as vice-dean of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology amid the controversy.<sup>22</sup>

## Politics

Elections for the European Parliament were held in May 2019, and according to the European Website on Integration none of the winning parties in this election included in their programmes any information about integration of migrants or refugees.

17. "European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Second Report of the Committee of Experts in Respect to Romania", Council of Europe, 21 December, 2017, [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016807766d3#\\_ftn1](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016807766d3#_ftn1), (Access date: 8 December 2019).

18. "Statul și cultele religioase", Secretariatul De Stat Pentru Culte, 2018, p. 162, <http://culte.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/BookRO.pdf>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

19. Andrei Crăciun and Vlad Stoicescu, "Să fie Lumina, Islam deschide-te!", Să fie Lumina, 8 February 2018, <https://safielumina.ro/islam-deschide-te/>, (Access date: 8 December 2019).

20. "Declarații halucinante făcute pe bandă de preotul Vasile Răducă despre viol și musulmani", ProTV, 23 July 2019, <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/declaratii-halucinante-facute-pe-banda-de-preotul-vasile-raduca-despre-viol-si-musulmani.html>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

21. "Preotul Vasile Răducă, nouă reacție după declarațiile despre viol și musulmani", ProTV, 24 July 2019, <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/preotul-vasile-raduca-noua-reactie-dupa-declaratiile-socante-despre-viol-musulmani-si-femei.html>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

22. "Preotul Vasile Răducă a demisionat din funcția de prodecan la Teologie", Radio Europa Romania Libera, 25 July 2019, <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/preotul-vasile-r%C4%83duc%C4%83-a-demisionat-din-func%C8%9Bia-de-prodecan-la-teologie/30073261.html>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

The PNL (National Liberal Party), PSD (Social Democratic Party), and Alliance 2020 (Save Romania Union and the Freedom, Unity and Solidarity Party – USR + PLUS) have discussed migration only with respect to border security, while other parties such as the PRP (Pro Romania Party) and the UDMR (Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania) did not include the subject of migration at all in their platforms. The only elected party (2 seats) whose programme included initiatives on migration and refugees was the Popular Movement Party (PMP). Their manifesto included ideas on making integration compulsory for migrants, by proposing EU-level regulations which would require acceptance of “the Christian traditions, culture, and habits which are specific to Europe”.<sup>23</sup>

Traian Basescu, the former president of Romania, was elected as a European Parliament representative on his centre-right party PMP list in May 2019. During a live show on Digi 24 TV post, the former president explained the motivation of his decision to go to Brussels as an MEP by the need of protecting Europe’s border of the “Muslim invasion” that in his opinion is a very acute problem. Basescu continued to state that he is a firm believer in protecting the borders of a state, and that the European Union should work on stopping migrants from reaching Europe illegally, including in international waters, and should fight to stop the alleged mafia involved in bringing migrants over in Europe.<sup>24</sup>

Mihai Chirica, former PSD member and the current mayor of Iași, made racist statements referring to Congolese, Somalis, Syrians, and people from other nations which he referred to as “[nations] that just came down from the tree<sup>25</sup>”. The NCCD took notice of the mayor’s declarations and opened an investigation.<sup>26</sup>

## Media

Over the years the media discourse in Romania has used words such as “Islam threat” and “Muslim invasion” to overemphasise the so-called refugee crisis of 2015 in the European Union. The UNHCR has reported that local media outlets depicted Muslim refugees as a threat because of their religion, adding that speech against Muslims is present on social networks.<sup>27</sup>

23. “European Parliament Elections – What Do Parties in Romania Say about Integration?”, Europe Website on Integration, <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/european-parliament-elections-what-do-parties-in-romania-say-about-integration>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

24. “De ce se duce Traian Bănescu la Bruxelles? ‘Sunt de dat niște bătălii. UE parcă ne spune că trebuie să trăim și cu invazia musulmană”, Digi 24, 18 June 2019, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/traian-basescu-imi-granti-refugiati-flota-militara-mafie-politica-externa-ue-1148177>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

25. “Mihai Chirica, noi declarații rasiste: O să vină peste noi congolezii, somalezii, sirienii și alte națiuni coborâte din copac”, Digi 24, 6 September 2019, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/mihai-chirica-noi-declaratii-rasiste-o-sa-vina-pesto-noi-congolezii-somalezii-sirienii-si-alte-natiuni-coborate-din-copac-1183994>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

26. Ibid.

27. “2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Romania”, U.S. Department of State, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/romania/>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

As immigration ceased to be an issue on the public agenda, very few publications, online or otherwise, continued to use bombastic headlines and factual misinterpretations to attract attention to migration or refugees. Among the ones that continued to depict Muslims using stereotypes, or who deliberately manipulated the facts to distort the public opinion, are nationalistic or Orthodox media outlets.

In perhaps the most widely reported incident which took place in September 2019, after a handball game between Romanian teams, a local news website wrote a controversial headline and racist subsequent article stating that “AHC Olimpia Braila, a tiny Christian team had a match with the Muslim conglomerate of HC Dunarea Braila, who absorbs money from the Quran<sup>28</sup>”. The publication further compared the game to a crusade and added that “victory was obtained by the team led by [Christian] God, in detriment to the Quran, who sponsored the team that was sold by the authorities to a sheik<sup>29</sup>”. After making further racist comments about a player from the opposing team, the article ended by describing the following week’s game in the following words: “Finally, a match between Christians<sup>30</sup>”. The president of the NCCD was notified of the article, and the institution started a procedure to sanction the publication.<sup>31</sup>

Examples of headlines that illustrate the use of stereotypes and misinformation to promote Islamophobia are offered in the figures that follow.



**Figure 1:** “Christians Decapitated on Christmas. The West Keeps Shutting Their Eyes”<sup>32</sup>

28. “CE CRONICĂ! Un meci de handbal dintre “un conglomerat musulman și o echipă micuță și creștină”. Cazul, la CNCD”, Pagina de Media, 27 September 2019, <https://www.paginademedia.ro/2019/09/ce-cronica-un-meci-de-handbal-dintre-un-conglomerat-musulman-si-o-echipa-micuta-si-crestina-cazul-la-cncd>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Tudor Borcea, “Creștinii decapitați de Crăciun. Occidentalul închide în continuare ochii”, Evenimentul Zilei, 14 January 2019, <https://evz.ro/crestinii-decapitati-de-craciun-occidentalul-inchide-in-continuare-ochii.html>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).



**Legea blasfemiei în EUROPA? Conform legii Islamice, oricine critică Islamul ar trebui UCIS**

**Figure 2:** "The Law of Blasphemy in Europe? According to Islamic Law, Anyone That Critiques Islam Should Be Murdered"<sup>33</sup>



**Visurile europene zdrobite de imigrația musulmană**

**Figure 3:** "European Dreams Crushed by the Muslim Immigration"<sup>34</sup>

33. Antonia Hendrik, "Legea blasfemiei în EUROPA? Conform legii Islamice, oricine critică Islamul ar trebui UCIS", Evenimentul Zilei, 15 January 2019, <https://evz.ro/legea-blasfemiei-europa-sharia.html>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

34. Radu Pădure, "Visurile europene zdrobite de imigrația musulmană", Evenimentul Zilei, 3 September 2019, <https://evz.ro/visurile-europene-zdrobite-de-imigratia-musulmana.html>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).



Figure 4: "French Muslims Want to Impose Sharia in Macron's France"<sup>35</sup>



ACTUAL

## Milioane de refugiați iau cu asalt țările noastre

Figure 5: "Millions of Refugees Assault Our Countries"<sup>36</sup>

35. "Musulmanii francezi vor să impună Sharia în Franța lui Macron", Napoca News, 20 September 2019, <https://www.napocanews.ro/2019/09/musulmanii-francezi-vor-sa-impuna-sharia-in-franta-lui-macron.html>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

36. Ambrus Bela, "Milioane de refugiați iau cu asalt țările noastre", Q Magazine, 9 October 2019, <https://www.qmagazine.ro/milioane-de-refugiati-iau-cu-asalt-tarile-noastre/>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

This type of reporting has been limited to a small number of publications, as most media outlets use a balanced, factual approach in reporting news on refugees, immigrants, or Muslims.

## Justice System

In 2019, the only significant legal development affecting the right of Muslims was the definitive rejection by the senate of the draft bill which proposed to prohibit the covering of the face in all educational institutions without providing for religious exemptions.

The bill was initiated in December 2017 by a group of 26 MPs, with the Popular Movement Party (PMP) being the main initiator and supporter. It received a negative advisory opinion from the government. It was further rejected by the Chamber of Deputies in April 2018, from which it was submitted for assessment to the senate. In March 2019, the senate composed of majority PSD (Social Democratic Party) members, stopped the initiative of the legislative proposal by a definitive rejection.<sup>37</sup>

The ECRI noted in its 2019 report on Romania that the criminal justice system fails to provide an adequate response to hate crimes due to underreporting of cases, lack of coherent data collection on hate-motivated violence, insufficient training of authorities, and the absence of racial motivation as aggravating circumstance in the criminal prosecution of cases.

It recommended that the authorities take action in a number of areas in this context, such as putting in place a system of data collection and producing statistics offering an integrated and consistent view of cases of racist and homo/transphobic hate speech and hate crime brought to the attention of the police and pursued through the courts, and making this data available to the public.<sup>38</sup>

## Internet

The radical groups that were fuelled by the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 have slowly faded from public attention, but sporadically still promote anti-Muslim sentiment in the context of migration in the European Union. The UNHCR reported that speech against Muslims is present on social networks.<sup>39</sup> Most anti-immigration and anti-Islam promoters have ties with nationalistic movements such as The New Right Party (*Noua Dreapta*). In 2019, the mentioned party has been mostly absent from the public scene, together with most activists linked to it.

The fourth evaluation of the Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online, an initiative by the European Commission, has seen continuous

---

37. For more information, see: "Propunere legislativă pentru modificarea și completarea Legii educației", Romania Camera Deputatilor, naționale[http://www.cdep.ro/pls/proiecte/upl\\_pck2015.proiect?idp=16761](http://www.cdep.ro/pls/proiecte/upl_pck2015.proiect?idp=16761), (Access date: 21 January 2020).

38. "Report on Romania (Fifth Monitoring Cycle)", European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 5 June 2019, <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-romania/168094c9e5>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

39. "2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Romania", U.S. Department of State.

progress in the rapid removal of online hate speech by IT companies. Across the EU, reported hate speech has been mostly on grounds of xenophobia, including anti-migrant hatred (17%), followed by sexual orientation (15.6%), and anti-Muslim hatred (13%). In Romania, 153 cases of illegal online hate speech were reported with a rate of removal of 92.2%.<sup>40</sup> Out of the total number, most cases were directed against Roma and the LGBT community while only 3% of the cases were hate speech against the Hungarian minority, refugees, and other categories.<sup>41</sup>

The Facebook page “We don’t want a mega-mosque in Bucharest”,<sup>42</sup> initially created to oppose the project of building a grand mosque in Bucharest, which was cancelled, still shares various articles to provoke and manipulate the public opinion. While the page has reduced the frequency of posting significantly, some of the posts shared still promote an anti-immigration or anti-Muslim perspective. However, they receive low to moderate engagement. One such post is the photo below, shared on 2 May 2019 that states “500,000 Pakistani people in Romania? No, thank you! We’d better bring the Romanians back home!” (Fig. 6)



**Figure 6:** “500,000 Pakistani people in Romania? No, thank you! We’d better bring the Romanians back home!”<sup>43</sup>

40. “Results of Commission’s Last Round of Monitoring of the Code of Conduct against Online Hate Speech”, European Commission Directorate for Justice and Consumers, February 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/code\\_of\\_conduct\\_factsheet\\_7\\_web.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/code_of_conduct_factsheet_7_web.pdf), (Access date: 20 January 2020).

41. “Raportul anual cu privire la discursul intolerant si instigator la ura din romania 2018”, Active Watch, p. 71, [https://activewatch.ro/Assets/Upload/files/Raport\\_ActiveWatch\\_Hate\\_Speech\\_2018.pdf](https://activewatch.ro/Assets/Upload/files/Raport_ActiveWatch_Hate_Speech_2018.pdf), (Access date: 23 January 2020).

42. For more information, see: <https://www.facebook.com/NuVremMegaMoscheeInBucuresti> (Access date: 22 January 2020).

43. Pa.ro.dox, Facebook, 2 May 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/paROdox.ro/photos/a.2090216214346990/2215540565147887/?type=3&theater>, (Access date: 22 January 2020).

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The main actors who are promoting Islamophobia are small far-right movements and parties that combine a nationalistic agenda, strong Orthodox Christian religious convictions, and elements of the fascist ideology of the Legionary Movement (the Romanian fascist movement during World War II). They are active in trying to gain public exposure and political support by adopting a strong stance on immigration and xenophobic rhetoric.

Most of these movements are relatively obscure and group themselves around the more established *Noua Dreaptă* (PND), which was registered as a political party in 2015. The PND is known to have branches abroad, including the Republic of Moldova, and according to some sources it also maintains political relations with similar anti-European and anti-NATO groups from different countries.<sup>44</sup>

During the year, their activity lacked major visibility and there is no record of any significant campaigns directed against Muslims.

The parliamentary party People's Movement Party (PMP) has been the main initiator of the 2017 legislative proposal to ban face covering in educational institutions. (See Justice System section). PMP MEP Traian Basescu made controversial statements regarding migration in the EU (see Politics section).<sup>45</sup>

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

The National Council for Combating Discrimination has become increasingly effective in its work. It has received a growing number of petitions over the years and has provided its expert opinion on judicial proceedings.<sup>46</sup>

The NCCD launched a project aimed at evaluating the transposition of the EU Council Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia at the country level. Envisaged activities include training for police involved in the registration and reporting of hate crimes.<sup>47</sup>

44. "Mic glosar al mișcărilor care se opun semnării de către România a Pactului ONU pentru Migrație", Radio Free Europe, 5 December 2018, <https://www.europalibera.org/a/mic-glosar-al-mi%C5%9F%C4%83rilor-care-se-opun-semn%C4%83rii-de-c%C4%83tre-rom%C3%A2nia-a-pactului-pentru-migra%C8%9Bie/29639490.html>, (Access date: 8 November 2019).

45. "Pactul Global pentru Migrație sau cum să anulezi Constituția României", Adevărul, 28 November 2018, [https://adevarul.ro/news/societate/pactul-global-migrație-anulezi-constituția-româniei-1\\_5bfe55badf52022f75e-26bc1/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/news/societate/pactul-global-migrație-anulezi-constituția-româniei-1_5bfe55badf52022f75e-26bc1/index.html), (Access date: 8 January 2019).

46. "Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review", UN Human Rights Council, 5 April 2018, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/084/74/PDF/G1808474.pdf?OpenElement>, (Access date: 3 January 2019).

47. "10 ani de Implementare a Deciziei Cadru UE privind rasismul și xenofobia în România: provocări și abordări noi ale acțiunilor privind infracțiunile motivate de ură - NoIntoHate2018", Consiliul National pentru Combaterea Discriminării, 27 February 2019, <https://cncd.ro/2019-02-27--10-ani-de-implementare-a-deciziei-cadru-ue-privind-rasismul-si-xenofobia-in-romania-provocari-si-abordari-noi-ale-actiunilor-privind-infracțiunile-motivate-de-ura-nointoshate2018>, (Access date: 3 January 2019).

The project ‘Combating Hate Crimes and Violent Extremism, Particularly Against Roma Population and Increasing the Quality of Police Service’, financed by the EEA and Norway Grants and implemented by the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police in partnership with the National Criminal Investigations Service in Norway (KRIPOS), provides for the operationalisation of a unit dedicated to combating hate speech in the online environment.<sup>48</sup>

The Coalition for the Rights of Migrants and Refugees (CDMiR), established in 2017 and comprising of 22 NGO members and five supporters (among them the Romanian UNHCR Office), continued to be the leading civil society initiative aimed at improving the perception of migrants and refugees in the public space, as well as their access to basic rights and services.<sup>49</sup>

The main NGOs committed to protecting and advancing the interests of Muslims in Romania are *Centrul Cultural Islamic “Islamul Azi”* (The Islamic Cultural Centre “Islam Today”)<sup>50</sup> and *Liga Islamica si Culturala din Romania* (The Islamic and Cultural League in Romania).<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The presence of Muslims in Romania remains a marginal issue on the political and public agenda. Despite the fact that no major internal developments affecting Muslims were registered during the reporting period, the stereotypical portrayal of Muslims in the media and in populist speeches by politicians continue, albeit at a lower level compared to previous years. Underreporting of hate crimes coupled with the authorities’ lack of preparation and collaboration in tackling racism and discrimination, remain issues that need to be addressed.

Based on the findings, a series of recommendations are made for relevant authorities and civil society, as follows:

- The authorities should put in place a system to collect, integrate, and publish data on cases of hate speech and hate crime investigated by the police and pursued through the courts.
- Relevant authorities should develop and promote the harmonisation of data collection in areas of hate crime and racism, recognising anti-Muslim bias as a category.

48. For more information, see: “Predefined project no. 3 – Combating hate crimes and violent extremism, particularly against Roma population, and increasing the quality of police service”, Norway Grants, <https://norway-grants-en.mai.gov.ro/proiect/proiect-predefinit-nr-3-combaterea-infractiunilor-motivate-de-ura-si-a-extremismului-violent-cu-accent-pe-populatia-roma-si-cresterea-calitatii-serviciilor-de-politie/>, (Access date: 3 January 2020).

49. For more information about the coalition and its recent activity, see: CDMiR, <https://cdmir.ro/wp/>, (Access date: 3 January 2020).

50. For more information, see: Islamul Azi, <http://www.islamulazi.ro/>, (Access date: 3 January 2020).

51. For more information, see: “Centre islamice din Romania”, Islam Romania, <https://islamromania.ro/contact/>, (Access date: 3 January 2020).

- Hate crime, hate speech, as well as anti-discrimination legislation should be included in the compulsory initial and continuous training of all law enforcement and legal professionals.
- Relevant authorities should ensure that monitoring mechanisms aimed at preventing hate speech in mass media and cyberspace (such as the EU Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online) are widely implemented.
- NGOs should strengthen their relationship with the Muslim community and enhance their legal capacity to assist victims of discrimination and hate crime.

## Chronology

- **25.03.2019:** The draft bill proposing to prohibit covering the face in educational institutions without providing for a religious exemption received a definitive rejection from the senate, stopping the legislative procedure.<sup>52</sup>
- **18.06.2019:** Traian Basescu, the former president of Romania who was elected as an MEP in 2019, stated that he wants to get involved in protecting Europe's borders from a "Muslim invasion", and that the European Union should work on stopping migrants from reaching Europe illegally, including in international waters.<sup>53</sup>
- **23.07.2019:** The vice-dean of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology made inappropriate statements related to his views on the condition of women in Islam, and intimate relationships in general. He stated that Islam views women as an object used only for the pleasure of men and advised a caller to pray so that her daughter would separate from a Muslim man with whom she was in a relationship.<sup>54</sup>
- **06.09.2019:** Mihai Chirica, the current mayor of Iași, made racist statements referring to Congolese, Somalis, Syrians, and people from other nations as "[nations] that just came down from the tree".<sup>55</sup>
- **27.09.2019:** After a handball game between Romanian teams, a local news website wrote a racist article, stating that "AHC Olimpia Braila, a tiny Christian team had a match with the Muslim conglomerate of HC Dunareea Braila, who absorbs money from the Quran", comparing the game to a crusade, adding that "victory was obtained by the team led by [Christian] God, in detriment to the Quran, who sponsored the team that was sold by the authorities to a sheik".<sup>56</sup>

---

52. For more information, see: Romania Camera Deputatilor, [http://www.cdep.ro/pls/proiecte/upl\\_pck2015.proiect?idp=16761](http://www.cdep.ro/pls/proiecte/upl_pck2015.proiect?idp=16761), (Access date: 3 January 2020).

53. "Why is Traian Basescu Going to Brussels?", Digi 24.

54. "Unbelievable Ongoing Declarations Made by Priest Vasile Raduca", ProTV.

55. "Mihai Chirica, New Racist Declarations", Digi 24.

56. "What a Report! A handball Game between a 'Muslim Conglomerate and a Small and Christian Team", Pagina de Media.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**RUSSIA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

SOFIA A. RAGOZINA



## The Author

**Sofia A. Ragozina** is a research fellow at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, and a lecturer at the National Research University Higher School of Economics. She is the managing editor in the peer-reviewed academic journal *State, Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide* (Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration). Her doctoral thesis examined the image of Islam in Russian media. Ragozina's professional interests include Muslim studies, sociology of Islam, and discourse analysis.

Email: sofyaragozina@gmail.com

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Sofia A. Ragozina; *Islamophobia in Russia: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

Speaking about Islamophobia in Russia, one should first take into account its fragmented nature. In view of the long history of interaction between the Muslim community and the Russian state (unlike most European cases), during which Islam acted as an integral part of the Russian sociocultural space, we cannot talk about the institutionalisation of Islamophobia: there are no social and political movements building their ideology around the idea of confrontation with Islam, and the discourse of Islamophobia is not in demand among politicians in power, as the official rhetoric focuses on cooperation with “traditional Islam”. Rather, Islamophobia is an articulated element of a number of other discourses that target Muslims as immigrants, the ‘racial other’, or a discourse of securitisation. The latter takes on particular significance in the light of the criminalisation of certain Muslim movements, abuses in countering terrorism and extremism (especially in matters related to Islamic extremism), restrictions on the construction of mosques, and the prohibition of Muslim literature. In 2019, most cases of Islamophobia in Russia were connected with the justice and law enforcement system. The persecution of members of Hisb-ut’Tahrir remains the most visible: in 2019, about one hundred sentences were passed on articles related to the participation or distribution of materials of this terrorist organisation that is banned in Russia. Different practices of surveillance have been intensified due to the increasing number of “returnees from ISIS”. For example, the creation of lists of “potentially dangerous individuals”. Criteria of a “dangerous” Muslim can be very different and vary depending on the context: from wearing a hijab or having a beard to being a neighbour of an amnestied militant. In 2019, Islamophobia appeared to be mostly present in Northern Caucasus republics.

## Резюме

Говоря об исламофобии в России, нужно в первую очередь принимать во внимание ее фрагментированный характер. Во-первых, ввиду давней истории взаимодействия мусульманской общины с российским государством (в отличие от большинства европейских кейсов), на протяжении которой ислам выступал как неотъемлемая часть российского социокультурного пространства, нельзя говорить об институционализации исламофобии: отсутствуют социальные и политические движения, выстраивающие свою идеологию вокруг идей противостояния исламу, дискурс исламофобии не востребован у политиков, находящихся у власти, так как официальная риторика акцентирует внимание на кооперацию с «традиционным исламом», нет оснований говорить о трудовой дискриминации мусульман или об искажении образа мусульман в образовательных материалах. Скорее она является артикулированным элементом ряда других дискурсов: мигрантофобии, ксенофобии или же дискурса секьюритизации. Последний приобретает особое значение в свете криминализации деятельности отдельных мусульманских движений, злоупотреблений в области противодействия терроризму и экстремизму (особенно, в вопросах, касающихся исламского экстремизма), ограничений, касающихся строительства мечетей, а также запрета мусульманской литературы. В 2019 году большинство случаев исламофобии в России было связано с системой правосудия и правоохранительной системой. Наиболее заметным остается преследование членов запрещенной в России террористической организации «Хизб ат-Тахрир»: в 2019 году было вынесено около ста приговоров по статьям, связанным с участием или распространением материалов этой организации. В связи с увеличением числа «возвращенцев из ИГИЛ» увеличились различные практики отслеживания «потенциально неблагонадежных» мусульман. Критерии «опасного» мусульманина могут быть самыми разными и варьироваться в зависимости от контекста: от ношения хиджаба или бороды до соседства с амнистированным боевиком. В 2019 году подобные практики чаще всего можно было наблюдать в республиках Северного Кавказа.

## Country Profile EIR 2019

**Country:** Russia

**Type of Regime:** Democratic Republic

**Form of Government:** Semi-presidential system

**Ruling Parties:** Edinaya Rossiya (United Russia) (right wing, centrist right)

**Opposition Parties:** Communist Party, LDPR, A Just Russia, Civic Platform

**Last Elections:** 2016 Presidential Election (Vladimir Putin won 76.69% of the vote, other candidates: Pavel Grudinin – 11.77%, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy – 5.65%, Kseniya Sobchak – 1.68%, Grigory Yavlinsky – 1.05%, Boris Titov – 0.76%, Maksim Suraikin – 0.68%, Sergey Baburin – 0.65%); 2016 Legislative Election (United Russia: 343 seats, Communist Party: 42 seats, LDPR: 39 seats, A Just Russia: 23 seats, Rodina: 1 seat, Civic Platform – 1 seat)

**Total Population:** 146.7 million (2019)

**Major Languages:** Russian

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** No special statistics on Islamophobia

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** No special statistics on racism and discrimination. There is data from the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis that monitors human rights violations including ethnic discrimination.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Christianity (71%), No religion (15%), Islam (10%) Other (4%) (Pew Research Center, 2017)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 13 million (9%) in 2010 (population census)

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Central Spiritual Board of Muslims, Spiritual Board of Muslims of Russian Federation, Coordination Center of Muslims of North Caucasus

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** SOVA Center for Information and Analysis; MEMORIAL: An International Historical, Educational, Human Rights and Charitable Society

**Far-Right Parties:** N/A

**Far-Right Movements:** N/A

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

Islam in Russia is the second largest religion after Christianity. According to the 2010 population census, where the question of religion was not asked, the number of traditionally Muslim peoples are estimated at 13 million, which is 9% of the total population.<sup>1</sup> Approximately the same data is provided by Pew Research Center in 2017, estimating the Muslim community in Russia at 10% of the total population.<sup>2</sup> Among the various right-wing movements, there are alarmist estimates that by 2050, more than 30% of the population in Russia will be Muslim.<sup>3</sup>

While in Europe and the United States the events of 9/11 became a trigger for the increase of Islamophobia, in Russia this function is performed by other events and phenomena.

First, it is the historical memory of the Chechen Wars. The enemy's image is formed of "ethnic" and "religious" elements. On the one hand, there is still prejudice against Chechen Muslims who fought in the war and, on the other hand, supporters of so-called radical Islam in the Caucasus are still called "Wahhabi". The problem of "exporting Wahhabism" from the Persian Gulf countries was most acute during both Chechen Wars. However, the thesis about the inevitability of the Wahhabi threat turned out to be extremely stable and is still being appealed to today by both individual experts and representatives of the establishment. The threat of the spread of ISIS was built into the already existing expectations of an "external Islamic enemy".

Secondly, anti-immigrant positions play an important role in shaping Islamophobia. Racist sentiments can be observed with respect to both labour migrants from Central Asia and representatives of the North Caucasian republics.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

Physical or verbal attacks on Muslims are not systematic. The activity of right-wing and nationalist organisations was reduced to zero in 2012-2015. Attacks on Muslim sites, therefore, can be explained by everyday racism that does not take any institutionalised forms.

In June 2019, raids were made on Muslim cemeteries in the village of Osypnoy Bugor in the Astrakhan region and on Christmas Street in the city of Astrakhan. The

1. "Ob itogakh Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 2010 goda. Soobshchenie Rosstat", Demoscope Weekly, 19-31 December 2011, <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2011/0491/perep01.php>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

2. "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe", Pew Research Forum, 10 May 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

3. "Chislo musul'man v mire postoianno rastet", Narodnyi sobor, 15 February 2017, <http://www.narodsobor.ru/events/demography/33348-chislo-musulman-v-mire-postoyanno-rastyot>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

acts were qualified as vandalism, but the perpetrators could not be apprehended. The Regional Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Astrakhan region called not to succumb to aggressive polemics and not to respond to verbal attacks pushing for illegal actions.<sup>4</sup> On 2 August 2019, in Astrakhan again, groups of former paratroopers carried out two attacks on the Red Mosque and the adjacent market, as well as one attack on the Mahmud Afandi Mosque. The incident is difficult to interpret as an action directed exclusively against Muslims: the police considered the conflict to be a domestic conflict, while according to members of the Muslim community, belligerents shouted anti-Caucasian slogans and insults against the Muslim scriptures and the Prophet Mohammed.<sup>5</sup>

## Employment

Numerous studies show that discrimination in the labour market is primarily related to ethnic stereotypes of employers, rather than to perceptions of Islam. Thus, one can speak with some caution about discrimination against Muslims, but it is mediated by their ethnicity. We are not aware of any specific studies on the marginalisation of Muslims in the labour market.

## Education

We are not aware of any cases of distortion of the image of Muslims in educational materials that would lead to any conflict. However, attention must be paid to framing the Islamic education system through a discourse of securitisation. The narrative of security predetermines the policy of Islamic education. Its roots go back to the negative experience of the 1990s of ‘uncontrolled Islamic revival’, which is associated with the following interrelated trend: the dependence of Islamic organisations on external sources of funding, which in the dominant discourse is unambiguously interpreted as a factor in radicalising the sentiments of Russian Muslims. In this connection, the main principle in subsequent projects to implement Islamic education projects has been the formation of Muslim organisations’ loyalty to the state. This is not a systemic or institutionalised Islamophobia, but security issues in regulating the system of Islamic education remains in priority.

## Politics

It should be emphasized once again that due to the special Russian context, the rhetoric of Islamophobia is hardly in demand in the political discourse. On the one hand, the historical memory of events related to certain conflicts (Afghan War, Chechen Wars) contributes to strengthening the negative image. Recently, Islam

---

4. “Dukhovnoe upravlenie astrakhanskikh musul'man prokomentirovalo pogrom na kladbishche”, RIA Volga, 21 June 2019, <https://astravolga.ru/duhovnoe-upravlenie-musulman-astrahanskoj-oblasti-prokomentirovalo-pogrom-na-kladbishhe/>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

5. “Sobytiia V Astrakhani pogromy v Den' desantnika kosnulis' dvukh mechetei”, Golos Islama, 4 August 2019, <https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=1708>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

has also been increasingly politicized due to the crises of refugees and in the Middle East. On the other hand, one cannot deny the long history of interaction between the Muslim community and the Russian state, during which Islam has acted as an integral part of the Russian sociocultural space. In this regard, especially in the last 10-15 years, the search for dividing lines between loyal and disloyal, “good” and “bad” Islam both within the framework of the reformatting of historical memory and for the purpose of applied political and ideological construction have become particularly popular. This is the reason one does not come across Islamophobic statements from political officials. Islamophobia thus becomes a consequence of the rigid dichotomy between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Islam. It is not Islamophobia that forms in the official political discourse and in the discourse of official representatives of the Muslim community, but on the contrary, the concept of “traditional Islam” opposing threats from radical Islam and being loyal to the authorities. For example, Russian President Putin in his speeches has repeatedly addressed the rhetoric of traditional values as applied to Islam. Putin states, “All our traditional confessions, and Islam certainly belongs to them, make a serious constructive contribution to inter-confessional peace.”<sup>6</sup>

## Media

One of the popular (and largely populist) strategies contributing to the negative image of Islam in the media is the “magic of big numbers” in describing Muslim communities. The designation of a certain number of Muslims, on the one hand, blurs the boundaries between different directions within Islam, turning Muslims into one amorphous actor. On the other hand, numbers are used to hyperbolise the scale of the threat (even potential) that Muslims may represent or already represent. One of the most resonant statements by representatives of the Muslim community in 2019 was the words of Mufti Ravil Gainutdin about the growth of the number of Muslims in Russia, the fact that in 15 years about 30% of the population of Russia will be Muslim, and that 3-4 million Muslims live in Moscow. Many media outlets picked up this news: someone made alarmist forecasts about the consequences of the uncontrolled growth of the Muslim community, while another, on the contrary, tried to expose their arguments. However, according to a true observation by the authoritative anthropologist Sergei Abashin, starting the conversation about Islam with numbers, “we fall into the trap of statisticians and, most importantly, the logic of the language that attributes people to simple, unambiguous and various dichotomous categories ... it is a language of generalization and fear”.<sup>7</sup>

6. “Putin: Islam v Rossii sdelal bolshie shagi v razvitiit”, Islam-today, 19 March 2019, <https://m.islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/03/19/putin-islam-v-rossii-sdelal-bolsie-sagi-v-razvitiit/>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

7. Sergey Abashin, Facebook, 19 January 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/sergey.abashin/>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

## Justice System

Thanks to the activities of a number of human rights organisations, mass media and research centers monitoring abuses in the fight against terrorism and extremism and related human rights violations, it is possible to provide an accurate overview of the law enforcement practice of Russian legislation that in some manner criminalises the activities of Muslims and Muslim organisations. We have identified several groups of measures that to some extent affect the interests of Muslims.

### *- The Criminalisation of Certain Muslim Organisations*

1) Hizb ut-Tahrir. By a decision of the Russian Supreme Court, it was declared a terrorist back in 2003. This decision has elicited a number of criticisms. The main arguments were that, firstly, Hizb-ut-Tahrir is a truly radical organisation, but it does not use violent methods to achieve its goals.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, the active struggle<sup>9</sup> that has taken place since its recognition as a terrorist organisation has been waged not only against its members, but also against Muslims who have nothing to do with radical activities. The main criticism is that members of this organisation are condemned on different terms simply because they are “affiliated” with it: “...the courts do not consider the extremist and terrorist nature of Hizb ut-Tahrir’s activities on the merits, referring only to the Supreme Court’s decision”, which lacks a motivating part. In addition, it is also emphasized that “it is unlikely that Russian Hizb ut-Tahrir groups are at least preparing for violent activities (if anyone was preparing for them, it would be extremely unfortunate)”.<sup>10</sup> Since 2012, the practice of accusing individuals not only of participating in a banned organisation, but also of preparing a conspiracy to overthrow the constitutional order in Russia has been added.<sup>11</sup> Since 2014, the number of cases related to participation in the activities of Hizb-ut-Tahrir has increased dramatically due to the persecution of Muslims in Crimea; in Ukraine, the activities of this organisation are not criminalised.

According to the SOVA Center, in 2019 alone about one hundred sentences were passed on articles related to the participation or distribution of materials of a terrorist organisation banned in Russia. These are the following articles of the Russian Criminal Code: Article 205.5. Organization of and participation in the activities

8. “Malashenko: Moskve nuzhno osteregat'sia provokatsii v Krymu”, Islam News, 10 September 2014, <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-432444.html>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

9. Malashenko A. and Starostin A., “Islam na sovremennom Urale”, Moscow Carnegie Center, April 2015, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP\\_Malashenko\\_Ural\\_web\\_Rus1.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_Malashenko_Ural_web_Rus1.pdf), (Access date: 25 January 2020).

10. Alexander Verkhovskiy, “Iavliaetsia li Khizbut-Takhrir ekstremistskoi organizatsiei?”, Center for Information and Analysis SOVA, October 2005, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2005/10/d6036>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

11. Alexandra Vagner, ““Koshmarnoe uzhest ochenie srokov”. Kak i pochemu presleduiut musul'man v Rossii i Krymu”, Krym.Realii, 3 November 2019, <https://ru.krymr.com/a/pochemu-presleduyut-musulman-v-rossii-i-krymu/30250949.html>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

of a terrorist organization; Article 205.1. Facilitation of terrorist activities, Russian Criminal Code; Article 205.2. Public calls for terrorist activities, public justification of terrorism or propaganda of terrorism; and Article 280. Public calls to carry out extremist activities. “Terrorist articles” presuppose punishment in the form of long imprisonment: more than ten years and up to life.

2) Slightly less attention is paid to another organisation, Takfir Val Hijra. There is no evidence of an institutionalised international network of this organisation, such as that of Hizb-ut-Tahrir or al-Qaeda. In general, there is much less information about the activities of this organisation, which suggests that the actions of its members are not systematic. Its activities were banned on Russian territory by a Supreme Court decision of 15 September 2010, but the organisation was found to be extremist rather than terrorist, which resulted in softer sentences for the accused. Articles relating to extremist activities (Article 282. Incitement to hatred or enmity and violation of human dignity, art; Article 282.1. Organization of an extremist community; Article 282.2. Organization of the activities of an extremist organization; Article 282.3. Financing of extremist activities) assume shorter time limits as compared to “terrorist” articles, and even the possibility of receiving a suspended sentence. For example, the majority of those accused of association with Takfir Wal-Hijra received suspended sentences in 2019.<sup>12</sup>

3) Tabligi Jamaat also has the status of an extremist organisation. The religious association was banned in Russia in 2009. SOVA specialists regard this ban as illegal because the movement was engaged in spreading the faith of Islam and did not issue any calls to violence. They thus consider it unjustified to persecute its supporters for continuing their activities.<sup>13</sup>

4) The activities and followers of the Turkish preacher Said Nursi (Nurjular movement) were criminalised. The case of Yevgeniy Kim, a follower of Said Nursi, demonstrated another preventive measure that can be applied to persons involved in extremist activities: after being released from prison in 2019, he was stripped of his citizenship, which he was granted in 2005.<sup>14</sup> A total of at least 20 sentences were handed down in 2019 in cases involving involvement in the Nurjular movement.

5) In mid-June, the Sovetsky District Court of Kazan sentenced five residents of the republic, finding them guilty of continuing the activities of the banned Faizrahmanist community. The Faizrahmanist community, founded by former deputy mufti of Tatarstan Faizrahman Sattarov, was declared extremist in 2013 after the

12. “Chleny iacheiki ‘At-Takfir Val’-Khid zhra’ poluchili uslovnye sroki”, *Kommersant*, 30 August 2019, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4078670>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

13. “Neppravomernyi antiextremizm v fevrale 2019 goda”, Center for Information and Analysis SOVA, 4 March 2019, <https://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/publications/2019/03/d40727/>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

14. “Posledovatel’ Saída Nursi iz Blagove shchenska lishen rossiiskogo grazhdanstva”, Center for Information and Analysis SOVA, 23 May 2019, <https://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2019/05/d41048/>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

control authorities discovered that its members lead an isolated lifestyle, do not go to medical institutions, and do not send their children to schools. These features of the organisation, however, are not subject to anti-extremist legal regulation.<sup>15</sup>

### ***- Mosque Building Ban***

The problem of a shortage of mosques, especially in large agglomerations, is quite acute. At the same time, it is a rather painful issue, since the issue of mosque construction is considered in public discourse not through the prism of implementing the constitutional principle of freedom of religion and means against “Muslim ghettos” around single mosques,<sup>16</sup> but as an expansion of the influence of “dangerous”, “other” Muslims.

On 22 May 2019, a prayer house built on private territory was demolished in the village of Svoboda in the Kaliningrad region. The court ruled that it was illegal to build a public place on the territory intended for personal subsidiary farming.<sup>17</sup> This spontaneous prayer house is a consequence of the absence of mosques not only in Kaliningrad, but also in the entire Kaliningrad region, where the Muslim community has at least 15,000 members.<sup>18</sup> Permission to build the mosque was granted back in 2010, but since then the construction site has been moved seven times.<sup>19</sup>

The situation is similar in Ekaterinburg. The city’s Muslim community estimates its number at 300,000. There is no cathedral mosque and the resolution of the issue of its construction has been delayed, despite the appeal of Muslims to Putin during a direct line in June 2019, as well as statements by leaders of the Muslim community

On 23 October 2019, in Efremov, Tula region, the court refused to issue a permit for the construction of a prayer house on the grounds that the structure was partially erected at the time of the appeal. The court ruled to satisfy fully the claim and ordered the city administration to consider the application. However, to date, the decision has not come into force.<sup>20</sup>

15. “Npravomernyi antiextremizm v iiiiune 2019 goda”, Center for Information and Analysis SOVA, 5 July 2019, <https://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/publications/2019/07/d41224/>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

16. “Shariat i musul'manskie getto: chto zhdet islam v Rossii”, Gazeta.ru, 30 September 2019, [https://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2019/09/30\\_a\\_12697381.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2019/09/30_a_12697381.shtml), (Access date: 25 January 2020).

17. Julia Paramonova, “Vsevyshnii ikh sam nakazhet”. Pochemu na zapade Rossii net ni odnoi mecheti”, 31 May 2019, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29972861.html>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

18. “Dannye o chislennosti veruiushchikh, otprazdnovavshikh Kurban-bairam”, Center for Information and Analysis SOVA, 1 September 2017, <https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/discussions/how-many/2017/09/d37792/>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

19. “Obshchestvo Mer Kaliningrad otdal 30 000 dollarov na mechet”, Golos Islama, 1 March 2014, <https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=22337>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

20. “Sud priznal nezakonnym zapret stroitel'stva musul'manskogo mole'nogo doma v Efremove”, MK-Tula, 3 November 2019, <https://tula.mk.ru/social/2019/11/03/sud-priznal-nezakonnym-zapret-stroitel'stva-musul'manskogo-molelnogo-doma-v-efremove.html>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

The problem of lack of mosques concerns not only the majority Sunni Muslims, but is even more acute for Shia Muslims. After the conflict in October 2016 in Moscow's Cathedral Mosque, when dissatisfaction with the conduct of Shia Muharram mourning ceremonies by individual Sunni worshippers led to a fight, the leadership decided to "remove" Shia Muslim assemblies outside the Cathedral Mosque. Prior to the conflict, Shia Muslims used to attend the mosque in an organised manner, holding their meetings (*majlis*). The absence of a separate Shia mosque provokes the conflict in the ethnically heterogeneous Moscow Shia community. Thus, the last such conflict occurred in February 2019, when the leadership of the Shia mosque Inam, represented by Tatar entrepreneur and philanthropist R.J. Bayazitov, decided not to allow Azerbaijani Shiites into the mosque territory.<sup>21</sup> The case with the closure of the Shia mosque received great resonance, so the head of the Caucasus Muslims Department (CMC), Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, the spiritual leader of the Muslims of Azerbaijan, during his meeting with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia on 30 January 2019 in Moscow, asked him to assist in the construction of a separate mosque for Shia Muslims. Shamil Tagiyev, chairman of the Azerbaijani Community of Moscow NGO, sent appeals and letters to President Vladimir Putin of Russia, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, Patriarch Kirill, and Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade about the violation of the constitutional right to practice their religion freely.<sup>22</sup>

### ***- Presumption of Guilt: "Preventive Lists" of Muslims***

Stigmatisation of the perception and violation of the rights of Muslims on the basis of their possible involvement in terrorist or extremist activities is a fairly common abuse on the part of law enforcement agencies engaged in combating extremism and terrorism, respectively. One common practice of "surveillance" is the creation of lists of "potentially dangerous individuals". Criteria of a "dangerous" Muslim can be very different and vary depending on the context: from wearing a hijab or having a beard to being a neighbor of an amnestied militant.

Thus, in December 2019, it became known that the social passports of the classes of several Makhachkala schools (Republic of Dagestan) included a clause on whether a child wears the hijab. According to teachers, this column appeared at the request of the juvenile affairs inspectorate.<sup>23</sup> In March 2019, Dagestani bloggers calling on fellow countrymen to disrupt "Islam-conflicting" entertainment events reported that the Centre for Combating Extremism of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

21. Erik Bey Seitov, "Shiism in Moscow region", Unpublished proposal for the conference, 2019.

22. Artur Priymak, "Priblizhaiutsia dni s korbi iz-za shiitskoi mechetiv", NG, 3 September 2019, [http://www.ng.ru/problems/2019-09-03/12\\_471\\_mosque.html](http://www.ng.ru/problems/2019-09-03/12_471_mosque.html), (Access date: 25 January 2020).

23. Kamal Jalilov, "Detei boevikov vziali" na karandash", Kavkaz Reali, 22 December 2019, <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/30335749.html>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

had been registered for prevention. In 2017, Dagestan Interior Minister Abdurashid Magomedov officially announced that the profiling had been cancelled and all lists of Salafis and other potential extremists had been destroyed after the statute of limitations had expired. However, law enforcement practice says the opposite: lawyers and human rights activists say they have secretly signed an open-ended agreement on the non-departure and surveillance of “suspects”.<sup>24</sup>

The situation has been exacerbated by the problem of “returnees from ISIS”. The official position of the state is dual. On the one hand, the return of Russian citizens to their homeland, especially women and children, is positioned as the rescue of citizens who sometimes find themselves in the territory of Syria and Iraq not of their own free will; their repatriation is carried out on behalf of the president. On the other hand, there is the position of law enforcement agencies voiced by the head of FSB (Federal Security Service) Alexander Bortnikov: “Returnees” often act as bearers of religious extremist ideology and are considered by the heads of international terrorist organisations as suicide bombers, propagandists, recruiters, and messengers.<sup>25</sup> Earlier he also criticised the practice of wives and children of ISIS fighters in Russia.<sup>26</sup> Return operations are widely publicised and contribute to a positive image of a responsible paternalistic state, while further “adaptation” of these citizens is often overlooked. For example, in 2018, more than 20 women received prison sentences ranging from 4.5 to 8 years for participation in an illegal armed formation. The court decision will take effect when their youngest child turns 14. Human rights defenders have repeatedly noted that the practice of punishing women who have returned from Syria is contrary to Russian law. According to the Russian Criminal Code, a person “who voluntarily ceases participation in the illegal armed formation and surrendered weapons is exempt from criminal responsibility, unless his actions contain another crime”.<sup>27</sup>

### **- Muslim Literature Ban**

Prohibitions of Muslim literature based on their designation as extremist are a fairly common practice by the Russian law enforcement agencies. In terms of procedure, there are at least two ways to ban such materials. The first is that on the basis of a prosecutor’s submission or in the course of proceedings by other agencies, the case

---

24. Artur Priymak, “Pishem ‘salafit’, ekstremist – v ume”, NG, 2 April 2019, [http://www.ng.ru/facts/2019-04-02/13\\_462\\_islam.html](http://www.ng.ru/facts/2019-04-02/13_462_islam.html), (Access date: 25 January 2020).

25. Rafael Fakhruddinov, “Detstvo v IG: v ‘Rossiiu dostavili 32 rebenka iz Iraka’”, *Gazeta.ru*, 18 November 2019, <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2019/11/18/12820166.shtml>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

26. “Rodstvenno-terroristicheskaja ugroza”, *Znak*, 8 November 2018, [https://www.znak.com/2018-11-08/fsb\\_kritikuet\\_vozvrashchenie\\_zhen\\_i\\_detey\\_boevikov\\_igil\\_v\\_rossiyu\\_etoy\\_temoy\\_zanimaetsya\\_ramzan\\_kadyro](https://www.znak.com/2018-11-08/fsb_kritikuet_vozvrashchenie_zhen_i_detey_boevikov_igil_v_rossiyu_etoy_temoy_zanimaetsya_ramzan_kadyro), (Access date: 25 January 2020).

27. “Iz IGIL v Rossiiu. Pochemu Moskva ostanovila programmu po vozvrashcheniiu bezhavshikh v Irak zhenshchin s det’mi”, *Nastoiashchee Vremia*, 18 July 2018, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/29368391.html>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

goes to court, which decides whether or not to declare the material extremist. Another legal tool for countering extremist activities is the power of the procurator to limit access to prohibited information out of court. On the basis of court decisions and extrajudicial measures, the Ministry of Justice draws up a federal list of extremist materials and makes it publicly available on the Internet.<sup>28</sup> As of December 2019, the list includes more than 5,000 entries, where not less than 300 are connected with Islam. Lawyers have repeatedly drawn attention to the imperfection of procedural mechanisms in the process of designating materials as extremist. For example, in such processes, the application of the principle of competitiveness and equality of the parties in the proceedings is limited (in such cases, the court is exempt from the need to involve persons whose rights are directly affected as an equal party in the case).<sup>29</sup> A question is raised about the competence of judges who decide on such cases: cases of designating (or not) certain materials as extremist are resolved by district courts at the place of discovery of such materials. Lawyers, emphasising the particular importance of such cases, speak of the need for a special court at the federal level.<sup>30</sup> One of the most frequent mistakes in such processes is the designation of material as extremist, which is not actually extremist. Such mistakes are quite regularly made with regard to Muslim literature.

One of the most resonant cases in 2019 was an attempt to prohibit the *Interpretation of the Holy Quran* by the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Saudi theologian Abd al-Rahman al-Saadi, translated by Azerbaijani theologian Elmir Kuliev. In April 2016, 60 people were detained in the village of Krasny Pakhar in Samara region on charges of links with the so-called Islamic State - among the seized literature was this source. The court proceedings on this case revealed several points of tension. First, it is a question of the competence of the experts and, consequently, of the fairness of the court's decision. For example, the expert examination revealed in the text "statements of an extremist nature aimed at inciting hatred or discord against 'Jews', 'Christians' and 'non-believers'".<sup>31</sup> In addition, according to experts, Al Saadi is not just a classic of modern Salafism but he is also a promoter of Wahhabism, which today has actually merged with Salafism.<sup>32</sup> Lawyers representing the interests of publisher Aslambek Ezhayev spoke out against the results of this expert examination, citing, firstly, the

28. Federal'nyi spisok ekstremistskikh materialov, <https://minjust.ru/ru/extremist-materials> (Access date: 16 March 2020).

29. Victor Mikhailov, "Protsedura priznan iia materialov ekstremistskimi trebuet korrektsii", *Administrativnoe pravo*, 2015, <https://www.top-personal.ru/adminlawissue.html?349>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

30. Aleksey Elaev, "Ob ekstremistskikh ma terialakh zamolvite slovo", *Zakon*, 16 November 2015, [https://zakon.ru/blog/2015/11/16/ob\\_ekstremistskix\\_materialax\\_zamolvite\\_slovo](https://zakon.ru/blog/2015/11/16/ob_ekstremistskix_materialax_zamolvite_slovo), (Access date: 25 January 2020).

31. Artur Priymak, "Pravookhranitelei ne ustroilo tolkovanie Korana", *NG*, 5 February 2019, [http://www.ng.ru/ng\\_religii/2019-02-05/14\\_458\\_sob1.html](http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2019-02-05/14_458_sob1.html), (Access date: 25 January 2020).

32. "Sudy o tolkovanii Korana soprovozhdia iutsia davleniem na kazanskikh ekspertov", *EurAsia Daily*, 22 July 2019, <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2019/07/22/sudy-o-tolkovanii-korana-soprovozhddayutsya-davleniem-na-kazanskikh-ekspertov>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

desire to politicise the judicial process, calling it “a purposeful policy of the central government” on the prohibition of the Koran;<sup>33</sup> and secondly, the ambiguity of the results of the expert examination itself, citing, for example, the following argument, “Experts project the events that took place in the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries to the present day”.<sup>34</sup> It should also be noted that E. Kuliev’s translations have already become the subject of legal proceedings. In September 2013, a Novorossiysk court, on the proposal of the prosecutor’s office, ruled that Kuliev’s semantic translation of the Koran was extremist. In December of the same year, the ban was lifted by the Krasnodar regional court.

As for the second point of tension, this process once again brought to the public space the problem of confrontation between two leaders of the Muslim community: Ravil Gainutdin, head of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Russian Federation (Moscow), and Talgat Tadzhuiddin, head of the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims of Russia (Ufa), who stressed his continuity from the first Muslim organisation in Russia, established in 1788. Both organisations claim to be the central organisation of Russian Muslims. In public discussions, Ravil Gainutdin supported the controversial *tafsir*, while Talgat Tadzhuiddin spoke out against it.<sup>35</sup>

### **- Hijab Ban**

In 2019, the prosecutor’s office of the Oktyabrsky district of Penza (Penza region) made recommendations to directors of 20 schools in the city, which did not prohibit the wearing of hijabs and other religious clothing. As a result of an inspection, 12 officials were brought to disciplinary responsibility.<sup>36</sup> Chairman of the Committee “Civil Assistance” Svetlana Gannushkina said such decisions can be considered discriminatory and may cause a negative reaction even from those Muslim women who do not wear the hijab. In addition, she also stressed that such prohibitions contribute to the marginalisation of Muslims: forced to seek comfortable living conditions, “they will find themselves in a closed system, and this may lead to withdrawal into extremism”. “Any division contributes to this,” says the human rights activist.<sup>37</sup>

---

33. “Idet novaia volna zapretov Korana i khadisov?! Advokat Marat Ashimov”, YouTube, 17 April 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=iKXWbKULr3I&feature=youtu.be>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

34. Ibid.

35. “Sudy o tolkovanii Korana sop rovozhdayutsia davleniem na kazanskikh ekspertov”, EurAsia Daily, 22 July 2019, <https://easaily.com/ru/news/2019/07/22/sudy-o-tolkovanii-korana-soprovozhdayutsya-davleniem-na-kazanskikh-ekspertov>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

36. “Prokuratura obiazala zapretit’ noshe nie khidzhabov v 20 shkolakh Penzy”, Tass, 6 May 2019, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/6406632>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

37. “The Ban on Wearing Headscarves in Schools May Be Regarded as Discrimination against Muslims”, Moscow Helsinki Group, 15 May 2019, <https://mhg.ru/zapret-na-noshenie-hidzhabov-v-shkolah-mozhet-byt-raschenen-kak-diskriminaciya-musulman>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

## Internet

There are no projects in the Russian Internet space that systematically utilize the rhetoric of Islamophobia. Single statements can be found in social networks of individual users, but they have no significant political influence.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

In light of the above trends in Russia, it is worth mentioning some significant figures in the modern media space, whose rhetoric contributes to the strengthening of the negative image of Islam. One such figure is Roman Silantyev, whom the media treat as an expert on Islam. His high academic status – he holds a doctorate in Historical Sciences, and is a professor at the Moscow State Linguistic University - is also supported by his political recognition, as he holds a number of significant positions.<sup>38</sup> This number of positions automatically, firstly, makes his expert opinion extremely authoritative and, secondly, allows him to claim a dominant position in the space of discussions about Islam.

Silantyev's discussion is lined up around several elements. Firstly, the radical measures to counter any threats to national security. It should be noted that Silantyev has long been advocating active (including using forceful methods) opposition to Wahhabism ideology (up to and including its legal prohibition), as well as the establishment of state control over those who adopt Islam. Secondly, the narrative about a strong state, traditional Islam, and the dominant position of Orthodoxy in Russian society is also updated in this regard. Thirdly, his belief that the threat comes from radical Muslims and those who could potentially fall into this category. For example, in 2019, Silantyev accused Muslims sympathising with private Ramil Shamsutdinov of romanticising a murderer.<sup>39</sup> A 20-year-old soldier shot his coworkers, killing eight and two others. During the interrogation, Shamsutdinov said he wanted revenge for all the humiliation and beatings he had experienced on the part of the old soldiers. The incident drew a wide public response in the Muslim community.

It should also be noted that another confirmation of the fact that Silantyev's discourse is recognized and broadcast, including by public authorities, is the active, practical work carried out by this specialist in his positions. In 2018, he announced the development of a new scientific discipline, Destructology. Destructive ideologies (including Islamic extremism) are the subject of destructive science, according to Silantiyev. The new discipline will train specialists in spiritual security. As early as

38. These positions include head of the Human Rights Center of the World Russian People's Cathedral, deputy chairman of the Expert Council on the State Examination of Religions under the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation, and member of the Expert Council of the Higher Attestation Commission under the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation on Theology.

39. "Silant'ev obespokoilisia neravnodushiem musul'man k istorii soldata Shamsutdinova", Islam News, 31 October 2019, <https://islamnews.ru/news-silant-ev-obespokoilisya-neravnodushiem-musul-man-k-istorii-soldata-shamsutdinova/>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

November 2019, the textbook *Fundamentals of Destructology* was presented. In addition, Silantyev confirmed his cooperation with the FSB, which, among other things, is intended for further training courses in destruction science.<sup>40</sup>

Other representatives of the expert community discussing Islam in the discourse of securitisation include Rais Suleymanov, an employee of the National Strategy Institute,<sup>41</sup> who in many of his publications calls for the use of the toughest measures to counter Islamism in Russian regions; Russian Institute of Strategic Research employee G. Khizrieva, who promotes the idea of Wahhabism penetrating all power structures; and another RISI employee Ya. Amelina who talks about forming a united Islamist front and a “fifth column” in the form of a certain Islamist lobby.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

One of the most important initiatives taken in 2019 is the decriminalisation of Hizb Al-Tahrir. In response to the flow of complaints due to very harsh sentences, a special working group under the Human Rights Ombudsman was established in February to examine the validity of recognising Hizb ut-Tahrir as a “terrorist organisation”. Vitaly Ponomarev, human rights defender of the Memorial Center, does not yet see the results of the group’s work, but admits that “the very establishment of such a group was the first acknowledgment of the problem by the authorities”.<sup>42</sup>

It is worth noting the systematic activities of a number of human rights organisations that monitor human rights violations, including cases of religious discrimination. For example, the information and analytical center SOVA publishes the monthly monitoring *Illegal Anti-Extremism*, which publishes the main and most significant events in the sphere of illegal application of anti-extremism legislation in Russia. The human rights centre Memorial regularly updates the list of those prosecuted for their involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, the promotion of a positive image of Islam and Muslims in the public space contributes to countering Islamophobic attitudes. One of the most resonant stories of this kind in 2019 was the incident of a plane landing in a cornfield, suc-

---

40. “Avtor kursa po novoi nauke destruktologii podtverdil svoe sotrudnichestvo s FSB”, Interfax, 25 November 2019, <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/685440>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

41. It is a think tank headed by Mikhail Remizov, who is a chairman of the Presidium of the Expert Council under the Collegium of the Military-Industrial Commission, and a member of the Expert Council under the Government of the Russian Federation.

42. Alexandra Vagner, “Koshmarnoe uzhest ochenie srokov”. Kak i pochemu presleduiut musul’man v Rossii i Krymu”, Krym.Realii, 3 November 2019, <https://ru.krymr.com/a/pochemu-presleduyut-musulman-v-rossii-i-krymu/30250949.html>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

43. “Spisok presleduemykh v svyazi s prichastnost’iu k “Khizb ut-Tahrir” (obnovliaetsia)”, Memorial, [https://memohrc.org/ru/news\\_old/spisok-presleduemykh-v-svyazi-s-prichastnostyu-k-hizb-ut-tahrir-obnovlyaetsya](https://memohrc.org/ru/news_old/spisok-presleduemykh-v-svyazi-s-prichastnostyu-k-hizb-ut-tahrir-obnovlyaetsya), (Access date: 25 January 2020).

cessfully performed by Muslim pilot Damir Yusupov. Many publications on this story emphasized his belonging to the Muslim community in a positive way, and in September 2019, he was awarded the Order of Muslims of Russia “For Merits”. At the award ceremony, Ravil Gainutdin noted that the example of Damir Yusupov will help young Muslims “to understand the obvious thing: in order to strengthen the cause of Islam, strengthen their minds, it is not enough just to spend a lot of time in the mosque and wait for the grace of Allah”.<sup>44</sup>

The Muslim community is also working systematically. Thus, one of the brightest initiatives was the annual Moscow event “Ramadan Shater” (Pavillion of Ramadan). It is a joint cultural and educational project of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Russian Federation and the Moscow government. During the whole month of Ramadan, everyone can come to the Memorial Mosque on Poklonnaya Hill, share iftars and listen to creative performances taking place on stage.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Speaking about Islamophobia in Russia, one should first take into account its fragmented nature. In view of the long history of interaction between the Muslim community and the Russian state (unlike most European cases), during which Islam acted as an integral part of the Russian sociocultural space, we cannot talk about the systematic institutionalisation of Islamophobia in Russia. There are no social and political movements building their ideology around the ideas of confrontation with Islam; the discourse of Islamophobia is not in demand among politicians in power; and the official rhetoric focuses on cooperation with “traditional Islam”. Rather, Islamophobia is an articulated element of a number of other discourses: migrant-phobia, xenophobia, or a discourse of securitisation. The latter takes on particular significance in the light of the criminalisation of certain Muslim movements, abuses in countering terrorism and extremism (especially in matters related to Islamic extremism), restrictions on the construction of mosques, and the prohibition of Muslim literature.

## Chronology

- **21.01.2019:** In the second half of the month, Krasnoglinskiy District Court of Samara began its consideration of the merits of the case of the designation of the publications of Ibn Qasir and al-Saadi as extremist.
- **30.01.2019:** The Volga District Military Court found Ainaz Yanyshv guilty of participation in the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir under Part 2 of Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code and sentenced him to seven years of imprisonment in a strict regime colony.

44. “Komandira, posadivshogo A321 na kukuruznoe pole, nagradili ordenom musul'man”, Ria.ru, 23 September 2019, <https://ria.ru/20190923/1559005093.html>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

- **15.02.2019:** The Moscow District Military Court sentenced Zafar Nodirov, Farhod Nodirov, and Hamid Igamberdiyev to 16 years in prison on charges of organising the activities of a Hizb ut-Tahrir cell, and six others to 11-12 years in prison for participation in its activities.
- **21.02.2019:** The Volga District Military Court sentenced 12 people on charges of organising the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir to 11-16 years of imprisonment.
- **11.03.2019:** In Orenburg, ten followers of the Islamic movement Tablighi Jamaat were found guilty of organising and participating in the activity of an extremist organisation.
- **13.03.2019:** Five followers of the Islamic radical party Hizb ut-Tahrir from Tatarstan were sentenced to 14 to 22 years in prison depending on the gravity of the charges.
- **05.04.2019:** In Novy Urengoy, an imam of the religious organisation Ihsan was fined for keeping the forbidden brochure *380 Big Sins* by Ibn Hajar al-Haythami in a mosque.
- **17.04.2019:** The Vyborg City Court fined Magomed Kadyrov, who had allowed *Fortress of a Muslim* to be stored in a prayer room in Vyborg.
- **26.04.2019:** The Volga District Military Court sentenced five residents of Almetyevsk (Republic of Tatarstan) on charges of involvement in the Islamic religious party Hizb ut-Tahrir to terms of 13 to 18 years in prison.
- **30.04.2019:** In Khabarovsk, a person convicted of involvement in the activities of the extremist organisation Nurdzhular was stripped of his citizenship after his release from prison.
- **30.04.2019:** The Orenburg regional court toughened the sentence of ten followers of the Islamic movement Tablighi Jamaat: the conditions of the additional punishment were toughened in the form of restriction of freedom - they were forbidden to leave their place of residence from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.
- **06.05.2019:** The Prosecutor's Office of the Oktyabrskiy district of Penza (Penza region) made recommendations to directors of 20 schools in the city that did not prohibit wearing hijabs and other religious clothing.
- **22.05.2019:** A prayer house was demolished in the village of Svoboda, Kaliningrad Oblast.
- **19.06.2019:** The Sovetsky District Court of Kazan sentenced five residents of the Republic of Tatarstan, having found them guilty of continuing the activities of the banned Faizrahmanist community.
- **20.06.2019:** Raids on Muslim cemeteries in the village of Osypnoy Bugor in the Astrakhan region and on Christmas street in the city of Astrakhan.
- **02.08.2019:** In Astrakhan groups of former paratroopers carried out two attacks on the Red Mosque and its adjacent market.

- **08.08.2019:** In Tatarstan, three residents of the republic were sentenced on charges of membership in Tablighi to terms of 2-6 years.
- **19.10.2019:** The Supreme Court of Russia in October increased terms of imprisonment for two defendants of the Bashkir case relating to Hizb ut-Tahrir: previously sentenced to 16 years of imprisonment Batyr Mukhame-tov and Bulat Rakhmanov are now sentenced to 16.5 years and 16 years and 3 months respectively.
- **23.10.2019:** In the city of Efremov, Tula region, the court refused to issue a permit to build a prayer house.
- **12.11.2019:** In Rostov-on-Don, the South (North Caucasus) District Military Court sentenced Hizb ut-Tahrir participants in the “Yalta case”: six defendants received sentences of 7 to 19 years.
- **22.11.2019:** The Central District Military Court sentenced the follower of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Amir Gilyazov of Chelyabinsk, to 11 years’ imprisonment. At the same time, he was released from serving his sentence in the colony for health reasons.
- **05.12.2019:** The Southern District Military Court sentenced a follower of Hizb ut-Tahrir to 17 years in prison.
- **16.12.2019:** In Ekaterinburg, Central District Military Court sentenced two Hizb ut-Tahrir supporters to 17 and 11 years in prison.



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**SERBIA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

IVAN EJUB KOSTIĆ



## The Author

**Ivan Ejub Kostić** is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade, Serbia. He graduated from the Department of Oriental Studies, Arabic Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade. He holds a Master's degree in Islamic Studies awarded by the same department. In the academic years 2011-2013, he was a lecturer at the Faculty of Media and Communications at Singidunum University, Belgrade, where he taught the courses "Middle Eastern Culture and History" and "Orientalism and Occidentalism." He is one of the founders of the Balkan Centre for the Middle East, and became its managing director in 2013. He has co-authored the book *Persecuted Islam* (2013), and edited *Religion, Belief and Civic Identity* and the textbook *Contemporary Islamic Thought* (2019). He is a member of the editorial board of the academic periodical *Journal for Religious Sciences – Kom* and a regular contributor to the *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* published by Brill. He is also a member of the board of the European Muslim Network seated in Brussels and chief editor of the regional online platform Algoritam - Contemporary Islamic Thought and Culture. Kostić has written numerous academic papers and articles in the field of Islamic studies, and is a regular contributor to leading media outlets in the country and the region on issues related to nationalism and religion, Balkan Muslims, and the Middle East and Islam. Email: kostici2000@yahoo.co.uk

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Ivan Ejub Kostić: *Islamophobia in Serbia: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

During 2019, the social situation in Serbia was marked by strong political instability. The main causes for this political crisis were a rise in authoritarianism by the ruling political party, increased pressure over an independent judiciary, a lack of media freedoms, widespread presence of hate speech throughout media outlets and in the general public, and the repression of opposition parties which, because of all of the above, decided in September 2019 to boycott the forthcoming 2020 parliamentary and local elections (scheduled for April 2020, according to the latest government official statements). The existence of this political crisis has been unambiguously confirmed by the European Commission, in its annual *Serbia 2019 Report* on the situation in the country.

Additionally, a particularly negative impact on the sociopolitical situation in Serbia, and the region, has been the stagnating negotiation process between the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Kosovo, concerning the normalization of relations between the two governments. The main cause for the current deadlock has been the 2018 decision by officials in Pristina to impose a 100% tax on all products from Serbia. This was done as a response to Serbia's continued blocking of Kosovo from various international institutions (UN, UNESCO, Interpol).

Furthermore, the October 2019 European Union (EU) decision against launching membership negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia has sent a strong message to other Balkan countries working to meet EU accession conditions (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro) that enlargement is not likely in the foreseeable future. This development has enabled Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and his right-wing populist Serbian Progressive Party to continue their "parallel" policies – one tailored for the international community, where Serbia is nominally pursuing EU membership with full respect of EU values, and the other tailored for domestic consumption, where the government fully supports Russian influence and embraces expansionist nationalism that directly affects the position of Muslims and other minority religious and ethnic groups. This domestic policy has led to increased activity and influence by other Eurosceptic, (far-) right and outright fascist political parties and movements that openly promote the hatred of Muslims and violent anti-migrant narratives.

## Izvršni rezime

Društvenu situaciju u Srbiji tokom 2019. godine obeležila je snažna politička nestabilnost u državi. Glavni razlozi za političku krizu jesu porast autoritarnosti vladajuće partije, pritisak na nezavisnost sudstva, nedostatak medijske slobode, sveprisutan govor mržnje u medijskom i javnom prostoru i snažna represija koju trpe opozicione partije koje su zbog svega navedenoga još u septembru mesecu 2019. godine odlučile da bojkotuju parlamentarne republičke i lokalne izbore koji bi po poslednjim izjavama vladinih zvaničnika trebalo da se održe u aprilu 2020. godine. O postojanju političke krize u Srbiji nedvosmisleno se izjasnila i Evropska komisija u svom godišnjem izveštaju za 2019. godinu o stanju u Srbiji.

Osim navedenog, negativan uticaj na društveno-političku situaciju u Srbiji i regionu ima i stagnacija u pregovorima na relaciji Beograd-Priština koji se tiču normalizacije odnosa između Republike Srbije i Republike Kosova. I dalje glavni razlog za zastoj pregovora leži u odluci prištinskih vlasti iz 2018. godine koje su odlučile da uvedu 100% carine na proizvode iz Srbije kao odgovor na kontinuirano delovanje predstavnika srpskog političkog establišmenta da se Republici Kosovo blokira članstvo u međunarodnim institucijama (UN, UNESKO, Interpol).

Takođe, odluka Evropske unije (EU) iz oktobra meseca da se ne odobre datumi Severnoj Makedoniji i Albaniji za početak pregovora pristupanju EU, poslala je snažnu poruku i drugim balkanskim državama (Srbiji, Bosni i Hercegovini i Crnoj Gori) koje rade na ispunjenju uslova zarad priključenja EU da proširenja najverovatnije neće biti u skorije vreme. U takvim uslovima stvorio se dodatan prostor da predsednik Aleksandar Vučić i njegova desničarsko populistička Srpska napredna stranka nastave sa "paralelnim" politikama – jednom za međunarodnu zajednicu, gde se deklarativno zalažu za EU i poštovanja njenih vrednosti, i one na unutrašnjem planu gde se insistira na proruskom uticaju, reafirmaciji najradikalnijih oblika ultranacionalističkih politika i vrednosti srpskog ekspanzionističkog nacionalizma. Upravo ovakav razvoj događaja dao je - uz prećutno odobravanje vladajućih struktura - snažan vetar u leđa evroskeptičnim, suverenističkim i (ultra) desničarskim političkim partijama i pokretima koji promovišu mržnju spram muslimana i drugih etničkih grupa, i snažne anti-imigrantske narative.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Serbia

**Type of Regime:** Democratic Republic

**Form of Government:** Parliamentary Republic

**Ruling Parties:** Serbian Progressive Party (populist, right-wing party)

**Opposition Parties:** See below

**Last Elections:** 2017 Presidential Election: the leader of the Serbian Progressive Party Aleksandar Vučić won 55.08% of the vote against 16.36% of independent candidate Aleksandar Saša Janković. 2016 Parliamentary Election: populist Conservative Coalition around Serbian Progressive Party, 131 seats; socialist Party of Serbia (the party which was led during the nineties by Slobodan Milošević), 29 seats; far-right Serbian Radical Party, 22 seats; center-left Coalition around Democratic Party, 16 seats; neoliberal movement “Enough Is Enough. Restart,” 16 seats.

**Total Population:** 7.03 million (in 2017)

**Major Languages:** Serbian

**Official Religion:** No state religion. The dominant Serbian Orthodox Church and other “traditional” religious communities (Roman Catholic Church, Slovak Evangelical Church, Reformed Christian Church, Evangelical Christian Church, Islamic community, and Jewish community) receive preferential status based on the “Law on Churches and Religious Communities” adopted in 2006.

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** N/A

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** N/A

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Orthodox Christianity (84.59%), Catholicism (4.97%), Islam (3.10%), Protestantism (0.99%), No religion (1.11%), Others (5.24%)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 222,829 people (3.1%) in 2011 (official census). This number is without Albanians who boycotted the census and a significant number of Bosniaks. The reason why they boycotted the census is that they didn't have questionnaires in their mother tongues. Also, the number of Roma and Ashkali Muslims is much higher, but because of extremely poor conditions they don't possess any documents so they remain “unrecognized citizens.” The number of Muslims living in Serbia is approximately 400,000-500,000.

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Islamic Community in Serbia; Islamic Community of Serbia.

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** There is no particular NGO that deals with Islamophobia. Data is collected and work is done only by certain individuals.

**Far-Right Parties:** Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska radikalna stranka*), Serbian Movement “Dveri” (*Srpskipokret “Dveri”*), Democratic Party of Serbia (*Demokratska stranka Srbije*), Serbian Right (*Srpska desdesnica*), Serbian Patriotic Alliance (*Srpski*

*patriotski savez*), Healthy Serbia (*Zdrava Srbija*)

**Far-Right Movements:** Progressive Club (*Napredni klub*), National Avant-garde (*Nacionalna avangarda*), Serbian Right (*Srpska desnica*), Serbian Action (*Srpska akcija*), *Otadžbinski pokret Obraz*, *Srpski sabor "Zavetnici"*, Serbian People's Movement "Naši" (*Srpski narodni pokret "Naši"*), Serbian People's Movement "1389" (*Srpski narodni pokret "1389"*), National Serbian Front (*Nacionalni srpski front*), Organization "Alternative" (*Organizacija "Alternativa"*)

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None (depends on local decision)
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

Since coming to power in 2012, the ruling coalition of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) have systematically reaffirmed a nationalist policy aimed at creating a “Greater Serbia,” that would include all Serbs in one territory. This national policy of “incomplete/unfinished borders” has automatically led to claims on the territories of neighboring countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, and Montenegro. Of these countries, particular emphasis is placed on the entity of Republika Srpska within BiH and Kosovo, territories that during the 1990s saw genocide and ethnic cleansing committed against Bosniaks and Albanian Muslims. For this expansionist “Greater Serbian” policy to regain credibility a systematic historical revisionism has been necessary, as has the construction of a (nationalist) policy of remembrance that abolishes Serbs from various atrocities and horrors committed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This affirmation of a nationalist policy of remembrance coupled with historical revisionism concerning the Balkan Wars, World War II, and especially the wars of the 1990s, can result in the social rehabilitation and overt glorification of war crimes and convicted war criminals, which, in a post-genocidal society like Serbia, creates a “culture of triumphalism” that Hariz Halilovich defines as “the eleventh stage of genocide.”<sup>1</sup>

On a practical level, this sociopolitical atmosphere does not promote a confrontation with the criminal past; rather, it deepens an already existing ethnic distance. As a result, according to research performed by Demostat in 2017 entitled *Serbian Citizens' Awareness of Wars in '90s, War Crimes, and War Crime Trials*, the level of ethnic distance between Serbs and ethnic groups of Islamic faith, for example Bosniak and Albanian, is alarming. Only 8% of Serbs stated that they feel close to Bosniaks, while only 2% of Serbs stated that they felt close to Albanians.<sup>2</sup>

Due to all of the aforementioned, in an atmosphere where the ideas of a “Greater Serbia” are being revived based on a genocidal “culture of triumphalism” and given the ethnic distance present in Serbia, the sociopolitical and economic position of Muslims is quite worrying.

---

1. The eleventh stage of genocide represents a post-genocidal phase. According to Halilovich, this phase serves as an addendum to the ten stages of genocide previously defined by Professor Stanton in his work *The Ten Stages of Genocide*. For more on this phase and the “culture of triumphalism” see Halilovic, H. (2017), “Globalization and Genocide” in A. Farazmand (eds.) *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy and Governance*, Springer International Publishing, p. 7.

2. Research by Demostat (2017) *Serbian Citizens' Awareness of Wars in '90s, War Crimes, and War Crime Trials*.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

Serbia does not keep official data on crimes committed out of ethnic or religious hatred. As a result, this lack of data remains one of the biggest challenges that international institutions and researchers face when attempting to address racism and intolerance in Serbia. In October, to improve conditions, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) held a two-day training in Belgrade for civil society activists on criminal acts perpetrated out of hate and intolerance as well as hate speech in the media. One of the goals of this training was to empower local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to establish a network to deal with the collection of hate crime data.

As there are no official statistics in order to compile the necessary data on possible incidents of hate crime, the author of this report carried out interviews with representatives of various Islamic communities and several NGOs. Furthermore, the author wrote the *2019 Media Monitoring on the Reporting and Representation of Muslims across Serbian Media Outlets*.<sup>3</sup>

In 2019, the incident that attracted the most media attention was undoubtedly when far-right groups took to social media to post a photo of an Albanian in central Belgrade with his hands making a “double-headed eagle,” which is found on the Albanian flag. The Albanian in question was subsequently identified as the brother of the owner of a bakery in the Belgrade suburb of Borca. Once this photograph was disseminated across social media platforms, far-right groups organized a protest in front of the bakery calling it “Where there is No Respect, there is No Business.” The goal of these groups was to force the bakery to close. The songs chanted by the protestors were the same songs that were sung as war crimes were being perpetrated against Muslim populations in the wars of the 1990s. Chants such as “Alija, I don’t like you, because you are a Balija,<sup>4</sup> you destroyed a peaceful dream! I hope the Drina carries one hundred mujahedeen bodies every day!” and “God I don’t know what’s wrong with me, I want to set mosques on fire, every night in my dreams I see mosques ablaze!” were heard for several days. Apart from the racist chants, these groups also brought a severed pig’s head to the bakery.<sup>5</sup> However, even more alarming was the fact that Serbian Member of Parliament (MP) Srdjan Nogo, a former member of the “Dveri” movement, joined the protest. (Fig. 1) Additionally, the Serbian Minister of the Interior Nebojsa Stefanovic issued a

3. The monitoring will be published in the forthcoming volume of *Context: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* that is published by Centar for Advanced Studies, Sarajevo. The Journal is available at: <https://www.cns.ba/v1/context-en/>

4. Derogatory term for Muslims.

5. “Far-right protests in Borca, a pig’s head displayed in front of the bakery”, N1, 2 April 2019, <http://rs.n1info.com/documents/1317516/comments/Vesti/Protest-desnicara-ispred-pekare-u-Borci-svinjske-glave-na-kolima.html>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

public statement which minimized the importance of the protest. The NGO Youth Initiative for Human Rights reacted to Minister Stefanovic's statement by describing it, especially in the context of the ongoing Serbia-Kosovo negotiations, as sounding "more like a preparation for war than an attempt to create preconditions for peace." The NGO went on to say that the minister "as on numerous previous occasions, gave instructions to the police on how to properly react in the interest of politics, and not as representatives of the laws which they are sworn to uphold."<sup>6</sup> A clear connection between the government, the security service, and the far-right protesters was made by investigative journalist Jovana Gligorijevic, from the weekly periodical *Vreme*. Her article goes on to show that the bakery incident in Belgrade was not an isolated event, but that there is a systematic targeting of Albanian-owned bakeries in towns such as Dolovo, Pancevo, and Novi Sad. In these three cases, Albanian-owned bakeries were closed while their owners were forced to leave their homes "overnight." In all cases, the police did nothing to stop the incidents.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 1:** A pig's head displayed in front of the bakery in Borca, Belgrade (left); Srđan Nogo, first on the right, at the protest in Borca, Belgrade (photo in the possession of the author) (right).<sup>8</sup>

In 2019, apart from the bakery attack, another event which drew a lot of attention was the organized interruption on 11 July of a play titled *Srebrenica. When We Who Were Killed Rise Up* by Zlatko Pakovic, which deals with the Srebrenica genocide. The disturbance was caused by a larger group led by two persons dressed in black uniforms belonging to the notorious paramilitary "Scorpions" formation which committed war crimes in BiH and Kosovo. When the police were asked to intervene by the play's organizers, they refused stating that there were already undercover members of the special police units at the scene. These undercover special police forces were indeed present, but they did not remove the far-right protesters or in any way intervene as – by their own admission – their "hands were tied."<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 2)

6. "Initiative: A Scandalous Statement by Stefanovic on the Bakery Protests", *Danas*, 29 April 2019, <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/inicijativa-skandalozna-izjava-stefanovica-o-skupu-ispred-pekare-u-borci/>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

7. Gligorijevic, J. "The Albanian Bakery Case: Who Is Behind Organized Hate", *Vreme*, 9 May 2019, <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1687477&tprint=yes> (Access date: 20 February 2020).

8. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/beograd/protest-u-borci-zbog-dvoglavog-orkla-vlasnik-pekare-se-slikao-sa-simbolom-ve-like/h0nq4z3>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

9. "A Far-Right Group Tries to Stop a Play about Srebrenica in Belgrade", *Al Jazeera Balkans*, 12 June 2019, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/desnicari-u-beogradu-upali-na-predstavu-o-srebrenici>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).



**Figure 2:** Far-right protesters trying to stop the play<sup>10</sup> (left); the protesters unfurl a sign saying “Alija your Balija killed you” (right).<sup>11</sup>

In 2019, as in the previous year, there were again protests during the *Mirëdita, dobardan* festival which promotes Kosovo’s cultural scene. During the opening ceremony, held in Belgrade at the Centre for Cultural Decontamination, a far-right group attempted to stop the event from occurring. That evening a group of right-wing protesters again attacked festival proceedings at Belgrade’s Dorcol Platz. In this case, police forces did intervene and the festival events were able to continue.<sup>12</sup>

As the year before, in 2019, there were numerous cases of graffiti that supports war crimes against Muslims in BiH and Kosovo as well as champions war criminals like Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic. For this report, we have set aside two of the more representative examples of graffiti. One was found on the walls of Različak day-care center on 28 September in Novi Sad and reads “From Kosovo to Iran there will be dead Muslims.” (Fig. 3, left) The second graffiti “Radovan Karadzic Hero” was found on 8 May at the center of Belgrade across from the central, Ottoman era Kalemegdan Fortress. (Fig. 3, right)



**Figure 3:** “From Kosovo to Iran there will be dead Muslims, Ratko Mladic”<sup>13</sup> (left); “Radovan Karadzic Hero” (right).<sup>14</sup>

10. Photo taken by the author of the Report.

11. Photo taken by the author of the Report.

12. “Hooligans Attempt to enter the ‘Mirëdita, dobardan!’ Festival”, Radio Free Europe, 2 June 2019, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/video-huligani-mirdita-dobar-dan/29972987.html>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

13. Photo taken by representatives of Islamic Community in Serbia who have delivered it to the author for the purpose of this Report.

14. Photo taken by the author of the Report.

## Employment

There are no significant changes in employment from last year's report. The most discrimination is still directed towards Roma, Ashkhal, and Egyptian communities of Islamic faith, who suffer a twofold form of discrimination: based on their skin color and on their religious beliefs. The highest unemployment rates and the lowest monthly income rates are still found in the Sandzak and Presevo regions of Serbia, where the majority population is comprised of Muslim Bosniaks and Albanians.

## Education

As in the case of employment, there are no significant changes or incidents in education that differ from last year's report. The main problem continues to be a lack of textbooks in the Bosniak and Albanian languages. Furthermore, Bosniak and Albanian children continue to face pressure to attend schools in Serbian and not in the languages of the ethnic groups to which they belong.

Additionally, the problem with history textbooks highlighted in last year's report on Serbia remains unchanged. The main problem is the presence of historical revisionism regarding movements and organizations which committed atrocities against Muslim and Roma populations during World War II, and completely "distorted representations of the Ottoman period and in the depiction of the basics of Islamic faith and culture."<sup>15</sup> These textbooks are widely used not only among Serbian Orthodox children but among Albanian, Bosniak, and Roma children.

Regarding halal food in Serbian schools, preschool institutions and primary schools do not provide such meals for Muslim children.

## Politics

As already mentioned, the Serbian nationalist ideology continues to be reaffirmed in 2019. This process began in 2012, when a coalition of the right-wing populist SNS and SPS (which was headed by Slobodan Milošević in the 1990s) came to power. However, sociopolitical concerns were further set back in 2016 when presidential and parliamentary elections took place, leading to a first round victory in the presidential election for SNS's Aleksandar Vučić<sup>16</sup> while his party won an absolute majority in the parliament. The election was carried out in a repressive atmosphere, with numerous voting irregularities being recorded across polling stations. Shortly after the new government was sworn in, opposition parties began facing significant pressure while citizens faced intimidation and blackmailing. Meanwhile the suppression of media freedom continues to this day. Due to these events, Freedom House's

---

15. Ivan Ejub Kostic, "Islamophobia in Serbia: National Report 2017", *European Islamophobia Report 2017*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2018), p. 548.

16. For more information about Aleksandar Vučić's political history, see: Ivan Ejub Kostic, "Islamophobia in Serbia National Report 2017", *European Islamophobia Report 2017*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2018), <http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Serbia.pdf>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

report *Freedom in the World 2019* downgraded Serbia (along with Hungary) from “free” to the status of “partly free.”<sup>17</sup> In addition to the Freedom House report, in 2019, the European Commission itself reported that nothing was done to improve election conditions in Serbia, nor were media freedoms increased, which, according to the report, “raises serious concerns.”<sup>18</sup>

The rise of authoritarianism, coupled with the collapse of democratic institutions and media freedoms are perfect for aggressive, nationalist, and hawkish rhetoric and hate speech that escalate regional tension and increase the vulnerability of ethnic minorities, especially Muslims. Andrej Nikolaidis’s text *Dodik Truly Doesn’t Need a War: Peacefully and Sovereignly towards the Secession of Republika Srpska*<sup>19</sup> accurately presents the current secessionist policy of Republika Srpska, which in the near future looks to materialize in “peace” what was achieved during war through a policy of genocide and ethnic cleansing of Muslims.<sup>20</sup> Such a plan has the current Serbian government’s full support for the first time, as evident by Serbia listing, in December 2019, the preservation of Republika Srpska as a key national priority in two national strategy documents: the *Defence Strategy of the Republic of Serbia* and the *Serbian National Security Strategy*.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, media outlets have been filled with open threats of war towards Kosovo Albanians, holding the Albanian ethnic minority in Serbia’s Presevo Valley under constant pressure and keeping them in an absolute state of ghettoization and exclusion from Serbian society. (Fig. 4)

Along with these aggressive narratives, Serbia’s highest officials have repeatedly continued to deny genocide and ethnic cleansing.<sup>22</sup> Officials have even made directly

17. “Democracy in Retreat Freedom in the World 2019”, Freedom House Report, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

18. “European Commission Report: Serbia Has Not Taken Any Steps Forward to Secure Freedom of Expression”, Danas, <https://www.danas.rs/politika/izvestaj-evropske-komisije-srbija-bez-napretka-u-slobodi-izrazavanja/>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

19. Nikolaidis A., “Dodik Truly Doesn’t Need a War: Peacefully and Sovereignly towards the Secession of Republika Srpska”, Zurnal, 13 May 2019, <https://zurnal.info/novost/22086/mirno-i-suvereno-prema-secesiji-republike-srpske?fbclid=IwAR3IbUWQ3SPICpPE-b4QKB5IYQPu4tZQj4g9v83BK6U6zFFGHIQOOCnAmGU>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

20. The dominant narrative about B&H in Serbia mainly consists of undermining its statehood and the insistence on achieving the goal of unification of the Republika Srpska and the Republic of Serbia sometime in the near future. There are numerous examples of clear irredentist statements from the highest representatives of Republika Srpska and the Serbian government. In one such statement, Milorad Dodik even drew the map of a future “unified” state: “Chairman of B&H Presidency Projected His Idea on the Map – Dodik ‘United’ the Territories of Serbia and Srpska” (Novosti, 9 April 2019).

21. “What Is in Serbia’s Defense Strategy and National Security Strategy”, Novosti, <https://www.novosti.rs/ves-ti/naslovn/politika/aktuelno.289.html:837917-Sta-sadrze-Strategija-odbrane-i-nacionalne-bezbednosti-Srbije-Sedam-nacionalnih-interesa-Saradnja-sa-ODKB-nema-nezavisnosti-KiM>, (Access date: 24 December 2019).

22. Nine NGOs issued a statement condemning as “shameful and disgraceful” the fact that no Serbian official has characterized Srebrenica as a genocide. For more information, see: “NVO iz Srbije: Sramna i porazna činjenica da zvaničnici Srbije negiraju genocid u Srebrenici”, Autonomija, 9 July 2019, <https://www.autonomija.info/nvo-iz-srbije-sramna-i-porazna-cinjenica-da-zvanicnici-srbije-negiraju-genocid-u-srebrenici.html>, (Access date: 10 January 2020).

racist statements towards other ethnic groups, for example Serbia's Prime Minister Ana Brnabic called Kosovo Albanian representatives "forest people." Due to this statement the government in Pristina has barred Brnabic's entry into Kosovo for the foreseeable future.<sup>23</sup> Similar to Ana Brnabic, the Minister of Defence Aleksandar Vulin gave an Islamophobic statement when he characterized Sarajevo, the capital of BiH, as a "Balkan Jamahiriya."<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 4:** "Vucic Is Not Bluffing: I Will Send the Army to Kosovo"<sup>25</sup> (left); "The Shqiptars Have Declared War on Serbia"<sup>26</sup> (center); "The Devilish Shqiptar Plan: A Rebellion in the Presevo Valley"<sup>27</sup> (right).

In 2019, the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) Patriarch Irinej joined the politicians in continual genocide denying and in anti-Muslim statements such as, referring to the dispute between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin regime, "the Serbian people rightfully say that *poturice*<sup>28</sup> are worse than the Turks."<sup>29</sup> As an addition to this statement, Patriarch Irinej made clear that Orthodoxy has an inseparable connection with being Serbian, saying that "Montenegrins would have gone the way of our Prizren neighbors and converted to Islam thus losing all that connects them to the Serbian people" had it not been for Serbian Orthodox Church that helped preserve them.<sup>30</sup>

23. "The Prime Minister's "Forest People" and More Tension between Belgrade and Pristina", N1, 30 May 2019, <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a487958/Premijerkino-ljudi-iz-sume-i-jos-jedan-sum-na-relaciji-Beograd-Pristina.html>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

24. "Vulin, While Defending Handke Calls Sarajevo a 'Balkan Jamahiriya", N1, <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a551578/Vulin-nazvao-Sarajevo-dzamazhirijom.html>, (Access date: 11 December 2019).

25. "Vucic Is Not Bluffing: I Will Send the Army to Kosovo", *Informer*, 29 May 2019.

26. "The Shqiptars Have Declared War on Serbia", *Informer*, 8 March 2019.

27. "The Devilish Shqiptar Plan: A Rebellion in the Presevo Valley", *Informer*, 1 July 2019.

28. Derogatory term for south Slavs who accepted Islam.

29. "Irinej poručio Đukanoviću: Ni Turci, ni komunisti nisu atakovali na imovinu crkve", *Al Jazeera Balkans*, 15 June 2019, [http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/irinej-porucio-djukanovicu-ni-turci-ni-komunisti-nisu-atakovali-na-imovinu-crkve?fbclid=IwAR2Lr9r7xbmJ6fXR6lQUL\\_lsTMaWwv-RuODh7k9W3d1BwGNEgxnMumc6Pc](http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/irinej-porucio-djukanovicu-ni-turci-ni-komunisti-nisu-atakovali-na-imovinu-crkve?fbclid=IwAR2Lr9r7xbmJ6fXR6lQUL_lsTMaWwv-RuODh7k9W3d1BwGNEgxnMumc6Pc), (Access date: 15 January 2020).

30. *Ibid.*

Additionally, something that will be discussed in more detail in the section “Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network” is that the current ruling party has continuously (in)directly supported the establishment of (ultra) right-wing movements. These movements serve as a conduit to convey all those views which because of the international community and the ruling party’s declarative commitment to European values, the SNS cannot express itself. It is also important to note that many of these far-right actors are either former or current members of the fascist, ultra-right Serbian Radical Party (SRS), whose leader Vojislav Seselj was sentenced to 10 years in prison by the Hague Tribunal for inciting persecution, deportation, and the forced displacement of Croats in the Vojvodina village of Hrtkovci in 1992.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the ruling SNS itself was founded by splitting from the SRS in 2008. The current president, Aleksandar Vucic, was, until then, the general secretary of the Serbian Radical Party and one of the most fervent ultra-nationalists who had spent the previous decade spreading the most radical forms of ethnic and religious hatred, especially towards Muslims.<sup>32</sup>

## Media

According to the 2019 European Commission Report, media freedoms in Serbia are under significant threat due to the authoritarian tendencies of the ruling coalition.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, pro-regime media continue to violate the fundamental rights of freedom of press. Thus, hate speech is pervasive on pro-regime television stations such as TV Happy and TV Pink, the tabloids *Informex*, *Alo*, *Kurir*, and in more prominent newspapers such as *Politika* and *Novosti*.<sup>34</sup> The TV Happy network leads the way in hate speech and the promotion of the most radical forms of Serbian ul-

31. “Seselj Sentenced to 10 Years for Crimes in Hrtkovci”, Radio Free Europe, 11 April 2019, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/pocelo-izricanje-drugostepene-presude-seselju/29159032.html>, (Access date: 19 February 2020).

32. For more information about Aleksandar Vucic’s political biography and his time as spokesman for the fascist Serbian Radical Party and promoter of genocidal attacks on Muslims in BiH and Kosovo, see: “Ruler - The Political Biography of Aleksandar Vucic”, Youtube, 17 February 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxR6hWb\\_uW8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxR6hWb_uW8), (Access date: 19 February 2020).

33. For more information about The European Commission Serbia Report, see: “Commission Staff Working Document”, European Commission, 29 May 2019, <https://www.danas.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/20190529-serbia-report.pdf?x42945>, (Access date: 5 February 2020).

34. There are hundreds of hate speech articles directed toward Bosniak Muslims and Kosovo Albanians that are published in Serbian newspapers. To illustrate we will mention just some of titles: “Bosniaks Erect a Monument in Honor of Turkish Conquest of Bosnia! Descendants of Turkish Slaves Celebrate the Invaders of Their Land”; “SDA President’s Diabolical Plan: Bakir Sends Afghans to Settle into Serbian Municipalities in Order to Chase Serbs out of B&H”; “Dodik Speaks for Novosti – Džaferović Watched Executions of Dozens of Serbs”, etc.

Apart from the texts listed above the idea of the “Islamic threat” is most noticeable in the five-page “Topic of the Week” section featured in the daily *Politika* on 14 July 2019, entitled “The Green Corridor: Balkan Corridor of Instability.” “The Green Corridor” is one of the most common terms used by Serbian nationalist circles in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which was employed to pave the way for the expansionist incursions of the Serb forces and their forays into the territories of B&H and Kosovo. The notion “Green Corridor” stands for “long-term goal of Islamist ideologues, both in the Balkans and in the entire Muslim world that they create a unified territory which would include predominantly Muslim cities located along the route from Turkey in the southeast to Bosnia in the northwest.” It is of the utmost importance to note that this five-page “Topic of the Week” was published precisely in the week of the anniversary of the genocide against Bosniak Muslims in Srebrenica on 11 July 1995. Bearing in mind the sociopolitical atmosphere prevailing in Serbian society, it is really hard to believe that choosing a topic that deals with the issue of the “Green Corridor” in the same calendar week when the genocide against Bosniak Muslims is commemorated is pure coincidence.

tra-nationalism and historic revisionism. The editor-in-chief of TV Happy, Milomir Maric, presides over the *Cirilica* program that has for year's hosted sentenced war criminals, intellectuals and public figures who spent the 1990s war years promoting the most ardent Islamophobia. War criminals and extreme nationalists also receive a large portion of broadcast time on the *Novo jutro* program, aired by the most watched network in Serbia, TV Pink. As for print media, as in previous years, the tabloid *Informer* leads the way in hate speech, continually printing bombastic headlines announcing a possible war with Kosovo Albanians. However, even daily print media with long-standing traditions such as the oldest newspaper in Serbia *Politika* and the newspaper *Novosti* regularly print articles which serve historical revisionism and the glorification of war criminals. As has been pointed out in the introduction, this has created an atmosphere of a post-genocide "culture of triumphalism" and the rehabilitation of the expansionist idea of a "Greater Serbia."

In addition, daily newspapers in Serbia constantly securitize Muslim Bosniaks and Kosovo Albanians by linking them to jihadist and paramilitary Muslim organizations. (Figs. 5 and 6)



**Figure 5:** "It Smells Like the Nineties! Americans Insert Jihadists into BiH and Prepare 'Alija's scenario': Terrorism Expert Reveals What Lies behind Muslim Invasion"<sup>35</sup> (left); "Shocking Claims of a Retired Iranian General. In BiH, I Trained Muslim Fighters"<sup>36</sup> (right).



**Figure 6:** "Bosnians Struck Twin Towers! Al-Qaeda Members in Maglaj Village Plotted an Attack on US!"<sup>37</sup> (left); "Jihadists from Košara Saw Death in London too"<sup>38</sup> (right).

35. "It Smells Like the Nineties! Americans Insert Jihadists into BiH and Prepare 'Alija's scenario': Terrorism Expert Reveals What Lies behind Muslim Invasion", *Informer*, 14 October 2019.

36. "Shocking Claims of a Retired Iranian General. In BiH, I Trained Muslim Fighters", *Informer*, 19 April 2019.

37. "Bosnians Struck Twin Towers! Al-Qaeda Members in Maglaj Village Plotted an Attack on US!", *Informer*, 18 September 2019.

38. "Jihadists from Košara Saw Death in London too", *Novosti*, 9 March 2019.

## Justice System

Like in the case of physical and verbal attacks, we don't have any official statistics from the Ministry of Justice regarding the crimes that have been committed on the bases of racial, ethnic, religious, or any other expression of hatred. Also, the problem is not that the legislative framework does not exist but in its implementation. On the other hand, the European Commission, in its annual report, has again stressed that Serbia has to demonstrate a much firmer commitment to the domestic processing of war crimes at all levels and to improve cooperation with the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT or Mechanism) and prosecutor's offices in BiH and especially Kosovo.<sup>39</sup>

In the context of war crimes, it is important that we also emphasize that all pro-government media (*Politika, Novosti, Informer, Alo, Srpskitelegraf*, etc.), representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, political parties like the Serbian Radical Party and the Serbian Movement "Dveri" as well right-wing organizations reacted once again negatively to the news that Bosnian Serb Radovan Karadzic lost the war crimes and genocide appeal to the United Nations court in The Hague.<sup>40</sup>

## Internet

Numerous far-right portals and YouTube channels that promote nationalist, exclusivist, and Islamophobic content can be found online. The most influential of these are the YouTube channels Balkan Info, Centar, Helm Cast, and the portal Srbin.info. The content of the YouTube channels BalkanInfo, Centar and Helm Cast frequently take the form of interviews, with views numbering in the hundreds of thousands. During 2019, Balkan Info hosted notorious Serbian nationalist Dragoslav Vanja Bokan, one-time leader of the paramilitary organization *Beli orlovi* (White Eagles), no less than five times. Bokan is known for his extreme far-right views and for propagating anti-Muslim hate speech.<sup>41</sup> Apart from Bokan, frequent guests in 2019 (some on multiple occasions) were intellectuals famous for their Islamophobic and anti-Muslim stance during the 1990s such as Srdja Trifkovic (PhD), Mirosljub Jevtic (PhD), and Darka Tanaskovic (PhD).<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, convicted war criminal Vladimir Lazarevic was a guest twice. In 2009, Lazarevic was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia for crimes against Kosovo Albanians. He was subsequently granted early release after serving two-thirds of his sentence.

39. "Commission Staff Working Document".

40. "Karadzic Verdict Will Reinforce Ethnic Divisions, Analysts Predict", Balkan Insight, 19 March 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/03/19/karadzic-verdict-will-reinforce-ethnic-divisions-analysts-predict/>, (Access date: 2 January 2020).

41. For more information about Dragoslav Vanja Bokan, see: "Bokan, Dragoslav", Pescanik, 1 October 2007, <https://pescanik.net/bokan-dragoslav/>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

42. It is important to note that all the intellectuals mentioned here have been frequent guests on pro-regime networks such as TV Happy and TV Pink, as well as numerous other television and radio stations. These interviews are then disseminated across social media platforms, primarily through Facebook or YouTube.

Apart from web portals and YouTube channels, there are a large number of Facebook pages that spread Islamophobia and especially anti-migrant rhetoric. Two of the most followed Facebook pages are those of the far-right organizations *Srpska cast* (Serbian Honor) with 237,155 followers and *Levijatan* (Leviathan) with 229,406 followers. The latter is nominally an animal rights group but in fact regularly disseminates far-right propaganda while its representatives on a regular basis join right-wing gatherings.

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The main generators of Islamophobia in Serbia are all the institutions, organizations, political parties, and intellectuals which are guided by an exclusivist Serbian nationalism on the basis of a Serbian Christian Orthodox identity (*Svetosavlje*) and the “Turk,” which has, as a result of centuries of Ottoman rule, been identified with Muslims and defined as the archetypal enemy. The institution that has contributed the most in establishing and creating such a national identity is the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC). In the political sphere, the Serbian nationalist discourse has been the dominant ideology from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to this day. In addition to the SPC and political parties, academic organizations, such as the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Association of Writers of Serbia, as well as various influential Serbian intellectuals have also played a vital role in perpetuating this national identity. These academic organizations and individuals have utilized a (quasi-) scientific approach to affirm and perpetuate a picture of Serbian national identity as exceptional and thus to “rationalize” intolerance towards Others, especially Muslims.<sup>43</sup>

However, as mentioned above, in recent years numerous far-right and nationalist movements have been established with the help of state structures.<sup>44</sup> The main reason for this can be found in the fact that the current president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, and his populist political party SNS were established after a split from the fascist, ultra-nationalist SRS led by Vojislav Seselj. During the 1990s, the SRS represented the cradle of Serbian ultra-nationalist ideas and later became the source of numerous far-right movements. For example, according to the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), most members of the far-right *Generacije identiteta* movement were also members of the SRS. Furthermore, *Generacija identiteta* was

---

43. Much has been written about the role of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Association of Writers of Serbia, and the role of Serbian intellectuals in the affirmation of Serbian nationalism. For more information about this topic, see: Dragojevic-Soso, J. (2002), *Saviours of the Nation. Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and Revival of Nationalism*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press. About the role of Serbian intellectuals in paving the way for genocide against the Muslim population in BiH and ethnic cleansing in Kosovo see: Cigar, N. (2000), *The Role of Serbian Orientalists in Justifying the Genocide against the Muslims in the Balkans*, Sarajevo, Institute for Research of Crimes Against Humanity and International Law.

44. *Srpska desnica* (Serbian Right), *Zavetnici* (Oath-Takers), *Srpska cast* (Serbian Honor), *Nacionalna avangarda* (National Vanguard), *Obraz* (Cheek), and *Pokret Naši* (Our Movement).

inspired by the French *Identitaires* movement, one of whose leaders, Arnaud Goullion, received Serbian citizenship from the current government based on the work of his non-governmental organization *Solidarité Kosovo*. Before arriving in Serbia, Goullion was linked to Islamophobes such as “Philippom Vardonom, who is now chief-of-communications for Marine Le Pen’s National Rally party, and with members of the far-right militant group *Unité Radicale*.”<sup>45</sup> One of the principal narratives of *Generacija identiteta* is that the “Islamic colonization of Christian countries, which began with the creation of the Republic of Kosovo, is now taking place through the onslaught of migrants” from the Middle East.<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that the *Generacija identiteta* Facebook page was taken down after the terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand. Apart from these French far-right organizations, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NDP) are also active in Serbia. For the past six years, the youngest AfD member of the German parliament and onetime chairperson of the party’s youth organization *Junge Alternative für Deutschland* Markus Frohnmaier has visited Serbia at least once a year during which time he has made close contact with the conservative *Narodnim slobodarskim pokretom* (National Libertarian Movement) as well as the parliamentary clerical-nationalistic *Srpskim pokretom Dveri* (Serbian Movement ‘Dveri’). Furthermore, the AfD has also made overtures to the Serbian Orthodox Church, because, according to the Frohnmaier, the AfD would like to forge closer ties with the SPC and help the Church’s “voice be heard in Germany.”<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, representatives of the NDP have made contacts with the ultra-nationalist extremist movement *Srpska akcija* (Serbian Action, SA) which identifies itself as a “pan-European Christian movement fighting against EU bureaucracy and Zionist-Atlantic occupation.”<sup>48</sup> The SA also has links with the Italian neofascist movement *Forza Nuova*.<sup>49</sup> The SA has spearheaded an anti-migrant campaign via posters that picture tabloid headlines about alleged crimes migrants have committed in Serbia. (Fig. 7)

45. A. Roknic, “Deal with the Devil: Austrian Serbs Embrace Anti-Migrant Right”, Resonant Voices Initiative, <https://resonantvoices.info/deal-with-the-devil-austrian-serbs-embrace-anti-migrant-right/>, (Access date: 12 December 2019).

46. Ibid.

47. During their joint press conference Miroslav Parovic (head of *Narodni slobodarski pokret*) and Markus Frohnmaier stated that their goal is to create a “Paris-Berlin-Beograd-Moskva” axis. For more on this and the relationship between the *Srpskog pokreta Dveri* and the SPC with the AfD see the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network article: Nenad Radicevic, “We Are Their Voice”: German Far-Right Builds Balkan Alliances”, *Balkan Insight*, 24 October 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/24/we-are-their-voice-german-far-right-builds-balkan-alliances/>, (Access date: 2 January 2020).

48. For more information about the ideology of *Serbian Action* see: Serbian Action, <https://akcija.org/serbian-action/>, (Access date: 2 January 2020).

49. “Student Action: Interview with our Italian Comrades / СтудентскаАкција: Интервјусаталијанскимдруговима”, Serbian Action, 16 March 2019, <https://akcija.org/studentska-akcija-intervju-sa-italijanskim-drugovima/>, (Access date: 18 September 2019).



Honor), *Nacionalna avangarda* (National Avant-garde), *Obraz* (Cheek), and *Pokret Naši* (Our Movement). In 2019, the conference “A New Era of Friendship between Israel and Serbia” held in Belgrade’s Hilton Hotel and organized by *Nacionalna avangarda* is notable. This conference was attended by representatives of the Serbian government, the Deputy Mayor of Belgrade Goran Vesic, and the Israeli Ambassador to Serbia H.E. Alona Fisher-Kamm. The historian Gideon Greif<sup>54</sup> and professor Vladimir Marinkovic also spoke at the event. The conference dealt with “the influence of the Serbian national idea on the Zionist movement,” how the “brotherhood of the Serbian and Jewish peoples is sealed by blood and martyrdom,” and finally how “today, the European and Judaeo-Christian civilization is being defended on the Golan Heights.” (Fig. 9)



**Figure 9:** Fisher-Kamm, “The influence of the Serbian national idea on the Zionist movement”<sup>55</sup> (left); Greif, “The brotherhood of the Serbian and Jewish peoples is sealed by blood and martyrdom”<sup>56</sup> (center); Marinkovic, “Today our European and Judaeo-Christian civilization is being defended on the Golan Heights”<sup>57</sup> (right).

Apart from far-right groups, an important role in the promulgation of a securitization-centric narrative in relation to Muslims is played by international organizations, which have for years financed projects to fight “Islamic extremism.” In media, of particular interest is the regional Facebook page *Ne u moje ime* (Not in My Name) which disproportionately utilizes negative phenomena among Muslims around the world and other extremist movements. (Fig. 10) This page also looks to strengthen the position of women in Muslim communities, but in doing so frequently exploits Orientalist stereotypes.

54. What is important to emphasize about Gideon Greif is that in 2019, he was appointed by Republika Srpska to head a commission to probe crimes of Srebrenica massacre during the war in BiH (1992-1995). The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia as well as the International Court of Justice and domestic courts have all characterized these killings as a genocide. There is a conviction among many that the commission is a bid to rewrite history, as the Republika Srpska’s officials have repeatedly minimized the number of killed persons or denied it was a genocide.

55. “The influence of the Serbian national idea on the Zionist movement”, National Avant-garde, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/nacionalnaavangarda/>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

56. “The brotherhood of the Serbian and Jewish peoples is sealed by blood and martyrdom”, National Avant-garde, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/nacionalnaavangarda/>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

57. “Today our European and Judaeo-Christian civilization is being defended on the Golan Heights, National Avant-garde, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/nacionalnaavangarda/>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).



## Our Story

NE U MOJE IME · FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2018

#NeUMojeIme je Facebook stranica Radija Slobodna Evropa koja otvara nova polja u digitalnom prostoru za dijalog o radikalizmima i ekstremizmima u stvarnom svijetu.

Platforma #NeUMojeIme podstiče mlade ljude i cjelokupnu zajednicu da se uključe u dijalog kao način za prevenciju i podizanje svijesti o radikalnim i ekstremnim ideologijama.

#UključiDijalog

**Figure 10:** The front page of “Our Story” on the “Ne u mojeime” webpage, which uses a picture of Muslim girls to call for fighting “radicalism” and “extremism.”<sup>58</sup>

In 2019, apart from *Ne u mojeime*, the already mentioned BIRN wrote an affirmative report on the British government’s controversial *Prevent* campaign and employed a problematic analysis of the campaign, particularly regarding the issue of the covering of young Muslim girls.<sup>59</sup>

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

In November, on the initiative of the Belgrade-based Balkan Centre for the Middle East, one month after the ODIHR held the previously mentioned two-day training for civil society activists on criminal acts perpetrated out of hate, intolerance, and hate speech in the media, the first assembly meeting was held in Novi Pazar to form a new *Koalicija za zaštitu manjinskih i verskih prava–Bedem* (Coalition for the Protection of Minorities and Religious Rights – Bastion). The coalition was joined by the local Novi Pazar organizations *Svetionik* (Lighthouse) and *Hidžab – naše pravo* (Hijab - Our Right) as representatives of Bosniak Muslims, and *Dituria* from Presevo, which gathers together Albanian Muslims. Numerous noteworthy repre-

58. “Ne u moje ime”, Facebook, 5 October 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/RSE.NeUMojeIme/>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

59. Ivan Ejub Kostic, “Balkanska istraživačka mreža u akciji spasavanja muslimanskih devojičica”, *Islamske informativne novine* Preporod, 4 July 2019, <https://preporod.com/index.php/misljenja/item/10956-balkanska-istrazivacka-regionalna-mreza-u-akciji-spasavanja-muslimanskih-djevojica?fbclid=IwAR2dHhUfqRXhB97PChQwTWOLBhuIZINxcjB0aCOYRf5CXnXNvYkD401OGM>, (Access date: 3 February 2020).

sentatives of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian national minorities of Islamic faith also joined the coalition.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The current Serbian government's strategy to strongly endorse Serbian nationalist policy which insists on the secession of Republika Srpska from BiH coupled with stagnating negotiations with Kosovo, have resulted in a significant rise in sociopolitical tensions in the region, with even the mention of armed conflict resurfacing. If we take into account the recent past and the wars of the 1990s, it is clear that any new armed conflicts would almost certainly lead to an existential risk for the Muslim population of the region. Furthermore, evidently Serbian nationalist ideology and its mythical narrative have become an influence on far-right movements and individuals fueled by anti-Muslim hatred across the world. The clearest indication of this can be found in the written materials of Anders Breivik and Brenton Tarrant. Both directly cited Serbian historical figures from the Serbian conflict with the Ottoman Empire and war criminals such as Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic as their idols. Furthermore, the activities and links between newly formed Serbian far-right and pro-fascist organizations with similar movements in France, Germany, Austria, and Italy clearly show the need to proceed with caution in the future.

Due to all of these factors, Muslims in the region must strive to strengthen their links and improve their position in order to provide an adequate counter-narrative and to begin proactively monitoring and identifying all actors working to spread anti-Muslim hatred. To achieve this, Muslims in the Balkans need strong support from the international community and Western European Muslim organizations which can assist by sharing their practical experiences and work methodology. Additionally, Muslims in Serbia are in a far less favorable infrastructural and organizational position than Muslims in predominantly Muslim countries such as BiH, Kosovo, and Albania. Thus, assistance from regional and international actors in the case of Serbia is even more crucial because the current Serbian authorities do not intend to provide any assistance and are, in fact, the main generator of intolerance towards Muslims in Serbia.

## Chronology

- **27.04.2019:** First attack on Albanian bakery in the neighborhood of Borca in Belgrade that lasted for days.
- **08.05.2019:** Graffiti in Belgrade city center that champions war criminal Radovan Karadzic.
- **29.05.2019:** Right-wing organizations try to stop Mirdita Festival.
- **30.05.2019:** Statement by Serbian Primer Minister Ana Brnabić that polit-

ical representatives of Kosovo Albanians “are people from the forest.”

- **11.07.2019:** Organized interruption of a play titled *Srebrenica. When We Who Were Killed Rise Up* by Zlatko Pakovic, which deals with the Srebrenica genocide.
- **28.09.2019:** Graffiti “From Kosovo to Iran there will be dead Muslims, Ratko Mladic” on the walls of Različak day-care center in the city of Novi Sad.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**SLOVAKIA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

JOZEF LENČ



## The Author

**Jozef Lenč** is an assistant professor at the Department of Philosophy and Applied Philosophy at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia. His research focuses on the relationship of religion and politics, especially in regards to political parties, Islam, and Islamic philosophy. Lenč is a commentator of Slovak and international politics, especially regarding the Middle East. He has co-authored the book *Young Migrants in the Slovak Society* (2012) and is the author of the book *Religion in Politics and the Position of Religious Political Parties* (2016). Email: [jozef.lenc@ucm.sk](mailto:jozef.lenc@ucm.sk)

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Jozef Lenč: *Islamophobia in Slovakia: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

In 2019, Islamophobia in Slovakia manifested itself mainly in social networks, political campaigns, and in several media that published conspiracy theory articles especially in connection to repeated proposals to tighten the abortion law and to the parliamentary debate on the so-called Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence). Politicians spreading Islamophobic views not only enjoyed more media coverage during parliamentary debates, but Islamophobic narrative became an important part of the campaign before the presidential election (March 2019) and the European Parliament election (May 2019).

Politicians, both the government coalition and parts of the opposition, have used Islamophobic statements in their election campaigns (2019). Some politicians repeatedly ignore the fact that Muslims are citizens of the Slovak Republic and that they have the same rights and obligations as other citizens. Slovak Muslims are repeatedly associated with terrorism, illegal migration, and labelled as a security threat to Slovakia.

In this light, the positive change from previous years is that the legislative position of Muslims in Slovakia has not deteriorated. Slovak Muslims were also partially publicly supported by the new President Zuzana Čaputová. In 2019, several non-governmental organisations, in cooperation with the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia, joined a series of discussions on interfaith dialogue to mitigate the effects of Islamophobia.

## Zhrnutie

Verejné prejavy islamofóbie sa v roku 2019 sa sústredili prednostne na sociálne siete. Napriek tomu sa šíreniu islamofóbie venoval relatívne veľký mediálny priestor. Najmä v súvislosti s opakovanými návrhmi sprísnenia zákona o interrupciách a v parlamentnej diskusii o tzv. Istanbulskej dohovore (Dohovor Rady Európy o predchádzaní násiliu na ženách a domácejmu násiliu a o boji proti nemu). Politici, ktorí šíria islamofóbne názory, mali väčší mediálny priestor nielen počas parlamentných debát, ale tiež počas kampane pred prezidentskými voľbami (marec 2019), a voľbami do Európskeho parlamentu (máj 2019).

Politici (vládnej koalície a časti opozície) využívali islamofóbne vyjadrenia v predvolebnej kampani, iní sa negatívne vyjadrovali smerom k moslimom v ad hoc situáciách naprieč celým rokom. Veľká časť politikov opakovane ignoruje fakt, že moslimovia sú občanmi Slovenskej republiky. Slovenskí moslimovia sú tiež často spájaní s terorizmom, nelegálnou migráciou a sú označovaní za bezpečnostnú hrozbu pre Slovensko.

V tomto svetle je pozitívnou zmenou oproti minulým rokom to, že sa legislatívne postavenie moslimov na Slovensku nezhoršilo. Slovenských moslimov sa čiastočne verejne zastala aj nová prezidentka Zuzana Čaputová. V roku 2019 sa viaceré mimovládne organizácie v spolupráci s Islamskou nadáciou na Slovensku zapojili do série diskusií spojených s medzináboženským dialógom s cieľom zmierniť dopady politickej islamofóbie na spoločnosť.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Slovakia

**Type of Regime:** Unitary Parliamentary Republic

**Form of Government:** Parliamentary System

**Ruling Parties:** SMER-SD (Direction-Social Democracy, left-wing populism, nationalism), SNS (Slovak National Party, nationalism), Most-Híd (Bridge, centre)

**Opposition Parties:** SaS (Freedom and Solidarity, national liberalism, Euro-scepticism); OĽaNO-NOVA-KU-ZZ (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities, conservatism, populism); K-LSNS (Kotlebovci – People’s Party – Our Slovakia, neo-fascism); *Sme Rodina* (We Are Family, national conservatism, social populism)

**Last Elections:** 2019 Presidential Election (Zuzana Čaputová [Independent] won 58.41% of the vote against 41.59% of Maroš Šefčovič [SMER-SD]); 2016 Legislative Election (SMER-SD; Robert Fico: 49 seats, SaS; Richard Sulík: 21 seats, OĽaNO-NOVA-KU-ZZ; Igor Matovič: 19 seats, SNS; Andrej Danko: 15 seats, K-LSNS; Marian Kotleba: 14 seats, *Sme Rodina*; Boris Kollár, 11 seats, Most-Híd; Béla Bugár, 11 seats, Sieť [Network]; Radoslav Procházka, 10 seats); next Legislative Election 29 February 2020.

**Total Population:** 5.45 million (2018)

**Major Languages:** Slovak

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism)

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** The Slovak Republic doesn’t have official statistics that report Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** N/A

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Catholic Church (62.0%), No Religion (13.4%), Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (5.9%), Greek Catholic Church (3.8%), Reformed Christian Church (1.8%)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 4,800-5,000 people (0.001%) in 2018

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (ISN), Foundation al-Huda in Kosice, Association of Muslims in Central Slovakia – al-Bakara

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** Islamic Foundation in Slovakia, Forum of the World Religions Slovakia, Open Society Foundation, Centre for Research of Ethnicity and Culture

**Far-Right Parties:** Kotlebovci – People’s Party Our Slovakia (*Kotleba – Ľudová strana naše Slovensko*, K-LSNS), Homeland (*Vlast’*), Slovak Revival Movement (*Slovenské hnutie obrody*, SHO)

**Far-Right Movements:** Our Homeland Is the Future (*Náša vlasť je budúcnosť*, NVB)

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None. In 2017, members of the alt-right political party We Are Family submitted a law to parliament banning the construction of mosques, which was not accepted.
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

In 2019, four events that influenced the perception of the Muslim community in the eyes of the public and defined the possibilities of its future status are crucial for evaluating the manifestations of Islamophobia in Slovakia.

The beginning of the year was marked by a campaign that preceded the presidential election in March 2019. The campaign included candidates who openly spread lies about Muslims and migrants in general, and thus supported widespread prejudice towards the Muslim community in Slovakia. Their statements were mainly based on the various conspiracies and arguments used in previous years by the far right in parliamentary debates in order to enforce legislation that would curtail the rights of Muslims, and respectively protect Slovakia from mass migration.

The European Parliament elections in Slovakia (May 2019) was the space in which the extreme right political parties and Eurosceptic political entities used the “Muslim card” and the threat of “bringing refugees to Slovakia”. This was part of the campaign of the K-LSNS, the SNS, and some smaller political parties that were formed shortly before the European Parliament elections (Christian Union, Christian Democracy – Life and Prosperity).

In the autumn of 2019, the Slovak Parliament was once again embroiled in a debate about the so-called Istanbul Convention. The main motto of the opponents of the international documentary to help reduce domestic violence and violence against women was “Stop the evil from Istanbul”. This was seized by several Islamophobic organisations who wanted to exploit the fear of Islam (exemplified in this instance by Istanbul) as an element in the general rejection of the convention, which they blamed, in particular, for the spread of so-called gender ideology.

In November 2019, the official campaign for the parliamentary elections of 2020 began. Several political parties decided to run their political campaigns on a platform premised on the fear of Islam. They spoke again of the threat of “bringing migrants to Slovakia” or said they wouldn’t allow a “comprehensive Muslim community” in Slovakia.<sup>1</sup>

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

The Slovak Republic doesn’t provide statistics on attacks that are motivated by hatred of a particular religion. Physical or verbal attacks against Muslims, which were re-

---

1. Jozef Lenč, “Predvolebná kampaň 2020: V znamení šírenia strachu z islámu a muslimov”, IslamOnline.sk, 31 December 2019, <http://www.islamonline.sk/2019/12/predvolebna-kampan-2020-v-znameni-sirenja-strachu-z-islamu-a-muslimov/>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

ported in previous reports on Islamophobia in Slovakia, were reported to the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia, which informed the public about them. For 2019, it did not report any information on physical violence against Muslims.

## Employment

It is not possible to ascertain from the available sources any data that Muslim women or men in Slovakia were discriminated against on the basis of their religion. There were no recorded Islamophobic instances that could be labelled as discriminatory in the context of the employment of Muslims in Slovak workplaces in 2019.

## Education

In Slovakia, the long-term problem is that most Slovak history textbooks describe the era of the Ottoman Empire's domination of the Kingdom of Hungary (including parts of today's Slovakia) as a period of darkness in the country's national history, full of oppression and violence by the Turks. This interpretation of history is one of the reasons for the negative view in Slovak society of Islam.<sup>2</sup> This historical interpretation is also used by Christian organisations or extreme right-wing political parties to spread a negative image of Muslims.<sup>3</sup> The most common argument is the unsuccessful siege of Vienna by the Ottomans and the victory of Christians over Muslims, which is interpreted as a key event in defending Europe against Islam.<sup>4</sup>

## Politics

In the presidential election of March 2019, candidates ran three different types of campaigns in terms of their position vis-à-vis Muslims. The first category included those who stylised themselves on the position that they will protect Slovakia from the threat of future Islamisation. This included former chairman of the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic Štefan Harabin and chairman of the neo-Nazi political party K-LSNS, Marián Kotleba. Both candidates associated the threat of Islamisation of Slovakia with the “dictate of Brussels” and if they did not win the elections, the EU would import Muslim migrants to Slovakia.<sup>5</sup>

In the campaign, Kotleba criticised President Kiska for awarding German Chancellor Angela Merkel the highest state decoration, the Order of the White Double

2. Radoslav Štefančík and Jozef Lenč, “Mladí migranti v slovenskej spoločnosti, Medzinárodná migrácia, moslimovia, štát a verejná mienka”, (Tribun EU, Brno: 2012), pp. 104-121.

3. “Absurdné! V bitke pri Viedni sa Európa zachránila pred moslimskou inváziou. Dnes sa za to hanbí”, Kotlebovci – ESNS, 26 September 2018, <http://www.naseslovensko.net/nase-nazory/absurdne-v-bitke-pri-viedni-sa-europa-zachranila-pred-moslimskou-invaziou-dnes-sa-za-to-hanbi/>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

4. “Keď sa bojovalo o Viednu”, Katolícke noviny, 20 May 2019, <https://www.katolickenoviny.sk/kultura/category/kultura/article/ked-sa-bojovalo-o-vieden.xhtml>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

5. Karol Sudor, “Unavený Harabin strasil, že do Veľkého Krtíša môže prísť 200-tisíc migrantov. Zoštátnil by verejnoprávne médiá”, Denník N, 10 March 2019, <https://dennikn.sk/1404981/unaveny-harabin-strasil-ze-do-velkeho-krtisa-moze-prist-200-tisic-migrantov-zostatnil-by-verejnopravne-media/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Tibor Habo, “Kotlebovci strašia islamom na novom webe, propagujú ho aj bilbordy”, Aktuality.sk, 9 January 2019, <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/654792/kotlebovci-strašia-islamom-na-novom-webe/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

Cross of the First Class, saying that she “has flooded all Europe with Africans and Muslims and made Germany die in two generations”.<sup>6</sup> His campaign included advertising the website [stratenaeuropa.sk](http://www.stratenaeuropa.sk)<sup>7</sup> as well as an allegedly “scary document from our visit to immigrant-dominated European cities”. The essence of this “document” was the spread of lies that cities in Western Europe are full of Muslims and immigrants who have created no-go zones and terrorize Europeans.<sup>8</sup> For this campaign, the Institute for Human Rights filed a criminal complaint against the K-LSNS.<sup>9</sup> The Advertising Standards Council also had a problem with Kotleba’s Islamophobic advertising; the council decided that such advertising was unethical.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 1:** K-LSNS poster for their Islamophobic campaign “Lost Europe”. Part of the campaign was a film showing how “Muslims gradually control Europe” (Spring 2019).<sup>11</sup>

6. “Marián Kotleba kritizuje Kisku za udelenie vyznamenania Merkelovej”, Kotlebovci – LSNS, 8 February 2019, <http://www.naseslovensko.net/nase-nazory/vyhlasenia/marian-kotleba-kritizuje-kisku-za-udelenie-vyznamenania-merkelovej/>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

7. It is a project of the political party Kotlebovci-LSNS, which they used in the campaign before the presidential and EP elections with the intention of spreading fear of Muslims and migrants and questioned Slovakia’s EU membership. *Stratená Európa*, <http://www.stratenaeuropa.sk/>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

8. “Film *Stratená Európa*, zobrazujúci desivé následky imigrácie, si prišli napriek zákazom pozrieť prvé stovky ľudí”, Kotlebovci – LSNS, 8 October 2019, <http://www.naseslovensko.net/cinnost/film-stratena-europa-zobrazujuci-desive-nasledky-imigracie-si-prisli-napriek-zakazom-pozriet-prve-stovky-ludi/>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

9. Soňa Otajovičová, “Inštitút ľudských práv podáva trestné oznámenie na Kotlebovu kampaň”, StartitUp, 11 February 2019, <https://www.startitup.sk/institut-ludskych-prav-podava-trestne-oznamenie-na-kotlebovu-kampan/>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

10. Rebeka Kosečeková, “Billbord Kotlebovcov je neetický, rozhodla Rada pre reklamu”, *Trend*, 30 January 2019, <https://medialne.etrend.sk/marketing/billbord-kotlebovcov-je-neeticky-rozhodla-rada-pre-reklamu.html>, (Access date: 6 February 2020); “Kotleba narazil. S jeho billboardami má problém Rada pre reklamu”, *Hospodárske noviny*, 31 January 2019, <https://strategie.hnonline.sk/marketing/1883166-kotleba-narazil-s-jeho-billboardmi-ma-problem-rada-pre-reklamu>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

11. *Stratená Európa*, <http://www.stratenaeuropa.sk/> (Access date: 6 February 2020).



**Figure 2:** K-LSNS poster for their Islamophobic campaign “Lost Europe”. “Immigrants occupy Europe” (Spring 2019).<sup>12</sup>

During the campaign, Stefan Harabin spread fake news that 11,000 migrants had arrived in Slovakia.<sup>13</sup> He stated, “Migration policy (EU) is clear: replace our Christian families with Muslim families”.<sup>14</sup>

The second group of candidates consisted of those who opposed migration, without explicitly associating it with Muslims and Islamisation. This included the candidates Maroš Šefčovič (Smer-SD) and the candidate Milan Krajniak (We Are Family).<sup>15</sup> The last group consisted of candidates who didn’t have a negative attitude towards Muslims. This included the election winner and current President of the Slovak Republic Zuzana Čaputová.

At the end of May 2019, elections to the European Parliament were held in Slovakia. Several political parties that ran in the election did not conceal their negative attitude towards refugees and Muslims. These parties were the K-LSNS,<sup>16</sup> the SNS, and We Are Family. Some of the marginal parties we can mention are Christian De-

12. Tibor Habo, “Kotlebovci strašia islamom na novom webe, propagujú ho aj bilbordy”, *Aktuality.sk*, 9 January 2019, <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/654792/kotlebovci-strasia-islamom-na-novom-webe/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

13. “President Candidate Štefan Harabin Insists: Migrants Are the Biggest Problem!”, *Nový Čas*, 11 March 2019, <https://www.cas.sk/clanok/813698/kandidat-na-prezidenta-stefan-harabin-trva-na-svojom-najvaecsim-proble-m-su-migranti-video/>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

14. Peter Kováč, “Harabin Screams and Sings at Meetings. He Also Mentions Soros”, *SME*, 15 February 2019, <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22050614/harabin-na-mitingoch-krici-i-spieva-spomina-aj-sorosa.html>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

15. Krajniak stated, “I think that Slovakia should be very careful about asylum seekers, especially from Muslim countries. Mass migration from Muslim countries is a security risk”. “Veľká anketa Pravdy: Kľúčové názory kandidátov na prezidenta”, *Pravda*, 13 March 2019, <https://spravy.pravda.sk/prezidentske-volby-2019/clanok/505137-velka-anke-ta-pravdy-klucove-nazory-kandidatov/>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

16. “K-LSNS election newspaper”, <http://www.naseslovensko.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/noviny-lsns-2019-05.pdf>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

mocracy – Life and Prosperity (KDZP)<sup>17</sup> and the National Coalition (NK).<sup>18</sup> These parties shared a negative view of the European policy of openness to immigrants, spread fear of migrants (Muslims) and of the so-called threat of Islamisation to Slovakia.<sup>19</sup> The campaign again revealed negative statements by former Prime Minister Fico against Slovak Muslims.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 3:** Excerpt from the newspaper K-LSNS. The underlined sentence writes, “I want our towns and villages to continue to sound beautiful church bells, not the cries of mosques.” (April 2019)<sup>21</sup>

In 2019, several times (March and November) the parliament debated the so-called Istanbul Convention. The whole debate was held on the slogan “Let’s stop evil from Istanbul”. Critics of the convention linked the fear of liberalism with the fear of Islam.<sup>22</sup>

17. Viliam Oberhauser wrote, “The churches are transformed into museums and often into undignified stalls. That is the reality. However, the migration of the Muslim population to Western European countries is rapidly accelerating this process”. Postoj, 4 April 2019, <https://blog.postoj.sk/42203/gender-ideologiu-na-zapade-zastavia-moslimovia-a-na-vychode-krestania>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

18. “In order to protect the cultural identity and Christian roots of European nations, the National Coalition (NK) will always oppose the promotion of political Islam and Sharia law in Europe, which we perceive as an immediate threat to our European civilization.” “Programové tézy”, Národnej koalície, <https://narodnakoalicia.sk/programove-tezy-narodnej-koalicie-pre-volby-do-europskeho-parlamentu-2019/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

19. K-LSNS boasted in its campaign that Lukáš Kopáč, the organiser of the biggest protest against the Islamisation of Slovakia in 2015, was also on its candidate list. “Lukáš Kopáč - Organizer of the Biggest Anti-Migration Protest, Will Be Candidate to European Parliamentary Election”, Naše Slovensko, 25 January 2019, <http://www.naseslovensko.net/imigracna-kriza/v-eurovolbach-bude-za-ls-nase-slovensko-kandidovat-aj-lukas-kopac-organizator-najvacsieho-protiimigracneho-protestu/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

20. Daniela Hajčáková, “Fica kritizovali za moslimov, Sulík frakciu opustil pre eurooptimizmus”, SME, 22 May 2019, <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22126965/eurovolby-volby-brusel-frakcie.html>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

21. Naše Slovensko, “Za záujmy Slovenska, proti nezmyslu z Bruselu”, Naše Slovensko, May 2019, <http://www.naseslovensko.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/noviny-lsns-2019-05.pdf>, (Access date: 12 March 2020).

22. Zastavme násilie, “Istanbulský dohovor: mýty a fakty. Reakcia na kampaň Zastavme zlo z Istanbulu”, blog Denník N, 30 November 2017, <https://dennikn.sk/blog/956850/istanbulsky-dohovor-myty-a-fakty-reakcia-na-kampaň-zastavme-zlo-z-istanbulu-ktorej-organizatori-siria-nespravne-skreslene-a-zavadzajúce-informácie-o-istanbulskom-dohovore/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020); Slovenský dohovor za rodinu, “Zastavme zlo z Istanbulu”, 11 November 2017, <https://slovenskydohovorzarodinu.sk/zastavme-zlo-z-istanbulu/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020); “Zdravý rozum zvíťazil nad ideológiou. Pozrite si, ktorí poslanci na Slovensku odmietli zlo z Istanbulu”, Hlavné správy, 29 March 2019, <https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/zdravy-rozum-zvitazil-ideologiu-pozrite-ktori-poslanci-slovensku-odmietli-zlo-istanbulu/1712731>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

MP Mazurek stated, “This is a direct attack on the essence of the whole European civilisation, on the essence of our culture, nations, faith, simply everything”.<sup>23</sup> The debate was most abused by MPs of the parties K-LSNS and SNS, and some independent MPs who endorse the protection of traditional values.<sup>24</sup> At the end of 2019, the debate on abortion was reopened in the National Council. The K-LSNS MPs combined the ban on abortion with the need to protect Christian Europe and protect Slovakia against Islamisation.<sup>25</sup>

In early November 2019, the campaign was launched for the parliamentary elections to be held in February 2020. Since the beginning of the campaign, Muslims have been attacked by the political parties the Homeland, K-LSNS, Christian Democracy – Life and Prosperity (KDZP), and Smer-SD.<sup>26</sup> The Homeland promised to “preserve normal Slovakia”. The abnormality, which, according to the party, threatens the sovereignty of the Slovak Republic, took several forms and one of them is Islam and migrants.<sup>27</sup> During its election meetings, the K-LSNS extended the message that the European Union wants to cancel Christmas.<sup>28</sup> KDZP candidates running for K-LSNS promised voters that they have solutions to avert the Islamisation of Europe and Slovakia.<sup>29</sup> Finally, former Prime Minister Robert Fico returned to make statements on Muslims, reiterating his previous words that “Islam has no place in Slovakia”.<sup>30</sup>

23. Milan Mazurek, “Vystúpenia v rámci 43. schôdze NR SR”, 29 March 2019, <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=schodze/rozprava/vyhľadavanie&CisObdobia=7&CPT=&CisSchodze=43&PoslanecID=975&DatumOd=1900-1-1%200:0:0&DatumDo=2100-1-1%200:0:0&TypVystupenia=>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

24. “Parlament opäť odmietol Istanbulský dohovor”, SME, 28 November 2019, <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22270910/parlament-opatovne-odmietol-istanbulsky-dohovor.html>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

25. “Rozprava k návrhu novely zákony o umelom prerušení tehotenstva”, NR SR, 3 December 2019, <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/default.aspx?SectionId=104>, (Access date: 6 February 2020).

26. Jozef Lenč, “Predvolebná kampaň 2020: V znamení šírenia strachu z islámu a muslimov”, IslamOnline, 31 December 2019, <http://www.islamonline.sk/2019/12/predvolebna-kampan-2020-v-znameni-sirenia-strachu-z-islamu-a-muslimov/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

27. “Spojme sa za normálne Slovensko!”, Strana Vlast, <https://stranavlast.sk/hlasovanie-buducnost-slovenska/?fbclid=IwAR3jBGgXBOFvD3fPOk6tdqzLD7GOecDmzYkQ5PnActHdv55HMgwnpFuLlqQ>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

28. “Kotleba: Nikdy nedovolíme, aby zo Slovenska urobili multikultúrny chliev, aký je na západe”, Magazin 1, 17 December 2019, [https://magazin1.sk/kotleba-nikdy-nedovolime-aby-zo-slovenska-urobili-multikulturny-chliev-aky-je-na-zapade-video/?fbclid=IwAR2DaR\\_6qxR5T28io-ek311R465pewn6xdBakGdYVVviAXWwxD-c3708URRV8](https://magazin1.sk/kotleba-nikdy-nedovolime-aby-zo-slovenska-urobili-multikulturny-chliev-aky-je-na-zapade-video/?fbclid=IwAR2DaR_6qxR5T28io-ek311R465pewn6xdBakGdYVVviAXWwxD-c3708URRV8), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

29. “Islamizácia Európy sa dá odvrátiť konkrétnymi rozhodnutiami”, KDZP, 28 April 2019, <http://www.kdzp.sk/islamizacia-eurovy-sa-da-odvratit-konkretnymi-rozhodnutiami/>, (Access date: 15 February 2020).

30. Jozef Lenč, “Fico už hovorí to, čo kotlebovci”, SME, 3 February 2020, <https://komentare.sme.sk/c/22316689/fico-uz-hovori-to-co-kotlebovci.html>, (Access date: 15 February 2020); “Fico v rozhovore: Nechceme meniť tradície, islam tu nemá miesto”, Pravda, 26 May 2016, <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/394210-fico-v-rozhovore-nehceme-menit-tradicie-islam-tu-nema-miesto/>, (Access date: 15 February 2020).



**Figure 4:** K-LSNS pre-election poster with the text: “We wish you a beautiful traditional Christmas until the European Union forbids them.” (December 2019)<sup>31</sup>

## Media

In the Slovak media, rooted stereotypes about Islam and Muslims are repeatedly present. The year 2019 was not an exception: Slovak media repeatedly used tabloid-like information about Muslims and Islam in news and commentaries. Some outlets approached the topic of Muslims, by employing conspiracy theories and fake news.



**Figure 5:** News on Islam in the tabloid daily *Plus 1 Deň*: “MASSACRE at Religious Celebrations”; “Spanish Police Broke up a Gang That Funded al-Qaeda Militias”; “Don’t Go to This Country Anymore!” (April – September 2019).<sup>32</sup>

31. Ján Benčík, “Kotlebovské Vianoce,” blog Denník N, 28 December 2019, <https://dennikn.sk/blog/1698885/kotlebovske-vianoce/>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

32. “Plus 1 Deň”, Pluska.sk, <https://www1.pluska.sk/vyhľadavanie/islam>, (Access date: 15 March 2020).

Another negative phenomenon in the context of most Slovak media which contributes to the spread of Islamophobia is the selection of tabloid-style and often irrelevant content to increase readability. Most of the information about Islam concerns terrorism, political violence, civil wars, the threat of migration, or unverified reports of religiously motivated attacks in Muslim countries.

The conspiracy media are the most active in spreading Islamophobia. Most prominent among them are the quasi-news pages of the *Hlavné správy*,<sup>33</sup> *Slobodný výber*,<sup>34</sup> and *Parlamentné listy*.<sup>35</sup> Other media outlets that spread Islamophobia in Slovakia are the journal and Internet portal of Tibor E. Rostaš *Zem a Vek*,<sup>36</sup> and the weekly magazine *Extra Plus*.<sup>37</sup> Media that provide accurate information about Islam and Muslims include the daily papers *Pravda*, *SME*, *Denník N*, *Aktuality.sk*,<sup>38</sup> and *RTVS*.<sup>39</sup> These media also convey the views of representatives of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia. On the border between Islamophobia and journalism – often offering accurate information about Muslims – is a news site *Postoj (Konzervatívny denník)*.<sup>40</sup>

## Justice System

In 2019, there were no recorded manifestations of Islamophobia present in the Slovak justice system. No member of the judicial branch dealt with the issue of Islamophobia in 2019, nor was directly involved in proceedings that could be described as discriminatory in the context of the Slovak Muslim community.

## Internet

The regular disseminators of Islamophobia on the Internet are conspiracy sites, the pages of extreme right-wing political parties and movements, and certain Internet platforms of Christian associations. *Konzervatívny web* is a platform that mainly presents reports

33. "Islam veľké bezpečnostné riziko pre kresťanskú spoločnosť", *Hlavné správy*, 16 August 2019, <https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/islam-velke-bezpecnostne-riziko-krestansku-spolocnost/1854562/>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

34. "Stop rasizmu!" *Slobodný výber*, 14 April 2019, <https://slobodnyvyber.sk/stop-rasizmu/>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

35. Vlastimil Vondruška, "Čím viac bude moslimov, tým väčšia bude ich moc", *Parlamentné listy*, 24 November 2019, <https://www.parlamentnelisty.sk/arena/rozhovory/Cim-viac-bude-moslimov-tym-vacsia-bude-ich-moc-Vlastimil-Vondruska-o-buducnosti-Eurovy-319557/>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

36. Ratko Sudecký, "Islam v službách nacizmu", *Zem a Vek*, 2 August 2019, <https://zemavek.sk/islam-v-sluzbach-nacizmu/>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

37. Gabriela Pastvová, "Kresťan toleruje, moslim podrobuje", *Extra Plus*, 1 July 2019, <https://www.extraplus.sk/clanok/krestan-toleruje-moslim-podrobuje>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

38. Júlia Jamrichová, "Rozhovor s moslimom o náboženstve", *Aktuality.sk*, 26 November 2019, <https://noizz.aktuality.sk/zaujímavosti/rozhovor-s-moslimom-o-nabozenstve/ntyxxje>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

39. The Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS) is a public service medium with nationwide coverage.

40. Ludwig Hagemann, "Islam ako neoriginálna hereza kresťanstva", *Denník Postoj*, 3 January 2019, <https://svet-krestanstva.postoj.sk/39271/islam-ako-neoriginalna-krestanska-heresa>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

that warn against the Islamisation of Europe.<sup>41</sup> They portray Islam as a religion that is incompatible with Christianity and democracy.<sup>42</sup> Islamophobia is also disseminated by websites funded by the K-LSNS; namely *Prehľad správ*, *Proti prúdu*,<sup>43</sup> and *Magazin 1*. These websites publish articles and comments that have hateful content directed at migrants,<sup>44</sup> Muslims,<sup>45</sup> and Islam.<sup>46</sup> One of the major spreaders of Islamophobia is the Centre for the Study of Political Islam.<sup>47</sup> Most of the aforementioned websites are shared by politicians from the extreme right (K-LSNS, Homeland, etc.).



**Figure 5:** An article from a quasi-news site *Denný výber* that spreads conspiracy theories and Islamophobia: “A Slovak Terrorist Planned a Bomb Attack on His Neighbours! Jihadist Is Said to Be Gay, Who Longs for His Wife.”<sup>48</sup>

41. “Obrátená kolonizácia Francúzska”, Konzervatívny web, 13 December 2019, <https://www.konzervativny-web.sk/c/22282712/obratena-kolonizacia-francuzska.html>, (Access date: 18 February 2020); “Ďalšie obmedzovanie slobody prejavu vo Francúzsku”, Konzervatívny web, 2 December 2019, <https://www.konzervativnyweb.sk/c/22273150/dalsie-obmedzovanie-slobody-prejavu-vo-francuzsku.html>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

42. “Európske snenie verzus masová migrácia”, Konzervatívny web, 16 October 2019, <https://www.konzervativnyweb.sk/c/22237029/europske-snenie-versus-masova-migracia.html>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

43. Selection of the Islamophobic Articles from website: *Proti prúdu*, <https://www.protiprudu.org/?s=moslimo>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

44. “Dvaja mladí migrant terorizujú celú školu v Nemecku”, *Magazin 1*, 26 September 2019, <https://magazin1.sk/dvaja-mali-migranti-terorizuju-celu-skolu-v-nemecku-obchytka-vu-dievcata-a-nadavaju-im-do-ku/>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

45. “Moslimovia z Paríža sa smejú a tešia z vyhorenej katedrály Notre Dame”, *Magazin 1*, 15 April 2019, <https://magazin1.sk/moslimovia-z-pariza-sa-smaju-a-tesia-z-vyhorenej-katedraly-notre-dame/>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

46. “Vo Veľkej Británii je stále viac moslimov, zatiaľ čo kresťania enormne vymierajú”, *Magazin 1*, 18 July 2019, <https://magazin1.sk/vo-velkej-britanii-je-stale-viac-moslimov-zatial-co-krestania-enormne-vymieraju/>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

47. For more information, see: Centrum pre výskum politického islamu, <https://www.cspii.org/sk/>, (Access date: 18 February 2020).

48. Magda Danková, “Slovenský terorista plánoval u susedov bombový útok! Džihádista je vraj gay túžiaci po manželke”, *Hlavný denník*, 24 October 2019, <https://www.hlavnydennik.sk/2019/10/24/slovensky-terorista-planoval-u-susedov-bombovy-utok-dzhihadista-je-vraj-gay-tuziaci-po-manzelke/>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The list of the main figures in the Islamophobia network in 2019 is very wide and diverse. A special category is the Internet platform Centre for Research of Political Islam (CSPI),<sup>49</sup> which propagates the ideas and work of American Islamophobe Bill Warner. The CSPI has its own blog,<sup>50</sup> publishes translations of Warren's works, and lobbies politicians to tighten laws against Muslims.<sup>51</sup> The CSPI is a registered non-profit organization in the Czech Republic and is the branch of the international organization CSPII.<sup>52</sup>

MPs for the Smer-SD, SNS, K-ĽSNS, and We Are Family have repeatedly expressed negative opinions on Muslims. In particular, the last two political parties have been active in the dissemination of Islamophobia in the parliamentary debates.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

From the civil society environment, the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia is the most active in the fight against Islamophobia.<sup>53</sup> The Forum of World Religions (Mário Nicolini), the Open Society Foundation (Ján Orlovský),<sup>54</sup> and the Human Rights League (Zuzana Številová)<sup>55</sup> are also active. From the media sector, worth mentioning are the photographer and journalist Andrej Bán, journalists from *Denník N*, *SME*, *Pravda*, and the editorial office of IslamOnline.sk.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The biggest problem of Islamophobia in Slovakia is that it has moved from social networks to parliament. It has become part of the politics and political communication of most political parties. It continues to influence elections and is part of election campaigns. The unpleasant finding of this report is that Islamophobic

49. For more information, see: Centrum pre výskum politického islamu, <https://www.cspii.org/sk>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

50. For more information, see: Blog Centrum pre výskum politického islamu, <https://dennikn.sk/autor/cspi-sr/>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

51. "Slovenskí poslanci dostali jeho knihu. Cituje ho aj Sulík. Kto je a čo hľása Bill Warner?", IslamOnline, 21 November 2016, <http://www.islamonline.sk/2016/11/slovenski-poslanci-dostali-jeho-knihu-cituje-ho-aj-sulik-kto-je-a-co-hlasa-bill-warner/>, (Access date: 22 March 2020).

52. For more information, see: Center for the Study of Political Islam International, <https://www.cspii.org/about/>, (Access date: 9 April 2020).

53. "Tretí ročník slávnostnej ramadánskej večere v Bratislave prilákal aj nové tváre", IslamOnline, 5 June 2019, <http://www.islamonline.sk/2019/06/treti-rocnik-slavnostnej-ramadanskej-vecere-v-bratislave-prilakal-aj-nove-tvare/>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

54. "Program Stronger Roots Nadácie otvorenej spoločnosti", Nadácia otvorenej Spoločnosti, 2 December 2019, <https://osf.sk/nezaradene/program-stronger-roots-podpori-35-neziskovych-organizacii/>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

55. Liga za ľudské práva, <https://www.hrl.sk/sk>, (Access date: 25 February 2020).

content has consciously and unconsciously settled in all Slovak media (conspiracy, tabloid, and mainstream).

The greatest challenges for the upcoming period will be to raise awareness that Islamophobia is as dangerous to Slovak society and democracy as all other forms of discrimination. Society – politicians, media, and teachers – must realise that the destruction of democracy and the onset of totalitarian regimes in the 1930s were triggered by anti-Semitism, manifested in the same accompanying phenomena that characterize Islamophobia today in Slovakia.

## Chronology

- **January – March 2019:** The election campaign before the 2019 presidential election saw a significant increase in Islamophobia in debates and on social networks.
- **29.03.2019:** Parliamentary debate about so-called Istanbul Convention.
- **15.11.2019:** In the Czech Republic, a Slovak Muslim was convicted of supporting terrorism, which had a negative impact on the rise of Islamophobia.<sup>56</sup>
- **28.11.2019:** Second parliamentary debate on the rejection of the so-called Istanbul Convention, which caused an increase in Islamophobia in society.
- **November – December 2019:** The start of the election campaign for the 2020 parliamentary election with a new wave of Islamophobia.

---

56. Dušan Mikušovič, “Ako sa z ministrov Dominika zo Šarišských Michalían stal islamista Abdul Rahman”, Denník N, 15 November 2019, <https://dennikn.sk/1647464/ako-sa-z-dominika-zo-sarisskych-michalian-stal-islamista-abdul-rahman/>, (Access date: 15 March 2020).

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**SLOVENIA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

ANA FRANK



## The Author

**Ana Frank** received her PhD from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana in 2013. From 2007 to 2014, she worked as a researcher on several European projects at the Peace Institute, a renowned NGO in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Between 2005 and 2007, she was a visiting student in Turkey at the University of Istanbul and at Ankara University. She complemented her studies at the University of Lodz, Poland, and Florida International University, USA. In 2012-2013, she conducted a research at Sabancı University in Istanbul for her PhD thesis entitled “The Influence of the Europeanisation Context on Religious Discourses in Gender Equality and Intimate Citizenship Policies in Turkey”. Her fields of research and academic interest are international relations, policy analysis, political studies, gender studies, religious studies, cultural studies, Orientalism and postcolonial studies, discourse analysis, nationalism, discrimination, Europeanisation, Turkey, and Islam. Her book *Feminism and Islam: Turkish Women between the Orient and the West* (Slovenian and English language editions) was published by the Peace Institute in 2014. She works as a freelance researcher. Email: [afrankica@yahoo.com](mailto:afrankica@yahoo.com)

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Ana Frank: *Islamophobia in Slovenia: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraktı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

In April 2019, Bernard Brščič, who has written extensively in various right-wing media about the incompatibility of Islam and Europe, formed a new right-wing party called *Domovinska liga* or *DOM* (Homeland league or HOME) and was elected as its president. In May 2019, four migrants hijacked a car together with its Slovene driver at the Slovenian-Croatian border to take advantage of his car. They eventually released the hostage and attempted to flee to Italy by foot. Claiming protection from such events caused by migrants entering via Slovenian borders, the paramilitary groups of *Štajerska varda* (Styrian Guards) performed vigilante activities on the borders of Slovenia. Their leader Andrej Šiško was found guilty of “Incitement to Violent Change of the Constitutional Order” and sentenced to prison for 8 months. In October, the government took action for banning and limiting these groups and their activities, and proposed bills for an amendment of the relevant laws to the parliament. In August 2019, the president of the Slovenian Nationalist Party Zmago Jelinčič Plemeniti posted on Twitter a photo of a woman in a burkini at a bathing area in Slovenia. In September, *Nova 24TV* published an article condemning the option of halal food in a public elementary school, claiming that children are treated unequally because a pork-free diet option for Muslim children is offered without precondition in any medical report as is required for the dietary needs of other children.

## Povzetek

Aprila 2019 je Bernard Brščič, ki je v različnih desnih medijih obširno pisal o nezdržljivosti islama in Evrope, ustanovil novo desničarsko stranko z imenom Domovinska liga ali DOM in bil izvoljen za njenega predsednika. Maja 2019 so štirje migranti ugrabili slovenskega državljana na slovensko-hrvaški meji, da bi izkoristili njegov avtomobil. Na poti so izpustili talca in skušali peš pobegniti v Italijo. Paravojaške skupine Štajerske varde in vaške straže so z izgovorm o obranitvi Slovenije in slovenskih meja pred vstopom migrantov, samoiniciativno pričele s stražo ob slovenskih mejah. Marca je bil vodja Štajerske varde Andrej Šiško spoznan za krivega napeljevanja k nasilni spremembi ustave in obsojen na 8 mesecev zapora. Vlada je oktobra sprejela ukrepe za prepoved in omejitve paravojaških skupin in njihovih dejavnosti ter državnemu zboru predlagala spremembo ustreznih zakonov. Predsednik Slovenske nacionalne stranke Zmago Jelinčič Plemeniti je avgusta 2019 na twitterju objavil fotografijo o pojavu žensk v burkiniju na slovenskih kopališčih. Nova 24TV je septembra objavila članek, v katerem obsoja možnost brezpogojne ponudbe halal hrane (brez svinjine) v eni od javnih osnovnih šol in trdi, da so zaradi tega otroci obravnavani neenako, saj morajo starši za druge dietne zahteve priložiti zdravniška potrdila, isti pogoj pa ni zahtevan za hrano brez svinjine.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** Slovenia

**Type of Regime:** Democratic system

**Form of Government:** Parliamentary Republic

**Ruling Parties:** Coalition of List of Marjan Šarec (LMŠ); Social Democrats (SD); Party of Modern Center (SMC); Party of Alenka Bratušek (SAB); Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS), with formal support of the Left (*Levica*). Main ideology: Central-Left, Liberal, Social-Democrat.

**Opposition Parties:** Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), New Slovenia (NSi), Slovenian National Party (SNS). Main ideology: Right-wing, Christian Democrat, Conservative, Nationalist.

**Last Elections:** Presidential election in 2017 (President Borut Pahor won 53.09% of the vote against 46.91% for Marjan Šarec). Parliamentary and local elections in 2018: right-wing Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) of Janez Janša won the election with 24.92% of votes with 25 seats; List of Marjan Šarec (LMŠ) won 13 seats; Social Democrats (SD), 10 seats; Party of Modern Center (SMC) of Miro Cerar, 10 seats; The Left (*Levica*), 9 seats; New Slovenia (NSi), 7 seats; Party of Alenka Bratušek (SAB), 5 seats; Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS), 5 seats; Slovenian National Party (SNS), 4 seats; Italian and Hungarian national communities each were given 1 seat automatically. The government was formed by the coalition of LMŠ-SD-SMC-SAB-DeSUS with the support of the Left.

**Total Population:** 2,089,310 (1 July 2019)

**Major Languages:** The official and majority language is Slovenian; official minority languages are Italian and Hungarian. Serbo-Croatian is also spoken by ex-Yugoslav immigrants although it is not an official language.

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism), but the majority is Christian Catholic.

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** N/A

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** According to the last available Annual Report of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality for 2018, discrimination on the basis of disability was reported in 15 cases (9.62%), followed by cases involving ethnicity, race, and ethnic background (14 cases or 8.24% of which 8 cases are race-related and 4 cases are related to race or ethnic background). Gender-based discrimination occurred in 8 cases (4.71%), followed by discrimination based on religion or belief (7 cases or 4.12%); age and sexual orientation (5 cases, or 2.94% each); social status, financial situation, and place of residence (2 cases or 1.18% each).

**Major Religions (% of Population):** According to the 2002 census: Christian Catholic 57.8%, Christian Protestant 0.8%, Christian Orthodox 2.3%, Muslim 2.4%, Other 0.2%, No religion 3.5%, Atheist 10.2%, No answer 15.7%, Unknown 7.1%.

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** Around 47,000 people (2.4%) according to the 2002 census (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia).

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** The Islamic Community in Slovenia (*Islamska skupnost v Sloveniji*), The Slovenian Muslim Community (*Slovenska muslimanska skupnost*)

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** Peace Institute (*Mirovni inštitut*), Slovene Philanthropy (*Slovenska filantropija*), Amnesty International, Society UP Jesenice (*Društvo UP Jesenice*), ROG Factory (*Tovarna ROG*), SLOGA - Slovenian Global Action, PIC - Legal Informational Center

**Far-Right Parties:** Slovenian National Party (*Slovenska nacionalna stranka*), Homeland League (*Domovinska liga*)

**Far-Right Movements:** Movement United Slovenia (*Gibanje Zedinjena Slovenija*), Uprising of Slovenians (*Upor Slovencev*), Generation Identity Slovenia (*Generacija Identitete Slovenija*)

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None. Limited to mandatory stunning of animals before slaughter.
- **Minaret Ban:** None. The minaret should not be taller than 40 m.
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

In April 2019, a new party was formed in Slovenia. Bernard Brščič, who has written extensively in various right-wing media about the incompatibility of Islam and Europe, formed a new right-wing party called *Domovinska liga* or *DOM* (Homeland league or HOME) and was elected as its president. Slovenian parties prepared themselves for the European parliamentary elections of 26 May, where a coalition of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) and Slovenian's People's Party (SLS) gained 3 representatives in the European People's Party (EPP); Social Democrats (SD) 2 representatives in Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D); the List of Marjan Šarec (LMŠ) entered with 2 representatives in Renew Europe; and New Slovenia (NSi) with 1 representative in the EPP.<sup>1</sup> In the pre-election period parties mostly focused on topics like security, migration, development, and the future of Slovenia in EU. In September 2019, Slovenia's national carrier Adria Airways filed for bankruptcy proceedings due to insolvency. Besides these major events, Slovenia was busy with corruption affairs and internal disputes among political parties, political members, and state organs.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

No explicit attack on Muslims or Muslim premises has been recorded. However, the paramilitary groups' activities at the borders are a specific phenomenon. Because of migrants entering Slovenia by crossing the border with Croatia, paramilitary groups called *Štajerska varda* committed themselves to "defend" the borders from illegal immigrants. Especially the event of 9 May 2019, when four migrants from Morocco and Alger hijacked a car with its Slovene driver in it on the Slovenian-Croatian border, Bela Krajina region, stirred up the claims that the Slovenian territory and citizens are unsafe, and, therefore, that there is a need for protecting the borders. The group of four migrants eventually released the hostage and attempted to flee to Italy by foot. The Italian police later captured three of the four migrants and returned them to Slovenia.<sup>2</sup> The actions of the paramilitary groups are regarded as a threat to the Slovenian institutional order.

### Employment

From last year there has been no crucial change in the employment field. Muslims still face problems since there is no legal framework (except for the religious rights

---

1. "Rezultati po nacionalnih strankah: 2019–2024", Rezultati evropskih volitev 2019, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/sl/nacionalni-rezultati/slovenija/2019-2024/>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

2. "Policija: Trije ugrabitelji so iz Maroka in Alžirije, četrtega iščejo", Delo, 9 May 2019, <https://www.delo.si/novice/crna-kronika/migranti-naj-bi-v-beli-krajini-ugrabili-domacina-179068.html>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

as protected nominally by the constitution) guaranteeing the actual performance of their religious rights in the workplace (time and place for worship, possibilities of consuming halal food, celebration of Islamic holidays, and religious clothing such as headscarves). According to the last available Annual Report of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality for 2018,<sup>3</sup> 15 cases of discrimination based on disability were reported (9.62%), followed by cases involving ethnicity, race, and ethnic background (14 cases or 8.24% of which eight cases are race-related and four cases are related to race or ethnic background). Gender-based discrimination occurred in eight cases (4.71%), followed by religion or belief (seven cases or 4.12%); age and sexual orientation (five cases or 2.94% each); social status, financial situation, and place of residence (two cases or 1.18% each). The majority of cases were related to employment and work; 29 cases (26.61%) involved employment and working conditions, termination of employment contract, and wages; and 27 cases (24.77%) involved conditions for access to employment, self-employment and occupation, selection criteria, and employment conditions on all levels of the professional hierarchy.

## Education

In the educational area, Muslims still face similar problems as in previous years.<sup>4</sup> However, because of the integration of migrant children, schools have started to adopt multicultural curricula, to take action for the inclusion of different cultural habits and needs, and for the education of staff.<sup>5</sup> For example, schools and kindergartens offer more possibilities for halal food. In a public school in Ljubljana it is officially possible to fill out a form with the preferred type of food, where a choice for “food without pork” is possible. In this manner, the school administration takes into account the parents’ choice for their child’s nutrition.<sup>6</sup>

## Politics

On 6 April 2019, Bernard Brščič, who has written extensively in various right-wing media about the incompatibility of Islam and Europe, formed a new party called *Domovinska liga* or *DOM* (Homeland League or HOME) and was elected as its president. Lawyer Lucija Šikovec Ušaj was elected as its vice-president. According to some commentators in the media, the party sees itself in the Matteo Salvini group or alliance among the extreme right-wing parties in Europe, and even more strongly

3. “Annual Report 2018”, Republic of Slovenia Advocate of the Principle of Equality, April 2019, p. 55-56, <http://www.zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/letno-poro%C4%8Dilo-2018-ANG-WEB.pdf>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

4. Ana Frank, “Islamophobia in Slovenia: National Report 2018”, *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2019).

5. “Integration of Immigrants in the Education System”, Republica Slovenija, [http://www.mizs.gov.si/si/varno\\_in\\_spodbudno\\_ucno\\_okolje/spodbudno\\_ucno\\_okolje/vkljucevanje\\_priseljencev\\_v\\_sistem\\_vzgoje\\_in\\_izobrazevanja/](http://www.mizs.gov.si/si/varno_in_spodbudno_ucno_okolje/spodbudno_ucno_okolje/vkljucevanje_priseljencev_v_sistem_vzgoje_in_izobrazevanja/), (Access date: 23 January 2020).

6. “Annual Report 2018”, Republic of Slovenia Advocate of the Principle of Equality.

than some other parties in Slovenia advocates anti-immigrant views.<sup>7</sup> Politically, Brščič stems from his links with the SDS and SDS President Janez Janša, and has appeared in the media over the years with explicit hate speech and intolerant, hateful statements against homosexuals, refugees, Muslims, and other population groups, even denying the Holocaust. Because of his offensive statements, he has had to defend himself against his employer. In previous *EIR* reports we have recorded many of his extreme statements. Lucija Šikovec Ušaj has also released statements on Twitter with offensive content related to migrants, which sparked a wave of outrage in public. In doing so, she also violated the Code of Professional Conduct of the Bar Association of Slovenia. She was a member of the SDS but left the party. The reason she explained was the “too weak attitude of the SDS towards the Marrakech agreement”. She and Janša also supposedly disagree on their attitude towards migration, since Ušaj has more radical views.<sup>8</sup> The party’s first political test was to participate at the European elections in May, where the party experienced a failure. In October, Šikovec Ušaj left the party on the grounds that it is only a satellite of the SDS and claimed that it was a very bad experience for her.<sup>9</sup>

## Media

In September 2019, the newspaper *Nova24TV* published an article condemning the possibility of halal food in a public school in Ljubljana.<sup>10</sup> The author stated that in “public elementary schools, they are starting to adapt to the Muslim way of life.” According to the author, special dietary requirements could be required only upon medical evidence and a medical report, while in this case this is not required from Muslim children’s parents, and therefore other (Slovenian) children are treated unequally. The author states that “given that all religions are supposed to be equal, one wonders how it is possible for children to be treated in such an unequal way in practice. Namely, Muslim children have a special diet at their disposal, and in the face of such changes, it is expected that members of other faiths will start to demand special nutrition too.” The author continues with spreading fear that this form of adaptation to the Muslim way of life will eventually lead to pork-free food as taken for granted elsewhere, both in services and in restaurants, and further warns that in

7. Luka Jakše, “Lahko Salvini pomaga SDS?”, *Delo*, 8 April 2019, <https://www.delo.si/mnenja/komentarji/lahko-salvini-pomaga-sds-169076.html>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

8. Beti Burger, “Vodilna obraza Domovinske lige druží nekdanja povezava z Janšo”, *Delo*, 7 April 2019, <https://www.delo.si/novice/slovenija/kdo-sta-vodilna-obraza-domovinske-lige-168809.html>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

9. Barbara Eržen, “Bernard Brščič edini kandidat, Lucija Šikovec Ušaj izstopila iz stranke”, *Delo*, 12 October 2019, <https://www.delo.si/novice/slovenija/bernard-brsicic-edini-kandidat-lucija-sikovec-usaj-izstopila-iz-stranke-237719.html>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

10. Hana Murn, “Islamizacija v ljubljanski javni osnovni šoli! Muslimanski starši lahko za otroka izberejo prehrano brez svinjine, medtem ko mora otrok z dieto prinesiti vsa možna zdravniška dokazila!”, *Nova24TV*, 13 September 2019, <https://nova24tv.si/slovenija/politika/islamizacija-v-ljubljanski-javni-osnovni-soli-muslimanski-starši-lahko-za-otroka-izberejo-prehrano-brez-svinjine-medtem-ko-mora-otrok-z-dieto-prinesiti-vsa-mozna-zdravniška-dokazila/>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

the case these specific requirements should not be met, accusations of discrimination against the Muslim population would immediately emerge. The right-wing newspaper *Demokracija* and *Nova24TV* published the same article on a group of Muslims active on the Internet, *Resnica – Haq* (Truth – Haq), about the ways sharia law could be established in Slovenia. In the article<sup>11</sup> they warn that the answer on the *Resnica – Haq* webpage “suggests that Islam is anything but a ‘religion of peace’. Because the suggested ways are namely through jihad, holy war or the invasion of Slovenia. They stress that parliamentary democracy is ‘not halal’”.<sup>12</sup>

## Justice System

In October 2019, the president of the Government Council for Religious Freedom Dialogue (*Svet vlade Republike Slovenije za dialog o verski svobodi*) Zoran Poznič cancelled the forthcoming regular meeting of the Council, because – according to his statement – the representative of the Islamic Community in the council rejected further dialogue within the council. The president of the council expressed his concern about this decision.<sup>13</sup> The Islamic Community published a public statement on their webpage<sup>14</sup> as a reply to this statement and sent a letter<sup>15</sup> to the council denouncing the claim that they rejected dialogue. In the letter, the Slovenian mufti expressed his disappointment about the issued statement and the claim that the Islamic Community rejects dialogue. He emphasized that they strongly believe in dialogue; however, the problem being that the needs of the Islamic community were never addressed by the state in a formal manner. The demands of religious spiritual care of Muslims in the army and police forces, in hospitals and prisons, the circumcision of boys, and the ritual slaughter of animals were never addressed and regulated properly by the

11. Ivan Šokić, “Kako prosim?! - Jeseniški islamski klerik pojasnjuje, ‘kako vzpostaviti Šeriat v Sloveniji’ – nobena od metod ni miroljubna!”, *Demokracija*, 10 December 2019, <http://www.demokracija.si/slovenija/kao-prosim-jeseniski-islamski-klerik-pojasnjuje-kako-vzpostaviti-seriat-v-sloveniji-nobena-od-metod-ni-miroljubna.html>, (Access date: 23 January 2020); *Nova 24TV*, 10 December 2019, <https://nova24tv.si/slovenija/bo-znova-tekla-kri-jeseniski-islamski-klerik-pojasnjuje-kako-vzpostaviti-seriat-v-sloveniji-nobena-od-metod-ni-miroljubna/>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

12. For more information, see: *Resnica-Haq*, <https://resnica-haq.com/vprasanja-in-odgovori/115-kako-vzpostaviti-sarijo-seriat-v-sloveniji.html>, (Access date: 23 January 2020). Regarding the way to establish sharia in Slovenia they state “basically it must be halal - allowed - so no one comes to me with a suggestion that we can do it ‘diplomatically’ by participating in parliament, because such a way is basically forbidden and is a work that leads a person out of Islam.”

13. Zoran Poznič, “Odpoved sklicane 4. seje Sveta Vlade RS za dialog o verski svobodi”, *Republica Slovenija Ministrstvo za Kulturo*, 8 October 2019, [https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MK/Verska-svoboda/Svet-Vlade-RS-za-dialog/Odpoved\\_4.-seje-Sveta-za-dialog-o-verski-svobodi.pdf](https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MK/Verska-svoboda/Svet-Vlade-RS-za-dialog/Odpoved_4.-seje-Sveta-za-dialog-o-verski-svobodi.pdf), (Access date: 23 January 2020).

14. “Obvestilo za javnost Islamske skupnost v zvezi z odpovedjo 4. seje Sveta Vlade RS za dialog o verski svobodi”, *Islamsko Skupnost*, 23 October 2019, <https://www.islamska-skupnost.si/novice/2019/10/obvestilo-za-javnost-islamske-skupnost-v-zvezi-z-odpovedjo-4-seje-sveta-vlade-rs-za-dialog-o-verski-svobodi/>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

15. Letter to Zoran Poznič, MA by the president of the Islamic Community in the Republic of Slovenia Nedžad Grabus, 23 October 2019, [https://www.islamska-skupnost.si/wp-content/uploads/Dopis\\_Ministrstvo-za-kulturo.pdf](https://www.islamska-skupnost.si/wp-content/uploads/Dopis_Ministrstvo-za-kulturo.pdf), (Access date: 23 January 2020).

state and these issues still remain unsolved to date. Regarding slaughter and circumcision, the Jewish community is affected in the same way - in Slovenia, it is difficult to practice Orthodox Judaism.

Due to the rising strength of the paramilitary groups which formed in 2018 and due to their vigilante activities on the borders of Slovenia, where they claim to offer security and protection from illegal immigrants, the Slovenian government imposed bans on organizing groups such as the *Štajerska varda* (Styrian Guards). In November, the government proposed to the National Assembly a bill amending the Law on the Protection of Public Order and Peace, and a bill amending the State Border Control Act. The amendments foresee a limited use of weapons (also fake items resembling and imitating real weapon) and military-like uniforms for purposes other than ones that are regulated by the state. The government states that the protection of the state border is the sole responsibility of the police. The so-called *Štajerska varda* and village guards announce or attempt to interfere with the powers and tasks of the police, and therefore hinder its work and cause excitement and fear in the public.<sup>16</sup> Andrej Šiško, the leader of the Movement United Slovenia (*Gibanje Zedinjena Slovenija*) and the organizer of the paramilitary groups, was found guilty of “Incitement to Violent Change of the Constitutional Order” according to Article 359 of the Slovenian Criminal Code in front of the Maribor District Court on 29 March 2019.<sup>17</sup> He was sentenced to an 8-month imprisonment which he didn’t fulfil and a warrant for his arrest was issued on 19 December 2019.<sup>18</sup>

## Internet

Two groups, namely *Upor Slovencev* (Uprising of Slovenians) and Generation Identity Slovenia (*Generacija identitete Slovenija*) have a very strong conservative, traditionalist, anti-immigration, and anti-Islamic stance. Both these groups have their own webpages and are not only active on social media, but regularly update their webpages where they call for activism on the web and on the streets. They seem to have become more organised and better articulated in their discourse on defending “authentic” tradition, history, the homeland, the nation, the family, and conservative values against the intrusion of foreigners, migrants, Islam, and multiculturalism. Generation Identity calls people to the streets to form a phalanx for a new European Reconquista (reminiscent of the historical Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula from

---

16. “Spremembe zakonov zaradi Štajerske varde in vaških straž”, Delo, 26 November 2019, <https://www.delo.si/novice/slovenija/spremembe-zakonov-zaradi-stajerske-varde-in-vaskih-straz-253909.html>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

17. “Sodišče Andreja Šiška spoznalo za krivega”, Delo, 29 March 2019, <https://www.delo.si/novice/slovenija/so-disce-andreja-siska-spoznalo-za-krivega-166102.html>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

18. “Andrej Šiško ne želi v zapor, policija za njim razpisala tiralico”, Večer, 21 December 2019, <https://www.vecer.com/andrej-sisko-ne-zeli-v-zapor-policija-za-njim-razpisala-tiralico-10106610>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

Arab/Muslim conquerors) against the multicultural agenda.<sup>19</sup> While previously there was a lot of explicit visual material with xenophobic messages<sup>20</sup> now their xenophobic discourse is much better disguised and implicit in the form of “defence” of “our” values vs. the Other. However, they still use open articulation of Islam as a threat.

The Uprising of Slovenians, for example, state the following on their webpage:

“Islam or death is the motto of all Islam, since “jihad” (holy war) is written in the DNA of this religion. Only the manner and time of realisation of jihad differ from group to group. The end result is the same Islam or death.// It is only a matter of time before the Islamic extremists start appearing on our soil and commit to the violence that is being taught to everyone in the Arab world. According to the Islamic scarves on heads of women in the middle of Ljubljana, we can conclude that the radicalisation of the Muslim population is taking place in Slovenia as well, which always runs out to attempt to promote Islam throughout society and, consequently, to suppress Christians. Europe is weak in our time in front of Islam. Because she has denied her own identity and wants to create a world without God, because of her suppression of everything that is Christian and Catholic, we must reject Islamisation as death, because Islamisation is the death of our world.”<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 1:** Photo posted on Twitter by politician Zmago Jelinčič Plemeniti.<sup>22</sup>

Zmago Jelinčič Plemeniti, a right-wing politician and president of the Slovenian National Party, publishes on his Twitter account many anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic posts. One of them is a repost on 16 August 2019 of a photo of a woman in a burkini (Figure 1). He only mentions the place and date of the case, but his implicit

19. “Kaj za vas predstavlja izraz ‘rekonkvista?’”, Generacija Identitete, <https://generacija-identitete.si/faq/#toggle-id-8>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

20. For more information, see: Ana Frank, “Islamophobia in Slovenia: National Report 2018”, *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2019), p. 755-774; Ana Frank, “Islamophobia in Slovenia: National Report 2017”, *European Islamophobia Report 2017*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2018), p. 577-595; Anja Zalta, “Islamophobia in Slovenia: National Report 2016”, *European Islamophobia Report 2016*, ed. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2017), p. 531-543.

21. “Islam ali smrt”, Slovenski Upor, 5 June 2019, <https://uporslovenecv.wordpress.com/2019/06/05/islam-ali-smrt/>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

22. Zmago J. Plemeniti, Twitter, 16 August 2019, <https://twitter.com/zmagoplemeniti?lang=en>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

message is a warning about actions undertaken by migrants and Muslims in accordance with his discourse on his Twitter account.<sup>23</sup> He often sarcastically comments that migrants and Muslims are allowed to commit illegal acts without appropriate sanctions, while Slovenians are severely punished for similar deeds (like physical attacks, robbery, etc.).

A Facebook group called “Boycott of Products with Halal Certificate” posts cases of companies who have acquired halal certification in order to support their boycott (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** The logo of the Facebook group “Boycott of Products with Halal Certificate”.<sup>24</sup>

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

On the political level, parties that openly express Islamophobic ideas belong to the right-wing conservative political spectre. These are the Slovenian Democratic Party (*Slovenska demokratska stranka*), New Slovenia (*Nova Slovenija*), Slovenian National Party (*Slovenska nacionalna stranka*), and the new Homeland League (*Domovinska liga*). These parties are also connected to right-wing media that spread the same ideological messages: *Demokracija*, *Nova24TV*, *Reporter*, and the conservative Christian newspaper *Domovina*.

Many of the groups that spread Islamophobic/xenophobic discourse were established on the Internet during the mass transition of refugees across Slovenia in 2015. Some of these pages are still active, such as Uprising of Slovenians (*Upor Slovencev*), Generation Identity Slovenia (*Generacija identitete Slovenija*), Radical Ljubljana (*Radikalna Ljubljana*), Stop the Islamization of Slovenia (*Stop islamizaciji Slovenije*), and Boycott of Products with Halal Certificate (*Bojkot izdelkov s Halal oznako*).

23. Zmago Plemeniti Jelinčič, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/zmagoplemeniti?lang=en>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

24. Bojkot izdelkov s Halal oznako, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/BojkotHalal/>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

The NGOs that are active in initiatives to counter Islamophobia in Slovenia are the Peace Institute (*Mirovni inštitut*), Slovene Philanthropy (*Slovenska filantropija*), Amnesty International, Society UP Jesenice (*Društvo UP Jesenice*), ROG Factory (*Tovarna ROG*), SLOGA - Slovenian Global Action, and PIC - Legal Informational Center. Humanitarian organisations and research institutes are also part of this network: Humanitas, Caritas, and the Slovenian Migration Institute (SMI). Muslims themselves also try to counter Islamophobia with their activities. There are two main Islamic communities in Slovenia: the Islamic Community in Slovenia, and the Slovenian Muslim Community.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Taking into account the events and the status quo of Islamophobia, the following policy recommendations are offered:

- Raising awareness of the dangers of hate speech, various forms of xenophobia and (neo) racism especially in the media and on the Internet, as well as in politics with a special focus on the implicit and disguised Islamophobic discourse.
- Improving the monitoring and collection of information about discrimination based on religious grounds in the employment area, education area, and social area.
- Implementing an official, state-driven legal change for Islamic practices such as praying hours and designated spaces at the workplace; halal dietary regimes; spiritual care for Muslims in the armed forces; and possibilities for safe circumcision of boys in hospitals.
- Facilitating the visibility and participation of Muslims in political, economic, social, and cultural life; taking active and formal (state) action to fulfil Muslims' basic rights and needs; and supporting mutual dialogue not only at a declarative level but also by taking appropriate formal action.

## Chronology

- **29.03.2019:** Andrej Šiško, the leader of *Štajerska varda*, was found guilty of "Incitement to Violent Change of the Constitutional Order" and sentenced to eight months of prison.
- **06.04.2019:** A new party Homeland League (HOME) was established and Bernard Brščič, who has an open anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic stance, was elected as its president.

- **05.06.2019:** The group The Uprising of Slovenians published an article entitled “Islam or death”.
- **16.08.2019:** President of Slovenian Nationalist Party Zmagaj Plešnik tweets about a woman wearing a burkini in a pool in Slovenia.
- **13.09.2019:** *Nova 24TV* publishes an article condemning the possibility of halal food in a public elementary school claiming that children are treated unequally because the school has offered pork-free meal options for Muslim children.
- **October 2019:** The regular session of the Government Council for Religious Freedom Dialogue is dismissed upon the claim that the representative of the Islamic Community did not want to cooperate anymore. A public statement and answer from the Islamic Community rejected such claims and explained the reason for not participating is the lack of solutions for the Islamic Community’s requests.
- **November 2019:** The government proposed a bill to the National Assembly amending the Law on the Protection of Public Order and Peace, and a bill amending the State Border Control Act to limit the paramilitary groups’ vigilante activities against migrant on the borders of Slovenia.
- **10.12.2019:** *Demokracija* and *Nova24TV* publish the same article about an Islamic group in Jesenice that explains how to establish sharia in Slovenia.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**SPAIN**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

AURORA ALI



## The Author

**Aurora Ali** is a human rights activist based in Madrid and director of the Spanish Muslim Association for Human Rights (*Asociación Musulmana por los Derechos Humanos* - AMDEH). Having studied international administration and languages and with extensive labour experience in the trading and legal sectors in Geneva, Madrid, and Cairo, in 2015, Ali started her specialization in human rights and anti-Muslim hatred in Spain at the Citizens Platform against Islamophobia (PCCI) and the Observatory of Islamophobia in the Media. In 2018, she co-founded AMDEH, where she is currently in charge of a research project on securitization. Email: amderechoshumanos@gmail.com.

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Aurora Ali: *Islamophobia in Spain: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

Islamophobia remains socially and politically omnipresent: education, housing, employment, securitization, freedom of movement, and the historic non-compliance with the Organic Law approving the Cooperation agreement signed in 1992 between the Spanish state and the Islamic Commission of Spain, which regulates many religious rights affecting daily life. Almost thirty years later, most of these rights are not respected, and the Muslim populations struggle for their effectiveness at local level. The year 2019 was again a year marked by elections (two general and one municipal election). Each campaign further normalizes hate speech and the instrumentalization of protected collectives, and previously typical far-right discourse can now also be found among center and sometimes left-wing parties. According to UNICEF, in 2018 over 6,000 unaccompanied minors arrived in Spain crossing the southern border from countries like Morocco and Algeria. Hate speech instrumentalizes these minors, dehumanizing, demonizing, and reducing them to mere initials (in Spanish “MENA”), stirring up attacks in the streets, at the ports, and at shelter homes. The denial of the Andalusian history or the manipulation of history through the “Reconquista” narrative, remain present in textbooks and in collective imaginaries, while generations of Muslims are construed as foreign. The autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla still suffer segregation, with hundreds of minors without schooling and lacking prosecutors specialized in discrimination and hate crime.

## Resumen ejecutivo

La islamofobia sigue presente en todo el espectro social y político: en la educación, en el acceso a la vivienda o a un empleo digno, en la securitización, en la libertad de movimiento y en el histórico incumplimiento del Acuerdo firmado entre el Estado español y la Comisión Islámica de España en 1992 que regula numerosos derechos religiosos de la vida cotidiana. Casi 30 años más tarde, se incumple la mayoría de estos derechos, y la población musulmana trata de hacerlos efectivos de forma local y con dificultades. 2019 vuelve a estar marcado por un estado permanente de campaña electoral (dos elecciones generales y una municipal). Con cada campaña se van normalizando el discurso de odio y la instrumentalización de los colectivos protegidos, de tal forma que lo que era el discurso de la extrema derecha, se ha ampliado hacia el centro y, en ocasiones, a sectores de la izquierda. Según datos de UNICEF, España registró en 2018 la llegada de más de 6.000 niños, niñas y jóvenes no acompañados que llegaron por la frontera sur desde países del Magreb, fundamentalmente Marruecos y Argelia, entre otros. El discurso de odio instrumentaliza a estos menores (Menores Extranjeros No Acompañados), deshumanizándolos, demonizándolos y reduciéndoles a sus siglas (MENA), con las correspondientes consecuencias en forma de agresiones en la calle, en los puertos y en sus centros de acogida. El negacionismo del pasado andalusí y la manipulación histórica en forma de “Reconquista” siguen presentes en el imaginario colectivo y en los libros de texto, así como la extranjerización constante de generaciones de musulmanes. Las ciudades autónomas de Ceuta y Melilla siguen en un estado de segregación importante, con cientos de menores sin escolarizar, además de no contar con Fiscalías especializadas en discriminación y delitos de odio.

## Country Profile EIR 2019

**Country:** Spain

**Type of Regime:** Social and Democratic State of Law

**Form of Government:** Parliamentary Monarchy

**Ruling Parties:** Coalition of *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE - Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) and *Unidas Podemos* (coalition of several left-wing parties)

**Opposition Parties:** *Partido Popular* (right), *Vox* (extreme right), *Ciudadanos* (centrist-right)

**Last Elections:** The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) won the general elections of April 28, 2019 but did not manage to form a government, calling for new elections that took place on November 10, 2019. Results: Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE): 120/350, Popular Party (PP): 88/350, *Vox*: 52/350, *Unidas Podemos* (UP): 35/350, Catalan Republican Left (ERC):13, *Ciudadanos* 10/350.

**Total Population:** 47.1 million (INE, July 1, 2019)

**Major Languages:** Spanish (official language); Catalan, Valencian, Basque and Galician (main co-official languages)

**Official Religion:** None. The Spanish Constitution of 1978 abolished Catholicism as the official state religion, though recognizing its role in Spanish society.

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** The last report on Islamophobia prepared by civil society (published by *Plataforma Ciudadana Contra la Islamofobia* regarding 2017) registered 546 incidents (70% online). For 2018, official sources did not report any anti-Muslim hate crimes to the OSCE-ODIHR, while 29 anti-Muslim hate incidents were reported by other sources.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** The “2018 Report on Racism in the Spanish State” by *Federación SOS Racismo*.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Practicing Catholics 21.5%; Non-practicing Catholics 46.8%; Agnostic: 7.3%; Indifferent: 8.1%; Atheists: 12.5%; Other religions: 2.6%. (CIS study n. 3263/2019 for Sept.-Oct. 2019)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** Approx. 4% of the total 2018 population in Spain is Muslim (*Observatorio Andalusi* 2019).

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** *Comisión Islámica de España* (CIE) as sole interlocutor with the Spanish state; the CIE is constituted by *Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de España* (UCIDE) and *Federación Española de Entidades Religiosas Islámicas* (FEERI).

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** *Asociación de Mujeres Musulmanas Biddaya*, *Asociación Marroquí para la Integración de Inmigrantes*, *Asociación Musulmana por los Derechos Humanos*, European Network of Women of African Descent, *Fundación de Cultura Islámica*, *Musulmanes contra la Islamofobia*, *Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los Medios*, *SOS Racisme Catalunya*, *SOS Racismo Madrid*, *Stop Als Fenòmens Islamòfobs*.

**Far-Right Parties:** Vox, *Hogar Social*, *España 2000*, *Alianza Nacional*, *Avant*, *ADÑ Coalition* (formed by *La Falange*, *Falange Española de las JONS*, *Alternativa Española*, and *Democracia Nacional*), *Front Nacional de Catalunya* (FNC). Since the rise of Vox, smaller far-right parties have almost disappeared.

**Far-Right Movements:** *Lo Nuestro*, *El Galeón*, *In Memoriam Juan Ignacio*, *Acción Social Cádiz*, *Valentia Forum*, *Iberia Cruor*, *Último Bastión*, *Somatemps*, *Hazte Oír*, *Hablamos Español*, *Defenem Valencia*, *Llibertadors del Regne*, *Moviment Identitari Català* (MIC).

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** The Madrid Community Council of Education and the Ombudsman indicated last June that “schools may regulate students’ attire and establish the obligation for students not to cover their head, including those with an Islamic veil.”
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

In Spain no official national records are published on anti-Muslim incidents and hate crimes. Some NGOs and anti-racist associations try to collect data from mainstream and social media as well as through direct contact with victims. Through non-systematic monitoring by volunteers,<sup>1</sup> NGO workers,<sup>2</sup> and the Office for Non-Discrimination in Barcelona,<sup>3</sup> in 2019, 148 incidents were registered, among which there were 16 instances of physical aggression (3 against women, 2 against men, and 11 attacks on minors); 14 cases of vandalism (4 against mosques or other Islamic cultural centers, and 10 in other public spaces); 26 verbal attacks and/or threats (9 against women, 9 against minors, and 8 against men); and 68 discriminatory incidents (23 against Muslims in general, 23 against women, 8 against minors, and 14 against men).

In 2019, political and public discourse shifted from a clear anti-Muslim and xenophobic rhetoric to a more sinister and intersectional attack on migrants in general and unaccompanied migrant children (MENA) in particular, both on the Internet and in physical space. According to author Helios F. Garcés (2019), “this discourse, especially when directed against migrants from North and West Africa, uses the previous existence of a very particular breeding ground that is made invisible because it is difficult to deal with: global Islamophobia. This discourse is used not only against minors, but against all families called ‘non-*assimilable* migrant populations’ and finds a solid base to adjust to: institutional practices and majority narratives.”<sup>4</sup>

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

The Hortaleza foster home for minors in Madrid is an example of how dangerous the mix of Islamophobia and xenophobia can be, especially through political and media campaigns against unaccompanied minor migrants. In June, the Madrid local police removed a banner<sup>5</sup> put on the building by neo-Nazi *Hogar Social* re-

1. “Resumen de incidentes contra la población musulmana en 2019”, Asociación Musulmana por los Derechos Humanos, 3 January 2020, <http://amderechoshumanos.org/resumen-de-incidentes-contra-la-poblacion-musulmana-en-2019/> (Access date 6 January 2020).

24 incidents reported by ENWAD-European Network of Women of African Descent, 23 January 2020.

2. 4 incidents reported by *Asociación Marroquí para la Integración de los Inmigrantes*, 8 January 2020.

3. 11 provisional cases of discriminatory actions provided by the Office for Non-Discrimination in Barcelona, 2 January 2020.

4. Helios F. Garcés, “Un campo minado para los menores migrantes”, *CTXT*, 18 December 2019.

5. “La Policía retira una pancarta de Hogar Social contra los MENAS en el CPA de Hortaleza”, *El Distrito*, 9 July 2019.

ferring to these minors as “dangerous.”<sup>6</sup> In October, two individuals with white masks beat two foreign minors with paddles.<sup>7</sup> Some days later, the Hortaleza Boxing Crew, frequented by these children, found one of the masks on the door knob with graffiti on the wall saying: “Long live Spain. We all paddle together” (referring to the paddles used during the beating).<sup>8</sup> A couple of days later, far-right Vox’s local leader Rocío Monasterio visited the Hortaleza neighborhood during the pre-electoral campaign with “a dozen elderly neighbors, who complain about Moroccan teenagers.”<sup>9</sup> A few days later, around thirty people assaulted the facilities with iron bars and chains, also vandalizing cars, a municipal bus, and street furniture. Some neighbors received death threats.<sup>10</sup> At the beginning of November, a group of Moroccan teenagers gathered near their Hortaleza foster home when about 10 youngsters attacked them by surprise with nightsticks, leaving three minors with injuries requiring medical assistance.<sup>11</sup> During the televised electoral debate (November 11) Vox’s national leader, Santiago Abascal, associated unaccompanied migrant minors with crime in said neighbourhood and stated that “out of the 100 rapist bands in Spain, 70% are foreigners.”<sup>12</sup> After the elections, neo-Nazi *Hogar Social* demonstrated in front of the shelter, supposedly against the crime increase in Hortaleza (any such increase was denied by the prosecutor).<sup>13</sup> On December 4, a grenade and a plastic bag containing nails and screws (shrapnel) was thrown into the home’s courtyard. The shelter was evacuated, while security forces detonated the grenade.<sup>14</sup> No arrests were made. The Ombudsman reported Vox’s electoral propagandistic attacks on unaccompanied migrant minors to the prosecutor’s office.<sup>15</sup>

6. Aitor Riveiro, Carlos del Castillo, “El grupo neonazi Hogar Social se inscribe como partido político para ir a elecciones ‘este año’”, *El Diario*, 5 March 2019.

7. “Isa Serra denuncia la agresión de dos hombres a dos menores extranjeros en Hortaleza”, *El País*, 4 October 2019.

8. Hortaleza Boxing Crew, Twitter, 4 October 2019, <https://twitter.com/Hortalezaboxing/status/1180099434715209730>, (Access date 30 December 2019).

9. Raquel Duva, “Vox hace campaña en el barrio de los ‘menas’”, *Nius Diario*, 21 October 2019.

10. F.J.B., “Unos 30 jóvenes intentan asaltar el centro de menores de Hortaleza”, *El País*, 30 October 2019.

11. Javier Barbancho, “Más Madrid denuncia un ataque con porras a menas del centro de Hortaleza el domingo en un parque”, *El Mundo*, 6 November 2019.

12. Marina García, “Abascal (Vox) debuta en un debate a cinco: ‘Hay más de 100 manadas y el 70% de los imputados son extranjeros’”, *La Sexta*, 4 November 2019.

13. Jairo Vargas, “La ultraderecha capitaliza la protesta contra los menores migrantes de Hortaleza: ‘Que se vayan a su puto país’”, *Público*, 17 November 2019.

14. J.J. Mateo, “Lanzada una granada contra un centro con menores migrantes en Madrid”, *El País*, 5 December 2019.

15. Miguel González, “El Defensor del Pueblo denuncia al fiscal los ataques de Vox a menores inmigrantes”, *El País*, 18 December 2019.



**Figure 1:** Example of chain events explained above against the Hortaleza foster home in Madrid.<sup>16</sup>

Similar chain events against shelter homes for minors in 2019 occurred in Canet de Mar,<sup>17</sup> Castelldefels,<sup>18</sup> Masnou (Catalonia),<sup>19</sup> and Alhama de Murcia.<sup>20</sup> The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child<sup>21</sup> and UNICEF<sup>22</sup> reprehended Spain.



**Figure 2:** A man explains to a virtual online audience how to get rid of “MENAs” with a bag of dehydrated pork blood.<sup>23</sup>

16. See footnotes 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, and 16.

17. ACN, “Un hombre entra armado con un machete en un centro de menores”, *La Vanguardia*, 6 March 2019.

18. Rebeca Carranco, “Unos 25 encapuchados asaltan un centro de menores inmigrantes en Castelldefels”, *El País*, 11 March 2019.

19. “Un detenido y cuatro heridos en un ataque al centro de menores de El Masnou, en Barcelona”, *RTVE*, 5 July 2019.

20. EFE, “Hallado un artefacto explosivo simulado en la puerta de un centro de menores inmigrantes de Alhama de Murcia”, *El País*, 24 December 2019.

21. María Martín, “La ONU vuelve a reprender a España por su trato a menores inmigrantes”, *El País*, 26 June 2019.

22. María Martín, “Unicef denuncia la desprotección de los niños inmigrantes en España”, *El País*, 27 February 2019.

23. Es Racismo, Facebook, 16 August 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/1507254769329965/videos/967426853606930/?v=967426853606930>, (Access date 29 December 2019).

Another example of the relation between Islamophobia and attacks on unaccompanied migrant minors is the below video of a man, who explains to his virtual audience how to get rid of “MENAs” with a bag of dehydrated pork blood. (Fig. 2)

## Employment

Discrimination of women wearing a hijab is omnipresent in Spain. It is extremely difficult for hijabis to find a job. In June, a young Muslim woman with a 3-month contract to work in the apparel retailer Pimkie was told to take off her hijab on her first day, which she refused.<sup>24</sup> Pimkie did not accept her with a hijab. Muslim students with hijabs are often refused internships. A nursing student at the Rovira i Virgili University (Catalonia) could not finish her studies, since the Pius de Valls Hospital did not allow her to wear a hijab during her internship. Both the internship mentor and the study coordinator at the university supported the hospital’s decision.<sup>25</sup> In Málaga, a woman wearing a hijab was not admitted to the supermarket *Día* during her traineeship, which was necessary to complete her training in “supermarket customer service” organized by the municipality’s equality body. In this case, the equality body found her another internship. The employers claimed that wearing a hijab is against internal rules. However, when requested by the persons concerned, such rules were not provided -as usual.

## Education

A new module titled “Terrorism in Spain” has been introduced within the subject of “Geography & History” for compulsory secondary education (15- & 16-year-old students). (Fig. 3) The (partially) published contents evidence the use of violent language and images,<sup>26</sup> and reinforce anti-Muslim sentiment. Exercises include “a search for terrorist kidnappings” or “to analyze the ‘map of terror.’”<sup>27</sup>

The conclusions of the 2009 research project “Islamophobia or No Curriculum? The Way in Which Islam, Muslim Culture and Muslim Immigrants Are Treated in School Textbooks in Catalonia”<sup>28</sup> found that among the examined material “less than two thirds made any reference, whether verbal or iconic, to Muslim culture or any of the other concepts. The data obtained show the need to revise the contents of school textbooks in order to correct omissions and deformations in the treatment of Islam,

24. Iciar Gutiérrez, “Mi primer día de trabajo duró media hora: me dijeron que no podía entrar por llevar velo”, *El Diario*, 27 June 2019.

25. “Comunicat: Un cas de defensa del dret a la llibertat religiosa contra l’ús discriminatori racista de les normatives en un centre sanitari”, *SOS Racisme Catalunya*, 29 October 2019.

26. María Torrens, “Los 3 errores básicos del nuevo temario sobre terrorismo para los institutos... y cómo resolverlos”, *Salam Plan*, 22 November 2018.

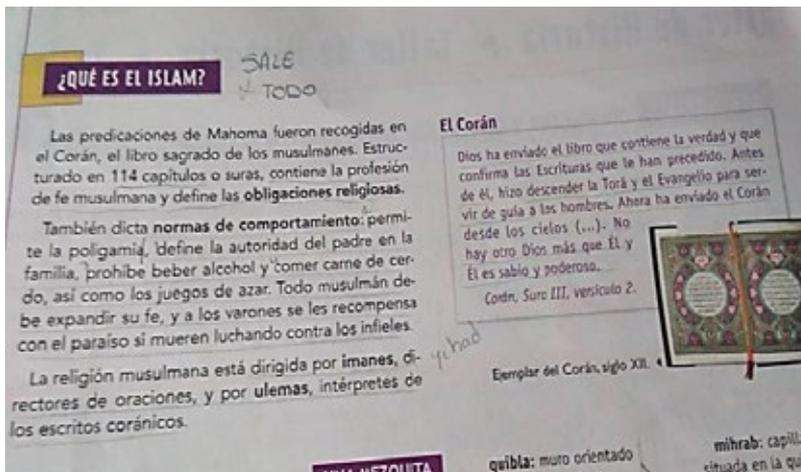
27. “Mapa del Terror”, COVITE, <https://mapadelterror.com/> (Access date: 6 January 2019).

28. Luis Samper, Dolores Mayoral and Fidel Molina “¿Islamofobia o currículo nulo? La representación del Islam, las culturas musulmanas y los inmigrantes musulmanes en los libros de texto de Cataluña”, *Revista de Educación*, 357 (2012), p. 257-279.

Muslim culture, and the presence of Muslims in society.”<sup>29</sup> These conclusions are still prevailing. In 2019, several textbooks were reported for their treatment of Islam, Muslims, and Andalusian history.



**Figure 3:** Cover of “Terrorism in Spain” and page 7 where the beginning of the definition of “Jihadists” states: “Their objective is to set up a Caliphate under an orthodox interpretation of Sharia, the Islamic Law”.<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 4:** “All Muslims must expand their faith, and men are rewarded with paradise if they die fighting against infidels.”<sup>31</sup>

29. Ibid. p. 257-258.

30. “El Terrorismo en España”, Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/dam/jcr:89f903c8-a016-4f7e-922a-ccc0171f5e49/unidad%20didactica.pdf>, (Access date: 15 January 2019).

31. M. García, C. Gatell and S. Riesco, *GH 2. Libro 1 Historia, 2 geografía y separata geografía. Comunitat Valenciana*, (Vicens Vives, Valencia: 2016), p. 20-21.

Securitization entered the education system in 2016 with several protocols. An example is the Catalanian PRODERAEV<sup>32</sup> (Detection, Prevention and Intervention in Processes of Radicalization and Violent Extremism), following the British PREVENT structure<sup>33</sup> and consists of training sessions on “radicalization detection” tools for education professionals. These sessions are taught in Catalanian schools by teams formed by Catalanian police officers and civil servants from the departments of Internal Affairs and Education. According to official data, 5,579 education professionals received this training between 2016 and 2018.<sup>34</sup> In December 2018, the newspaper *La Directa* published a leaked recording<sup>35</sup> of a training session, demonstrating how trainers explain to teachers and school staff how to detect “signs of radicalization” using indicators as “born in a family from a Muslim-majority country”, hijab-wearing, asking halal food at school, neighborhood of residence, not drinking Coca Cola, etc.

In October, a young Muslim student was prevented from entering her public high school in Gijón because she is wearing the Islamic scarf. The Islamic Commission of Spain tried to mediate, but the school management filed a complaint with the Council of Education of the Asturian government.<sup>36</sup> Young Muslim students with hijabs also encounter difficulties when taking examinations. In June, a young woman was forced to take off her hijab while receiving humiliating comments by a teacher and had to take the university entrance exam with her head uncovered. A similar case occurred in September at the National Distance Education University (UNED) in Alicante, when a (male) member of the examination board demanded two female students take off their hijabs for their final exam. One of the examination supervisors intermediated and managed to argue in favor of the students.<sup>37</sup>

On August 20, the Association Pro Rights of the Child (Prodein) filed a request, endorsed by more than 80,000 signatures, with the Register of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in Madrid, in which they demand access to schooling for over 200 minors who live in Melilla. The association considers the current situation of their school applications (“pending verification”)<sup>38</sup> a “situation of apartheid” in Melilla and Ceuta.<sup>39</sup> According to Prodein’s director, José Palazón, most of these

32. “Prevenió, detecció e intervenció de processos de radicalització als Centres Educatius”, *The Department of Education of the Generalitat*, (Access date: 22 February 2019).

33. Ainhoa Douhaibia and Vicent Almela, “Control policial a les aules”, *La Directa*, 443 (2017), pp. 4-11.

34. “La escuela como panóptico racial”, *La radicalización del racismo. Islamofobia de Estado y prevención antiterrorista*, ed. Salma Amzian y Ainhoa Douhaibi, (Cambalache, Oviedo: 2019), p. 91-108.

35. Ainhoa Douhaibi and Vicent Almela, “No beure Coca-Cola, no celebrar Sant Jordi o esborrar-se els tatuatges són indicadors de ‘radicalització islamista’, segons els Mossos”, *La Directa*, 18 December 2018.

36. VA, “La Comisión Islámica recuerda a un instituto de Gijón el derecho de una alumna a llevar hijab”, *La Voz de Asturias*, 4 November 2019.

37. Reported to AMDEH, 4 September 2019.

38. Patricia Simón, “Los niños y niñas que tienen vetado el acceso al cole en Melilla”, *La Marea*, 21 August 2019.

39. Gabriel Barba, “Melilla y la lucha contra el apartheid”, *El Faro de Ceuta*, 2 June 2019.

children and youngsters are born in Melilla, but “the documentation requested from the families is the city registration card, which they will never obtain. Many of these children have parents who were also born here, even with grandparents who fought in the army with Franco.”<sup>40</sup> The Ombudsman has required the local governments in Ceuta and Melilla to enrol these children,<sup>41</sup> but the claim for enrolment has not been met until to date.

## Politics

Each year on January 2, Granada commemorates the city’s surrender to the Catholic monarchs in 1492 CE. This celebration includes a parade of “Moors and Christians” and has become a day in which far-right, right-wing, and fascist parties and individuals gather publicly showing fascist symbols and flags. (Fig. 5) Another part of Granada’s population rejects the festivity considering it a “historical error” to celebrate “a genocide.”



**Figure 5:** Demonstrators with Spanish flags and the blue flag of neo-Nazi *Hogar Social* during the commemoration.<sup>42</sup>

Before the general elections of April, the secretary general of far-right Vox Javier Ortega Smith, now an MP, declared in a public meeting (Ibiza) that Europe and Spain are suffering an “attempted Islamist invasion.”<sup>43</sup>

In April, Santiago Abascal, Vox leader and MP, tweeted after the Notre-Dame fire: “Islamists want to destroy Europe and western society by celebrating the fire of #NotreDame. Take note before it’s too late.”<sup>44</sup> In a public meeting in October, he

40. PRODEINORG, Twitter, 16 November 2019, <https://twitter.com/PRODEINORG/status/1195651212198199296?s=19>, (Access date 30 December 2019)

41. Iñigo Domínguez, “El Gobierno estudia cómo escolarizar a los 160 niños sin papeles de Melilla”, *El País*, 9 July 2018.

42. Alvaro López, “La Toma de Granada: entre gritos de ‘yo soy español’ y ‘no hay nada que celebrar’”, *El Diario*, 2 January 2019.

43. EFE, “Ortega Smith reitera que España está sufriendo un intento de invasión islamista”, *20 Minutos*, 5 April 2019.

44. Redacción, “El potente mensaje del Centro Islámico de Madrid tras lo que soltó Abascal en pleno incendio de Notre Dame”, *HuffPost*, 16 April 2019.

declared that Muslims and migrants from Muslim-majority countries are the main beneficiaries of housing aid reading out loud Arabic and foreign-sounding names: “[...] Abou, Ali, Amir, Adbati, Abanaisati, Abatui [...]”<sup>45</sup> These declarations also contribute to perpetuating certain names as foreign, incompatible with Spanish identity. The NGO *Musulmanes contra la Islamofobia* reported his declaration to the Supreme Court Prosecutor.<sup>46</sup>

In Ceuta, the local political party *Caballas Ceuta* filed a complaint in April with the local courthouse against the local secretary general of Vox for his ongoing smear campaign against *Caballas* and local Muslim communities accusing them of “being complicit” with “Islamic extremism” and “terrorism.”<sup>47</sup> A month later, Vox Ceuta challenged the polling-station results since the female chairperson of the election table wore a niqab.<sup>48</sup>

In Palencia, Vox used the image of a hijabi candidate of left-wing party *Podemos* in Ceuta to tweet: “This twenty-year-old is a candidate for *Podemos Ceuta*. We didn’t know that women’s liberation consists of wearing a purple hijab.” (Fig.6)



**Figure 6:** “This twenty-year-old is candidate for Podemos Ceuta. We didn’t know that women’s liberation consists of wearing a purple hijab.”<sup>49</sup>

In June, the Vox councillor of urban planning in Cadrete (Zaragoza) removed a bust of Abderraman III (Abd al-Raḥmān III) from a public square. (Fig. 7) Abderra-

45. Vox España, YouTube, 27 October 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zM82YJas2u0>, “Santiago Abascal desvela a dónde van las ayudas para la vivienda”, (Access date 30 December 2019).

46. “Denuncia presentada a la Fiscalía del Tribunal Supremo contra Santiago Abascal”, *MCIslamofobia*, <https://mcislamofobia.org/denuncia-santiago-abascal-mitin-lista-ayudas-comunidad-madrid>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

47. EP, “Caballas demanda al secretario general de Vox en Ceuta por ligarle con el ‘extremismo islamista’ y terrorismo”, *Europa Press*, 24 April 2019.

48. Redacción, “Una mujer con niqab preside una mesa en Ceuta y Vox reacciona así”, *El HuffPost*, 25 May 2019.

49. Vox Palencia, Twitter, 28 March 2019, [https://twitter.com/VOX\\_Palencia/status/1111296560602759168](https://twitter.com/VOX_Palencia/status/1111296560602759168) (Access date 22 December 2019).

man III was a caliph (891-961 CE) in the Al-Andalus period who founded the first medicine academy in Europe, 70 libraries, a university, and a school for translators, among others.



**Figure 7:** Bust of Abderramán III in Cadrete, Zaragoza (left); in the City Council, Cadrete (right).<sup>50</sup>

After local elections in Melilla in May, Sofía Acedo Reyes (*Partido Popular*), a Melilla Assembly member and spokesperson on immigration for the State Senate, conducted a smear campaign against left-wing party *Coalición por Melilla* (CPM). She shared several videos of old demonstrations led by former activists (now political candidates), combining their names and images with statements they never made. (Fig. 8)

The local general secretary (PP Melilla), Miguel Marín, made the same accusations: “The rise of an ethnic-religious party such as the Mustafa Aberchan’s CpM, whose candidates claim that Muslims should not vote for Christians; that Pedro Estopiñán, the founder of the city, was a mercenary and who doubts our 521 years of Spanishness.”<sup>51</sup>

At the end of 2019, a purple Christmas tree was put up by Melilla’s local government defending “Christmas in equality.” One Melilla Assembly member (PP Melilla) tweeted: “Mixing ‘equality’ with Christmas [...] is a real stupidity [...] doing politics with religion is deplorable. I’m waiting for ‘Equality in Islam.’”<sup>52</sup>

50. EFE, “Un concejal de Vox retira el busto de Abderramán III de la plaza de Cadrete, en Zaragoza”, *La Sexta*, 19 June 2019.

51. Gonzalo Testa, “Melilla, una ciudad pendiente de Marruecos donde el 90% de la población no ve futuro”, *El Diario*, 23 May 2019.

52. Paz Vázquez, Twitter, 20 December 2019, <https://twitter.com/PazVelquez/status/1208129593179344897?s=03>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).



**Figure 8:** “I feel ashamed. I am disgusted to see and read that those undesirables of the CPM are launching inflammatory hate messages towards Christians and instructions to vote correctly for the faithful, according to the Koran.”<sup>53</sup>

## Media

In 2019, the Spanish Observatory of Islamophobia in the Media,<sup>54</sup> found that in their analysis of 5 mainstream digital national newspapers (*El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Razón*, *La Vanguardia*, and *eldiario.es*), which were the same newspapers analyzed in 2017, the presence of Islamophobia has decreased in comparison to that year. The total number of news and articles analyzed in 2019 was 1,304 compared to 1,600 articles analyzed in 2017.

The TV series like “*Los nuestros*” (Our people) portray Muslims as terrorists and Islamic terminology is overassociated.<sup>55</sup> Muslim actors complain that they mostly receive roles as drug dealers or terrorists.<sup>56</sup>

During the daily TV program *Espejo Público*, journalist María Jamardo, while commenting on the New Zealand terror attacks and the terrorist who killed 51 Muslims, stated that there is a connection between the extreme-right terror attack and

53. Sofia Acedo, Twitter, 27 April 2019, <https://twitter.com/SofiaAcedo/status/1122194039829299201>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

54. “Estadísticas 2019”, Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los Medios, 6 February 2020, <http://www.observatorioislamofobia.org/category/material-observatorio/estadisticas/estadisticas-2019/>, (Access date: 28 February 2020).

55. “Los Nuestros”, Telecinco, 17 January 2019, [https://www.telecinco.es/losnuestros/Capitulo-completo-HD\\_2\\_2692230210.html](https://www.telecinco.es/losnuestros/Capitulo-completo-HD_2_2692230210.html), (Access date: 19 January 2020).

56. “Entrevista al actor Ayoub ElHilali El cine español está suspenso en representatividad”, *Ramiaschannel*, 4 March 2019.

“certain parts of the Koran which say that ‘we will conquer or reconquer *al-Andalus* with the bellies of our women’ and the second, third generation of Muslims who are winning in birth rate.” (Fig. 9) *Musulmanes contra la Islamofobia* reported her comments to the National Commission on Markets and Competition.



**Figure 9:** Journalist María Jamardo during the program.<sup>57</sup>

In another daily TV program, *Cuatro al día* (channel *Cuatro*), the presenter Joaquín Prat, during a telephone interview with fascist activist Pilar Gutiérrez,<sup>58</sup> cut the call after she called Muslims “murderers” and “rapists” (among others). (Fig. 10) Prat informed the audience that “this woman will never be on this program again.”



**Figure 10:** Presenter Joaquín Prat (left) arguing with Pilar Gutiérrez (right).<sup>59</sup>

57. “Denuncia a María Jamardo por sus comentarios en Espejo Público a la Comisión Nacional del Mercado y la Competencia”, *Musulmanes contra la Islamofobia*, 22 March 2019, <https://mcislamofobia.org/denuncia-contra-la-periodista-maria-jamardo-programa-espejo-publico-cnmc>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

58. José María Garrido, “¿Quién es Pilar Gutiérrez, la franquista de la que todo el mundo habla?”, *El Plural*, 17 August 2018.

59. “Joaquín Prat manda callar y veta a Pilar Gutiérrez: ‘En este programa, esta tía, no vuelve a entrar’”, *Cuatro*, 27 December 2019.

## Justice System

In Spain, specific hate crime prosecutors work in each of the 17 autonomous communities, but the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla still lack this service, despite the strong necessity there. Hate incidents are often treated as “settling of scores” or “regular fights.”<sup>60</sup> In Melilla, around 53% of the population is Muslim and in Ceuta over 40%.<sup>61</sup> Despite born and raised in Ceuta or Melilla, due to their Amazigh origin and their religion; Muslim citizens in these cities are subjected to foreignization, segregation, and discrimination in all socio-economic areas, starting at school.<sup>62</sup>

In May, the State General Attorney stated regarding hate crime interpretation guidelines that “...the origin of hate crime is related to the protection of a disadvantaged group [...] thus, an assault on a person of Nazi ideology, or the incitement of hate towards such a collective, can be considered a hate crime.”<sup>63</sup>

In July, the Madrid Council of Education and the Ombudsman allowed schools to regulate students’ attire and establish the obligation to keep heads uncovered, also for students with an Islamic veil.<sup>64</sup> The General Directorate for Relations with Confessions (Ministry of Justice) may issue (non-binding) recommendations to the contrary.

Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE), Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Counterterrorism policies and countless initiatives by think tanks (*Real Instituto El Cano*<sup>65</sup>) and NGOs (IntelCISEG,<sup>66</sup> COVITE<sup>67</sup>) have a long-term negative impact on Muslim individuals and communities. These policies have developed control tools to be used by citizens in general to participate actively in the construction and report of suspects.<sup>68</sup> Various imams have been deported without a judicial procedure,<sup>69</sup> apparently more often due to the person’s lack of means and relations<sup>70</sup> than to alleged terror-related accusations.<sup>71</sup> In July, *El País* informed that “the National

60. Survey conducted by AMDEH with religious & community leaders, on 5 December 2019.

61. “Estudio demográfico de la población musulmana”, Observatorio Andalusi, 31 December 2019, <http://observatorio.hispanomuslim.es/estademograf.pdf>, (Access date: 31 December 2019)

62. Patricia Simón, “Los niños y niñas que tienen vetado el acceso al cole en Melilla”, *La Marea*, 21 August 2019.

63. “Circular 7/2019, de 14 de mayo, de la Fiscalía General del Estado, sobre pautas para interpretar los delitos de odio tipificados en el artículo 510 del Código Penal”, Attorney General’s Office, 24 May 2019, [https://www.boe.es/diario\\_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2019-7771](https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2019-7771), (Access date: 22 December 2019).

64. “La Comunidad de Madrid permite a los colegios prohibir el velo islámico”, *El País*, 4 July 2019.

65. Real Instituto El Cano, [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_es](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es), (Access date: 28 February 2020).

66. Comunidad de Inteligencia y Seguridad Global, <https://www.intelciseg.org/>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

67. “Observatorio Internacional de Estudios sobre Terrorismo” COVITE, <https://observatorioterrorismo.com/>, (Access date: 28 February 2020).

68. Virtudes Téllez, “El ‘Pacto Antiyihadista’ y las estrategias de lucha contra la ‘radicalización violenta’: implicaciones jurídicas, políticas y sociales”, *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos*, 24 (2018), p 9-30.

69. Francisco Carrión, “El imam de Logroño, de la expulsión exprés en España a una cárcel egipcia”, *El Mundo*, 24 September 2018.

70. “La Policía se plantea expulsar de España a un líder de la comunidad musulmana de Salt por terrorismo”, *El Mundo*, 9 September 2018.

71. “Marlaska ‘perdona’ a un imán expulsado de España por el anterior Gobierno”, *Voz Pópuli*, 17 November 2018.

High Court endorses the use of secret reports by the National Intelligence Agency to deport suspects of Jihadism.”<sup>72</sup>

## Internet

Far-right disinformation websites, such as *Mediterráneo Digital*, *Diario Patriota*, *Alerta Digital*, *Caso Aislado*, *Periodista Digital*, *OK Diario*, among many others,<sup>73</sup> strongly contribute to the far-right social movements they support. They regularly publish and recycle fake news and disinformation against protected groups, women, left-wing parties, and politicians, and those who form part and/or support the different independence movements.

*SOS Racisme* published a chapter on Spain<sup>74</sup> for a project on hate speech called “Words Are Stones,” in which they state that

“in terms of targets of hate speech, it is important to highlight the preponderance of anti-Muslim racism and the level of symbolic violence of the narrative on Islamist Terrorism, which is based on profound distortions [...] hate speech narratives on the threat of Islamist terrorism seem to reduce Islam to Islamism, which is at the same time equated to Islamist terrorism, generating feelings of threat and danger as a result of intended distortions, even through dehumanizing rhetoric and symbolic strategies [...] VOX extremist claims have now a “loud-speaker” in the political arena, and their claims and calls for action have now a major reach and impact. The “VOX effect” has also temporarily brought right-wing parties further to the right –a process reflected by different right-wing political leaders’ declarations. But racist hate speech in public discourse is not only present in the right and extreme-right organizations, since it is not unusual for center or left-wing politicians to use it as well.”<sup>75</sup>

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

As seen in the previous sections, the aforementioned Vox members (and PP in Ceuta and Melilla) and far-right websites regularly promote and normalize anti-Muslim sentiment through their social media and the Internet. Some of the owners of the aforementioned websites regularly participate in prime time TV talk shows.<sup>76</sup>

---

72. Oscar López-Fonseca, “La justicia avala el uso de informes secretos del CNI para expulsar a sospechosos de yihadismo”, *El País*, 16 July 2019.

73. In consultation with journalist Miquel Ramos specialized on far-right extremism and movements, 14 January 2020.

74. “Racist Hate Speech in Spain: a 2018 Case Analysis”, *SOS Racisme*, January 2020, [http://www.sosracisme.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/WAS\\_Spagna\\_hatespeech\\_national-report-SPAIN-SOS-RACISME.pdf](http://www.sosracisme.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/WAS_Spagna_hatespeech_national-report-SPAIN-SOS-RACISME.pdf), p. 41, (Access date: 15 January 2020).

75. “Words Are Stones”, *Cronache di razzismo*, January 2020, <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/words-are-stones-english/>, (Access date: 15 January 2020).

76. “Alfonso Rojo tacha ‘Todo es mentira’ de telebasura: ‘He ganado tanta pasta con Periodista Digital que esas cosas no me interesan’”, *Cuatro*, 11 June 2019.

“Jesús Maraña planta cara a Inda en ‘La Sexta Noche’: ‘Estás manipulando, es lo que mejor se te da’”, *HuffPost*, 30 March 2019.

A fast-growing “feminist” current led by a number of women with Arabic or Amazigh names who usually define themselves as “non-Muslim”, “former Muslim”, and/or “from Muslim origin” is targeting Muslim communities and Islam in the name of “women’s rights.” Their stereotyping discourse on Muslim women and the hijab, for example, by blaming left-wing parties as “actively promoting the veil and, with it, a whole set of attitudes of the fundamentalist patriarchy,”<sup>77</sup> publicly smearing female politicians who wear hijab,<sup>78</sup> or attacking Muslim female converts online for years,<sup>79</sup> is gaining space in press articles, (Fig. 11) online campaigns,<sup>80</sup> blogs,<sup>81</sup> conferences,<sup>82</sup> prime time TV shows,<sup>83</sup> and through the publishing of books. (Fig. 12) According to academic Sara R. Farris (2017), who specializes on Sociology of Religion, “this is the sexualization of racism. Women are presented as victims for whom, if properly assimilated, space can be made –whereas men are the unredeemable others.”<sup>84</sup> The leading voices of this current, whose family and cultural backgrounds supposedly contribute to the validation of their rhetoric, receive support from currents within dominant feminism,<sup>85</sup> Zionist sectors,<sup>86</sup> as well as from politicians across the political spectrum (including Vox,<sup>87</sup> *Ciudadanos*,<sup>88</sup> *PSOE*,<sup>89</sup> *Unidas Podemos*<sup>90</sup>) and thus reach the wider public.

77. Mimunt Hamido, “El velo exhibicionista”, *Txalaparta*, January 2020.

78. “Fuego valyrio. Carta a Podemos”, *No nos tapanán*, 9 November 2018. Mimunt Hamida, Twitter, 7 September 2019, [https://twitter.com/Mim\\_Rif/status/1170338268417802240?s=19](https://twitter.com/Mim_Rif/status/1170338268417802240?s=19), (Access date: 29 December 2019).

79. Imane Rachidi, “Musulmanas por exotismo”, *M-Sur*, 29 September 2017.

80. “#SinVelo”, Twitter, [https://twitter.com/search?q=%23SinVelo&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23SinVelo&src=typed_query), (Access date: 30 December 2019).

81. “No nos tapanán”, <https://nonostapananblog.wordpress.com/>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

82. Nuria Coronado, Twitter, 30 November 2019, <https://twitter.com/NuriaCSopena/status/1200689281125277696>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

83. “Najat el Hachmi reflexiona sobre el machismo en el Islam: ‘Nos piden que nos tapemos como si los hombres no tuvieran autocontrol’”, *La Sexta*, 15 October 2019.

84. Sara Farris, “What is femonationalism?”, *Open Democracy*, 13 July 2017.

85. Feminicidio.net, Twitter, 10 September 2019, <https://twitter.com/feminicidio/status/1171415527949918209>, (Access date: 20 January 2020)

86. ACOM, Twitter, 27 July 2019, [https://twitter.com/ACOM\\_es/status/1155080177283731456](https://twitter.com/ACOM_es/status/1155080177283731456), (Access date: 20 January 2020). Rafa Lara, “El largo brazo del sionismo”, *El Diario*, 18 June 2019.

87. Lucio Curiel Torres (Vox), Twitter, 26 November 2019, <https://twitter.com/AzoteCasta/status/1067078725701959680>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

88. Sonia Sierra (Ciudadanos), Twitter, 23 September 2019, <https://twitter.com/SoniaSierra02/status/1176234215056257026>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

89. Josefina Bueno (PSOE), Twitter, 18 December 2019, <https://twitter.com/NuriaCSopena/status/1200689281125277696>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

90. Dina Bouselham (Unidas Podemos), Twitter, 20 September 2019, <https://twitter.com/DinaBouselham/status/1175006653231616003>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

NAJAT EL HACHMI  
**Najat El Hachmi: "El Islam es una desgracia para las mujeres"**  
EFE | Barcelona | 8 sep. 2019



Figure 11: "Najat El Hachmi: "Islam is a tragedy for women"<sup>91</sup>

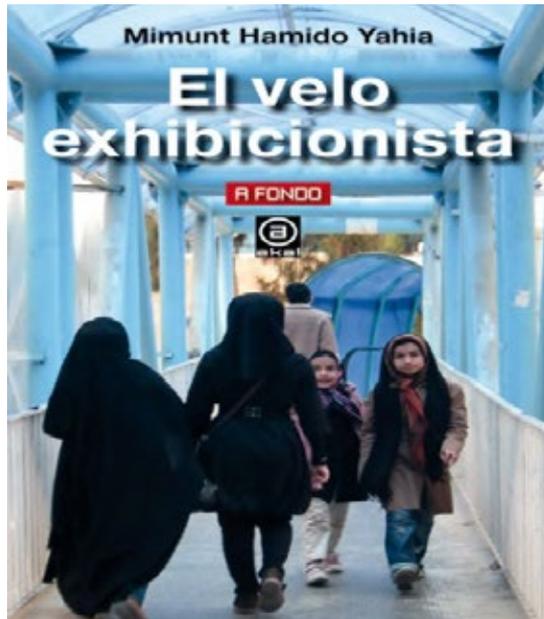


Figure 12: Cover of the book "El velo exhibicionista" (The Exhibitionist Veil),<sup>92</sup>

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

The report "Police Identifications by Ethnic Profile in Catalonia 2018" published by *SOS Racisme* says that for each Spaniard, 18 people of Algerian origin are stopped in

91. "Najat El Hachmi: 'El Islam es una desgracia para las mujeres'", *EFE*, 8 September 2019.

92. Mimunt Hamido Yahia, *El velo exhibicionista*, (Akal, Tres Cantos: 2020).

Catalonia. In September, NGO Rights International Spain published “Under Suspicion”<sup>93</sup> on identifications by ethnic profile, describing the short- and long-term emotional and social impacts of police controls on people’s lives.



**Figure 13:** Report *SOS Racisme*: “Islamophobia is also Police”<sup>94</sup>

Spanish civil society conducted various initiatives to counter anti-Muslim hatred, focusing efforts and means mostly on raising awareness, not on advocacy or monitoring.

The 2018 National Office for Hate Crimes report<sup>95</sup> mentions an overall 11.6% increase in hate crime: out of 1,598 complaints, 69 relate to religion (except anti-Semitism) and 524 to racism and xenophobia. No segregated statistics for anti-Muslim bias are available (even though two new categories were recently added: discrimination due to illness, and ageism). The “2019 Action Plan to Combat Hate Crimes” (Ministry of Internal Affairs)<sup>96</sup> includes measures for anti-Gypsyism and Romaphobia “as done by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency.”<sup>97</sup> Following this logic, the plan should also measure anti-Muslim bias -but it does not. The lack of data on anti-Muslim bias makes the fight against Islamophobia very difficult.

93. “Under Suspicion, The Impact of Discriminatory Policing in Spain”, Rights International Spain, 2019, <http://rightsinternationalspain.org/uploads/publicacion/1f8275586cc7875ad2d984717b9d63a612d26f0c.pdf>, (Access date: 22 December 2019).

94. SOS Racisme, “Police Identifications by Ethnic Profile in Catalonia 2018”, Parada De Pararme, 11 February 2019, <https://www.pareudepararme.org/informe-es/>, (Access date: 22 December 2019).

95. “Informe sobre los Delitos de Odio en España 2018”, The Interior Ministry and the Secretary of State, 2017, <http://www.interior.gob.es/documents/10180/7146983/ESTUDIO+INCIDENTES+DELITOS+DE+ODIO+2017+v3.pdf/5d9f1996-87ee-4e30-bff4-e2c68fade874>, (Access date: 12 October 2019).

96. “Plan de Acción contra los delitos de odio”, The Interior Ministry and the Secretary of State, <http://www.interior.gob.es/documents/642012/3479677/plan+de+accion+delitos+de+odio/d054f47a-70f3-4748-986b-264a93187521>, (Access date: 12 October 2019).

97. “Database 2012-2017 on Anti-Muslim Hatred”, Fundamental Rights Agency, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/project/2018/database-2012-2017-anti-muslim-hatred>, (Access date: 2 January 2020).

Specific hate crime units within local police forces, providing specialized assistance to victims of hate incidents, can be found in Madrid<sup>98</sup> and Fuenlabrada.<sup>99</sup> The hate crime prosecutors in Barcelona and Malaga, as well as the Barcelona City Non-Discrimination Office<sup>100</sup> make exemplary contributions against Islamophobia.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

In addition to awareness activities, hate crimes, far-reaching hate speech, and other forms of anti-Muslim discrimination should be monitored. Security forces, prosecutors, and corresponding local institutions should keep a segregated record of reported incidents with anti-Muslim bias to provide yearly figures, also to the OSCE-ODIHR hate crime database.<sup>101</sup> Local and national security forces and prosecutors (specifically including Ceuta and Melilla) need hate crime and discrimination awareness training. A Code of conduct for (mainstream) media on the treatment of migrant minors must be implemented. All minors living in the Spanish state should be guaranteed their right to schooling. Revision of educational textbooks regarding Islam, Muslims, Islamic Spanish heritage, migration, and terrorism is necessary. Education on human rights should be given priority over classes on terrorism.<sup>102</sup> Business owners and human resources departments should treat all job applicants in the same way based on equality and provide pertinent documents, such as internal dressing regulations, when requested. CVE protocols should be removed from public schools and foster homes.

## Chronology

- **25.01.2019:** Crosses with the word “Christ” were painted on a mosque in Avila.<sup>103</sup>
- **30.01.2019:** Demonstration against opening new mosque in *Los Dolores*.<sup>104</sup>

98. “Unidad de Gestión de la Diversidad”, Madrid City Council, <https://www.madrid.es/portales/munimadrid/es/Inicio/El-Ayuntamiento/Centro/Direcciones-y-telefonos/Unidad-de-Gestion-de-la-Diversidad/?vgnnextfmt=default&vgnextoid=8ed0be21ab129510VgnVCM2000001f4a900aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=cac1d47f6ee28010VgnVCM100000dc0ca8c0RCRD>, (Access date: 22 December 2019).

99. “Fuenlabrada lucha contra la discriminación y la intolerancia a través del Plan de Acción contra el Odio”, Fuenlabrada City Council, 20 October 2016, <http://www.ayto-fuenlabrada.es/index.do?MP=1&MS=12&MN=2&cid=5138>, (Access date: 22 December 2019).

100. “Office for Non-Discrimination”, The Barcelona City Council, <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/oficina-no-discriminacio/en>, (Access date: 29 December 2019).

101. “ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting - Spain”, OSCE-ODIHR, <http://hatecrime.osce.org/spain>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

102. “Educación en Derechos Humanos- España”, Amnistía Internacional, <https://www.es.amnesty.org/en-que-estamos/temas/educacion-en-derechos-humanos/>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

103. AMDEH, Twitter, 29 January 2019, <https://twitter.com/MusulmanaDDHH/status/1090305792811679745?s=19>, (Access date 29 January 2020).

104. Jorge Sánchez, “Manifestación en Los Dolores con el lema ‘Integración sí, mezquita no’”, La Opinión de Murcia, 30 January 2019, <https://www.laopiniondemurcia.es/murcia/2019/01/30/manifestacion-dolores-lema-integracion-mezquita/992809.html>, (Access date: 29 January 2020).

- **16.02.2019:** Physical and verbal attack on a Muslim woman (Barcelona).<sup>105</sup>
- **18.02.2019:** Far-right signs and Islamophobic messages found in Sant Martí de Provençals (Barcelona).<sup>106</sup>
- **24.02.2019:** Newspaper *El Periódico* published headline “An Islamic Group Controls the Illegal Street Vendors in Spain” on cover.<sup>107</sup>
- **26.02.2019:** War material and weapons found in Valencia during a police investigation on a Facebook account inciting violence against Muslims and immigrants.<sup>108</sup>
- **27.02.2019:** Two Muslim women verbally abused by doctor in hospital (Melilla).<sup>109</sup>
- **06.03.2019:** A man armed with a machete entered a shelter for minors (Canet de Mar). He was detained and left no injured.<sup>110</sup>
- **07.03.2019:** Two Muslim women were verbally intimidated in a shop (Madrid).<sup>111</sup>
- **09.03.2019:** One minor and two educators were injured when 25 hooded men assaulted a shelter for minors (Castelldefels). About 60 protesters threw stones at the facility the day after the attack.<sup>112</sup>
- **08.04.2019:** Islamophobic graffiti on a school (Tarragona).<sup>113</sup>
- **15.05.2019:** The Spanish Troop and Maritime Association ordered an investigation into a case of alleged discrimination of Muslims within the “Melilla Group of Regulars 52”. One of its officials had established the requirement “not to be Muslim” to join the unit.<sup>114</sup>
- **05.06.2019:** Two Muslim women entering a police station to report an incident were obliged by the police to take off their hijab, while were publicly subjected to humiliating comments.<sup>115</sup>
- **24.06.2019:** Individuals fired at least four times at the Muley el-Mehdi

105. Reported to Es Racismo, on 17 February 2019.

106. CUP Sant Martí, Twitter, 19 February 2019, <https://twitter.com/CUPSantMarti/status/1097765762268315648?s=19>, (Access date: 22 February 2020).

107. Juan José Fernández, “Los adeptos de una cofradía islámica senegalesa se hacen con el control del ‘top manta’ en España”, *El Periódico*, 24 February 2019.

108. “A Man Who Incited Islamophobia in the Networks Possessed War Material from the Second World War in His House”, *Las Provincias*, 26 February 2019.

109. Reported to AMDEH, on 28 February 2019.

110. ACN, “Un hombre entra armado con un machete en un centro de menores”, *La Vanguardia*, 6 March 2019.

111. Es Racismo, “Denunciada una mujer por gritos racistas en una tienda de moda”, *Es Racismo*, 7 March 2019.

112. Rebeca Carranco, “Unos 25 encapuchados asaltan un centro de menores inmigrantes en Castelldefels”, *El País*, 11 March 2019.

113. “Nazis en el barrio de Campclar”, *Diari de Tarragona*, 8 May 2019.

114. EP, “ATME pide investigar un presunto caso de discriminación a soldados musulmanes en Melilla”, Europa Press, 14 May 2019. Investigation is still pending (22 December 2019).

115. Reported to the Coordinator of *Es Racismo*, on 6 June 2019.

Mosque in Ceuta. The shots hit the façade and left no victims, though causing moments of panic and tension.<sup>116</sup>

- **30.06.2019:** Muslim woman carrying her child verbally abused on the street (Santander).<sup>117</sup>
- **05.07.2019:** Attack on shelter home (Masnou, Barcelona) resulted in one arrest, 3 minors and 1 adult injured.<sup>118</sup>
- **11.07.2019:** Vox council in Badajoz refused to concede use of cemetery plot to local Islamic community.<sup>119</sup>
- **20.07.2019:** A man verbally abused and threatened a Muslim woman and her nephew with violence at train station (Zaragoza).<sup>120</sup>
- **20.07.2019:** Woman verbally harassed and denied access when accompanying her children to the compound swimming pool.<sup>121</sup>
- **24.07.2019:** National Police arrested 6 individuals in Ceuta for stealing and beating up unaccompanied migrant minors sleeping in the streets. Investigations “do not appreciate a hate crime component.”<sup>122</sup>
- **14.08.2019:** Discrimination of several Muslim women with hijabs when renewing their IDs (Tarragona).<sup>123</sup>
- **25.08.2019:** Racist graffiti “Death to all Moors” appeared at 9 locations in Vitoria-Gasteiz.<sup>124</sup>
- **01.09.2019:** Menacing graffiti in Deba (Guipúzcoa) against the mayor, demanding the closure of the local mosque.<sup>125</sup>
- **15.09.2019:** Far-right leader (Valencia) claimed a religious celebration to be “a call to the holy war, ‘the jihad.’”<sup>126</sup>

116. Marta Rodríguez, “La policía española investiga un tiroteo contra una mezquita de Ceuta”, *Euro News*, 6 June 2019.

117. W. N., Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/wadi.ndaghestani/videos/2824852874208282/?lst=100000701446201%3A100000507920165%3A1576438922>, (Access date: 22 December 2019).

118. Agencias, “Un detenido y cuatro heridos en un ataque al centro de menores de El Masnou, en Barcelona”, *RTVE*, 5 June 2019.

119. Eldiarioex, “La comunidad musulmana lamenta la negativa de Vox a su derecho a tener enterramientos islámicos”, *El Diario*, 11 July 2019.

120. María R. Díaz, “Un hombre agrede con insultos racistas y amenazas a una mujer y a su sobrino entre gritos de ‘viva España y viva Franco’”, *Es Racismo*, 20 July 2019, <http://esracismo.com/2019/07/20/un-hombre-agrede-con-insultos-racistas-y-amenazas-a-una-mujer-y-a-su-sobrino-entre-gritos-de-viva-espana-y-viva-franco/> (Access date: 22 December 2019).

121. Reported to *Asociación Marroquí para la Integración de Inmigrantes*.

122. Agencias, “Detenidas seis personas por robar y agredir a niños migrantes en Ceuta”, *El País*, 24 July 2019.

123. EP, “Interior permitirá a las musulmanas usar velo en la foto del DNI”, *El País*, 19 June 2006.

124. Plataforma Antirracista de Gasteiz, Twitter, 25 August 2019, <https://twitter.com/PlatAntirracis1/status/1165685033971126275>, (Access date: 22 December 2019).

125. Ander Salegi, “Aparecen pintadas de contenido racista y machista en Deba”, *El Diario Vasco*, 1 September 2019.

126. Toni Cuquerella, “Una dirigente de una formación de extrema derecha vincula una celebración religiosa en València con una llamada a la ‘yihad’”, *El Diario*, 16 September 2019.

- **04.10.2019:** Muslim woman verbally abused while waiting for the police after car accident (Madrid).<sup>127</sup>
- **07.10.2019:** A dozen people violently broke into a Pakistani-owned supermarket (Barcelona). They caused damage, stole goods, and injured the owner and his two children (aged 2 and 7). The aggressors who were described as “Nazi-aesthetic people” fled.<sup>128</sup>
- **09.10.2019:** A man painting Islamophobic graffiti was surprised in Vitoria-Gasteiz by pedestrians. He accused the current Basque president (I. Urkullu) of “Islamizing Europe.”<sup>129</sup> The next day, more Islamophobic graffiti showed up.<sup>130</sup>
- **17.10.2019:** Fascist slogans and Vox signs painted on the Islamic Association of Oliva (Alicante). Similar slogans appeared on a nearby car and some days later, xenophobic slogans were painted on Oliva’s Youth House.<sup>131</sup>
- **19.10.2019:** Rejection by neighbors of municipal land for new mosque in Benalmádena (Málaga). The City Council withdrew the assignment of 2,200 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>132</sup>
- **27.10.2019:** A group of individuals brutally beat an unaccompanied migrant minor in Zaragoza. They severely injured his skull and fled, leaving him lying on the street. Doctors feared for his life. Later, the victim said he was “cornered” by at least seven individuals.<sup>133</sup>
- **29.10.2019:** All family members recently arrived from Melilla to Hoyos (Ávila) were harassed at school and in town.<sup>134</sup>
- **30.10.2019:** The manager of McDonald’s in Melilla was reported for expelling 3 unaccompanied minors and their educator from the establishment after they bought food, accusing them of being “criminals.”<sup>135</sup>
- **03.11.2019:** A young journalist, perceived as an unaccompanied migrant minor, received threats in Masnou.<sup>136</sup>

127. Reported to AMDEH, on 4 October 2019.

128. Guillem Sánchez, “Una banda destroza un súper de Barcelona y deja heridos a dos niños y al propietario”, *El Periódico*, 7 October 2019.

129. Natxo Gatón, “FOTO: Un hombre realiza pintadas islamófobas y contra Urkullu”, *Gasteizhoy*, 9 October 2019.

130. Plataforma Antirracista de Gasteiz, Twitter, 10 October 2019, <https://twitter.com/PlatAntirracis1/status/1182400538920587275>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

131. SS. Gandía, “Nuevos símbolos intolerantes en el Casal Jove generan rechazo en Oliva”, *Levante EMV*, 19 October 2019.

132. J.J. Madueño, “Una nueva mezquita en suelo municipal levanta el rechazo de los vecinos de Benalmádena”, *ABC*, 19 October 2019.

133. M.A. Coloma, “Los dos detenidos por la paliza al mena son hermanos y han quedado libres con cargos”, *Heraldo*, 7 November 2019.

134. Reported to Asociación Marroquí para la Integración de Inmigrantes.

135. Rosa Soto, “Denuncian a McDonald’s por prohibir comer en su restaurante a tres niños tutelados en Melilla”, *Público*, 2 November 2019.

136. Aladdin, Twitter, 3 November 2019, [https://twitter.com/aladdin\\_azr/status/1190988886085947392?s=19](https://twitter.com/aladdin_azr/status/1190988886085947392?s=19), (Access date: 30 December 2019).

- **03.11.2019:** A group of Moroccan teenagers from the Hortaleza foster home was attacked by 10 youngsters with nightsticks, leaving three minors with bruises and minor injuries.<sup>137</sup>
- **05.11.2019:** A cross was painted on the Soria Islamic Cultural Center.<sup>138</sup>
- **05.11.2019:** The Councillor of Employment (El Ejido) advised a Muslim woman to take off her hijab “to get a job.”<sup>139</sup>
- **05.12.2019:** A grenade was launched against the Hortaleza home for unaccompanied migrant minors (Madrid).
- **28.12.2019:** A security guard surprised two people trying to place a simulated explosive device, similar to the one that was found on Christmas Eve, at Alhama de Murcia’s home for minors.<sup>140</sup>
- **29.12.2019:** Islamophobic and xenophobic posters signed by far-right *Democracia Nacional* appear on the Aranjuez Islamic Center.<sup>141</sup>

---

137. M. Belver, P.R. Rocas and L.F. Durán, “Más Madrid denuncia un ataque con porras a menas del centro de Hortaleza el domingo en un parque”, *El Mundo*, 6 November 2019.

138. Amparo Sánchez, Twitter, 5 November 2019, <https://twitter.com/AmparoRosel/status/1191799559732772873?s=19>, (Access date: 30 December 2019).

139. Reported to *Asociación Marroquí para la Integración de Inmigrantes*.

140. Agencias, “Investigan otro artefacto explosivo simulado en un centro de menores no acompañados de Murcia”, *El Español*, 28 December 2019.

141. Houssien El Ouariachi, Facebook, 29 December, [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10157017416688348&id=692498347](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10157017416688348&id=692498347), (Access date: 30 December 2019).

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**SWITZERLAND**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

OLIVER WÄCKERLIG



## The Author

**Oliver Wäckerlig** studied sociology and religious studies at the University of Zurich. He worked as a research associate and assistant at the Department of Religious Studies, where he also received his doctorate. At the University of Zurich, he was involved in various empirical projects in religious studies, practical theology, and criminology. Since 2018 he has been working at the Swiss Pastoral Sociological Institute (SPI). His research interests include Islamophobia, religion and the public sphere, religion and the media, and religion and health. His latest publication is *Vernetzte Islamfeindlichkeit* (Transcript, 2019) on the transatlantic network of anti-Muslim groups. Email: o.waeckerlig@skalderberg.ch

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Oliver Wäckerlig: *Islamophobia in Switzerland: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

The 29 November 2019 was the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ban on minaret construction in Switzerland. Because of the same SVP circles that were responsible for the popular initiative at the time, a vote will also be taken on a national ban on facial coverings, which has already been in force in the canton of Ticino since 2016 and in the canton of St. Gallen since 2019. Bans on headscarves in schools and in the public sector are a recurring topic of discussion. In February 2019, a referendum in the canton of Geneva approved a law on secularity that affects religious dress.

In politics, the SVP is constantly pushing forward Islam-related issues. Debates are often taken up from the media or topics are taken up from abroad, such as the ban on veiling or the new Islam law in Austria. In the case of questions on integration, immigration, or refugees, regular warnings are issued against “Islamisation”.

Islamophobia is very present in the counselling practice for victims of racism, and the number of counselling sessions is constantly increasing. Workshops by NGOs show that especially women wearing headscarves regularly experience discrimination of various kinds. In 2019, in a representative survey on the role of religious and social identities, one in two Muslims stated that they had been discriminated against because of their religious identity. Surveys also show that Islamophobic perceptions are widespread.

In contrast to field experiences and the findings of surveys, Islamophobia is not a relevant topic in the media. This was evident, for example, in the largely uninformed and banalising reporting on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ban on the construction of minarets. The networking of Islamophobic actors and organisations has become established, but they manage to generate attention, especially in social media.

## Zusammenfassung

Am 29. November 2019 war der 10. Jahrestag des Minarettbauverbotes in der Schweiz. Wegen derselben SVP-Kreise, die damals für die Volksinitiative verantwortlich waren, wird auch über ein nationales Verhüllungsverbot abgestimmt werden, das seit 2016 bereits im Kanton Tessin und seit 2019 im Kanton St. Gallen gilt. Kopftuchverbote in der Schule und im öffentlichen Dienst stehen immer wieder zur Diskussion. Im Februar 2019 wurde im Kanton Genf durch eine Volksabstimmung ein Laizitätsgesetz angenommen, das religiöse Bekleidung tangiert.

In der Politik kommt es ständig zu Vorstössen zu islambezogenen Themen durch die SVP. Dabei werden oft Debatten aus den Medien aufgenommen oder Themen aus dem Ausland übernommen, wie zu Verhüllungsverboten oder zum neuen Islamgesetz in Österreich. Bei Fragen zu Integration, Einwanderung oder Geflüchteten wird regelmässig vor einer "Islamisierung" gewarnt.

In der Beratungspraxis für Rassismuspfer ist Islamfeindlichkeit sehr präsent, die Anzahl Beratungen nimmt kontinuierlich zu. Workshops von NGOs zeigen, dass vor allem Frauen mit Kopftuch regelmässig Diskriminierung verschiedener Art erleben. 2019 gaben in einer repräsentativen Umfrage zur Rolle von religiösen und sozialen Identitäten jeder und jede Zweite unter den Muslimen und Musliminnen an, aufgrund der religiösen Identität diskriminiert worden zu sein. Befragungen zeigen auch, dass islamfeindliche Vorstellungen weit verbreitet sind.

Im Kontrast zu den Erfahrungen im Feld und den Erkenntnissen aus Befragungen ist Islamfeindlichkeit kein relevantes Thema in den Medien. Dies zeigte sich etwa an der grösstenteils uninformierten und banalisierenden Berichterstattung zum 10. Jahrestag des Minarettbauverbotes. Die Vernetzung islamfeindlicher Akteure und Organisationen hat sich etabliert, sie schaffen es aber vor allem in den sozialen Medien Aufmerksamkeit zu generieren.

## Résumé

Le 29 novembre 2019 a marqué le 10e anniversaire de l'interdiction de construire des minarets en Suisse. En raison des mêmes cercles de l'UDC qui étaient responsables de l'initiative populaire à l'époque, un vote aura également lieu sur une interdiction nationale interdiction des revêtements faciaux, qui est déjà en vigueur dans le canton du Tessin depuis 2016 et dans le canton de Saint-Gall depuis 2019. L'interdiction du voile dans les écoles et dans le secteur public est un sujet de discussion récurrent. En février 2019, un référendum dans le canton de Genève a approuvé une loi sur la laïcité affectant les vêtements religieux.

En politique, l'UDC ne cesse de faire avancer les questions liées à l'Islam. Les débats sont souvent repris par les médias ou des sujets sont abordés depuis l'étranger, comme l'interdiction des revêtements faciaux ou la nouvelle loi sur l'islam en Autriche. En cas de questions sur l'intégration, l'immigration ou les réfugiés, des avertissements sont régulièrement émis contre l'«islamisation».

L'islamophobie est très présente dans la pratique du conseil aux victimes du racisme, et le nombre de séances de conseil est en constante augmentation. Des ateliers d'ONG montrent que les femmes portant le voile, en particulier, sont régulièrement victimes de discriminations de toutes sortes. En 2019, dans une enquête représentative sur le rôle des identités religieuses et sociales, un musulman sur deux a déclaré avoir été discriminé en raison de son identité religieuse. Les enquêtes montrent également que les perceptions islamophobes sont très répandues.

Contrairement aux expériences de terrain et aux résultats des enquêtes, l'islamophobie n'est pas un sujet pertinent dans les médias. Cela s'est manifesté, par exemple, dans les reportages largement mal informés et banalisés sur le 10e anniversaire de l'interdiction de construire des minarets. La mise en réseau des acteurs et organisations islamophobes s'est établie, mais ils parviennent à attirer l'attention, notamment dans les médias sociaux.

## Country Profile EIR 2019

**Country:** Switzerland

**Type of Government:** Federal semi-direct democracy under a multi-party parliamentary directorial republic

**Ruling/Opposition Parties:** Multi-party system with the Federal Council (cabinet) as a seven-member executive council with annually rotating presidency (2 Swiss Social Democratic Party [SP/PS], 1 Christian Democrat People's Party [CVP/PDC], 2 FDP. The Liberals [FDP/ PLR], 2 Swiss People's Party [SVP/UDC])

**Other Parties in the Federal Assembly (Parliament):** Swiss Green Party (GPS/PES), Swiss Green Liberal Party (glp/pvl), Conservative Democratic Party (BDP/PBD), Ticino League (Lega), Swiss Evangelical People's Party (EVP/PEV), Federal Democratic Union (EDU/UDF), Swiss Party of Labour (PdA/PST), Solidarity (solidarités)

**Last Elections:** Federal elections 2019 (Seats: National Council/ Council of States): SVP/UDC (53/6), SP/PS (39/9), FDP/PLR (28/12), GPS/PES (28/5), CVP/PDC (25/13), glp/pvl (16/0)

**Total Population:** 8.6 million

**Major Languages:** German, French, Italian

**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism), but some recognised religious communities in the cantons.

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** The KONID Survey 2019 revealed that one in two Muslims stated that they had been discriminated against on the basis of their religious identity. On the basis of the Documentation System Racism there were 44 counselling cases in the area of "anti-Muslimism" and 24 counselling cases in the related category of "hostility against people from the Arab world" in 2018.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** Annual report "Racism Incidents from Counselling Practice, January to December 2018"; Report of the Office for Combating Racism "Racist Discrimination in Switzerland 2018"

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Catholics 35.2%, No religion 28.0%, Protestants 23.1%, Muslims 5.3% (in 2018)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 375,456 (from the age of 15 and over in 2018)

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Federation of Islamic Organisations in Switzerland (FIOS), Coordination of Islamic Organisations in Switzerland (KIOS)

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI)

**Far-Right Parties:** Swiss People's Party (SVP/UDC), Federal Democratic Union of Switzerland (EDU/UDF), Swiss Nationalist Party (PNOS/PNS)

**Far-Right Movements:** *Résistance Helvétique*

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** Yes (since 1893)
- **Minaret Ban:** Yes (since 2009)
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** Cantons of Ticino (2016) and St. Gallen (2019)
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

In Switzerland, there are various studies and reports that deal with Islamophobia, among other forms of discrimination. For example, in 2019, the Counselling Network for Victims of Racism published the annual report “Racism Incidents from Counselling Practice”<sup>1</sup> for the year 2018 on the basis of the Documentation System Racism (DoSyRa): there were 44 counselling cases in the area of “anti-Muslimism” and 24 counselling cases in the related category of “hostility against people from the Arab world”.<sup>2</sup> This was the third most common motive for discrimination after xenophobia and racism against blacks. Muslim hostility and hostility against people from the Arab world occurred most frequently in the neighbourhood, in education, school, day-care centres, and at work.<sup>3</sup>

The year 2019 also saw the publication of the fourth report of the Office for Combating Racism “Racist Discrimination in Switzerland 2018”.<sup>4</sup> In the preface, Federal Councillor Alain Berset wrote, “The report also demonstrates that racism is a structural problem. Changes are required in many areas of life – such as at work, when looking for housing or in public life – to enable all people, regardless of their origin, religious affiliation or nationality, to participate in society on an equal basis.”<sup>5</sup> The number of consultations related to religion has increased from 4 to 50 between 2008 and 2018.<sup>6</sup>

The “Survey on Diversity and Coexistence in Switzerland” (VeS) of the Federal Statistical Office (FSO) is another relevant report based on a regular representative survey of the permanent resident population between 15 and 88 years of age. In 2019, results for 2018 were published.<sup>7</sup> In a catalogue of questions with negative

1. Edited by the association [humanrights.ch](http://humanrights.ch) and the Federal Commission against Racism (EKR) of the Federal Department of Home Affairs, the report is published in German, French, and Italian. It evaluated 278 counselling cases on racial discrimination. These were compiled by the 24 counselling centres in the counselling network from all regions of Switzerland in the Documentation System on Racism (DoSyRa), <https://www.ekr.admin.ch/publikationen/d602/1340.html> (Access date: 4 January 2020).

2. “Racism Incidents from Counselling Practice”, p. 7.

3. *Ibid.* p. 14.

4. Every two years, the Anti-Racism Unit of the Federal Department of Home Affairs publishes a report entitled “Racial Discrimination in Switzerland”. It is published in German, French, Italian, and English. For more information, see: “Bericht ‘Rassistische Diskriminierung in der Schweiz’, Eidgenössisches Departement des Innern, <https://www.edi.admin.ch/edi/de/home/fachstellen/frb/berichterstattung-und-monitoring/bericht-rassistische-diskriminierung-in-der-schweiz-.html>, (Access date: 4 January 2020).

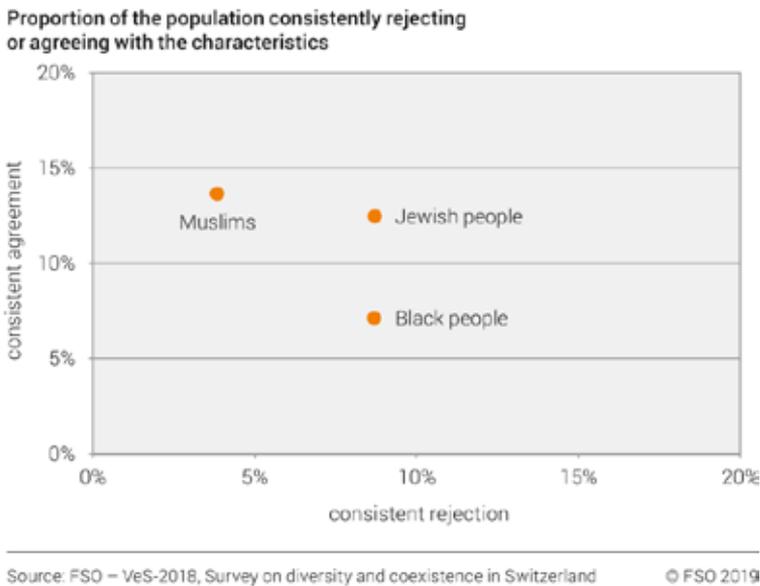
5. “Racist Discrimination in Switzerland 2018”, p. 4.

6. *Ibid.* p. 37. The report also refers to a pilot study conducted by the Research Institute gfs Bern in 2017, according to which 83 per cent of the Muslims surveyed agreed with the statement that persons of Muslim affiliation are discriminated against in Switzerland. In the last 12 months, more than half of the interviewees “have experienced discrimination on the basis of their Muslim group membership, either themselves or with people in their environment” (*Ibid.*, p. 131).

7. “Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland (VeS): results 2018”, Bundesamt für Statistik, February 2019, <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/bevoelkerung/migration-integration/zusammenleben-schweiz.asserdetail.7466706.html>, (Access date: 10 January 2020).

stereotypes about Muslims, 14 per cent of those questioned considered the descriptions “fanatical, aggressive, oppressing women, and not respecting human rights” to be accurate. Four per cent rejected these attributions. In comparison with other groups, the rejection rate for negative attributions is particularly low. (Fig 1)

### Attitudes towards negative characteristics attributed to the groups, 2018



**Figure 1:** Attitudes towards negative characteristics attributed to the groups.<sup>8</sup>

The VeS survey also formed two indices from the assessment of further statements: “hostility towards Muslims” and “mistrust of Islam”. (Figure 2) Due to methodological changes, the data from the pilot surveys from 2010 to 2014 are not directly comparable with the FSO data from 2016 and 2018. According to these data, 11 per cent of those surveyed in 2018 were hostile towards Muslims. In addition, 29 per cent of the population had a negative attitude towards Islam.

The KONID Survey 2019, a representative survey on the role of religious and social identities, revealed that one in two Muslims stated that they had been discriminated against on the basis of their religious identity. The experience of discrimination stemmed more from the general category “Muslims” than from the denominational directions. “This corresponds to the already known insight that in Germany and Switzerland discrimination and exclusion of people of Muslim religious affiliation are generalising categorisations, stereotyping and exclusion on

8. Ibid. p. 9.

the basis of the attribution of the religious affiliation ‘Muslim’.<sup>9</sup> Such attributions are also likely to play a role in discrimination in the housing market. A large-scale field experiment in Switzerland showed *“that people with Kosovar and Turkish names are generally less frequently invited to view apartments in Switzerland than people with typical names from Switzerland or neighbouring countries. This constitutes ethnic discrimination by landlords in Switzerland. Since the fictitious applicants have identical characteristics, alternative explanations are not necessary”*.<sup>10</sup>

## Hostility towards Muslims and mistrust of Islam

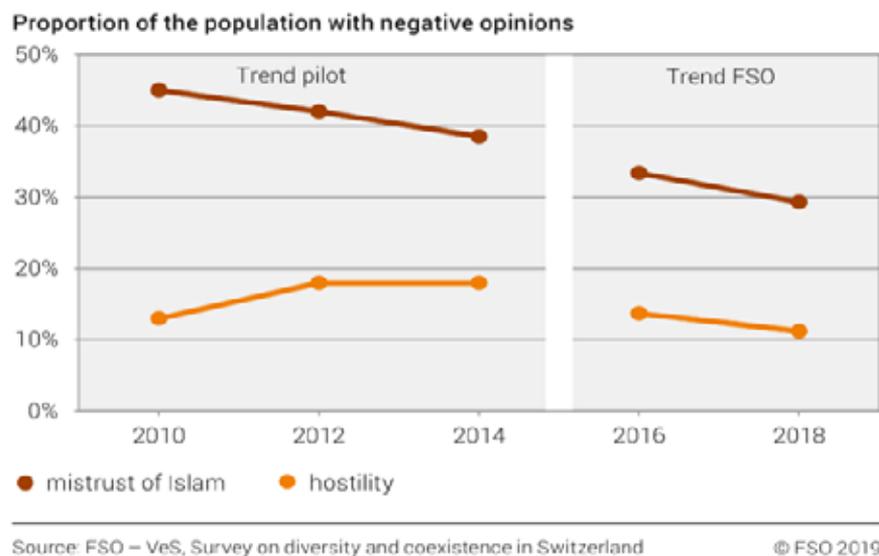


Figure 2: Proportion of the population with negative opinions towards Muslims and mistrust of Islam.<sup>11</sup>

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

The National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) offers workshops and events on topics such as Islamophobia. When asked, they find that women wearing head-

9. Antonius Liedhegener, Gert Pickel, Anastas Odermatt, Alexander Yendell & Yvonne Jaeckel, “Wie Religion ‘uns’ trennt – und verbindet: Befunde einer Repräsentativbefragung zur gesellschaftlichen Rolle von religiösen und sozialen Identitäten in Deutschland und der Schweiz 2019”, (Zenodo, Leipzig, Lucerne: 2019), p. 21, <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3560792>, (accessed 11 January 2020).

10. Daniel Auer, Julie Lacroix, Didier Ruedin, and Eva Zschirnt, “Ethnische Diskriminierung auf dem Schweizer Wohnungsmarkt”, (BWO, Grenchen: 2019), p. 15, <https://www.bwo.admin.ch/bwo/de/home/Wohnungsmarkt/studien-und-publikationen/diskriminierung-auf-der-schweizer-wohnungsmarkt.html>, (accessed 11 January 2020).

11. Ibid. p. 10.

scarves regularly experience discrimination of various kinds: comments, threats, and assaults by people they do not know (often older local people) on the street, on public transport, or when shopping. In Lausanne, for example, according to the GRA chronology, a 14-year-old schoolgirl wearing a headscarf in the metro was described by an elderly man as a “slut” and “Muslim filth”. She was told she should “return to her country”.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, according to the NCBI, there are obvious or suspected difficulties due to Islamophobia in finding accommodation, apprenticeships, internships, and jobs. In workshops with young people, it is noticeable that little expertise is available and Islamophobic stereotypes are widespread. Ignorance, fear, and prejudices are experienced against Muslim refugees from Syria or Afghanistan, for example. Family structures, values, religion, and practices are met with rejection and cultural practices are regarded as religious. This does not only concern young people, but also specialists in asylum care, social counselling, or teachers.

In the nationwide women’s strike of 14 June 2019, participating Muslim women were mobbed by other women because of their headscarves.<sup>13</sup>

## Employment

In 2018, a woman visited a counselling centre because she had been discriminated against by the Regional Employment Centre (RAV) because of her headscarf. She was accused of not wanting to work and told that she would have found a job long ago without a headscarf. An interview with a superior was also unsuccessful. She received less unemployment benefit because of the discriminatory allegations and got into financial difficulties.<sup>14</sup>

In May 2018, it became known that the staff of the courts in Basel will be prohibited from wearing religious symbols such as headscarves or crosses during hearings. The regulation was triggered by the application of a Muslim trainee who had applied for a traineeship and used a photo with a headscarf for this purpose.<sup>15</sup>

At a post office branch, an employee was allowed to wear a headscarf at the counter. According to a newspaper report, this was justified with a “constitutional

---

12. “Chronology”, GRA Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism, 27 March 2019, <https://chronologie.gra.ch/chronology/3985/>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

13. “Meldungen zu Rechtsextremismus und Rassismus in der Schweiz”, Hans Stutz, 14 June 2019, <https://hansstutz.ch/meldungen-zu-rechtsextremismus-und-rassismus-in-der-schweiz/genf-67>, (Access date: 11 January 2020); Meral Kaya, “Rassismus am Frauen\*streik”, Neue Wege, 9 December 2019, <https://www.neuewege.ch/rassismus-am-frauenstreik>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

14. “Racism Incidents from the Counselling Practice January to December 2018”, p. 15.

15. Andreas Schwald, “Basel schert aus: Gerichte verbieten Kopftuch und Kreuz an Verhandlungen”, bz Basel, 23 May 2018, <https://www.bzbasel.ch/basel/basel-stadt/wegen-muslimischer-bewerberin-basler-gerichte-verbieten-kopftuch-und-kreuz-132600699>, (Access date: 10 January 2020).

right to the preservation of freedom of belief and conscience”.<sup>16</sup> The Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) also allow the wearing of headscarves at the counter. However, the headscarf must match the colour of the uniform. White headscarves can be worn by Muslim women in Solothurn hospitals. In the canton of Geneva, however, it is forbidden to wear a headscarf - or other religious symbols - in public service. These regulations were brought up because of SVP politician Hermann Lei, who considers the headscarf to be “not a religious symbol”. Rather, he said, it stood for “the oppression of women”.<sup>17</sup>

## Education

In September 2018, it was reported that the Federal Court rejected an appeal against the invalidation of an initiative to ban headscarves in schools in the canton of Valais. In 2017, the SVP had demanded in a popular initiative that the wearing of the headscarf be banned in schools in the canton of Valais. The cantonal parliament had declared the initiative invalid on the grounds that it contradicted fundamental rights. The initiators lodged an appeal, but the Federal Supreme Court ruled that wearing the headscarf was an expression of a religious belief protected by the constitution. Therefore, restricting students in their religious beliefs would be a serious violation of this principle.<sup>18</sup>

In June 2019, Jean-Luc Addor submitted the parliamentary initiative “Students without Headgear in Public Schools”. He referred to the popular initiative in the canton of Valais, which had been declared invalid, and stressed that the Islamic headscarf was “above all a political sign” and “only remotely related to religion”.<sup>19</sup> Wearing the Islamic headscarf has “something shocking and therefore something antisocial”.<sup>20</sup> Hence in the school context the negative religious freedom of the other pupils and their parents had to be protected.<sup>21</sup>

Since 2006, there have been regular debates in Switzerland about Christmas parties in schools. In November 2019, the news that three Christmas carols at a school in St. Gallen’s Wil were cancelled due to complaints led to over 70 newspaper and television reports. In addition, there were four interventions in the city and

16. Lucien Fluri, “Post und SBB erlauben Personal, am Schalter Kopftuch zu tragen – das stört den Thurgauer SVP-Mann Hermann Lei”, *St. Galler Tagblatt*, 27 December 2019, <https://www.tagblatt.ch/schweiz/post-und-sbb-erlauben-personal-am-schalter-kopftuch-zu-tragen-das-stoert-den-thurgauer-svp-mann-hermann-lei-ld.1180983?reduced=true>, (Access date: 10 January 2020).

17. *Ibid.*

18. “SVP-Initiative für Kopftuchverbot an Schulen ist ungültig”, *Tages-Anzeiger*, 7 September 2018, <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/schweiz/standard/svpinitiative-fuer-kopftuchverbot-an-schulen-ist-ungueltig/story/23958254>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

19. “Schülerinnen und Schüler ohne Kopfbedeckung an öffentlichen Schulen”, *Parliamentary Initiative 19.454*, <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20190454>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

cantonal parliaments. SVP National Councillor Lukas Reimann demanded on Facebook, for example, that non-Christians should move to a “different cultural area”. Together with fellow campaigners, he carried out a political action in front of the school building.<sup>22</sup>

## Politics

SVP National Councillor Jean-Luc Addor submitted the parliamentary initiative “No Muslim Army Chaplains in Our Army” in 2017. In March 2019, the National Council decided not to follow the initiative.<sup>23</sup> In the debate, SVP National Councillor Erich von Siebenthal, for example, spoke out in favour of the initiative because Islam’s goal was “world domination”.<sup>24</sup>

In June 2019, SVP National Councillor Walter Wobmann used question time in the National Council to criticise the planned construction of an Islamic dome on the House of Religions in Bern.<sup>25</sup> His Egerkinger Committee finally found residents who objected to the building application. Wobmann argued that “the dome with the tower is, just like a minaret, a sign of political Islam and therefore should be forbidden.”<sup>26</sup>

On 11 September 2019, SVP National Councillor Walter Wobmann submitted the motion “Stop the Spread of Radical Islam in Switzerland”. The motion calls for the monitoring of all mosques, that no more visas be issued to foreign imams, and that mosques and other Islamic organisations receive no more funds from abroad.<sup>27</sup>

The popular initiative against the free movement of persons (“Limitation Initiative”) was recommended for rejection by the National Council and the Council of States in December 2019. A referendum will be held on 17 May 2020.<sup>28</sup> The popular initiative was submitted by the SVP and its leading organisation “Action for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland” (AUNS).

22. Lukas Reimann, Facebook, 26 November 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/lukasreimann>, (Access date: 1 December 2019).

23. “Keine muslimischen Armeeseelsorger in unserer Armee”, Parliamentary Initiative 17.485, <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaef?AffairId=20170485>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

24. “Vote von Siebenthal”, Das Schweizer Parlament, 13 March 2019, <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/amtliches-bulletin/amtliches-bulletin-die-verhandlungen?SubjectId=45587#votum4>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

25. “Dome with mini-minaret”, Question Time in the National Council, Question 19.5284, <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaef?AffairId=20195284>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

26. “Roger Braun, ‘Mini-Minarett’: Anwohner erhebt Einsprache gegen goldene Kuppel auf Berner Moschee”, Luzerner Zeitung, 19 June 2019, <https://www.luzernerzeitung.ch/schweiz/haus-der-religionen-in-bern-einsprache-gegen-bau-einer-kuppel-ld.1128693>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

27. “Stopp der Ausbreitung des radikalen Islams in der Schweiz!”, Das Schweizer Parlament, <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaef?AffairId=20194005>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

28. Christoph Nufer, “Stellvertreter-Debatte vor der Stunde der Wahrheit”, srf.ch, 9 December 2019, <https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/svp-begrenzungsinitiative-stellvertreter-debatte-vor-der-stunde-der-wahrheit>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

The AUNS advertises in a voting poster with a teacher wearing a headscarf and the slogan “Stop!”.<sup>29</sup> Another advertisement uses the slogan “No to the Islamisation of Switzerland” for the popular initiative.<sup>30</sup>

## Media

In April 2018, the imam of the mosque in Wil (canton of St. Gallen) was naturalised by the city parliament. This path became necessary because a former SVP politician, who had already been convicted of multiple instances of racial discrimination on the grounds of anti-Islamic statements,<sup>31</sup> had objected to the naturalisation council’s approval of the application for naturalisation.

There has been resistance and widespread media coverage against the mosque, which opened in 2017, since the new building project became known in 2006. The naturalisation of the imam led to almost 100 media reports in 2018. This led to various Islamophobic statements and personal defamations of the imam. For example, Saïda Keller-Messahli, who is considered by journalists to be an expert on Islam, also took part in the debate. Her accusations were rejected by the Security and Justice Director of the canton of St. Gallen as “sweeping and unsubstantiated”.<sup>32</sup>

In a letter to the editor, SVP Cantonal Councillor Bruno Dudli called for the imam not to be naturalised, as it could not be assumed that he would tell the truth due to his religious affiliation. The SVP politician warned the city parliament not to let itself be lulled by the superficial “drivel” of the imam: “In order to conceal the true intentions of their religion, Muslims may deceive and even lie to the ‘infidels’ with the blessing of Allah and Mohammed.” Imams are even worse: “Since the beginnings of Islam, imams have been trained to consciously deceive and lie to the ‘unbelievers’ about the true intentions of Islam. Deception, guile, conspiracy, cheating, stealing and killing are nothing but means to the cause of Allah”. Finally, the SVP politician perfidiously concluded on the alleged Islamic requirement of deception (“Taqiyya”): “And if [imam, ow] Bekim Alimi denies this principle, then it is precisely a practical application of this tactic.”<sup>33</sup>

In the context of a complaint to the Swiss Press Council, the newspaper editors justified the publication of the letter to the editor, as it represented a frequently expressed attitude and fear. Such a political stance should have been allowed freedom

29. *Schweizerzeit*, 20 December 2019, p. 9.

30. *Schweizerzeit*, 6 December 2019, p. 5.

31. “Reports on Right-Wing Extremism and Racism in Switzerland, Wil SG”, Hans Stutz, 5 April 2018, <https://hans-stutz.ch/mteilungen-zu-rechtsextremismus-und-rassismus-in-der-schweiz/wil-sg-0>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

32. Jörg Krummenacher, “Die aufwühlende Einbürgerung von Imam Alimi”, NZZ, 5 April 2018, <https://www.nzz.ch/schweiz/die-aufwuehlende-einbuengerung-von-imam-a-ld.1374438>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

33. Bruno Dudli, “Die Krux mit der ‘Taqiyya’”, *Wiler Zeitung*, 17 March 2018, <https://www.tagblatt.ch/ostschweiz/wil/die-krux-mit-der-taqiyya-ld.579355>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

of expression, even if the content was assumed to be discriminatory. In its statement in August 2019, the Press Council followed the argumentation of the editors. The Press Council does not know whether the “Taqiyya” exists in the alleged form but considers the content of the letter to the editor to be “a fairly widespread political opinion”. Therefore, in weighing the information content against the danger of discrimination, it does not want to prevent relevant information in order to avoid possible discrimination. The complaint was dismissed.<sup>34</sup>

In June 2019, the Press Council upheld a complaint against a report about another imam, as unsubstantiated allegations were made, information was withheld, and sources were unjustifiably anonymised.<sup>35</sup>

In September 2019, Pastor Dr. Christine Dietrich was elected to the Church Council of the Protestant Reformed Church of Basel-Stadt. Since then, due to protests inside and outside the church, an ongoing debate with over 70 media contributions has developed.<sup>36</sup> For several years, the pastor was editor and at times solely responsible for the Islamophobic blog “Politically Incorrect” (PI-News).<sup>37</sup>

In February 2007, she gave a programmatic sermon on life in the biblical end times and the “disregarding” of the coming disaster in the form of “Islamic fascism”. She asked whether one would decide in time to defend oneself. The Bible demanded a “clear yes or no”, it was not an option to “simply wait for the catastrophe”.<sup>38</sup> Thus she travelled to Brussels on 11 September 2007, where the hard core of European Islamophobes met for the illegal demonstration “Stop the creeping Islamisation of Europe”,<sup>39</sup> whereupon she was accepted into the PI editorial staff.<sup>40</sup>

In November 2007, a well-known author left PI because of “sectarian aberrations” in the editorial department, where people thought they were “in possession of

34. “Diskriminierungsverbot / Menschenwürde / Leserbriefe”, Statement of the Swiss Press Council 38/2019, 26 August 2019, [https://presserat.ch/complaints/38\\_2019/](https://presserat.ch/complaints/38_2019/), (Access date: 11 January 2020).

35. “Quellenbearbeitung / Unterschlagen wichtiger Informationselemente / Sachlich nicht gerechtfertigte Anschuldigungen / Diskriminierung”, Statement of the Swiss Press Council 16/2019, June 2019, [https://presserat.ch/complaints/16\\_2019/](https://presserat.ch/complaints/16_2019/), (Access date: 11 January 2020).

36. Jonas Hoskyn and Benjamin Rosch, “Eine Frau redet sich ins Elend: Pfarrerin mischte bei einem rechtsextremen Anti-Islam-Blog mit”, bz Basel, 30 September 2019, <https://www.bzbasel.ch/basel/basel-stadt/eine-frau-redet-sich-ins-elend-pfarrerin-mischte-bei-einem-rechtsextremen-anti-islam-blog-mit-135724229>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

37. Thomas Knellwolf, “Tapfere Christine’: Doppelleben einer Schweizer Pfarrerin”, Tages-Anzeiger, 17 September 2011, <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/schweiz/standard/tapfere-christine-doppelleben-einer-schweizer-pfarrerin/story/11053969>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

38. Christine Dietrich, “Hooray, We’re Going Down?!? Zu Joël 2,1-11, Reading text: Rev 3,14-22”, Sermon in the Reformed Church Altdorf, 18 February 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20071116063901/www.reformiertealtdorferpredigten.com/Predigt54.htm>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

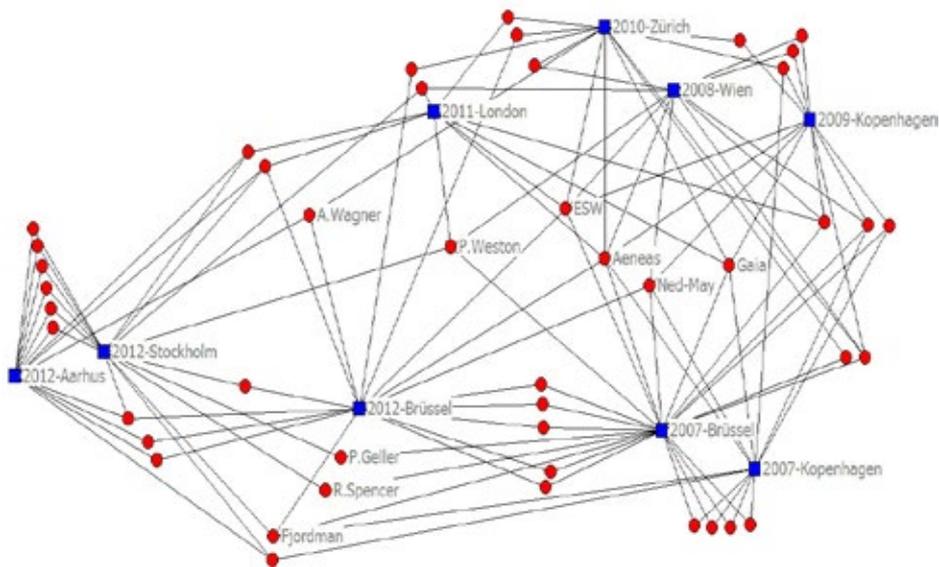
39. “Brüsseler Spitzen”, PI-News, 11 September 2007, <http://www.pi-news.net/2007/09/bruesseler-spitzen/>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

40. Oliver Wäckerlig, “Das Fanal von Fangen. Der Schweizer Minarettediskurs - Ursachen und Folgen”, (Master’s thesis, AV Akademikerverlag, Saarbrücken: 2014), p. 228, <https://www.zora.uzh.ch/id/eprint/92420/>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

the truth” and almost drove each other into a delusion “which hopefully will never have an impact in real life”.<sup>41</sup>

In December 2007, when Dietrich’s involvement with PI was the subject of discussion and criticism in the Swiss media, she reacted on 8 December 2007 with the PI article “Fundamental Problems”. In it, she regretted that “fundamentalism” had become a dirty word in Europe and defended the “confessing church”, which “stands up for Christianity (against Islam)”.<sup>42</sup> on 16 December 2007, she wrote a contribution to reports about a priest who was injured in a knife attack in Turkey. “In Turkey (...) another Christian priest was stabbed - third Advent in Turkish.”<sup>43</sup>

In 2008, Dietrich took part as a representative of PI in the secret annual meeting of the transatlantic self-styled “Counterjihad” in Vienna.<sup>44</sup> (Figure 3)



**Figure 3:** The meetings of the “Counterjihad” in the period 2007-2012 with the key players. Author’s own presentation.<sup>45</sup>

41. Stefan Niggemeier, “Die ‘sektenähnlichen Verhältnisse’ von PI”, stefan-niggemeier.de, 5 November 2007, <http://www.stefan-niggemeier.de/blog/598/die-sektenaehnlichen-verhaeltnisse-von-pi/>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

42. Christine Dietrich, “Fundamentale Probleme”, PI-News, 8 December 2007, <http://www.pi-news.net/2007/12/fundamentale-probleme/>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

43. Oliver Wäckerlig, “Das Fanal von Wangen”, p. 229. Here Islam is drawn as bloodthirsty in contrast to a peaceful Christian Advent season.

44. Ned May, “Slouching towards Vienna”, Gates of Vienna Blog, 16 May 2008, <http://gatesofvienna.blogspot.com/2008/05/slouching-towards-vienna.html>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

45. For more information, see: Oliver Wäckerlig, “Vernetzte Islamfeindlichkeit. Die transatlantische Bewegung gegen ‘Islamisierung’. Events – Organisationen – Medien”, (Transcript, Bielefeld: 2019), p. 58ff., <https://www.transcript-verlag.de/media/pdf/60/33/85/oa9783839449738.pdf>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

In May 2009, Dietrich held the opening speech at the “Anti-Islamisation Congress” in Cologne to right-wing radicals and gave them her blessing.<sup>46</sup> In August, as PI spokeswoman, she called on television for freedom of opinion for the FPÖ politician Susanne Winter, who was convicted of incitement to hatred in Austria because she had described the Prophet Mohammed as a “child molester” who had written the Koran “in the context of epileptic seizures”. She warned against an “Islamic immigration tsunami” and also demanded that “Islam” should be “thrown back” on the other side of the Mediterranean. As Dr. Dietrich of PI, the pastor defended the FPÖ politician by saying that Islam oppresses women, abuses children for hatred, kills homosexuals, and persecutes Jews.<sup>47</sup>

In 2010, the secret “Counterjihad” annual conference took place in Switzerland. Dietrich participated again for PI and showed the participants Zurich with the Grossmünster. SVP National Councillor Lukas Reimann spoke about the success of the minaret construction ban and representatives of the extreme right-wing English Defence League (EDL) showed how they use hooligans to mobilise for Islamophobic rallies.<sup>48</sup>

When Anders Breivik, motivated by Islamophobia, massacred left-wing youth in July 2011, he did so inspired by the texts of the Norwegian right-wing extremist Peder “Fjordman” Jensen, among others.<sup>49</sup> His texts have also been published on PI-News and he has also been a guest of Dietrich in Switzerland, as the *Spiegel* reported.<sup>50</sup> Due to media pressure after the Breivik terror, Dietrich had to withdraw from PI-News in September 2011.

In 2019, the CDU politician Walter Lübcke was the target of an assassination attempt. This was due to a 2015 statement on refugee policy, which was scandalised by PI-News, among others, and triggered a continuing controversy.<sup>51</sup>

In November 2019, Swiss television staged a meeting of the SVP National Councillor Lukas Reimann with the imam of the mosque in Wil (“Together on the sofa”) on the topic of “10 years of minaret ban”.<sup>52</sup> Reimann had spoken out against the naturalisation of the imam in 2018, as he considered his claim to religious free-

---

46. Michael Stürzenberger, “Eine moderne Jeanne d’Arc”, PI-News, 18 May 2009, <http://www.pi-news.net/2009/05/eine-moderne-jeanne-darc>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

47. Wäckerlig, “Das Fanal”, p. 230f.

48. Ibid., p. 214f.

49. Wäckerlig, “Vernetzte Islamfeindlichkeit”, p. 70-75.

50. Markus Feldenkirchen and Holger Stark, “Islamophobie: ‘Uns brennt der Hintern’. Interne Protokolle zeigen, wie die Führung des umstrittenen Blogs ‘Politically Incorrect’ über die Anschläge von Norwegen denkt”, *Der Spiegel*, No. 39 2011.

51. Matern Boeselager, “So hasserfüllt war die rechtsextreme Kampagne gegen den erschossenen CDU-Politiker”, *VICE*, 4 June 2019, <https://www.vice.com/de/article/mb85bq/walter-luebcke-tot-so-hasserfullt-war-die-rechtsextreme-kampagne-gegen-erschossenen-cdu-politiker>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

52. “10 Jahre Minarett-Verbot – Ein Treffen in der Moschee Wil”, SRF 1 Regional Journal Eastern Switzerland, 29 November 2019, <https://www.srf.ch/news/regional/ostschweiz/10-jahre-minarett-verbot-ein-treffen-in-der-moschee-wil>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

dom to be a denial of integration.<sup>53</sup> Contrary to the facts - but matching the story - the television report claimed that the anti-minaret initiative had its origin in Wil.<sup>54</sup>

Reimann, who fought for years against the building of the new mosque in Wil, could claim without contradiction: “I was never against a mosque, only against a minaret.” The tenor of the report was that “the impact of the initiative was that it had no impact.” The Muslims were well-integrated and did not mind the ban on minarets. Not a word about Islamophobia. Also, in a review in the *Luzerner Zeitung*, Saïda Keller-Messahli stated that the anti-minaret initiative had had no effect and that Muslims who denounced the minaret ban as “Islamophobic” would merely cultivate a “victim discourse”.<sup>55</sup>

In the debate about his naturalisation, she also imputed a “victim mentality” to the imam of Wil, who took it upon himself to describe an attitude test published by the newspaper as “humiliating”. According to Keller-Messahli, this victim mentality is an instrument of “all Islamists”.<sup>56</sup>

Another review of “10 years of minaret ban” did not focus on Islamophobia, but on the growing number of Muslims in Switzerland and the continued construction of mosques “though without minarets”. Since then “the matter” has calmed down and the debates have become “more differentiated”, without going into further details.<sup>57</sup>

A systematic survey of media reporting on Muslims in Switzerland from 2009 to 2017 was conducted at the University of Zurich on behalf of the Federal Commission against Racism FCR.<sup>58</sup>

Since 2015 there has been an increasing concentration on the topics of “radicalisation” and “terror”, whereas the topics of “successful integration” and “everyday life”, which “reflect the living environment of the majority of Muslims in Switzerland”, remain marginal in reporting. Since 2009, there has been a steady increase in contributions with a distancing tonality towards Muslim actors in Switzerland. This is particularly problematic where they are linked to generalisations. In *Weltwoche* this affects

53. Lukas Reimann, Facebook, 5 April 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/lukasreimann>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

54. For more information, see: Wäckerlig, “Das Fanal von Wangen”.

55. Kari Kälin, “Zehn Jahre Minarett-Verbot: Die Gegner lagen mit ihren Warnungen turmhoch daneben”, *Luzerner Zeitung*, 23 November 2019, <https://www.luzernerzeitung.ch/schweiz/zehn-jahre-minarett-verbot-die-gegner-lagen-mit-ihren-warnungen-turmhoch-daneben-ld.1171125>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

56. “Der Imam toleriert radikale Prediger”, *Tagblatt*, 1 April 2018, <https://www.tagblatt.ch/ostschweiz/integration-bekim-alimi-toleriert-radikale-prediger-ld.1015171>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

57. “Islam in der Schweiz. 10 Jahre Minarett-Verbot: Rückblick auf eine hart umkämpfte Debatte”, *Swissinfo Editorial Office*, 29 November 2019, [https://www.swissinfo.ch/ger/islam-in-der-schweiz\\_10-jahre-minarett-verbot-rueckblick-auf-eine-hart-umkaempfte-debatte/45393798](https://www.swissinfo.ch/ger/islam-in-der-schweiz_10-jahre-minarett-verbot-rueckblick-auf-eine-hart-umkaempfte-debatte/45393798), (Access date: 11 January 2020).

58. Patrik Ettinger, “Qualität der Berichterstattung über Muslime in der Schweiz”, A study commissioned by the Federal Commission against Racism EKR, (Bern: 2018), <https://www.ekr.admin.ch/dokumentation/d107/1331.html>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

48 per cent of contributions. In addition, the people affected, i.e. Muslim actors, are predominantly the objects of reporting: “In 55% of the contributions, they are written about without having their say, in another 25% they only have their say in the margins of the contribution”.<sup>59</sup> And where Muslims have their say, this often happens “in a polarising setting”, among others with Saïda Keller-Messahli, who has established herself “as a critic of the Muslim umbrella organisations in Switzerland”.<sup>60</sup> Representatives of these umbrella organisations, on the other hand, rarely get a chance to speak.<sup>61</sup>

## Justice System

In February 2019, a referendum in the canton of Geneva approved a law governing the state’s relationship with religious communities. It prohibits “visible religious characteristics” in the civil service and in plenary sessions of the legislature. Religious events on public grounds require special permission, which can be prohibited if “conspicuous religious features” are displayed.<sup>62</sup>

The Geneva Constitutional Court partially revised the laity law passed in November 2019. Members of Parliament are likely to continue to wear religious symbols such as headscarves. Parliamentarians as members of a legislative body would not represent the state, “but embody society and its pluralism”.<sup>63</sup>

In February 2019, a petition by Giorgio Ghiringhelli was dealt with in the canton of Ticino. Ghiringhelli, who initiated the Ticino ban on facial coverings, wanted to ban prayers in public spaces “that contain hate messages, discriminate against other religions and violate the anti-racism penalty norm”. As an expert, Sami Aldeeb confirmed that Muslim prayer falls under it.<sup>64</sup> The Ticino cantonal parliament rejected the petition.

There has been a ban on facial coverings in the canton of Ticino since 2016. So far, almost exclusively football and ice hockey fans have been fined. In 2017, the *Landsgemeinde* in the canton of Glarus rejected an initiative to ban facial masking. After a referendum, facial coverings have been banned in the canton of St. Gallen since 2019.<sup>65</sup> No one has ever been fined.<sup>66</sup>

---

59. Ibid., p. 6.

60. Ibid., p. 6.

61. Ibid., p. 6.

62. Marianne Weymann, “Genfer streiten über Trennung von Kirche und Staat”, ref.ch, 5 February 2019, <https://www.ref.ch/news/genfer-streiten-ueber-trennung-von-kirche-und-staat>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

63. “Genfer Parlamentarier dürfen religiöse Symbole tragen”, kath.ch, 27 November 2019, <https://www.kath.ch/newsd/genfer-parlamentarier-duerfen-weiterhin-religioese-symbole-tragen/>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

64. Kari Kälin, “Burka-Bekämpfer will Muslimen Beten auf der Strasse verbieten”, Aargauer Zeitung, 13 February 2019, <https://www.aargauerzeitung.ch/schweiz/burka-bekaempfer-will-muslimen-beten-auf-der-street-for-bid-134080490>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

65. “Racial Discrimination in Switzerland”, p. 134.

66. Katharina Brenner, “Ein Papiertiger’ – die Bilanz nach einem Jahr Burkaverbot im Kanton St.Gallen: Da war nichts”, Tagblatt, 23 December 2019, <https://www.tagblatt.ch/ostschweiz/ein-papier-tiger-the-balance-after-a-year-ban-on-burka-in-the-canton-stgallen-there-was-nothing-ld.1180289?reduced=true>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

The popular initiative “Yes to the ban on facial coverings” was submitted in 2017 by the Egerkinger Committee. It demands that no one in Switzerland should cover their face in public space.<sup>67</sup>

The Federal Council rejected the popular initiative and in March 2019 compared it with an indirect counterproposal: “The proposed regulation at law level requires people to show their faces when it is necessary for identification purposes, for example in the areas of migration, customs, social security, and passenger transport.”<sup>68</sup> At the end of 2019, the National Council and the Council of States approved and extended the counterproposal.<sup>69</sup>

## Internet

The blog “Les observateurs” was founded in 2012 by Uli Windisch and quickly turned to the topic of Islam. It is closely linked to French “alternative” media such as “Riposte laïque”.<sup>70</sup>



**Figure 4:** ASVI laments on Facebook the deletion of a Facebook page of the Identitarian movement.<sup>71</sup>

67. “Eidgenössische Volksinitiative ‘Ja zum Verhüllungsverbot’”, Federal Chancellery – People’s Initiatives, <https://www.bk.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vis465t.html>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

68. “Ja zum Verhüllungsverbot Volksinitiative und indirekter Gegenvorschlag”, Das Schweizer Parlament, 15 March 2019, <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaefit?AffairId=20190023>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

69. Linda Koponen, “Burka-Initiative im Nationalrat: Nein zu Kleidervorschriften, Ja zur Gleichstellung”, NZZ, 12 December 2019, <https://www.nzz.ch/schweiz/burka-initiative-nationalrat-sagt-nein-zu-clothing-regulations-yes-for-equality-ld.1528029>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

70. Thomas Jammet and Diletta Guidi, “Observer Les Observateurs. Du pluralisme médiatique au populisme anti-islam, analyse d’un site de ‘réinformation’ suisse et de ses connexions”, Réseaux, 2 (2017), p. 241-271, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-reseaux-2017-2-page-241.htm>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

71. ASVI, Facebook, 18 May 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/Association-Suisse-Vigilance-Islam>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

Mireille Vallette's "Association Suisse Vigilance Islam" (ASVI) operates in a similar environment and on Facebook, focuses, among other things, on the topics of the extreme right-wing identity movement. (Figure 4)

Social media such as Facebook and Twitter continue to provide a breeding ground for the dissemination of Islamophobic propaganda and are the starting point and resonance space for media storms. The call by SVP National Councillor Andreas Glarner to contact a teacher in 2019 and complain about a holiday arrangement for a Bairam caused quite a stir.<sup>72</sup>

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

In 2018, money was collected via the campaign platform of the SVP-related magazine *Schweizerzeit*<sup>73</sup> for Giorgio Ghiringhelli's "Stop Islam Award" (changed to "Stop Islamisation Award" after criticism).<sup>74</sup> A partner of the platform is the Egerkinger Committee,<sup>75</sup> which was founded for the anti-minaret initiative adopted in 2009. It remained active thereafter under the leadership of SVP National Councillor Walter Wobmann. The committee is currently behind the popular initiative "Yes to the ban on facial coverings". Wobmann was the winner of the Award 2018, as was Mireille Vallette with her organisation "Association Suisse Vigilance Islam" (ASVI).

Other candidates for the award were Uli Windisch from *lesobservateurs.ch* and Saïda Keller-Messahli from the "Forum for a progressive Islam" (FFI).<sup>76</sup> Keller-Messahli, author of an anti-Islamic pamphlet, places Muslim self-organisation in mosques and associations under general suspicion.<sup>77</sup> Together with the FFI and internationally networked with "secular Muslims", she stands for a paternalistic laicism that is opposed to the historical experience in Switzerland and wants to ban religion into the private sphere.<sup>78</sup>

One of the winners of the "Stop Islamisation Award 2019" was Sami Aldeeb,<sup>79</sup> who is considered an expert by the foundation Zukunft CH,<sup>80</sup> which warns "that

72. "Meldungen zu Rechtsextremismus und Rassismus in der Schweiz", Hans Stutz, 4 June 2019, <https://hansstutz.ch/meldungen-zu-rechtsextremismus-und-rassismus-in-der-schweiz/oberwil-lieli-ag-2>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

73. On the role of *Schweizerzeit* in the minaret discourse, see: Wäckerlig, "Das Fanal von Wangen", p. 86-91.

74. "Swiss Stop Islamisation Award 2018", Tells-Geschoss.ch, [https://www.tells-geschoss.ch/crowdfunding-projekt/?tx\\_projekt\\_domain\\_model\\_projekt\[id\]=20](https://www.tells-geschoss.ch/crowdfunding-projekt/?tx_projekt_domain_model_projekt[id]=20), (Access date: 11 January 2020).

75. Wäckerlig, "Vernetzte Islamfeindlichkeit", p. 190-192; Wäckerlig: "Das Fanal von Wangen".

76. For more information, see: "Swiss Stop Islamisation Award 2018".

77. Reinhard Schulze, "Populist Stereotypes, Bazonline, 27 February 2018, <https://www.bazonline.ch/schweiz/standard/populistische-stereotypen/story/10685618>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

78. Wäckerlig, "Vernetzte Islamfeindlichkeit", p. 287-291.

79. "Voici les trois lauréats du 'Swiss Stop Islamization Award 2019', *lesobservateurs.ch*, 22 July 2019, <https://lesobservateurs.ch/2019/07/22/voici-les-trois-laureats-du-swiss-stop-islamization-award-2019/>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

80. For more information about "Zukunft CH", see: Wäckerlig, "Vernetzte Islamfeindlichkeit", p. 195f.

every Muslim is obliged to wage a ‘Holy War’ in order to subject the whole world to the law of Allah, be it through inner effort, migration, births, or even terror”.<sup>81</sup> The foundation organises Islamophobic events, most recently in October 2019 on “Heimittel Migration?” with Thilo Sarrazin, and distributes corresponding brochures.<sup>82</sup>

## Voici les trois lauréats du “Swiss Stop Islamization Award 2019”



La rédaction

 Partager sur Facebook

 Twitoor

 Imprimer

 1

Article publié le 22.07.2019

**Ndlr. Giorgio Ghiringhelli nous signale que les médias du Système n'ont pas publié ce communiqué. Nous le faisons volontiers.**

Communiqué de presse (18 juillet 2019)

**Figure 5:** “Swiss Stop Islamisation Award 2019” post published on the blog “Les observateurs”<sup>83</sup>

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

In 2019, the Swiss Centre for Islam and the Society (SZIG) of the University of Fribourg each held a three-day workshop on “Religion in the Workplace. A Theme for Employees and Employers” in French and German. According to the organisers, the workshops showed a great potential for sensitisation: experts and Muslims met at eye level, so that the focus was not only on the aspect of religion or the headscarf. This helped to reduce asymmetries and prejudices.

81. “Warum Zukunft CH?”, Stiftung Zukunft CH, <https://www.zukunft-ch.ch/ueber-uns/stiftung/>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

82. “Fachbroschüren”, Stiftung Zukunft CH, <https://www.zukunft-ch.ch/publikationen/fachbroschueren/>, (Access date: 22 January 2020).

83. La rédaction, “Voici les trois lauréats du ‘Swiss Stop Islamization Award 2019’”, Les observateurs, 22 July 2019, <https://lesobservateurs.ch/2019/07/22/voici-les-trois-laureats-du-swiss-stop-islamization-award-2019>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

In 2019, the Centre for Religious Studies at the University of Lucerne prepared a practice-oriented guide on Islam, schools, and society.<sup>84</sup>

The National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) offers workshops on topics such as Islamophobia. The NCBI also offers courses for refugees and specialists or for young Muslim women wearing headscarves in dealing with Islamophobia, especially when looking for an apprenticeship or for integration in general. The touring exhibition on the subject of “Muslim-Jewish friendships” travelled to almost ten locations.<sup>85</sup> The NCBI offers various writings on Islam.<sup>86</sup>

IRAS COTIS, the Interreligious Study Group in Switzerland, also has projects in the areas of education, encounters, and networking in order to reduce prejudices and fears and thus contribute to social cohesion in Switzerland.<sup>87</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The reports on the naturalisation of the imam of Wil, the confusion surrounding the election of a long-standing anti-Islam activist to the Basel City Church Council, or the way the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ban on minaret construction in the Swiss Federal Constitution were handled have shown how social actors struggle for orientation in Switzerland. On the one hand, we find ourselves in a culture war, where every media report on provocative topics such as Islam, climate change, or Trump can trigger a media storm orchestrated by digital combat troops with unforeseeable psychological and physical consequences for those involved. On the other hand, attempts are being made to trivialise the social division and the systematic attacks on religious and social peace from the ranks of the SVP and its satellites in order to avoid having to take a position and question the political status quo. The following points are recommended:

- As media analyses and consulting practice show, the years of debate on Islam have apparently not led to more knowledge about Islam in the public and in media editorial offices, but rather to the hardening of prejudices and acceptance of conspiracy theories that are as well-known as known to be

---

84. Andreas Tunger-Zanetti, Jürgen Endres, Silvia Martens and Nicole Wagner, “Ramadan kommt immer so plötzlich. Islam, Schule und Gesellschaft. Ein Leitfaden mit Hinweisen und Ideen für die berufliche Praxis”, (Lucerne: University of Lucerne Centre for Religious Studies: 2019), <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3086011>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

85. For more information, see: “Jüdisch – Muslimische”, Respect, <http://www.ausstellung.ncbi.ch/>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

86. “Ich spreche für mich”, NCBI, [https://www.ncbi.ch/wp-content/uploads/2019-04-03\\_ich-spreche-fuer-mich\\_layout\\_ansicht.pdf](https://www.ncbi.ch/wp-content/uploads/2019-04-03_ich-spreche-fuer-mich_layout_ansicht.pdf), (Access date: 11 January 2020); “ABC des Islams”, NCBI, 15 April 2013, <https://www.ncbi.ch/Produkt/abc-des-islams/>, (Access date: 11 January 2020); Ratgeber “Muslimische Kinder in der Schule”, NCBI, <https://www.ncbi.ch/de/projekte/vorurteile-abbauen/islamophobie/muslimische-kinder/>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

87. For more information, see: “Verein”, Iras Cotis, <https://www.iras-cotis.ch/verein/>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

false. The consequence of this is that hostility of all kinds becomes an undifferentiated “criticism of Islam” that is trivialised. The refusal to perceive and name Islamophobia is reflected in the arbitrary distinction between “anti-Muslimism” to be condemned and unproblematic “Islam criticism” or “mistrust of Islam”. Thus the discriminatory ban on building minarets, exclusionary dress codes, or the defamation of a blameless imam become legitimate political positions,<sup>88</sup> while “anti-Muslimism” is projected from the centre of society onto marginalised racists. Public authorities should therefore reconsider their conceptual narrow-mindedness, because racial discrimination is not only present when it is racially motivated.<sup>89</sup>

- The interpretation of the factor analysis of the VeS, which leads to the indices “Hostility towards Muslims” and “mistrust of Islam”, also shows this blind spot: “anti-Muslimism” is based on the assessment of three statements that have no “explicit reference to religion or religious practices”.<sup>90</sup> But one of the three reads: “Muslims should be banned from practising their religion in Switzerland”. The index “mistrust of Islam” should therefore refer only to statements about religion. Besides a statement according to which Muslims everywhere wanted to enforce the “Sharia”, the explicit religious references are missing in “Muslims strive for world domination” and “Islamist terrorists find strong support among Muslims”. The distinction between “anti-Muslimism” and “mistrust of Islam” is also inappropriate here.
- In statistical evaluations Islamophobia should be evaluated separately.

## Chronology

- **01.01.2019:** A ban on facial coverings is in force in the canton of St. Gallen.
- **10.02.2019:** A law on secularity is adopted in a referendum in the canton of Geneva.
- **19.02.2019:** A petition for a public ban on prayer is rejected in the canton of Ticino.
- **15.03.2019:** The Federal Council rejects the popular initiative “Yes to the ban on facial coverings” and puts forward an indirect counterproposal.
- **04.06.2019:** An SVP politician triggers a media storm against a female teacher via Facebook because of a Muslim holiday regulation.

88. Cf. also this acquittal regarding racial discrimination through the separation of Islam and Muslims: “Flyer ‘Sie sind in Gefahr!’, Eidgenössische Kommission gegen Rassismus EKR, 2018, <https://www.ekr.admin.ch/dienstleistungen/d524/2018-015N.html?db=N&keyword5=52&p=1>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

89. Michael Bischof, “Widersprüchliche Realität. Integrationsförderung und Rassismusbekämpfung – zwei Seiten derselben Medaille?“, *Tangram* 42/2018, p. 42–45, <https://www.ekr.admin.ch/d730.html>, (Access date: 11 January 2020).

90. VeS, p. 10.

- **14.06.2019:** Muslim women participating in a women's strike are accosted by other women because of their headscarves.
- **18.07.2019:** The "Swiss Stop Islamisation Award 2019" is presented to three people.
- **04.09.2019:** A long-time PI-News activist is elected to the church council of the Protestant Reformed parish of Basel-Stadt.
- **26.09.2019:** The Council of States approves the Federal Council's counterproposal to the popular initiative "Yes to the ban on facial coverings".
- **26.11.2019:** The Geneva Constitutional Court partially revises the law on secularity. Members of parliament are allowed to continue to wear signs of religious affiliation such as headscarves.
- **29.11.2019:** Various media report on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the minaret construction ban.
- **12.12.2019:** The National Council also approves the counterproposal to the popular initiative "Yes to the ban on facial coverings" and adds various points to improve equality.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**THE UNITED  
KINGDOM**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

---

ARISTOTLE KALLIS



## The Author

**Aristotle Kallis** is a professor of modern and contemporary history at Keele University, UK. His research interests revolve around fascism and the contemporary radical/far right in transnational terms, with a particular focus on the ‘mainstreaming’ of extreme views and on the processes that facilitate taboo-breaking language and behaviour. He has published extensively on the history of fascism and the radical right; on the rise of far-right extremism in Greece and Germany; on the mainstream-extremism nexus with regard to a number of key themes in the ideology of the far right including nationalism, sovereignty, and attitudes to particular groups of ‘others’; and on Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. He has provided written and oral evidence to committees of the UK Parliament and participated with international NGOs in international forums such as the UN Human Rights Council, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE/OHDIR. He is the author of the chapter on Islamophobia in the *Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right* (OUP 2018), and co-editor of the report *Violent Radicalisation and Far-Right Extremism in Europe* (Hedayah and SETA, 2018). Email: aristotlekallis@gmail.com

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

**To cite this report:** Aristotle Kallis: *Islamophobia in the United Kingdom: National Report 2019*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019*, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

## Executive Summary

The year 2019 was a period of high political drama in the UK, with elections, a new prime minister, the ongoing saga of Brexit negotiations, and an extensive debate about the impact of Islamophobia on public life. Yet, in spite of the welcome news attention and public debate, the year was sadly a vintage one for Islamophobia. Another rise in religiously and racially aggravated hate incidents was recorded. A stream of allegations about systemic Islamophobic behaviour within the ranks of the Conservative Party produced spectacular declarations, suspensions, and promises of an enquiry - but the public interest faded away towards the end of the year, once the electoral and Brexit whirlwind had come to an end.

The government's refusal to accept the legal definition of Islamophobia proposed by the 2019 All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, in spite of its ongoing traction among political parties and public institutions, stalled the momentum generated in 2018. This is particularly regrettable in the light of the growing threat posed by far-right radicalism, on- and offline; a threat that has finally been acknowledged as the most serious challenge to social cohesion and as the primary source of violent extremism. Notwithstanding more robust social media scrutiny of hate messaging, and in spite of restrictions and bans on high-profile figures of the Islamophobic far right, anti-Muslim prejudice and hate continue to have deep roots in mainstream society.

It is especially frustrating that mainstream political and media institutions are using either 'liberal' arguments (e.g. freedom of expression, defence against censorship and authoritarianism) or the security/terrorism card to stifle legal and political progress in the direction of combatting anti-Muslim racism in contemporary Britain. But Islamophobia cannot simply be played down or wished away. Events in 2019 illustrated how it has become woven into all spheres of public and private life. Action would need to be multilayered, consistent, and unswerving, responsive to both short-term needs and longer-term change goals.

In addition, as it becomes clear that banning or correcting divisive material alone cannot counter the profusion of hate narratives on- and offline, the need to strengthen people's resistance to hate messaging and content is the most robust longer-term strategy for combatting the normalisation of Islamophobia in everyday life.

## Country Profile

### EIR 2019

**Country:** United Kingdom

**Type of Regime:** Unitary Parliamentary Constitutional Monarchy

**Form of Government:** Parliamentary Democracy headed by a Prime Minister leading the Executive

**Ruling Parties:** Conservative Party (since 2010)

**Opposition Parties:** Labour Party (official opposition); Liberal Democrats; regional parties (Scottish National Party; Plaid Cymru; Democratic Unionist Party; Sinn Féin); Green Party; Brexit Party (since 2019)

**Last Elections:** 2019 Parliamentary Election: the Conservative party won 43.6% of the vote and 365 out of 650 parliamentary seats in the House of Commons, achieving a parliamentary majority of 86; the Labour Party came a distant second with 32.1% and 202 seats, with the Liberal Democrats third (in votes) with 11.5% but only 11 seats; and the Scottish National Party fourth with 3% but with a larger share of 48 seats (all in Scotland). The recently formed Brexit Party, which had emerged as the largest party in the May 2019 elections for the European Parliament, managed only 2% of the vote and did not elect any MPs.

**Total Population:** 66,182,000 (2011 census)/66,775,286 (2019 estimate)

**Major Languages:** English (98%), Scots (2.5%), Welsh (1%); Scottish Gaelic, Cornish, and Irish (all <0.1%)

**Official Religion:** Church of England (Anglican) in England only; no established religion in other parts of the United Kingdom

**Statistics on Islamophobia:** The upward trend in Islamophobic incidents in the UK continued in the figures for 2018-19, with the number of cases recorded in official statistics rising by 10%, religion-specific cases by 3%, and those recorded under the racial flag up by 11%. There were 3,530 recorded cases of Islamophobic hate crime, representing 47% of all recorded religiously motivated hate crime offences.

The percentage of Muslim adults (16 or over) who were victims of religiously motivated crime in 2017-18 was nearly double that recorded for any other religious group (0.8%). In the London metropolitan area, Islamophobic hate crimes fell by 10% in 2019 (average of 100 incidents per month), albeit against the backdrop of a larger-than-usual rise in 2018. Still, 'racist and religious hate crime' overall figures grew by 11% in 2019. (Metropolitan Police, Hate Crime Dashboard)

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** In 2019, nearly 79,000 racist incidents were reported to the police, up 11% from 2018.

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Christianity (59.5%), No religion (25.7%), Islam (4.5%), Hinduism (1.3%), Sikhism (0.7%), Judaism (0.4%), Buddhism (0.4%), Other (0.4%) (2011 census)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 2,786,635 (2011 census or 4.8% of

total UK population), 3,372,966 (2017-18 Annual Population Survey); 47% are British-born

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), Muslim Association of Britain

**Main NGOs Combatting Islamophobia:** Muslim Council of Britain, Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND), Tell MAMA UK, Islamophobia Watch, Islamic Human Rights Commission, Islamophobia Response Unit (ISU), Cage, HOPE Not Hate

**Far-Right Parties:** British National Party (BNP), UK Independence Party (UKIP), National Front, English Democrats, British Democrats

**Far-Right Movements:** English Defence League (EDL), Britain First (deregistered in 2017), For Britain, Generation Identity, New British Union (NBU), Football Lads Alliance, Veterans Against Terrorism, Blood and Honour, British Movement

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** Combat 18, National Action (proscribed in 2016)

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** None, but schools have the right to determine their own dress code, which has led to some cases of hijab ban for particular student age groups.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

## Introduction

There was a brief moment during the tumultuous 2019 in the UK when Islamophobia was thrust into the forefront of public debate. On 18 June 2019, at the height of the Conservative Party's leadership campaign following the resignation of Prime Minister Theresa May, a televised debate between the candidates for the position produced a memorable exchange that pushed Islamophobia to the top of the political agenda. Sajid Javid, then home secretary and a contender for the top job, candidly called the other candidates to commit to holding a full-fledged inquiry into Islamophobia in the Conservative Party. His seemingly off-the-cuff question threw the others off balance and generated what seemed like a full, unconditional commitment from all contenders. Among those who agreed was Boris Johnson, the eventual winner of the contest and now UK prime minister.



**Figure 1:** Conservative Party leadership candidates Boris Johnson, Jeremy Hunt, Michael Gove, Sajid Javid, and Rory Stewart during the BBC TV debate (18 June 2019).<sup>1</sup>

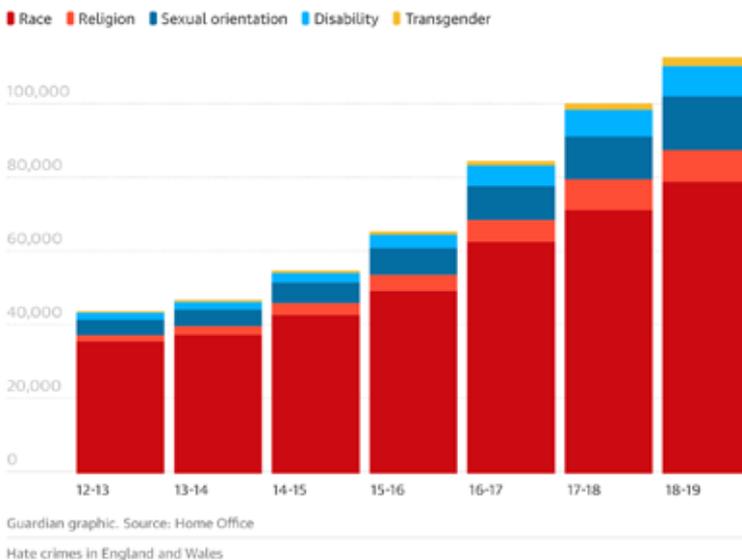
The reason why Islamophobia was uncharacteristically on the menu of the Conservative leadership's televised debate was the series of allegations about endemic Islamophobic prejudice inside the ranks of the Conservative Party repeatedly made during the year. The agreement of the contenders for the leadership of the party to hold the enquiry on these allegations was in response to the media exposure that the issue had received. The momentum from the publication of the report on Islamophobia by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims in December 2018 had created considerable traction centred on the report's definition of Islamophobia as 'anti-Muslim racism' and the calls for this definition to be officially accepted by the government. Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, the most outspoken and consistent campaigner against anti-Muslim prejudice inside the Conservative Party who was also a member of the APPG, worked

1. "Tory Leadership on Islamophobia", 18 June 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/live/uk-politics-48678723>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

harder than ever to keep the spotlight on the issue. In May, the government rejected the definition, offering instead a vague promise to consider the issue seriously.<sup>2</sup>

Yet damning allegations about systemic anti-Muslim prejudice in the party kept coming up. As the focus of the probe shifted from the top echelon and MPs to middle-ranking and local party officials as well as ordinary members, further evidence was not hard to get. At the televised debate, leadership contenders were responding more to an internal party crisis than to a more meaningful shift in public concern for Islamophobia. But the public debate of Islamophobia that peaked dramatically on that night of June, faded away afterwards. Johnson went on to triumph in the elections, riding the wave of a ‘get Brexit done’ narrative that in hindsight resonated with enough voters to give him the working parliamentary majority that had eluded his predecessor May. In January 2020, miraculously given the turmoil of 2019, public debate on Brexit and pretty much everything else effectively ceased. The arc of history bent unpredictably but the line moved at breakneck speed to a spectacular anticlimax. In their ennui with Brexit, it seems that the British public really longed for silence and lighter distractions. Amidst the Brexit whirlwind, the flash of interest in Islamophobia (or indeed in anti-Semitism, accusations of which afflicted the Labour party) did not stand a chance.

**There were 103,379 hate crimes recorded in England and Wales in 2018-19, with increases seen in all categories of motivation**



**Figure 2:** Official hate crime figures per category of motivation (2012-19).<sup>3</sup>

2. Lizzie Dearden, “Government Rejects Proposed Islamophobia Definition but Will Give Issue ‘Consideration’, James Brokenshire Says”, *The Independent*, 16 May 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/islamophobia-meaning-definition-theresa-may-government-terror-islam-a8916926.html>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

3. Ben Quinn, “Hate Crimes Double in Five Years in England and Wales”, *The Guardian*, 15 October 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/oct/15/hate-crimes-double-england-wales>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

Brexit has coincided with a significant rise in hate incidents; and this trend continued with a further increase in 2019 (See Figure 2). ‘Taking back control’ touched on immigration of course but also on identity, nativism, border control, and racial, ethnic, and cultural otherness. It unleashed exclusionary undercurrents and legitimised them as extensions of the fabled public mandate from the June 2016 referendum. Meanwhile the threat from far-right hate campaigns, intimidation, physical attacks, and terror threats reached an alarming all-time high in 2019. Official Home Office figures recognised that this is now the primary referral source for the government’s Prevent counter-radicalisation programme, overcoming the long-fetishised category of ‘Islamist terrorism’.<sup>4</sup> Right-wing extremism is now recognised as the fastest growing threat to UK security.<sup>5</sup> What is more, in 2019, it was identified for the first time as the most significant threat by a majority of Britons.<sup>6</sup> A 2019 survey of four non-violent far-right political movements in the UK (British National Party, Britain First, Generation Identity, For Britain) has underlined (a) the ideological and discursive overlaps between non-violent and violent far-right organisations or individuals; and (b) the ways in which the on- and offline output from non-violent organisations can influence others down the path of violent action.<sup>7</sup> The hate crime and Prevent referral figures relating to the far right are only the (growing) tip of a disturbingly deep iceberg that traversed the extremist-mainstream boundaries.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Physical and Verbal Attacks

In the wake of the attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, the then home secretary Javid announced a significant increase of funding for strengthening the security at UK mosques. Furthermore the government launched a new £5m dedicated security training programme for places of worship and initiatives to improve security arrange-

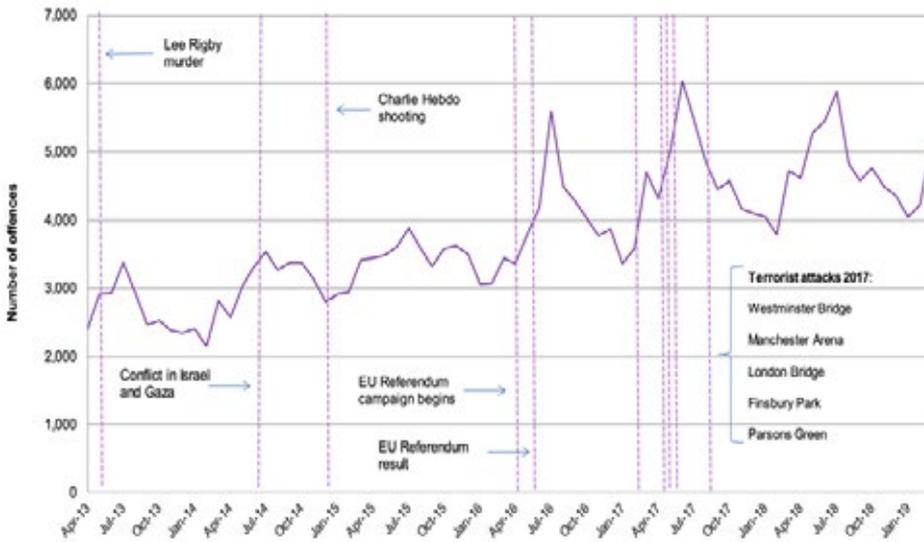
4. Charles Hymas, “Half of Terror Arrests Are White for First Time Amid Rise in Far-Right Extremist Threat”, *Telegraph*, 5 September 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/09/05/half-terror-arrests-white-first-time-amid-rise-far-right-extremist/>, (Access date: 29 January 2020).

5. Hellen Warrell, “Rightwing Extremism Poses Fastest Growing Threat to UK, Say Police”, *Financial Times*, 19 September 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/82f2c89e-daac-11e9-8f9b-77216ebe1f17>, (Access date: 29 January 2020).

6. Andrew Woodcock, “Britons Believe Far-Right Groups a Greater Threat to Society than Islamist Extremism, Poll Says”, *The Independent*, 13 July 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-far-right-terrorism-hope-not-hate-poll-islamism-a9003826.html>, (Access date: 29 January 2020).

7. *Narratives of Hate: The Spectrum of Far-right Worldviews in the UK* (London: Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2019), [https://institute.global/sites/default/files/inline-files/Far%20Right%20report%20V10\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://institute.global/sites/default/files/inline-files/Far%20Right%20report%20V10_final_0.pdf), (Access date: 20 January 2020).

ments at mosques during the period of the Ramadan.<sup>8</sup> This was welcome news, as the first recorded physical attack in the UK occurred within a few hours after the New Zealand massacre and was followed by a distressing increase (by 593%) in anti-Muslim hate crimes across the UK - the second-highest spike recorded since 2012.<sup>9</sup> But the government funding announcement also highlighted how, even after the increase, this form of financial support remains limited in comparison to a separate government scheme protecting synagogues and Jewish schools - £14m versus £2m for all other faiths combined.



**Figure 3:** Hate crime spikes in the UK (2013-Jan 2019). Please note that the chart does not capture the effect of the Christchurch attacks.<sup>10</sup>

Attacks on mosques, Islamic schools, and cultural/community centres have consistently represented a relatively small slice of offline anti-Muslim hate incidents. Statistics from 2018 show that the largest share of such incidents occur in public spaces (including transport), at work, and business places or in private properties.<sup>11</sup> Still the attacks on places of religious and cultural significance for a community are complex for they represent both physical/targeted and performative/symbolic assaults. Three consecutive acts of vandalism were recorded against the Masjid-e-Sa-

8. "Places of Worship: Security Funding", Hansard, Vol: 659, 7 May 2019, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-05-07/debates/21C4190A-5CAB-43DA-8360-AA944753E549/PlacesOfWorshipSecurityFunding>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

9. Vikram Dodd, "Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes Soar in UK after Christchurch Shootings", *The Guardian*, 22 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/mar/22/anti-muslim-hate-crimes-soar-in-uk-after-christchurch-shootings>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

10. "Hate Crime Statistics", House of Commons Library, 28 October 2019, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8537/>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

11. *Normalising Hatred: Annual Report 2018*, TellMAMA, (London: Faith Matters, 2019).

laam Mosque in Preston in April. Around the same time, two mosques in Scotland (Dundee and Elgin) and another in the north of England (Blackburn) suffered from similar acts of vandalism.<sup>12</sup> Vandals have also repeatedly targeted Muslim cultural spaces, such as the Mitree Bahr Academy in Newcastle, targeted in January and again in March 2019; and the North Brixton Islamic Cultural Centre in London, on the very last day of 2019.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 5:** Vandalism against the Elgin Mosque.<sup>14</sup>

12. Jake Keith, “Worshippers Left Saddened by Vandalism to Dundee Mosque”, *Courier*, 9 April 2019, <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/local/dundee/867302/worshippers-left-saddened-by-vandalism-to-dundee-mosque/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Jack Aitchison, “Scottish Mosque Targeted with ‘Allah is a Paedo’ and Swastika Graffiti in Sick Attack”, *Daily Record*, 21 May 2019, <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/scottish-mosque-targeted-allah-paedo-16179025>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Jonathan Grieve, “Fencing Plan for Theft-Hit Mosque”, *Lancashire Telegraph*, 11 October 2019, <https://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/17961845.fencing-plan-theft-hit-mosque/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

13. “Swastika Graffiti Painted in Islamic School by Vandals”, MCB Press Release, 26 January 2019, <https://mcb.org.uk/general/swastika-graffiti-painted-in-islamic-school-by-vandals/>, (Access date: 31 January 2020); Muhammad Mussa, “UK: Islamic Academy Attacked for 2nd Time in 3 Months”, *Anadolu Agency*, 26 March 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/uk-islamic-academy-attacked-for-2nd-time-in-3-months/1430731>, (Access date: 23 January 2020); Seth Jacobson, “Anti-Islamic Slogans Spray-Painted Near Mosque in Brixton”, *The Guardian*, 1 January 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jan/01/anti-islamic-slogans-spray-painted-near-mosque-in-brixton>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

14. “Graffiti Sprayed on Mosque Walls in Hate-Fuelled Attack”, *STV News*, 21 May 2019, <https://news.stv.tv/north/1437920-police-hunt-for-man-after-racist-graffiti-sprayed-on-mosque>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).



**Figure 6:** Graffiti sprayed on the walls of Mitree Bahr Academy Islamic School in Newcastle upon Tyne.<sup>15</sup>

Arson attacks were also recorded. A site earmarked for a mosque and then a community centre in the English town of Skegness was ravaged by fire twice - in February and again in October, the second time only days after the Muslim community had submitted its application for planning permission following four years of fundraising.<sup>16</sup> In August, a vehicle was left burning outside a mosque in Dewsbury in an incident that the police classified as an arson attempt against a religious site.<sup>17</sup> A plot to attack the Islamic Centre in Glenrothes, Scotland, by a far-right extremist was foiled by the police.<sup>18</sup> Although they represented only 5% of all hate crime incidents,<sup>19</sup> arson attacks have a devastating effect on local communities, not only in terms of the terror effect that they unleash but also because they shatter community life and leave behind a void in identity and everyday practice that often takes years of considerable effort to repair.

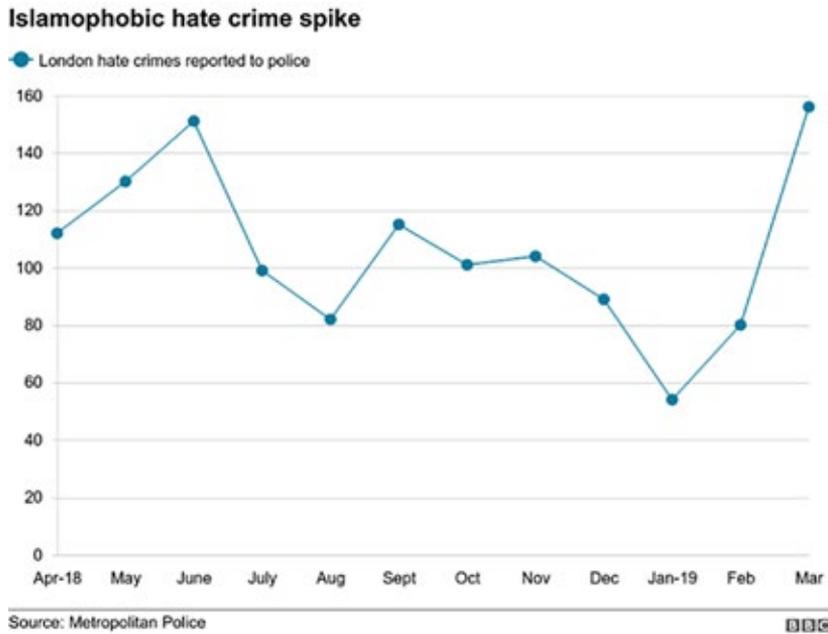
15. "Swastika Graffiti Painted in Islamic School by Vandals", The Muslim Council of Britain, 26 January 2019, <https://mcb.org.uk/general/swastika-graffiti-painted-in-islamic-school-by-vandals/>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

16. Joseph Verney, "Arson Attack at Site Earmarked for Skegness' First Mosque", *Lincolnshire Reporter*, 8 October 2019, <https://lincolnshirereporter.co.uk/2019/10/arson-attack-at-site-earmarked-for-skegness-first-mosque/>, (Access date: 30 January 2020); "Skegness Mosque Plans Submitted to Council", *BBC News*, 30 September 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lincolnshire-49880587>, (Access date: 28 January 2020).

17. Ben Abbiss, "Car Burned out in Suspected Arson Attack Outside Mosque", *Examiner*, 2 August 2019, <https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/car-burned-out-suspected-arson-16690262>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

18. "Man Accused of Plotting Terror Attack on Scottish Mosque to Stand Trial Next Year", *Herald*, 5 December 2019, <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/18082430.man-accused-plotting-terror-attack-scottish-mosque-stand-trial-next-year/>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

19. "Hate Crime, England and Wales 2018/19", Home Office, p. 10.



**Figure 7:** The impact of the Christchurch, NZ attack on Islamophobia hate crime in London.<sup>20</sup>

By comparison, attacks against persons represented a significantly higher percentage (36%) of the officially recorded hate crimes in 2018/19 in England and Wales. Of those, the majority did not result in physical injury on the targeted person(s). Religious motives were behind more than 8% of all recorded incidents (a total of 8,566 during the most recent census period that ran from April 2018 to March 2019). Still the actual number of Islamophobic attacks against persons is widely understood to be much higher because of the intersectional nature of victimisation (for example, incidents recorded under the ‘race’ flag - the largest category of hate crime representing c.80% of all cases - very often involve some element of religious and ethnic motive, and vice versa).<sup>21</sup> March saw a significant spike in such attacks that was overwhelmingly connected to the massacre in New Zealand (See Figure 4). Hours after the Christchurch incidents, a man was first subjected to verbal attack and was then physically assaulted by a group of men who approached him in a car near a mosque in Whitechapel, east London. He sustained injuries after having been hit with a hammer.<sup>22</sup> In June, two security staff of the Dar Ul-Isra Mosque in Cardiff, Wales suffered minor injuries following an attack by two men

20. ‘Hate crime in London soars since Christchurch attacks’, BBC, 1 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-48120278>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

21. Maureen McBride, *A Review of the Evidence on Hate Crime and Prejudice: Report for the Independent Advisory Group on Hate Crime, Prejudice and Community Cohesion*, SCCJR, No: 7, (University of Glasgow, Scotland: 2016), <https://www.sccjr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/A-Review-of-the-Evidence-on-Hate-Crime-and-Prejudice.pdf>, (Access date: 15 January 2020).

22. ‘Muslim Worshipper Assaulted at East London Mosque after NZ Attack’, *Aljazeera*, 16 March 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/muslim-worshipper-assaulted-east-london-mosque-nz-attack-190316092902959.html>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

armed with knives.<sup>23</sup> Another spike was seen in the wake of the London Bridge attack in November, the magnitude of which will be properly assessed in the months to come.

Only a relatively small number of hate incidents are reported by victims; fewer, especially low-intensity verbal attacks or intimidation attempts, make news headlines, and an even smaller number result in any kind of legal action. The case of the two women in traditional Islamic dress who were subjected to racist and Islamophobic abuse, followed by a vicious physical attack that left them with serious injuries at the South Ealing London Underground station in August<sup>24</sup> speaks volumes of the everyday vulnerability of Muslim persons - and especially women - even in the busiest public spaces.

## Employment

Despite welcome news that the employment gap chronically affecting ethnic minorities has been steadily reduced in the last five years (falling below ten percentage points in 2018),<sup>25</sup> in May 2019 a report presented to the UN Human Rights Council pointed to enduring racial discrimination and xenophobia in the UK. E Tendayi Achiume, special rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, noted how ‘race, ethnicity, religion, gender [and] disability status ... continue to determine the life chances and well-being of people ... in ways that are unacceptable and, in many cases, unlawful’.<sup>26</sup> In fact, recent research findings appear to corroborate the suspicion that, in spite of legislative initiatives and changing social beliefs, discrimination in the employment market based on religion, race, and ethnicity has remained largely the same as it was in the 1960s.<sup>27</sup> Employees with a Muslim background are half as likely to rise to management-level positions.<sup>28</sup> The salary gap continues to be significant, with London recording the highest disparity (21.7%) and workers from Bangladesh receiving c.20% less median pay per hour.<sup>29</sup>

23. Cathy Owen, “Cardiff Mosque Attack: ‘Imagine Two Young Muslims Attacked a Chapel Congregation with Knives’”, Wales Online, 3 June 2019, <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/cardiff-mosque-attack-imagine-two-16371381>, (Access date: 21 January 2020).

24. Vincent Wood, “Women ‘Attacked for Wearing Hijabs’ in London Suffer Possible Broken Ribs and Internal Bleeding”, *The Independent*, 3 September 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/women-attacked-wearing-hijab-london-ealing-btp-cctv-a9087086.html>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

25. “Labour Market Status by Ethnic Group”, ONS, 12 November 2019, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/labourmarketstatusbyethnicgroupa09>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

26. “Report: Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland”, UN Human Rights Council, Forty-first session (24 June-12 July 2019), p. 7, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/148/21/PDF/G1914821.pdf?OpenElement>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

27. “Nuffield College Oxford: ‘Are Employers in Britain Discriminating against Ethnic Minorities?’”, Centre for Social Investigation, [http://csi.nuff.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Are-employers-in-Britain-discriminating-against-ethnic-minorities\\_final.pdf](http://csi.nuff.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Are-employers-in-Britain-discriminating-against-ethnic-minorities_final.pdf), (Access date: 19 January 2020).

28. “Oral Evidence: Islamophobia, HC 1828”, House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 11 June 2019, <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/islamophobia/oral/103084.html>, (Access date: 15 January 2020).

29. Haroon Siddique, “Britain’s Ethnic Pay Gap: Workers of Bangladeshi Heritage Paid Least”, *The Guardian*, 9 July 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2019/jul/09/ethnic-pay-gap-bangladeshi-workers-earn-fifth-less-white-britons>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

Hate incidents continue to be recorded in workplaces. According to the TellMAMA figures for the most recent (2018) census period, 11% of all recorded cases occurred in places of work. Of these, discrimination and abusive behaviour constituted the two most common incidents.<sup>30</sup> Intersectionality between religion, race, ethnicity, and gender is once again a significant factor in explaining the significantly higher negative impact on particular subgroups.<sup>31</sup> For example, 64% of Muslim women in Scotland have reported Islamophobic incidents, nearly a quarter of which happened in the workplace.<sup>32</sup> In October, a Muslim woman of Pakistani origin was awarded £22,500 in compensation for suffering years of religious and racial abuse by her manager. She was subjected repeatedly to derogatory comments such as ‘you Pakis’ and to offensive responses to her observance of Ramadan as ‘a lot of bollocks to me’.<sup>33</sup> In the National Health Service, the majority of female staff have reported how the organisation’s dress code has affected the performance of their duties or has even influenced their decision as to what kind of career they could pursue given the limitations involving headscarves and the ‘bare below the elbows’ policy.<sup>34</sup> In June, another long drawn out case of religion-based discrimination reached its conclusion when the London South Employment Tribunal decided in favour of a worker in Eltham Crematorium, London, who had reported Islamophobic verbal abuse by their employer.<sup>35</sup>

## Education

For a number of years now, education has been flashing bright on the UK Islamophobia radar. From 2013 to 2017, allegations surrounding the so-called ‘Operation Trojan Horse’ in Birmingham fanned the flames of anti-Muslim prejudice, alleging nothing short of an extensive conspiracy to promote the ‘Islamisation’ of state

30. TellMAMA, *Normalising Hatred*, pp. 25, 27.

31. Memoona Tariqa and Jawad Syed, “Intersectionality at Work: South Asian Muslim Women’s Experiences of Employment and Leadership in the United Kingdom”, *Sex Roles*, No: 77, (2017), p. 510–522, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0741-3>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

32. “Nearly Two-Thirds of Muslim Women Witness Hate Crime in Scotland – Survey”, ITV, 21 March 2019, <https://www.itv.com/news/2019-03-21/nearly-two-thirds-of-muslim-women-witness-hate-crime-in-scotland-survey/>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

33. “Miss S Noreen v Recruitment Finder Limited, Employment Tribunal Case 3302860.2018”, 5 September 2019, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d933d9b40f0b65e5dbe04f0/Miss\\_S\\_Noreen\\_-v-\\_Recruitment\\_Finder\\_Limited\\_3302860-2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d933d9b40f0b65e5dbe04f0/Miss_S_Noreen_-v-_Recruitment_Finder_Limited_3302860-2018.pdf), (Access date: 28 January 2020); “£22.5k Payout for Muslim Woman Racially Abused by Her Employer”, TellMAMA, 7 October 2019, <https://tellmamauk.org/22-5k-payout-for-muslim-woman-racially-abused-by-her-employer/>, (Access date: 28 January 2020).

34. Abida Malik, Hafsa Qureshi, et al, “I Decided Not to Go into Surgery Due to Dress Code’: A Cross-Sectional Study within the UK Investigating Experiences of Female Muslim Medical Health Professionals on Bare Below the Elbows (BBE) Policy and Wearing Headscarves (Hijabs) in Theatre”, *BMJ Open*, 9/3 (2019), <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/9/3/e019954>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

35. Maggie Baska, “Crematorium Worker Wins Discrimination Claim after Manager’s Offensive Comments about Muslims”, *People Management*, 24 June 2019, <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/news/articles/crematorium-worker-wins-discrimination-claim-manager-offensive-comments-muslims>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

schools.<sup>36</sup> In 2019, it was once again education in the city of Birmingham that made it to the top of the news. Parkfield Community School and Anderton Park School witnessed angry weeks-long demonstrations by parents who objected to their children's enrolment in the recently introduced relationships and sex education lessons that touched on the LGBTQ+ subject. In November 2019, Birmingham City Council was eventually successful in getting a permanent court injunction against the protecting parents.<sup>37</sup> But the episode did little to calm already raw nerves and lessen suspicion on both sides of the cultural divide.<sup>38</sup> What is particularly relevant to this report is the framing of the demonstrations in Birmingham as a supposed proxy war between a 'tolerant Britain', on the one side, and 'backward religion', on the other.<sup>39</sup>

Even more alarmingly, the publicity given to the Birmingham demonstrations contributed to an appreciable increase in both Islamophobia and homophobic hate incidents in the Birmingham area, both inside and outside schools, with far-right organisations fanning the flames in the background.<sup>40</sup> The link between negative news publicity given to Muslims and increase in Islamophobic incidents has been amply demonstrated in the past;<sup>41</sup> but educational institutions in particular have recorded a number of different forms of Islamophobia, ranging from vandalism against the premises (particularly those directly linked to Muslim communities) to hostile or insensitive treatment by the teaching staff to bullying by fellow classmates.<sup>42</sup> When teenage student Idris Aslam was physically attacked by a group of teenagers who called him a 'terrorist' and had to be taken to hospital, the police response was to classify the incident as 'racial bias'. Idris's family complained about the apparent lack

36. Samira Shackle, "Trojan Horse: The Real Story Behind the Fake 'Islamic Plot' to Take over Schools", *The Guardian*, 1 September 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/01/trojan-horse-the-real-story-behind-the-fake-islamic-plot-to-take-over-schools>, (Access date: 27 January 2020).

37. Birmingham City Council v Shakeel Afsar, High Court Case no F90BM116, 26 November 2019, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Birmingham-CC-v-Afsar-No-3-2019-EWHC-3217-QB-Final.pdf>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

38. Josh Halliday, "Ministers Accused of 'Radio Silence' over LGBT School Protests", *The Guardian*, 20 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/sep/20/ministers-radio-silence-lgbt-school-protests-birmingham>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

39. Melanie McDonagh, "Should Muslim Parents Be Allowed to Challenge LGBT Lessons?", *Spectator*, 19 October 2019, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2019/10/should-muslim-parents-be-allowed-to-challenge-lgbt-lessons/>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

40. Eleanor Busby, "Hate Crimes in Schools in Region Affected by Anti-LGBT+ Protests Surge", *The Independent*, 4 August 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/lgbt-protests-school-lessons-hate-crimes-a9037401.html>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

41. "Normalising Hatred: Annual Report 2018", TellMAMA, p. 29-31; Shaista Aziz, "Islamophobic Attacks in the UK Leave Muslims Feeling Increasingly Anxious", *The Guardian*, 21 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/21/islamophobia-attacks-uk-muslims-christchurch-far-right>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

42. "Islamophobic Bullying Made School a Nightmare", BBC Three, 18 April 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbc-three/article/be8f4f0b-02aa-43d3-9924-f22c23263ecb>, (Access date: 27 January 2020); "Islamophobia in Schools: Children are Experiencing Hate Crime Too", JAN Trust, 2 September 2019, <https://jantrust.org/blog/islamophobia-in-schools-children-are-experiencing-hate-crime-too/>, (Access date: 27 January 2020).

of urgency or concern, as well as the local police's reluctance to classify the incident as Islamophobia. In August 2019, the family's appeal was upheld and the Independent Office for Police Conduct called the local police force to investigate the event fully.<sup>43</sup>

Prevent, part of the government's counter-terrorism strategy, has also had a polarising effect on educational institutions. Against the backdrop of fierce opposition by teacher and student organisations, in March 2019, the government announced a review of the programme. The decision was welcomed by its critics but the appointment of Lord Carlisle, a public defender of the programme, as head of the review body and the exclusion of past incidents from the review remit have caused concern that any reform initiatives coming out of the process will be superficial and inadequate.<sup>44</sup> In the meantime, Islamophobia continues to have a detrimental effect in educational institutions, often forcing Muslim students to conceal their identity and fostering a culture of fear and suspicion that goes against the very liberal principles that Prevent is meant to defend.<sup>45</sup>

## Politics

In July 2019, Boris Johnson was comfortably elected leader of the Conservative Party after a short leadership campaign. He instantly became prime minister of the UK - a position for which he renewed his mandate after winning, again very convincingly, the December 2019 snap national election. Always a controversial political figure, Johnson never shied away from stirring controversy or expressing controversial, even insulting views on a wide range of political and social issues. During 2018, Johnson was never far from making the headlines. In August, he published the infamous article likening women in niqab to 'letter boxes' and 'bank robbers'.<sup>46</sup> In spite of evidence that his article contributed to a significant (c.375%!) spike in anti-Muslim

43. Matt Jarram, "Police Told to Investigate the Way They Handled Racially-Aggravated Attack on Schoolboy", Nottinghamshire Live, 29 August 2019, <https://www.nottinghampost.com/news/nottingham-news/police-told-investigate-way-handled-3260001>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

44. Jamie Gieron, "Prevent Review Branded 'Superficial' as Past Decisions Overlooked", *The Guardian*, 16 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/sep/16/prevent-review-branded-superficial-as-past-decisions-overlooked>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

45. "Liberty Uncovers Secret Prevent Database", Liberty, 7 October 2019, <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/news/press-releases-and-statements/liberty-uncovers-secret-prevent-database>, (Access date: 15 January 2020); Nadine El-Enany, "Prevent Is Stopping Free Speech on Campus and Demonising Muslims", *The Guardian*, 1 July 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jul/01/prevent-stopping-free-speech-campus-demonising-muslims>, (Access date: 28 January 2020); Sham Qayyum, "In the Face of Fear and Loathing, Many British Muslims Feel They Must Play Hide and Seek with Their Identity", *Conversation*, 25 July 2019, <http://theconversation.com/in-the-face-of-fear-and-loathing-many-british-muslims-feel-they-must-play-hide-and-peek-with-their-identity-120705>, (Access date: 27 January 2020); Christos Boukalas, "The Prevent Paradox: Destroying Liberalism in Order to Protect It", *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 72, (2019), p. 467–482.

46. Boris Johnson, "Denmark Has Got It Wrong. Yes, the Burka Is Oppressive and Ridiculous – But That's Still No Reason to Ban It", *Telegraph*, 5 August 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/08/05/denmark-has-got-wrong-yes-burka-oppressive-ridiculous-still/>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

hate incidents,<sup>47</sup> and in the face of widespread criticism from all political forces and Muslim organisations, his meteoric rise to the top of UK politics continued unabated. Initially adamant that he would not back down from his ‘letter box’ comments, he finally offered an apology in November 2019.<sup>48</sup>

Johnson’s apology was also in response to a stream of allegations about Islamophobic incidents within the Conservative Party. In May, Baroness Warsi shared a dossier documenting 110 cases of racist and specifically Islamophobic content distributed online by members of the party at all levels. The election of Johnson as prime minister did very little to assuage fears among members of the UK’s Muslim communities about the government’s handling of Islamophobia.<sup>49</sup> Although the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) welcomed the opportunity to heal divisions and to ‘transform the government’s relationship ... with Muslim communities’ in the wake of his election as prime minister back in July,<sup>50</sup> his victory in the December national elections renewed fears that Islamophobia is ‘oven-ready’ for the Conservative Party and its majority government unless immediate and concrete action were to be taken.<sup>51</sup> During the election campaign, the MCB produced an election platform containing ten key pledges that ranged from tackling Islamophobia and improving engagement with the Muslim communities to safety at the workplace and equality of treatment in education, justice, and economic life.<sup>52</sup> Yet, as more and more instances of Islamophobic behaviour from members of the Conservative Party kept coming to the forefront, the MCB criticised the Tory party for developing a ‘blind spot for [anti-Muslim] racism’ and for its failure to engage meaningfully with the underlying problem.<sup>53</sup> The MCB had plenty of reasons to feel aggrieved. The list of Conservative

47. Jonathon Read, “Significant Spike” in Islamophobic Incidents after Boris Johnson’s Letterbox Remarks”, *The New European*, 2 September 2019, <https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/boris-johnson-islamophobic-remarks-about-muslim-veils-1-6247128>, (Access date: 22 January 2020).

48. “Boris Johnson ‘Won’t Apologise’ for Burka Comments”, *BBC News*, 7 August 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-45096519>, (Access date: 22 January 2020); Eleanor Langford, “Boris Johnson Finally Apologises for Comparing Women in Burqas to ‘Letter Boxes’”, *PoliticsHome*, 5 December 2019, <https://politicshome.com/news/uk/political-parties/conservative-party/boris-johnson/news/108393/boris-johnson-finally>, (Access date: 22 January 2020).

49. Aasma Day, “Boris Johnson Remaining Prime Minister Makes Me Feel I’m Not Welcome’ Muslims React to Tory Win”, *Huffington Post*, 15 December 2019, [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/racist-boris-johnson-remaining-prime-minister-makes-me-feel-im-not-welcome-in-this-country-anymore-muslims-react-to-conservative-victory\\_uk\\_5df3c7dee4b04bcba18488bd](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/racist-boris-johnson-remaining-prime-minister-makes-me-feel-im-not-welcome-in-this-country-anymore-muslims-react-to-conservative-victory_uk_5df3c7dee4b04bcba18488bd), (Access date: 20 January 2020).

50. “MCB Hopes for Unity as Mr Johnson Becomes the New Prime Minister”, *MCB Press Release*, 23 July 2019, <https://mcb.org.uk/press-releases/muslim-council-of-britain-hopes-for-unity-as-mr-johnson-becomes-the-new-prime-minister/>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

51. “Conservative Victory Makes British Muslims Fearful, Says Advocacy Group”, *Middle East Eye*, 13 December 2019, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/conservative-victory-makes-british-muslims-fearful-says-advocacy-group>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

52. “MCB Launches Cross-Party Election Pledges”, *MCB*, 12 November 2019, <https://mcb.org.uk/general/muslim-council-of-britain-launches-cross-party-election-pledges/>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

53. “General Election 2019: Muslim Council Criticises Tories over Islamophobia”, *BBC News*, 26 November 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2019-50561043>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

Party parliamentary candidates included Zac Goldsmith (who ran an Islamophobic campaign against Sadiq Khan during the London mayoral elections of 2016); and Bob Blackman, who has repeatedly shared Islamophobic content through his social media and in 2017 organised an openly anti-Muslim event in the parliament.<sup>54</sup> Ryan Houghton, (eventually suspended) Conservative candidate for Aberdeen North in Scotland, somehow managed to embody the broadest racist stereotype, combining Holocaust revisionism and homophobia with claims about alleged Muslim global conspiracies.<sup>55</sup> Allegations about on- and offline Islamophobic behaviour made by members of the party at all levels led to investigations and suspensions.<sup>56</sup> But revelations that some of those suspended had been subsequently reinstated in spite of showing no evidence of regret undermined how superficial the official party attitude to Islamophobic instances within its ranks was.<sup>57</sup>

These fears have been boosted by Johnson's decision, shortly after his national election victory in December 2019, to broaden the promised inquiry to include all forms of discrimination. This decision, as the MCB noted, was of course laudable in principle; but it also signalled a watering-down of the original focus on Islamophobia, whose endemic status within the Conservative Party had prompted calls for such an inquiry in the first instance.<sup>58</sup> But there was also considerable criticism directed at the government's choice of the person heading the enquiry. Professor Swaran Singh, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Warwick and former member of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), was immediately criticised for views he expressed in his online articles on racism in the UK and the Kashmir conflict in India.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, the focus on Islamophobia as a Tory-specific issue runs the risk of overshadowing its deeper roots in a much wider spectrum of the UK's political and social attitudes. In March, the leader of the Brexit Party (a party that emerged as the largest

54. "How Could Bob Blackman MP Host an Anti-Muslim Extremist in Parliament?", TellMAMA, 25 October 2017, <https://tellmamauk.org/how-could-bob-blackman-mp-host-an-anti-muslim-extremist-in-parliament/>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

55. Rowena Mason, "Tory Aberdeen Candidate Suspended over Holocaust Tweets", *The Guardian*, 19 November 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/19/tory-aberdeen-candidate-ryan-houghton-suspended-holocaust-tweets>, (Access date: 22 January 2020).

56. "Conservatives Suspend Members over Islamophobia Allegations", BBC News, 13 November 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-50398826>; and "Tories Reinstate Councillor Who Made Islamophobic Posts", New European, 22 November 2019, <https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/david-abbott-muslim-comments-houghton-regis-1-6389756>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

57. Shehab Khan, "Tories Accused of 'Sweeping Islamophobia under the Carpet' After Quietly Reinstating 15 Suspended Councillors", *The Independent*, 25 March 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tory-islamophobia-suspended-councillors-muslim-council-britain-a8838626.html>, (Access date: 14 January 2020).

58. Kevin Rawlinson, "Tories Accused of Ignoring Islamophobia After Dropping Inquiry", *The Guardian*, 17 December 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/dec/17/equalities-professor-to-head-tory-inquiry-in-to-discrimination-in-party>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

59. Swaran Singh, "Is Britain a Racist Country?", *Prospect*, 18 February 2016, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/immigration-i-dont-think-britain-is-racist>, (Access date: 14 January 2020); and "Kashmir: A Tale of Two Mothers", *Spiked*, 13 August 2019, <https://www.spiked-online.com/2019/08/13/kashmir-a-tale-of-two-mothers/>, (Access date: 27 January 2020).

party in the EU parliament elections in May with a 31.6% of the national vote), Catherine Blaiklock, was forced to resign after it emerged that she had repeatedly published extreme anti-Muslim material online in the past (See Figure 7).<sup>60</sup> Blaiklock had claimed, among other offensive comments, that Islam is incompatible with liberal western values; that it is synonymous with slavery and the submission of women; and that she wanted 'her country back' freed from 'acid attacks, mobs and mosques'.<sup>61</sup> Unsurprisingly for a party built on the traditions of xenophobia and hostility to immigration or multiculturalism, a significant number of the party election candidates were forced to resign over earlier Islamophobic comments, such as Mark Nash who had likened Islam to 'cancer' and called for mosques to be bulldozed.<sup>62</sup> But some also slipped through the very porous vetting net: Wendy Garcanz, MP candidate in Birmingham, retained her nomination in spite of her drawing a parallel between Islam and the rise of the Nazis in 1930s Germany in addition to habitually sharing items from known far-right sources.<sup>63</sup>



**Figure 8:** Islamophobic tweet by the first (now former) leader of the Brexit party, Catherine Blaiklock.<sup>64</sup>

60. "Brexit Party Founder Booted for Islamophobia Backs Boris Johnson's Tories", *New European*, 11 December 2019, <https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/brexit-party-founder-booted-for-islamophobia-endorses-boris-johnson-s-tories-1-6420047>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

61. David Lawrence, "Farage's Brexit Party Leader Quits after Hope Not Hate UnCOVERS Social Media Racism", *HopeNotHate (HnH)*, 20 March 2019, <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2019/03/20/farages-brexit-party-leader-quits-hope-not-hate-uncovers-social-media-racism/>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

62. Jonathon Read, "Abhorrent Racist' Brexit Party Candidate Was Announced 'in Error'", *New European*, 16 August 2019, <https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/brexit-party-candidate-mark-nash-announced-in-error-1-6219039>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

63. "Brexit Party Stands by Islamophobic Candidate in Birmingham", *HnH*, 4 November 2019, <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2019/11/04/brexit-party-stands-by-islamophobic-candidate-in-birmingham/>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

64. Mia Jankowicz, "Brexit Party founder blames immigration policy for Islamophobia", *The New European*, 26 September 2019, <https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/catherine-blaiklock-tweet-islamophobia-and-immigration-1-6292453>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

## Media

When it comes to media, it is arguably very hard to draw clear lines between the national and the inter-/trans-national domains. Recent reports of a well-orchestrated attempt to control the output of a network of existing far-right Facebook pages across the world and transform it into a potent operation that uses Islamophobic content for commercial profit<sup>65</sup> may be sensational on their own - but they most likely constitute the tip of an enormous online Islamophobic iceberg yet to be fully grasped. The so-called rise of the far-right threat is of course not a new phenomenon but more like a belated recognition of a shady reality. What has changed is the unprecedented extent to which these online networks can wield the power of the internet in an increasingly sophisticated and hard to detect manner to control the dominant narratives on political and social issues.<sup>66</sup> Anonymity, one of the fundamental pillars of the operation of social media, has been found to facilitate the online expression of extreme anti-Muslim views.<sup>67</sup>

But the threat posed by online hate content cannot be understood in separation from the operation of traditional media. Prominence given to particular ‘Islamist’ terrorist incidents by UK media have resulted in significant spikes in anti-Muslim incidents, underlining a direct correlation between media coverage, online noise, and local intimidation and violence.<sup>68</sup> Yet the problem appears to be systemic. Research by the MCB’s Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM) has found that most UK news items relating to Muslims suffer from anti-Muslim bias, lack of Muslim voices, divisive language, and negative imagery.<sup>69</sup> Alan Moses, outgoing head of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), claimed that the overall depiction of Muslims in UK newspapers is exceptionally problematic.<sup>70</sup> The admission is even

65. Christopher Knaus, Michael McGowan, Nick Evershed and Oliver Holmes, “Five of the Global Far Right Figures Are British”, *The Guardian*, 5 December 2019, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/hope-not-hate-uk-far-right>, (Access date: 27 January 2020).

66. *Narratives of Hate: The Spectrum of Far-right Worldviews in the U*, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, (London, September 2019), <https://institute.global/sites/default/files/2019-09/Far%20Right%20report.pdf>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

67. *Challenging Hateful Extremism*, Commission for Countering Extremism, (October 2019), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/836538/Challenging\\_Hateful\\_Extremism\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/836538/Challenging_Hateful_Extremism_report.pdf), (Access date: 23 January 2020); cf. Imran Awan, Hollie Sutch and Pelham Carter, *Extremism Online – Analysis of Extremist Material on Social Media*, (Birmingham City University, 2019), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/821874/Awan-Sutch-Carter-Extremism-Online.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/821874/Awan-Sutch-Carter-Extremism-Online.pdf), (Access date: 20 January 2020).

68. Ria Ivandic, Tom Kirchner and Stephen Machin, “Jihadi Attacks, Media, and Local Anti-Muslim Hate Crime”, VOX, 6 September 2019, <https://voxeu.org/article/jihadi-attacks-media-and-local-anti-muslim-hate-crime>, (Access date: 15 January 2020). The report can be accessed at <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1615.pdf> (Access date: 15 January 2020).

69. “Report: State of Media Reporting on Islam and Muslims”, CfMM, 8 July 2019, <https://cfmm.org.uk/resources/publication/cfmm-quarterly-report-launched/>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

70. Patricia Nilsson, “Muslims Treated Differently by Newspapers, Says Press Watchdog”, *Financial Times*, 30 December 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/60d5bea6-1ff9-11ea-b8a1-584213ee7b2b>, (Access date: 28 January 2020).

more important given the previous criticisms raised against IPSO's effectiveness in dealing with cases of inaccurate reporting involving Muslims and Islam. Right-leaning print media outlets have provided the majority of these instances,<sup>71</sup> with journalists such as Rod Liddle, Allison Pearson, and Trevor Kavanagh having been implicated in numerous complaints about their anti-Muslim language and views (See Figure 8). Recently Liddle was publicly slapped down by no other than Sajid Javid for his suggestion that elections should be scheduled on days when neither Muslims nor students could vote in order to maximise the Conservative constituency vote.<sup>72</sup> Isabelle Hardman, *Spectator's* assistant editor, 'profoundly disagreed' with Liddle's article.<sup>73</sup> The editor Fraser Nelson defended Liddle by invoking two familiar tropes: that the comment was a 'joke' (also used by Liddle himself), albeit one that could be 'too easily misrepresented' and thus 'should not have been published in the form that it was'; and that the journal hosted a broad range of views passionately defended under the mantra of 'freedom of speech'.<sup>74</sup>



**Figure 9:** Rod Liddle. Photo: David Levene.<sup>75</sup>

71. Sam Bradley, "Broadcast Bosses Admit Islamophobia Biases Exist But Accuse Print of Being 'Far Worse'", *Drum*, 22 August 2019, <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2019/08/22/broadcast-bosses-admit-islamophobia-biases-exist-accuse-print-being-far-worse>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

72. Rajeev Syal, "Sajid Javid Condemns Rod Liddle Article over Muslim Comments", *The Guardian*, 1 November 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2019/nov/01/sajid-javid-condemns-rod-liddle-article-over-muslim-comments>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

73. Richard Spillett, "Spectator Editor Fraser Nelson Apologises for Rod Liddle's Claim", *Mail Online*, 1 November 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7639449/Javid-slams-Spectator-columnist-suggested-poll-day-Muslims-t-vote.html>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

74. Rod Liddle, "Response to My Critics', with a note from Fraser Nelson", *Spectator*, 1 November 2019, <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2019/11/a-response-to-my-critics/>, (Access date: 27 January 2020).

75. Simon Hattenstone, "Rod Liddle interview: 'I'm not a bigot'", *The Guardian*, 13 June 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/jun/13/rod-liddle-im-not-a-bigot>].

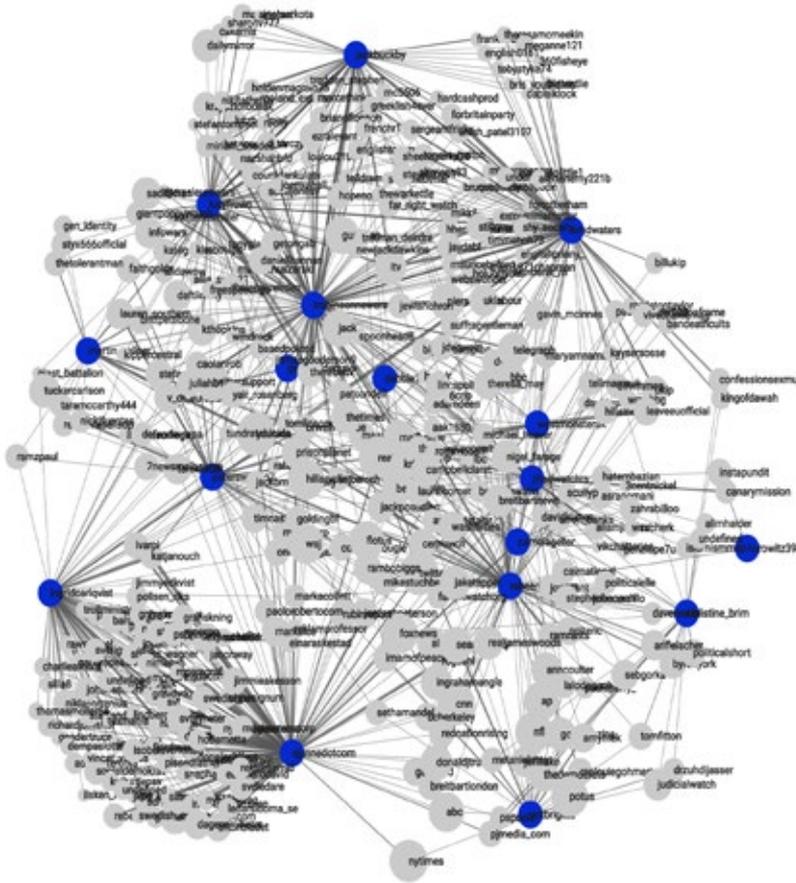


Figure 10: Map of anti-Muslim internet bots.<sup>76</sup>

This ‘freedom’ trope was deployed ad nauseam in 2019 against a wide range of targets: the APPG definition of Islamophobia as ‘anti-Muslim hatred’<sup>77</sup>, IPSO’s forthcoming guidelines on Islamophobia,<sup>78</sup> as well as criticisms raised against articles with Islamophobic content (including the one published by Johnson in 2018). In the preface to a report published by the Policy Exchange think tank in 2019, Trevor Philips likened the press guidelines on Islamophobia to a form of ‘media apartheid’ akin to top-down censorship and a form of unacceptable appeasement to ‘regressive trends’ leading all the way to the ‘silencing’ of the press. The authors also termed the APPG definition of Islamophobia as ‘illiberal’ and read the IPSO guidelines as part

76. “Bots, Fake News and the Anti-Muslim Message on Social Media”, HOPE Not Hate, <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/bots-fake-news-anti-muslim-message-social-media/>, (Access date: 19 January 2020)].

77. Peter Tatchell, “Free Speech Is under Threat over Islamophobia”, Times, 26 March 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/free-speech-is-under-threat-over-islamophobia-85r6h8czr>, (Access date: 27 January 2020).

78. Will Heavem, “Revealed: The Press Regulator’s Leaked Guidelines on Islamophobia”, Spectator, 7 September 2019, p. 5-6, 21-4, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2019/09/revealed-the-press-regulators-leaked-guidelines-on-islamophobia/>, (Access date: 4 February 2020).

of a pernicious ‘anti-Islamophobia agenda’.<sup>79</sup> Such a framing of the discussion of endemic, institutionalised, and routinised Islamophobia in large sectors of the UK press media as ‘joke’ and/or ‘free speech’ provides a deeply problematic framework for action against promoting anti-Muslim sentiment and reproducing Islamophobia stereotypes. It also underlines how the anti-Muslim bias, conscious and unconscious alike, is not simply a matter of a minority of extremists but of the entire British mainstream society, trivialised under seemingly innocuous labels of humour, cheeky provocation, or ‘liberal’ exercise of freedoms.

## Justice System

The case of Shamima Begum, the British woman of Bangladeshi heritage who had left as a teenager for Syria in 2015 and married a DAESH fighter, made headlines in early 2019 as she was located in one of the refugee camps in northern Syria. The decision of the UK government was to revoke her British citizenship and block her and her young son’s return to the UK.<sup>80</sup> The then shadow home secretary, Labour politician Diane Abbott, accused the government of contravening international human rights legislation and attributed the death of Begum’s son to the failure of repatriation efforts on humanitarian grounds as a result of the revocation of the mother’s citizenship.<sup>81</sup> The ensuing public debate was predictably polarised, with those agreeing with the revocation arguing on the basis of counter-terrorism while those condemning the decision as discriminatory and morally reprehensible. Lord Anderson QC criticised the government for effectively legitimising a system with ‘two classes of citizenship’ and for ‘abdication of responsibility [towards] someone radicalised in our country, who left when only a child and [with whom] we are relatively well-equipped to deal with, either through prosecution or de-radicalisation’.<sup>82</sup>

After nearly two decades of the so-called war on terror and in the shadow of a series of recent terrorist incidents, the terrorism-security-rights nexus remains a deeply contentious one in the UK.<sup>83</sup> A significant section of criticisms at the 2018 APPG

---

79. Will Heaven and Sir John Jenkins, *Eroding the Free Press* (Policy Exchange: 2019), <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Eroding-the-free-press.pdf>, (Access date: 4 February 2020).

80. “Deprivation of Citizenship and ‘ISIS Bride’ Shamima Begum”, Free Movement, 18 February 2019, <https://www.freemovement.org.uk/shamima-begum-citizenship/>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

81. Ashley Cowburn, “Shamima Begum: Sajid Javid Facing Outrage as Death of Isis Bride’s Son Labelled ‘Stain on the Conscience’ of Government”, *The Independent*, 9 March 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/shamima-begum-dead-son-sajid-javid-uk-citizen-isis-bride-passport-a8815096.html>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

82. Poppy Noor, “What Do Experts Think of Revoking Shamima Begum’s Citizenship?”, *The Guardian*, 20 February 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/feb/20/what-do-experts-think-of-revoking-shamima-begums-citizenship>, (Access date: 15 January 2020).

83. Cf. Mark Gilks, “The Security-Prejudice Nexus: ‘Islamist’ Terrorism and the Structural Logics of Islamophobia in the UK”, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol: 13, No: 1, (2020): 24-46, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17539153.2019.1650874?journalCode=rter20>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

definition of Islamophobia was justified on grounds that it would weaken Britain's counter-terrorism capacity (the 'Contest' strategy).<sup>84</sup> The centre-right think-tank Policy Exchange made this connection explicitly in its April 2019 report, arguing that two strands in particular (Contest and Prevent) would be significantly degraded should the definition be officially adopted.<sup>85</sup> And yet this passionate, seemingly unconditional defence of Contest as-is legitimises the same counter-terrorism strategy that has been identified as part of the problem of institutionalising Islamophobia in the UK. The gross over-representation of BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) individuals among those either targeted by the 'stop and search' powers of Contest or getting caught in the criminal justice and prison systems has been recorded in previous years' versions of this report.<sup>86</sup> In August, a report published by CAGE that drew attention to the role of 'racial and religious profiling' in many instances of stop and search/question prompted renewed calls to the very successful Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group (CPG) on Tackling Islamophobia to launch an investigation into aspects of the government's counter-terrorism legal framework.<sup>87</sup>

With the number of Muslims in prisons doubling between 2002 and 2018 (from 8% to 16% of the country's overall prison population),<sup>88</sup> research that sheds light on both prison conditions and life afterwards for this group are especially revealing and welcome. Ryan Williams conducted a series of personal interviews with Muslim men who had either served or were still serving prison sentences for serious offences. Predictably Williams's research has revealed a complex picture of both everyday and institutionalised racial and religious discriminatory experiences, of regret and determination to improve their own lives once released, of suffering and desire for redemption.<sup>89</sup> Still even mainstream media have for years reproduced the narrative of omnipotent/-present 'Muslim gangs' - a term that is evidently laden with the stereotypical association of Muslims with criminality and threat. The far right has

84. Lizzie Dearden, "Proposed Islamophobia Definition 'Would Undermine Counterterror Operations and Threaten Free Speech', Police Tell Prime Minister", *The Independent*, 15 May 2019, [https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2019/04/03/gender\\_and\\_nation/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2019/04/03/gender_and_nation/), (Access date: 28 January 2020).

85. Richard Walton and Tom Wilson, *Islamophobia – Crippling Counter-Terrorism*, (Policy Exchange: April 2019), <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Islamophobia-Crippling-Counter-Terrorism.pdf>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

86. For more information, see: Aristotle Kalis, "Islamophobia in the United Kingdom National Report 2018", *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2019): p. 816-18.

87. "Submission to the Inquiry into Islamophobia in Scotland", SACC, 25 August 2019, <https://www.sacc.org.uk/articles/2019/submission-inquiry-islamophobia-scotland>, (Access date: 31 January 2020). See also: "Schedule 7: Harassment at Borders", CAGE, August 2019, <https://www.cage.ngo/schedule-7-harassment-at-borders-report-executive-summary>, (Access date: 27 January 2020).

88. Georgina Sturge, "UK Prison Population Statistics", House of Commons, Briefing Paper Number CBP-04334, 23 July 2019, p. 11, <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN04334#fullreport>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

89. "Muslims Leaving Prison Talk about the Layers of Their Lives", University of Cambridge, <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/features/muslims-leaving-prison-talk-about-the-layers-of-their-lives>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

repeatedly manipulated these reports to amplify their Islamophobic message. Such claims have been dissected by a Ministry of Justice enquiry into ‘Muslim groups and related gang activity’ in high-security prisons, the results of which were published in the summer of 2019. The report noted that there was indeed a small subgroup of Muslim prisoners engaging in these violent activities but it also noted that their members ‘operated as a gang under the guise of religion, which offered members the opportunity to engage in anti-establishment and criminal behaviours, to exert power and influence and provided protection’.<sup>90</sup> A prison guard interviewed by Vice confirmed this evidence, stressing that ‘on most British prison wings, both anti-Muslim groups and Islamic extremists are marginal players ... It’s common to have a mix of Christians and Muslims in the same group’. Predictably these and other nuances were diluted or disappeared altogether in sections of the media coverage.<sup>91</sup>

## Internet

The UK holds the dubious distinction that it is the country of birth for five of the ten arguably most influential far-right agitators.<sup>92</sup> The names of Tommy Robinson, Milo Yannopoulos, Paul Joseph Watson, Carl Benjamin, and Katie Hopkins, all born in the UK, hold extraordinary clout in social media: in particular, Watson’s and Benjamin’s YouTube channels (See Figure 10); Hopkins’s Twitter account; Yannopoulos and Robinson’s Facebook profiles - not to mention their overlapping presence in other social media platforms. After more than a year in the spotlight for their failure to restrict the far right’s online disinformation campaigns,<sup>93</sup> social media companies have taken significant active steps to address growing concerns about the growing online mobilisation of extremist groups and the amplification of online hate messaging. Nevertheless, the sheer enormity of the challenge facing them is evident and their commitment to addressing the roots of the problem questioned by a growing number of critics. In spite of removing offending posts (e.g. YouTube’s belated decision to place heavy restrictions on Robinson’s channel),<sup>94</sup> enforcing bans (Facebook

---

90. Beverly Powis, Louise Dixon and Jessica Woodhams, “Exploring the Nature of Muslim Groups and Related Gang Activity in Three High Security Prisons”, Ministry of Justice, (2019), p. 17, <https://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/testimony/410.pdf>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

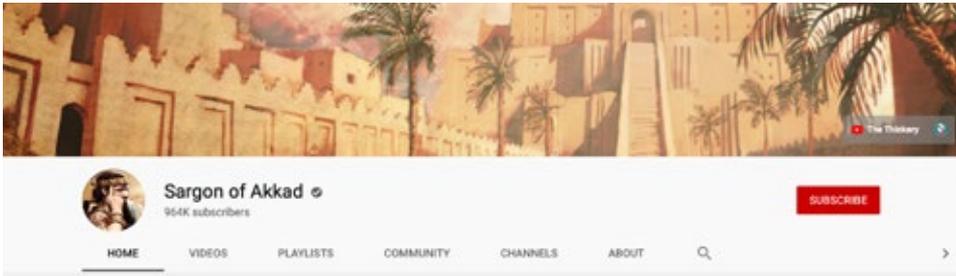
91. Nick Chester, “A Prison Guard Debunks Tommy Robinson’s ‘Muslim Gang’ Claims”, Vice, 16 April 2019, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/43jy7w/stephen-yaxley-lennon-tommy-robinson-muslim-prison-guard-gang-claims](https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/43jy7w/stephen-yaxley-lennon-tommy-robinson-muslim-prison-guard-gang-claims), (Access date: 6 February 2020).

92. “The People vs “the Elite”? State of Hate 2019”, HnH, <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/research/state-of-hate-report-2019/>, (Access date: 27 January 2020); Will Bedingfield, “Five of the Top Far-Right Figures Are British. We’re World Leaders in Hate”, Wired, 21 February 2019, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/hope-not-hate-uk-far-right>, (Access date: 27 January 2020).

93. Emma Graham-Harrison, “Far-Right Facebook Groups ‘Spreading Hate to Millions in Europe’”, *The Guardian*, 22 May 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/22/far-right-facebook-groups-spreading-hate-to-millions-in-europe>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

94. “YouTube Restricts Tommy Robinson Channel”, BBC, 2 April 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-47786252>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

has banned Robinson, Yannopoulos, and Alex Jones),<sup>95</sup> temporarily suspensions (e.g. Hopkins's account on Twitter),<sup>96</sup> and introducing stricter regulations and ever more sophisticated systems of monitoring, the volume of the hate messaging and the number of online outlets for its amplification remain barely dented.



**Figure 11:** Carl Benjamin's (Sargon of Akkad) YouTube channel with nearly one million subscribers.<sup>97</sup>

No matter how sophisticated and heavy-handed the monitoring of content by social media platforms may have become, the Islamophobic far right continues to thrive in a vast online ecosystem that far exceeds the sum of its star personalities.<sup>98</sup> But online Islamophobia is not merely a problem rooted in far and alt right agitators and 'alternative' media sources. The year 2019 was dominated by revelations about streams of anti-Muslim content posted or endorsed online by a bewilderingly large number of political figures from so-called mainstream or radical parties. The 2019 European and national election campaigns in the UK directed more attention than usual to the online activities of politicians fighting for (re)election. The findings have been depressing and alarming. UKIP and Brexit Party pages were rife with Islamophobic content.<sup>99</sup> The Conservative Party was repeatedly put in the spotlight for the anti-Muslim content made by a number of its MP candidates, councillors, and ordinary members.<sup>100</sup> Put together, the posted comments by these otherwise 'mainstream' social actors formed a kaleidoscope of cliché stereotypes and tradition-

95. Will Bedingfield, "Facebook's Tommy Robinson Ban Is All about Saving Face, Not Stopping Extremism", *Wired*, 28 February 2019, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/tommy-robinson-facebook-instagram-ban>, (Access date: 26 January 2020); Dave Lee, "Facebook Bans 'Dangerous Individuals'", *BBC*, 3 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-48142098>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

96. Lizzie Dearden, 'Katie Hopkins' Twitter Account Suspended', *The Independent*, 30 January 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/katie-hopkins-twitter-suspended-deleted-review-a9309351.html>, (Access date: 2 February 2020).

97. Sargon of Akkad, Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/user/SargonofAkkad100>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

98. Christina Ariza, "Will Online Takedowns Defeat the Offline Far Right?", *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR)*, 27 September 2019, <https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2019/09/27/will-online-takedowns-defeat-the-offline-radical-right/>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

99. Mark Bridge, "Brexit Party' Facebook Group Rife with Islamophobia", *The Times*, 11 August 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/brexit-party-facebook-group-is-rife-with-islamophobia-k3c2lrrz3>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

100. Alex Forsyth, "Islamophobia: Conservative Party Members Suspended over Posts", *BBC*, 20 September 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-49763550>, (Access date: 13 January 2020).

al anti-Muslim/Islam prejudices refracted through more contemporary narratives: Muslims were depicted as culturally primitive and barbaric, resistant to ‘western values’, often violent and linked to international conspiracies as ‘the enemy within’; there were the usual calls for restrictions on Islamic religious practice, on mosques and cultural/community centres, on Sharia law, on ‘burqas’, and on halal food. But the most alarming facet of this revealed online content was marked by aggressive language about ‘rounding-up’, ‘invasion’, ‘evil cult’, and open calls for mass expulsion.<sup>101</sup> The discursive leakage from far/radical right to mainstream narratives is evident and belies narratives of distinction between far/radical and ‘mainstream’ Islamophobia, the former allegedly vile while the latter a matter of tolerable ‘free speech’ with the occasional misdemeanour.



**Figure 12:** Some of the online Islamophobic comments posted by Conservative Party members and discovered by ITV.<sup>102</sup>

## Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

In spite of stricter regulations enforced by both state authorities and social media platforms, familiar stars of the UK far right already mentioned in this report have maintained a strong presence in 2019. Tommy Robinson added prolifically to his CV: he was implicated in yet another trial for contempt of court and was jailed for another ten weeks, posing as a modern-day martyr for free speech and journalism;

101. Simon Murphy, “Revealed: Tory Councillors Posted Islamophobic Content on Social Media”, *The Guardian*, 12 November 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/12/revealed-conservative-councillors-islamophobic-social-media>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

102. “Conservative Party members being investigated for Islamophobia can vote for the next prime minister”, ITV, 3 July 2019, <https://www.itv.com/news/2019-07-03/conservative-party-members-being-investigated-for-islamophobi-a-can-vote-for-the-next-prime-minister/>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

he stood as an independent candidate in the elections for the European Parliament, receiving only 2.2% of his constituency's vote; he launched a film called *Panodrama* in response to a BBC 'Panorama' investigative programme by John Sweeney on his extremist political views that led to protests from Robinson's supporters and prompted the eventual decision by the public broadcaster not to show the 'Panorama' programme;<sup>103</sup> and in January 2020, he received the Danish Free Press Society's 2019 Sappho Award for defending freedom of speech in Copenhagen.<sup>104</sup> Katie Hopkins also produced her own anti-Muslim film, *Homelands*, whose main narrative was that Islam and Muslims had been allowed to dominate European societies, destroyed 'Judeo-Christian values', and forced Christian and Jewish communities to a mass 'silent exodus' from the continent. UKIP candidate lists for the European Parliament elections provided a welcome home for another prominent far-right figure, Carl Benjamin, who campaigned in the south west of England but failed spectacularly to receive more than 3% of the votes.<sup>105</sup>



**Figure 13:** Tommy Robinson at the ceremony for the award of the Sappho prize in Copenhagen, Denmark.<sup>106</sup>

103. Lizzie Dearden, "BBC Journalist Leaves After 17 Years with Parting Shot at Tommy Robinson: 'He's a Complete C\*\*\*'", *The Independent*, 3 October 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/bbc-journalist-john-sweeney-tommy-robinson-panorama-a9129326.html>, (Access date: 15 January 2020).

104. "Sappho Award 2019 Ceremony in Copenhagen, Denmark", The Free Press Society, 30 January 2020, <https://www.trykkefrihed.dk/the-free-press-society-sappho-award-2019-ceremony-in-copenhagen-denmark..htm>, (Access date: 30 January 2020).

105. Lizzie Dearden, "Resounding Defeats for Tommy Robinson and Ukip as UK Overwhelmingly Rejects Far Right in European Elections", *The Independent*, 27 May 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/european-elections-results-tommy-robinson-ukip-far-right-batten-a8931671.html>, (Access date: 28 January 2020).

106. "Photo: Marie Krarup", New English Review, [https://www.newenglishreview.org/files/100/Image/Tommy\\_in\\_Danish\\_parliament.jpg](https://www.newenglishreview.org/files/100/Image/Tommy_in_Danish_parliament.jpg), (Access date: 28 January 2020).



**Figure 14:** Tommy Robinson, far-right provocateur, at a public screening of his *Panorama* in Salford.<sup>107</sup>



**Figure 15:** Still image from Kate Hopkins's *Homelands* film.<sup>108</sup>

Nevertheless, the ‘Islamophobia network’ in the UK as elsewhere is not simply a connected group of like-minded extremist individuals; it is also, arguably more egregiously, an intricate web of anti-Muslim ideas, stories, and narratives where ‘extremist’ and ‘mainstream’ views intersect and overlap, deliberately or inadvertently reinforcing each other. It is no coincidence that the Danish Sappho prize awarded to Robinson for 2019 had been previously given to Douglas Murray, author of *The Strange Death of Europe* (2018), and to the controversial British philosopher Roger Scruton, who died in early 2020. The last episode of Scruton’s controversial political life occurred in the spring of 2019, when he was dismissed from his role as government housing advisor following a series of Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, and anti-Chinese racist comments during an interview that he gave to the magazine *New*

107. “Tommy Robinson urges supporters to cancel TV licences in protest against BBC”, ITV Report, 23 February 2019, <https://www.itv.com/news/2019-02-23/tommy-robinson-urges-supporters-to-cancel-tv-licences-in-protest-against-bbc/>, (Access date: 23 January 2020).

108. “Homelands by Katie Hopkins”, Youtube, 14 June 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orTAUM-MWd-A>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

*Statesman*.<sup>109</sup> In that interview, Scruton repeated his view that Islamophobia was a ‘propaganda’ weapon against free speech and lamented the ‘sudden invasion of huge tribes of Muslims from the Middle East’ in Europe.<sup>110</sup> In December 2019, the journalist Melanie Phillips provided a fresh statement of her view that ‘Islamophobia was invented by the Muslim Brotherhood to mimic anti-Semitism’ that has been used to ‘silence any criticism of the Islamic world’. For Phillips, equating it with anti-Semitism was morally wrong and ‘obscene’ because Islamophobia was ‘profoundly anti-Jew ... [and] facilitates [anti-Semitism]’.<sup>111</sup> Thus, alongside the more connected network of far-right provocateurs in social media, there exists an informal *narrative* grid promoted by diverse mainstream public figures who have joined their intellectual and professional forces to discredit the very discussion around Islamophobia as allegedly pandering to extremism and authoritarianism. No-one would seriously argue that these two ‘networks’ are connected or indeed same; but equally their discursive overlap should be greeted with considerable alarm.

## Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

Civil society organisations continued their invaluable research and publication efforts in 2019, with a string of reports and other outputs drawing attention to the ongoing and increasing threat of Islamophobia in the UK and beyond. HOPENotHate, TellMAMA, and the newly formed Centre for Media Monitoring of the MCB have published new reports that update findings but also draw attention to new trends in hate crime in general and Islamophobia in particular. In addition, it is gratifying and encouraging to see so many fiercely innovative local and national actions to combat anti-Muslim hatred and positive initiatives recorded in 2019. The following enumeration does not do justice to the diversity of these initiatives but is indicative of the energy and ingenuity of efforts to challenge Islamophobia in the UK:

- the efforts of the Tackling Islamophobia Working Group to coordinate the efforts of local Muslim organisations, police authorities, and communities to establish supportive structures that encourage the reporting of hate incidents, using innovative social media platforms and instruments;<sup>112</sup>

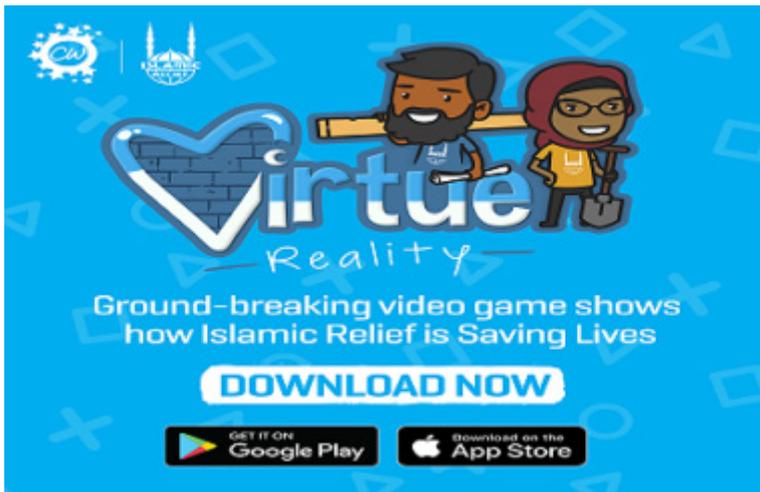
109. Matthew Weaver and Peter Walker, “Government Sacks Roger Scruton after Remarks about Soros and Islamophobia”, *The Guardian*, 10 April 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/apr/10/roger-scruton-calls-for-dismissal-islamophobiad-soros-remarks>, (Access date: 31 January 2020).

110. George Eaton, “Roger Scruton: ‘Cameron’s Resignation Was the Death Knell of the Conservative Party’”, *New Statesman*, 10 April 2019, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2019/04/roger-scruton-america-s-resignation-was-death-knell-conservative-party>, (Access date: 27 January 2020).

111. Melanie Phillips, “Don’t Fall for Bogus Claims of ‘Islamophobia’”, *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 January 2020, <https://www.thejc.com/comment/columnists/don-t-fall-for-bogus-claims-of-islamophobia-1.494367>, (Access date: 1 February 2020).

112. “Social Media to Tackle Under-Reported Islamophobia in Bristol”, BBC, 5 April 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-47817920>; “Bristol Anti-Islamophobia Group Aims to ‘Demystify Muslims’”, BBC, 22 November 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-50478891>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

- the tireless work of young imams to reach out and break down barriers and misconceptions that lie at the heart of anti-Muslim prejudices in British society - such as Sabah Ahmedi in Baitul Futuh Mosque in south London, who has invited thousands of journalists for a ‘coffee with the imam’;<sup>113</sup>
- the work of the Cross Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia of the Scottish Parliament which, in its short life (it was established in March 2018 through the initiative of Anas Sarwar, Member of the Scottish Parliament), has already produced media guidelines for reporting on Muslims and Islam in collaboration with the National Union of Journalists, and has begun a public inquiry into Islamophobia in Scotland;<sup>114</sup>
- the innovative approach used by Islamic Relief UK, which launched a video game to acquaint young people with the work of international Muslim aid organisations and at the same time challenge the conventional negative depiction of Muslim characters in video games; the launch was part of the annual Charity Week, a now international fundraising event that was originally organised by London Muslim students;<sup>115</sup>



**Figure 16:** Islamic Relief UK’s innovative video game fighting anti-Muslim prejudice.<sup>116</sup>

113. Maria-Claire Chappet, “South London Imams Speak Out”, *The Face*, 16 January 2020, <https://theface.com/society/south-london-imams-islam-religion>, (Access date: 16 January 2020).

114. Gemma Fraser, “New Media Guidelines Designed to Tackle Islamophobia”, *Holyrood*, 5 November 2019, [https://www.holyrood.com/news/view,new-media-guidelines-designed-to-tackle-islamophobia\\_14664.htm](https://www.holyrood.com/news/view,new-media-guidelines-designed-to-tackle-islamophobia_14664.htm), (Access date: 23 January 2020).

115. Harriet Whitehead, “Islamic Relief UK Launches Videogame to Tackle ‘Skepticism of Aid and Islamophobia’”, *Civil Society News*, 18 October 2019, <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/islamic-relief-uk-launches-videogame-to-tackle-scepticism-of-aid-and-increasing-islamophobia.html#sthash.iEtJfhd.kEjHTBJH.dpuf>, (Access date: 26 January 2020).

116. “Islamic Relief UK Launches Videogame to Tackle ‘Scepticism of Aid and Islamophobia’”, *Civil Society News*, 18 October 2019, <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/islamic-relief-uk-launches-videogame-to-tackle-scepticism-of-aid-and-increasing-islamophobia.html>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

- successful annual events, such as the ‘Visit My Mosque Day’ (3 March 2019) and ‘Islamophobia Awareness Month’ (November) that also are designed to challenge misconceptions and bring communities closer together;
- finally, though not a planned initiative in itself, the ‘Mohamed Salah effect’ in Liverpool; the popularity of the Egyptian footballer joining Liverpool FC in 2017 has been linked to a significant drop in both Islamophobic incidents in Merseyside metropolitan county and particularly of anti-Muslim online content posted by his team’s fans.<sup>117</sup>



Figure 17: The ‘Mohamed Salah effect’ in Liverpool.<sup>118</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

In a vintage year of political drama and unceasing public political debate, it is striking how much Islamophobia was talked about and yet how transient all the attention proved and how little actually changed. Yet Islamophobia has deep roots in UK politics and society that go well beyond any particular party, as well as well beyond the ‘extremist’ fringe of political forces and media personalities. It remains encrypted in omnipresent hardening public attitudes to immigration, identity, austerity, and of course ‘taking back control’. It cannot thus be wished away with token condemnations or perfunctory enquiries into any or all political parties. It cannot be restricted to a discussion of the national and global far right’s shady online dealings. More

117. Ala’ Alrababa’h, William Marble et al, “Can Exposure to Celebrities Reduce Prejudice? The Effect of Mohamed Salah on Islamophobic Behaviors and Attitudes”, SocArXiv, 31 May 2019, <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/eq8ca/>, (Access date: 19 January 2020).

118. Mo Salah Facts, Twitter, 28 May 2018, <https://twitter.com/mosalahfacts/status/1001130986531246085>, (Access date: 25 January 2020).

than ever Islamophobia has become woven into all spheres of public and private life, on- and offline. Action would need to be multilayered, consistent and unswerving, responsive to both short-term needs and longer-term change goals.

If there is a general recommendation in the light of the experiences of 2019, this is related to the need to shift the balance towards inoculating society vis-à-vis disinformation and hate narratives. As it becomes clear that banning or correcting divisive material alone cannot counter the profusion of hate narratives on- and offline, the need to strengthen people's resistance to hate messaging and content is the most robust strategy for combatting both radicalisation and the normalisation of Islamophobia in everyday life.

In addition, the following action areas are identified:

- continuous pressure to government and authorities to accept the 2018 APPG definition of Islamophobia;
- effective review and revision of the government's counter-terrorism strategy, acknowledging the need for a new balance between the overarching need for such a framework and its detrimental effects on social cohesion so far;
- deconstruction of the framing of Islamophobia as a problem of supposed balance between censoring the far right and invoking the threat of 'Islamist extremism' 'in the same narrative;
- promoting an understanding of Islamophobia in the UK as an expression of a broader dynamic fed by broader racial, social, and cultural prejudices (e.g. immigration, BAME discrimination, colonial legacies) and as international in its dynamic of self-perpetuation;
- robust scrutiny and more meaningful regulation of traditional media, accompanied with robust official guidelines and more effective intervention powers by regulators and relevant watchdogs. The latter point is particularly important as IPSO is preparing to issue its press guidelines, a leaked draft of which provoked fierce vocal opposition from parts of the media world and conservative think tanks on grounds of 'free speech' and 'pandering' to readers' beliefs;<sup>119</sup>
- adequately resourced campaigns to enhance the safety and well-being of Muslim communities, protecting them against discrimination and abuse, while also actively promoting positive transformational initiatives in the spheres of education, leisure, culture, and employment;
- effective assistance to civil society organisations to enhance their constructive input in the process of generating a range of counter-narratives about Islam and Muslims in contemporary Britain; and in their efforts to expose and counter extremism;

---

119. Tom Wilson, "Why Is IPSO Issuing Guidance on Islam?", Spiked, 12 September 2019, <https://www.spiked-online.com/2019/09/12/islam-and-the-press/>, (Access date: 29 January 2020).

- stronger pressure on social media platforms to improve their systems of monitoring of hate content and employ more robust definitions of unacceptable online behaviour; and
- the need to continue to seek and foster *international* co-operation in the fight against hate crime, disinformation, and extremism, in recognition of the fact that all these problems are driven by both national and global factors and channels.

## Chronology

- **26.02.2019:** Facebook bans Tommy Robinson. The ban also applies to its other platform, Instagram.
- **15.03.2019:** Hours after the massacre in Christchurch, New Zealand, a worshipper sustains head injuries outside Ashaadibi Centre Mosque in Whitechapel, London.
- **21.03.2019:** Five mosques are attacked and vandalised in Birmingham.
- **26.03.2019:** The Bahr Academy in Newcastle is vandalised and desecrated for the second time in two months.
- **02.04.2019:** YouTube reverses its earlier neutral stance and places heavy restrictions on Tommy Robinson's channel.
- **09.04.2019:** The Ahmadiyya Mosque in Dundee is targeted by vandals.
- **19-21.04.2019:** The Masjid-e-Salaam Mosque in Preston is targeted with offensive graffiti on three consecutive days.
- **26.04.2019:** All parties in the Scottish Parliament agree to adopt the definition of Islamophobia proposed by the 2018 Report of the APPG on British Muslims.
- **03.05.2019:** Facebook bans 'dangerous individuals' from its platform, among them Milo Yannopoulos and Paul Joseph Watson.
- **15.05.2019:** The UK government refuses to adopt the definition of Islamophobia proposed by the Report of the APPG on British Muslims in November 2018; however, the definition is adopted by other political parties (Labour, Liberal Democrats, Green, all parties of the Scottish Parliament including the Scottish Conservatives), the City of London, and other local councils, the National Union of Students, and other organisations.
- **17.05.2019:** A dossier containing 110 incidents of Islamophobic content posted online by Conservative Party members is passed on to ITV.
- **21.05.2019:** The Elgin Islamic Centre suffers from a vandal attack.
- **18.06.2019:** In a televised debate among the candidates for the Conservative Party leadership, Sajid Javid gets his co-candidates - among them Boris Johnson - to agree to hold an inquiry into Islamophobia in the party.

- **11.07.2019:** Tommy Robinson, far-right provocateur, is sentenced to a nine-month prison sentence for contempt of court. He is released on 13 September.
- **24.07.2019:** After being elected leader of the Conservative Party, Boris Johnson becomes prime minister, succeeding Theresa May who resigned on 24 May.
- **02.08.2019:** A car is deliberately set on fire outside a mosque in Dewsbury.
- **23.08.2019:** Two women in traditional Islamic dress are viciously attacked and sustain serious injuries in South Ealing Underground station in London.
- **06.10.2019:** Arson attack at a site in Skegness where a new mosque was planned. The same site had also been attacked in February 2019.
- **02.11.2019:** Journalist Rod Liddle publishes an article in *The Spectator* stating that ‘my own choice of election date would be a day when universities are closed and Muslims are forbidden to do anything on pain of hell, or something’. The article results in widespread condemnation from all sides of the political spectrum and an apology from the editors of the magazine.
- **11.11.2019:** Arson attack against a place of worship in Havenhill.
- **13.11.2019:** The Conservative Party suspends 25 members for posting or endorsing Islamophobic and racist content - the second time that the party takes such action since a similar wave of suspensions in September.
- **27.11.2019:** During the parliamentary elections campaign, Boris Johnson finally apologises for his 2018 newspaper article that described women in traditional Islamic dress as ‘letter boxes’ and ‘bank robbers’.
- **28.11.2019:** MEND released a report outlining 120 Islamophobic incidents involving Conservative Party MPs, candidates, and councillors.
- **12.12.2019:** Parliamentary elections result in a comfortable majority for the Conservative Party and the re-election of Boris Johnson as prime minister.



**B**y gathering 35 local scholars, experts, and civil society activists specialized in racism and human rights, the fifth edition of the *European Islamophobia Report* addresses a still timely and politically important issue. All 32 country reports included in this book follow a unique structure that is convenient, first, for comparing countries and, second, for selected readings on a particular topic such as politics, employment, or education with regard to Islamophobia across Europe.

The present report investigates in detail the underlying dynamics that directly or indirectly support the rise of anti-Muslim racism in Europe. This extends from Islamophobic statements spread in national media to laws and policies that restrain the fundamental rights of European Muslim citizens and threaten the whole of society. As a result, the *European Islamophobia Report 2019* discusses the impact of anti-Muslim racism on human rights, multiculturalism, and the state of law in Europe.

This fifth edition of our report highlights how European societies are progressively overwhelmed by the Islamophobic discourse of the “Great Replacement” and other far-right conspiracy theories. The 32 country reports demonstrate how governments and mainstream media participate in reproducing such discourses that put the fundamental rights of millions of European citizens in jeopardy and how one can counteract these developments.

This compendium of useful insights and data aims to provide European policy-makers, institutions, and NGOs with recommendations on how to tackle anti-Muslim racism in Europe seriously.

#### **About SETA**

Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) is a non-profit research institute based in Turkey dedicated to innovative studies on national, regional and international issues. SETA is the leading think tank in Turkey and has offices in Ankara, Istanbul, Washington D.C., Berlin and Brussels. The objective of SETA is to produce up-to-date and accurate knowledge and analyses in the fields of politics, economy, and society, and inform policy makers and the public on changing political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. Through research reports, publications, brain storming sessions, conferences and policy recommendations, SETA seeks to guide leaders in government, civil society, and business, and contributes to informed decision making mechanisms.

