

---

EUROPEAN  
**ISLAMOPHOBIA**  
REPORT  

---

2015

---

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

---

---

EUROPEAN  
**ISLAMOPHOBIA**  
REPORT  

---

2015

---

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

---



COPYRIGHT © 2016 by SETA

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 : 978-605-4023-68-4

Layout : Erkan Söğüt

Printed in Turkey, İstanbul by Turkuvaz Haberleşme ve Yayıncılık A.Ş., 2016

**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

Eyüp 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 | Cairo**

21 Fahmi Street Bab al Luq Abdeen Flat No 19 Cairo EGYPT

Phone: 00202 279 56866 | 00202 279 56985 | @setakahire

## 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 is a researcher at the Department of Sociology and Political Science at the University of Salzburg. He earned his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Vienna. Hafez has been teaching at a number of universities in the world. He has been a Visiting Scholar at Columbia University. Hafez is the editor of the German-English Islamophobia Studies Yearbook, ([www.jahrbuch-islamophobie.de](http://www.jahrbuch-islamophobie.de)). He was awarded with the Bruno-Kreisky-Award for the political book of the Year 2009 for his German anthology "Islamophobia in Austria" (co-edited with Prof. John Bunzl). He has published more than 10 books and 20 articles. His last publications include 'From the Far Right to the Mainstream: Islamophobia, Party Politics and the Media' (Campus Verlag, 2012, together with Humayun Ansari), an introduction to the history of Islamic Political Thought and 'Shifting borders: Islamophobia as the cornerstone for building pan-European right-wing unity' (in: Patterns of Prejudice, vol. 48, no. 5, October 2014). 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)

# INTRODUCTION

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ

In June 2014, the website for reporting hate crimes to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) went public. In 2014, only five states officially reported on hate crimes against Muslims, whereas civil society reported in 21 countries. Still, for the majority of the 57 member countries of the OSCE, there is no official information available. Furthermore, if one were to assess the quality of these state reports, it becomes apparent that the collected data does not always rely on a comprehensive systematic collection.

Since Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism has become a growing threat in European societies, we – the editors – felt an urgent need to address this problem. In fact, there are still people denying the very existence of racism against Muslims. Many state and civil society institutions have done priceless work to prove and establish the opposite: from the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) to the countless civil society organisations throughout Europe. Yet, institutions like the FRA publish only irregular reports on a restricted number of countries while most civil society organisations tackle racism in general and only few focus on Islamophobia in specific - this is the urgent gap our report wishes to fill.

The *European Islamophobia Report* (EIR) is an annual report, which is presented for the first time this year. It currently comprises 25 national reports regarding each state and the tendencies of Islamophobia in each respective country. The current report features the work of 37 extraordinary scholars. In the years to come we will attempt to cover even more countries. This report aims to enable policymakers as well as the public to discuss the issue of Islamophobia with the help of qualitative data. At the same time, several of its unique characteristic features make a difference to the current state of the debate on Islamophobia.

## **Contribution of this report**

The national reports in the EIR look at significant incidents and developments in each country during the period under review. The authors look at the employment sector: has there been any discrimination in the job market based on the (assumed) Muslimness of a person? They look at education: has Islamophobic content become part of any curricula, textbooks, or any other education material? The political field in a narrow sense is also a central aspect of the EIR: has Islamophobia played any role in politics, from election campaigns to political programmes to personal statements, etc., be it on a regional or national level? Authors also take a close look at a central force where Islamophobia has spread: the media. Which media events have focused on Islam/Muslims in an Islamophobic way? The justice system is also featured in the national reports: are there any laws and regulations that are based on Islamophobic arguments or any laws restricting the rights of Muslims in their religious lifestyle? Cyberspace as a central space for spreading hate crime is also examined: which web pages and initiatives have spread Islamophobic stereotypes? In addition, central figures in the Islamophobia network are discussed: which institutions and persons have, among others, fostered Islamophobic campaigns, stirred up debates or lobbied for laws?

Since the EIR is not content with pointing a finger at the problem, the reports also look at observed civil society and political assessment and initiatives undertaken to counter Islamophobia in the aforementioned fields. This will empower politicians and NGO activists, who want to tackle the issue. Since the EIR is not a purely scholarly work, at the end of every report, authors offer policy recommendations for politics and NGOs. An executive summary at the beginning and a chronology at the end of every report give the reader an overview on the state and the development of Islamophobia in the respective countries.

Since the single reports share broadly the same structure, the EIR offers the possibility to compare Islamophobia in these countries. Despite the fact that the data in specific fields is not available in an identical way for all countries, the report still facilitates an impulse for identifying research gaps.

Studies on Islamophobia have in the past predominantly concentrated on Western Europe. This is especially the case with reports focusing on Islamophobia. The EIR is the first to cover a wide range of Eastern European countries like Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, or Latvia. This will enrich the debate on racism in general and Islamophobia in Europe in specific.

## **What is Islamophobia?**

Although the term 'Islamophobia' has become widely recognised in the Anglo-Saxon world and has become established in academia as can be seen by the numerous conferences, journals, and research projects dedicated to it, in many European countries, there is still a great amount of opposition to the term. One can understand the opposition expressed by the public not merely as an academic debate, but, in fact, as a sign of the hegemonic power of Islamophobic prejudices. Acknowledging this situation,

at the heart of this project lies the following working definition of Islamophobia:

“When talking about Islamophobia, we mean anti-Muslim racism. As Anti-Semitism studies have shown, the etymological components of a word do not necessarily point to its complete meaning, nor to how it is used. Such is also the case with Islamophobia studies. Islamophobia has become a well-known term used in academia as much as in the public sphere. Criticism of Muslims or of the Islamic religion is not necessarily Islamophobic. Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilising 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 generalised for all Muslims. At the same time, Islamophobic images are fluid and vary in different contexts as Islamophobia tells us more about the Islamophobe than it tells us about the Muslims/Islam”.

### Central findings

That Islamophobia works without Muslims and tells us more about the anti-Muslim racists than it tells us about Islam and Muslims, can best be seen in the eastern region of Europe. In countries like Hungary, Finland, Lithuania, or Latvia, where only a small number of Muslims live, Islamophobia functions as a successful means to mobilise people. People not only greatly overestimate the country's Muslim population but, although Muslims have not committed any violent acts in most countries in the name of Islam, they are still often deemed violent and are considered to be terrorists.

It could be observed that both attacks in Paris, which happened in 2015, became a discursive event that shaped the debates on Islam and Muslims throughout Europe. Above that, the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ was a central topic, which many actors linked to the issue of Muslims invading Europe. For example, the leader of the Hungarian Fidesz’ parliamentary club Antal Rogán warned of a future ‘United European Caliphate’,<sup>1</sup> while former Secretary of State László L. Simon urged Hungarians to return to their Christian spirituality and make more babies in order to counter the negative cultural effects of mass migration such as the envisioned ‘impending victory of Islamic parties imposing polygamy and destroying the remainder of European culture’.<sup>2</sup> This strong Islamophobic rhetoric is not restricted to the extreme right. In fact, the *refugee-migration-Islam-terrorism nexus* became the standard argument justifying a number of domestic and international measures. The social democrat Czech President Miloš Zeman claimed the influx of refugees into Europe was masterminded by Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood as “an organised invasion” to “gradually control Europe”.<sup>3</sup>

1. Károly Villányi, “Azt akarjuk, hogy unokáink egy európai kalifátusban éljenek?”, *Magyar Idők*, 14.11.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, <http://magyaridok.hu/belfold/azt-akarjuk-hogy-az-unokaink-egy-europai-kalifatusban-eljenek-5035/>.

2. “L. Simon: Szaporodjunk!”, *Népszabadság Online*, 05.09.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, [http://nol.hu/video/lSimon-a-szaporodasban-latja-a-jovot-1573295?utm\\_source=mandiner&utm\\_medium=link&utm\\_campaign=mandiner\\_201601](http://nol.hu/video/lSimon-a-szaporodasban-latja-a-jovot-1573295?utm_source=mandiner&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=mandiner_201601).

3. Agence France-Presse, “Integrating Muslims into Europe is ‘impossible’, says Czech president”, 18 January, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/18/integrating-muslims-into-europe-is-impossible-says-czech-president> (accessed 8 March, 2016)

## Policy Recommendations

Islamophobia poses a great risk to the democratic foundations of European constitutions and social peace as well as the coexistence of different cultures throughout Europe. Both civil society actors and states should acknowledge the seriousness of this issue and develop concrete policies to counter Islamophobia. Here we have summarised some of the important policy recommendations from the national reports.

- Islamophobia should be acknowledged as a crime and should be included in all national statistics throughout Europe.
- Hate crime legislations should be adopted in all European countries that acknowledge one's religious identity as being a basis upon which one may be targeted.
- In order to collect data about Islamophobic incidents, victims registers must be introduced in all European states.
- In order to help the victims of Islamophobic attacks, counseling services for victims must be established in all European states.
- Journalists, lawyers, Police (security officials) and legal authorities in all European countries should be educated by qualified personnel in regards to Islamophobia.
- Muslim civil society has to be empowered with information to combat Islamophobia, especially in the direction of the creation of a consciousness of the illegality of hate crimes.
- Educational institutions and stakeholders have to work towards creating an alternative narrative of Muslims in the respective countries which will work to dispel the widely accepted negative image of Islam.
- Civil society actors must also push for legislative change in the context of school enrolment policies so that all members of the respective societies are treated fairly when accessing education.
- Governments must draft a policy that ensures that the rights of religious minorities to manifest their faith are respected in education and the workplace; this must not be left to the preferences of individual boards of management or principals.
- Discrimination on the job market towards Muslims and especially Muslims who wear veils is a widespread phenomenon. This should be recognised and seriously addressed by better legal regulations and the creation of a relevant consciousness.
- Civil society actors must engage with media actors/outlets in terms of the publication and broadcasting of standards in order to reduce/minimise the use of racialising discourses vis-à-vis Muslims and other minority communities.
- The civil rights violations experienced by women wearing headscarves should be addressed by lawmakers and politicians.
- An independent media watchdog should be established in order to monitor media reports in real time in all respective countries.



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**BELGIUM**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2015

---

AMINA EASAT-DAAS



## THE AUTHOR

**Amina Easat-Daas** has recently completed her PhD at Aston University, Birmingham, UK. Her doctoral research is entitled *Muslim Women's Political Participation in Francophone Europe: A Comparative Analysis of France and Belgium*, and it specifically examines the motivations, opportunities and barriers to political participation by Muslim women in the two cases. Amina's broader research interests include the study of Muslim political participation and representation, Muslim women's dress, 'European Islam' and anti-Muslim prejudice or Islamophobia in Europe, and has several forthcoming book chapters and articles related to these topics. Amina has worked alongside prominent European NGOs. She regularly participates in academic conferences throughout the UK and has also previously presented some of her work related to anti-Muslim prejudice at the European Parliament in Brussels. [aeasat@gmail.com](mailto:aeasat@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 Easat-Daas (2016): Islamophobia in Belgium: *National Report 2015*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2015*, Istanbul, SETA, 2016.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This section of the European Islamophobia Report details the state of Islamophobia in Belgium in 2015 and establishes its significant growth across the country over the year. Islamophobia in Belgium is shaped by factors both internal and external to the country; most notably peaks in Islamophobia in Belgium correlate with events in Paris such as the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January and the series of terror attacks in the French capital in November 2015. Belgian Muslim women and young Muslims are disproportionately affected by the phenomenon, notwithstanding Muslim men and those presumed to be Muslim or those affiliated with Islam who are also targeted by Islamophobia. In spite of the growing rates of Islamophobia in the country, Belgium is also home to numerous counter-Islamophobia initiatives. Analysis of these groups demonstrates several examples of good practice, which have informed the set of recommendations proposed at the end of this section of the report.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY IN FRENCH**

Cette partie du Rapport Européen de l'Islamophobie raconte l'état de l'Islamophobie en Belgique pendant 2015 et il établit une forte croissance d'Islamophobie à travers du pays. L'Islamophobie en Belgique est formée par des éléments même dans le pays et l'extérieur, surtout des augmentations soudaines sont liées avec des évènements qui ont eu lieu à Paris, par exemple les attentats 'Charlie Hebdo' en janvier et la série des attentats terroristes du novembre 2015. Les Musulmanes et les jeunes Musulmans sont affectés par l'Islamophobie d'une façon disproportionnée, néanmoins les hommes Musulmans et ceux qui sont présumés d'être Musulman ou d'être affilié avec l'Islam sont aussi ciblé par l'Islamophobie en Belgique. Malgré l'augmentation de taux d'Islamophobie en Belgique, les organisations qui luttent contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique sont nombreuses. L'analyse de ces groupes démontre des exemples de bonne pratique, qui ont informé les recommandations proposées à la fin du rapport.

## INTRODUCTION

Belgium is the administrative and political heart of Europe. Its capital, Brussels, is the seat of the European Parliament and many prominent pan-European institutions. The Belgian federal regions differ in terms of the primary languages spoken, but also each region sees the foregrounding of complex political and social issues. Typically these concerns are in part driven by the influences exerted on the country by its closest neighbours: France and the Netherlands. More specifically the consequences of French polemics are more keenly perceived in Wallonia and in parts of the bilingual capital, Brussels. So, for example in spite of Belgian constitutional norms of organised secularism, the French secular, pro-assimilationist model strongly shapes normative attitudes in francophone Belgium. This influence is driven by both historical factors and also the presence of French language media. In 2015, perhaps more than ever before, this French influence has shaped both the nature and incidences of Islamophobia in Belgium.

Conversely in Dutch-speaking Flanders, the influence exerted by the Netherlands is more apparent. This typically manifests in the multicultural model taking precedence<sup>1</sup>. In spite of the dominance of multicultural norms, comparable to the Netherlands' successful Partij Voor de Vrijheid, or Freedom Party, Flanders is home to the particularly vocal and notably Islamophobic far-right political party, Vlaams Belang (VB), or Flemish Interest. Their moderate success shapes the nature of Islamophobia and to an extent contributes to the normalisation of anti-Muslim attitudes in the country.

Belgian Muslims make up an estimated 6 % of the overall Belgian population<sup>2</sup>, and are either of Moroccan or Turkish heritage. Furthermore, Belgium is also home to an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 native Belgian converts to Islam<sup>3</sup>. These Muslims are often as visible as their Turkish and Moroccan counterparts and also occupy prominent roles in the Belgian Muslim community, such as former Vice President of the Belgian Muslim Executive, Isabelle Praille.

During recent months in particular, the question of Islam, Muslims and Islamophobia in Belgium have been at the fore not only in the country but also globally. The year began with raids across Belgium as part of the search for suspected Islamic extremists, and although necessary, the raids contributed to the climate of fear of Belgian Muslims. The year continued with controversies surrounding Muslim women's dress and ended with an intense worldwide focus on Belgian Muslims coupled with a dramatic rise in Islamophobia following the attacks in Paris on 13 November, 2015.

1. Bertossi, Christophe. (2012): "French Republicanism and the Problem of Normative Density." *Comparative European Politics* no. 10 (3):248-265.

2. Pew Forum. (2015): *Religious Composition by Country 2010-2050*. Pew Forum 2015 [cited 02.08.15 2015]. Available from <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/2010/percent/all/>.

3. Karagiannis, Emmanuel. (2012): "European Converts to Islam: Mechanisms of Radicalization." *Politics, Religion and Ideology* no. 13 (1):99 - 113.

Ever increasing rates of Islamophobia underline the need to systematically document and analyse this growing trend. This section of the report draws on media sources, data compiled by Belgian and European anti-Islamophobia initiatives and key Belgian grassroots activists to present an overview of Islamophobia in Belgium in 2015.

Recognising the potentially problematic nature of defining Islamophobia and in a bid to refute claims of overgeneralisation or its non-existence, as highlighted by Allen<sup>4</sup>, this section of the European Islamophobia Report draws on several definitions of Islamophobia. Namely the initial definition put forward in the European Islamophobia Report, the first noted definition as put forward by the Runnymede Trust in its 1997 report *Islamophobia: A Challenge for us All* describes it as “... a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and therefore a fear of all or most Muslims” (Richardson 1997, 1). Finally the review of Islamophobia in Belgium in 2015 also relies on the definition of Islamophobia as applied by Counter-Islamophobia (CICB) or Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie/Collectief Tegen Islamofobie in België, taken from their sister organisation the Counter-Islamophobia Collective in France (CICF), or Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en France who describe Islamophobia as

“... discriminatory acts or violence against institutions or individuals based on their affiliation, real or imagined, with Islam. These acts are provoked by ideologies and discourses that create hostility and rejection of Muslims.”<sup>5</sup>

Applying these multiple definitions of Islamophobia allows for an understanding of the term’s complex and nuanced undertones that might not be as keenly understood if relying on a sole definition. Furthermore this also allows the report to capitalise on the way in which Islamophobia is understood in Belgium by those who record and report it.

Having established the particularisms of Belgium and the relevance of outlining the nature of Islamophobia in Belgium in 2015, this section of the report continues by outlining a chronological overview of selected significant Islamophobic events in Belgium that took place in this year. This is followed by a summary of selected Belgian anti-Islamophobia initiatives and some of their campaigns during 2015. The text continues by putting forward a series of conclusions and policy recommendations that arise from this section of the report.

## **CHRONOLOGY OF SIGNIFICANT ISLAMOPHOBIC EVENTS**

An overview of selected key Islamophobic events is presented in a timeline format in the section below. The chronology seeks to provide an insight into the scale of anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic events in Belgium during the course of 2015 by highlighting particular

---

4. Allen, Christopher. (2010): *Islamophobia*. Surrey: Ashgate.

5. CCIF, Collectif Contre L’Islamophobie. (2014) : Annual Report 2014. Paris: Collectif Contre L’Islamophobie.

peaks, troughs and triggers of Islamophobia over the year. The Islamophobic incidents detailed in this section are drawn from official publications by anti-Islamophobia organisations in Belgium, Belgian Muslim groups and individuals, and media sources. Undoubtedly, Islamophobia is a complex phenomenon with multiple actors and numerous victims and therefore the overview of anti-Muslim events detailed below only provides some insight into some of those who perpetrate Islamophobia in Belgium, such as the media, institutional actors, the general public and political figures. The chronology also sheds light on those who are at the receiving end of Islamophobia including visibly Muslim women, Muslim males, Muslim politicians, those presumed to be Muslim or affiliated with Muslims, Muslim organisations and sites of worship. Nonetheless, whilst the chronology highlights some of the multiple and complex factors that surround Islamophobia in Belgium in 2015, the section is by no means comprehensive since it is constrained by issues of self-reporting by victims of Islamophobia. The true scale of the phenomenon cannot be fully understood, and therefore as a result the chronology is best regarded as a snapshot of reported Islamophobia - or the tip of the iceberg.

## January

- 7 January, 2015. Attack on the Charlie Hebdo offices in Paris. The shootings, perpetrated by brothers Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, resulted in twelve deaths, including those of famous French cartoonists Jean Cabut, Stéphane Charbonnier and Philippe Honoré, and also the death of Muslim police officer Ahmed Mera-bet. Although these events took place across the border, the attacks resulted in an increase in reported incidences of Islamophobic attacks on Muslims and Muslim places of worship in Belgium. The events in Paris are also linked to raids that took place across Belgium later in January 2015.
- 8-9 January, 2015. Prominent Muslim organisations, such as the Belgian Muslim Executive (EMB) and the League of Belgian Muslims (LMB), issue official statements condemning the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, call for unity and speak out against the stigmatisation of Belgian Muslims<sup>6</sup>.
- 15 January, 2015. Following reports of possible attacks on sellers of the Charlie Hebdo publication inspired by the attacks in Paris earlier in the month, Belgian police carry out raids and arrests in areas with significant Muslim communities, including Verviers, Molenbeek, Schaebeek, Vilvoorde and Zaventem. Although necessary, these events contribute to the climate of fear of Belgian Muslims.

## February

- 15 February, 2015. Mosques in the francophone Belgian Liège province host an open mosque event, whereby members of the public are able to visit their local

6. Azzouzi, Karim. (2015): Communiqué de presse LMB: Attentat meurtrier contre l'hebdomadaire Charlie Hebdo. Brussels: Ligue des Musulmans de Belgique. Soir, Le. (2015b) : "L'Exécutif des musulmans de Belgique appelle «les acteurs musulmans à condamner le terrorisme»." 08.01.15.

mosque. Verviers-based imam, Franck Amin Hensch highlighted that the day sought to dispel popular stereotypes and associations of Muslims with radicalism. The day represents a timely example of the efforts to counter Islamophobic attitudes among the wider population undertaken by the Belgian Muslim community<sup>7</sup>.

## March

- 2 March, 2015. Around 200 demonstrators took to the streets in Antwerp in a Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West (PEGIDA) demonstration protesting against the alleged 'Islamification' of Europe<sup>8</sup>. Although founded in neighbouring Germany, PEGIDA has gained some support in Belgium. Support for the far-right and Islamophobic organisation is more keenly seen in Dutch-speaking Flanders, than in francophone Wallonia and Brussels. Coincidentally, as stated, Flanders is also home to the fairly successful far-right and notably anti-Muslim political party VB. Comparatively, far-right political parties see reduced success in francophone Belgium<sup>9</sup>. The already significant pool of supporters of the VB is likely to readily identify with the Islamophobic narrative promoted by PEGIDA and as a result likely to support their anti-Muslim and anti-Islam campaigns in Belgium.
- 25 March, 2015. Belgian far-right politician, Filip Dewinter of VB along with a group of Belgian lawmakers met with Syrian President Bashar Al Assad. Dewinter and his political party colleagues are noted for their Islamophobic positions, including the demonization of Muslim immigrants to Belgium and their rhetoric against the construction of mosques in the country. Dewinter is among several European politicians who have expressed support for Assad<sup>10</sup>. Dewinter's position arguably shaped the treatment of Syrian refugees, who are often Muslim, to Belgium later in the same year.

## April

- 1 April, 2015. Dutch-speaking Belgian anti-racism organisation, KifKif, and Documenting Oppression against Muslims report that the Catholic school in Mechelen has banned students from wearing long skirts to school. The ban is justified as a means of removing faith symbols from schools. Both organisations criticise the ban as being unfairly targeted towards young Muslim schoolgirls and therefore Islamophobic<sup>11</sup>. This Islamophobic event in Flanders precedes a similar controversy

---

7. Events, Islamic. (2015). *Des mosquées de la Province de Liège ouvrent leurs portes*, 10.02.2015 2015 [cited 20.11.2015 2015]. Available from <http://www.islamic-events.be/2015/02/mosquees-province-liege-portes-ouvertes/>.

8. Taylor, Sarah Joanne. (2015): "Belgium: PEGIDA Anti-Muslim March Attracts 200." *Euronews*, 03.03.2015.

9. Deschouwer, Kris. (2009): *The Politics of Belgium*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

10. Eye, Middle East. (2015): "Syria's Assad Meets Far-Right Belgian Politician." *Middle East Eye*, 25.03.2015.

11. Hudhayfa, Abu. (2015): *Catholic school in Belgium bans long dresses unfairly targets Muslim students*. Documenting Oppression Against Muslims 2015 [cited 20.10.2015 2015]. Available from <http://www.doamuslims.org/?p=2432>.



in Brussels and is reflective of the persistent and growing Islamophobic demonization and intense fixation on Muslim women's dress in Belgium.

- 23 April, 2015. The organisation Muslims' Rights Belgium (MRB) publish their annual report for the preceding year. The report indicates that 696 Islamophobic incidents took place in francophone Belgium alone during 2014. The report details incidents of Islamophobia including those that took place in the workplace, schools and public places. The document concludes that women are more likely to be victims of Islamophobia than men with 73 % of reports from women compared to 27 % from males, and also younger people are more likely to suffer anti-Muslim discrimination with 94 % of those who reported Islamophobia to MRB being aged twenty nine or under<sup>12</sup>.

## May

- 29 May, 2015. The francophone Belgian political party Centre Démocrat Humaniste announces its decision to expel its political representative in Schaerbeek and Brussels, Mahinur Özdemir. She is most famous for being the first elected political official in Europe who wears a headscarf. Özdemir has been involved with the party since 2006 and has stood as an elected political representative for the party at the municipal and regional parliamentary level since 2009. She was unexpectedly expelled from the party on the grounds of her alleged position on the Armenian genocide. Fellow political colleagues such as Farida Tahar dismissed the expulsion of Özdemir as an example of Islamophobia in Belgian politics<sup>13</sup>. In spite of her contestations and numerous supporters, Özdemir was formally excluded from the political party in November 2015. Nonetheless she continues to stand as an independent political official. Özdemir's experiences point to discriminations that cut across issues of ethnicity, gender and faith faced by many Muslim women, and Muslims more generally, in Belgium.
- 29 May, 2015. Reports emerged of thirty Brussels schoolgirls being denied entry to their school on the grounds of wearing long skirts. Their attire was deemed problematic since it was considered that the long skirts were overly symbolic of Islam. The affair follows a similar incident in Dutch-speaking Mechelen earlier in the year, and a similar controversy in France in the preceding weeks. However, in Brussels all reports indicate that the matter was quickly resolved and the girls were allowed back into their school soon after. Nonetheless, the affair demonstrates the often gendered nature of Islamophobia in Belgium<sup>14</sup>.

12. MRB, Muslims' Rights Belgium. (2014): *Islamophobie en Belgique Francophone: Rapport Annuel 2014*. Brussels: Muslims' Rights Belgium.

13. RTL. (2015): *L'exclusion de Mahinur Özdemir du cdH scandalise certains: "Cela ne va que cristalliser encore plus le débat"*. RTL Belgium 2015 [cited 05.06.15 2015]. Available from <http://www.rtl.be/info/regions/bruxelles/l-exclusion-de-mahinur-ozdemir-du-cdh-scandalise-certains-cela-ne-va-que-cristalliser-encore-plus-le-debat--727185.aspx>.

14. Tunakan, Begüm. (2015): "After France, Muslim Students in Belgium Banned from School." *Daily Sabah*, 31.05.15.

## June

- 26 June, 2015. The Belgian anti-racism organisation Movement against Racism, Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia (MRAX) publishes its report for the previous year. Although the report highlights a wide range of prejudice and discrimination, including anti-Semitism, Afrophobia and anti-Gypsyism, the report highlights an increase in the number of reports of Islamophobia it received, rising from 13 % in 2013, to more than 20 % of all reports received by the organisation in 2014. The document also points to the rise in Islamophobia with the increasing use of the internet and in particular social media<sup>15</sup>. These published figures correlate with a similar report published by MRB in April 2015 and indicate the concerning rise of Islamophobia in Belgium.

## July

- 31 July, 2015. The CICB reported a significant increase in anti-Muslim incidents in Belgium, rising from 95 recorded events in 2011 to 185 events in 2014<sup>16</sup>. Like the reports published by MRB and MRAX, the statistics published by the CICB indicate an increase in Islamophobia across the country. However, whilst all three reports point to a clear and significant increase in the incidence of Islamophobia in Belgium during the previous year, each of the organisations rely on self-reporting by victims to compile their statistics and therefore the findings in each case are bound by the constraints of victims of Islamophobia coming forward and cannot fully depict the scale of anti-Muslim discrimination. Reports of this rise in Islamophobia in Belgium also reach the mainstream media. Although the media faces much criticism for its role in the promotion of Islamophobic narratives, this article demonstrates the coverage of anti-Islamophobia initiatives in Belgium and points towards a positive move in raising public awareness in the growing problem of Islamophobia in the country.

## August

- 17 August, 2015. The company Siroperie Meurens reported intense Islamophobic backlash following its application for halal certification for their well-known sweet speciality, Sirop de Liège. The fruit syrup is already permissible for Muslim consumption. The bid for halal certification was part of the company's drive to penetrate Muslim markets, such as those in Indonesia or Egypt. The decision was met with calls for boycott of the product by the public and especially Catholics, and a false conflation of the company with the so-called Islamic State in Syria and the Levant (ISIL). The company CEO expressed his surprise stating

---

15. MRAX, *Mouvement Contre le Racisme, l'Antisémitisme et la Xénophobie*. (2014): Rapport MRAX 2014. Brussels: Mouvement Contre le Racisme, l'Antisémitisme et la Xénophobie.

16. CCIB, *Collectif Contre L'Islamophobie en Belgique*. (2015a): Communiqué de Presse: Islamophobie: J'écris ton Nom. Brussels: Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique.

“I know that there’s Islamophobia in Belgium, but not to this point”<sup>17</sup>. The example also indicates the way in which a presumed affiliation with Islam leaves individuals and organisations open to become victims of Islamophobia.

## September

- 3 September, 2015. Having previously lodged a complaint against the newspapers *Het Belang Van Limburg* and *De Gazet Van Antwerpen* for the publication of Islamophobic cartoons, the CICB receives correspondence from the editors recognising the error in publication. This specific case highlights the role of the media in the spread and normalisation of Islamophobia in Belgium, but also makes clear the way in which anti-Islamophobia groups work to combat this and the potential positive effects of such groups.
- 11 – 21 September, 2015. The CICB coordinates a week of action against Islamophobia in Belgium, including a sold out fundraising gala dinner held in Molenbeek on 18 September, 2015. The week primarily promoted the organisation’s work in their campaign against Islamophobia in Belgium.
- 21 September, 2015. The European Action Day against Islamophobia and Religious Intolerance held in the European Parliament in Brussels is organised by the Council of Europe and numerous non-governmental organisations as part of the No Hate Speech Movement project. The event is an example of the way in which Belgium is also at the fore of pan-European anti-Islamophobia initiatives.
- 24 September, 2015. The celebration of Eid al Adha by Muslims across the world. The Muslim festival traditionally entails the ritual sacrifice of an animal by Muslim adults in recognition of the Prophet Abraham’s actions. In Belgium the festival was preceded by controversy surrounding the practice of this ritual slaughter in Belgium. Typically, during the celebration the Belgian legislation that slaughter must take place in specific slaughterhouses is softened in order to allow Belgian Muslims to complete the slaughter. However, due to protest from animal rights activists, slaughters were restricted to only three sites in Brussels. Muslim officials dismissed the move as Islamophobic and called on Muslims to send money to the poor abroad or to donate money to Belgian projects (2015).

## October

- 1-2 October, 2015. The Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights held in Brussels, Belgium takes place. The colloquium theme this year is Tolerance and Respect: Preventing and Combating Anti-Semitic and Anti-Muslim Hatred in Europe. The conference theme underlines the similarities between Islamophobia

17. Holehouse, Matthew. (2015): “Belgian Fruit Syrup Faces Boycott Calls Over Halal Labelling.” *The Telegraph*, 17.08.2015.

and anti-Semitism and points to the pressing need to meaningfully combat both forms of religious hatred<sup>18</sup>.

- 15 October, 2015. Flemish Belgian schoolgirl, Silke Raats prematurely cuts short her social experiment where she wore the Islamic headscarf due to the unexpected amount of Islamophobic abuse she received. Examples include suggestions that she ought to be sent to Syria in spite of having no connection to the country and also suggestions that others should keep away from her since she might “start throwing bombs”<sup>19</sup>. Raats’ personal experiences shed light on the depth and severity of Islamophobia experienced towards visibly Muslim women in Belgium and the seemingly automatic associations made between Muslim women’s dress, extremism and threat of violence.

## November

- 13 November, 2015. Extremist attacks across Paris. The terror attacks resulted in 130 deaths and 368 injuries. Shortly after the attacks so-called ISIL claimed responsibility for the atrocities. The suspected attackers were thought to be from the Molenbeek area of Brussels. Although committed across the border, the attacks resulted in intense local, national and international scrutiny of Belgian Muslims and a sharp rise in Islamophobia.
- 14 November, 2015. The spike in Islamophobia also results in an increase in online anti-Muslim and anti-Islam posts; an example reported to the CICB includes the Facebook post “Fils de puta\*n... j’encu\*e le prophète” (“son of a bi\*ch, I fu\*k the Prophet”) accompanied by a photo of Adolf Hitler<sup>20</sup>.
- 16 November, 2015. The CICB receives a report of a female teacher conflating all Muslims with terrorists. The event resulted in both Muslim and non-Muslim students leaving the class, some of whom were in tears<sup>21</sup>.
- 16 November, 2015. A Muslim woman reports facing discrimination at work on the grounds of her headscarf<sup>22</sup>.
- 17 November, 2015. In a television appearance on RTL French polemicist Eric Zemmour controversially states that the alleged justification for the Paris attacks was rooted in Islam and the Qur’an. Most controversially, during the programme Zemmour stated “au lieu de bombarder Raqa, la France devrait bombarder Molenbeek d’où sont venus les commandos du vendredi”, suggesting that instead of bombing Islamic state-

---

18. European Commission. (2015): *Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights: “Tolerance and respect: preventing and combating antisemitic and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe”* 2015 [cited 2015.11.04 2015]. Available from [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/colloquium-fundamental-rights-2015/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/colloquium-fundamental-rights-2015/index_en.htm).

19. El Jafoufi, Khalid. (2015): “Belgian Girl Halts Social Experiment after Earning a Headscarf for 10 Days.” *Muslim*, 15.10.15.

20. CCIB, Collectif Contre L’Islamophobie en Belgique. (2015b): *Islamophobie en Belgique; Bilan des Actes Islamophobes Post-13 Novembre 2015*. Brussels: Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en Belgique.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

held Raqa in Syria, it would be more apt for France to bomb the Brussels area of Molenbeek. Although heavily populated by Muslims, Molenbeek was also home of the perpetrators of the Paris attacks. Zemmour's clearly Islamophobic remarks provoked outrage among Belgian Muslims and in response protests were staged in Brussels<sup>23</sup>.

- 21 November, 2015. As part of the search for Paris attacker Salah Abdeslam, the metro, schools, and shops are shut in Brussels.
- 26 November, 2015. Reports emerge of a suspected anthrax attack on the Grand Mosquée du Cinquenaire in Brussels. The substance was later found to be non-threatening<sup>24</sup>.
- 28 November, 2015. The recently formed group Bruxelloise et Voilée receive online hate speech suggesting “a bullet in the head” for the Muslim woman discussed in the online post<sup>25</sup>.

## December

- 2 December, 2015. Parliamentarian Mahinur Özdemir receives a threatening letter sent via the postal service to her home address. The letter has excrement smeared over it and reads “Bougn\*l, je ch\*e dans ta voile” (“W\*g, I sh\*t on your headscarf”)<sup>26</sup>.
- 7 December, 2015. LMB also receives postal correspondence marked with excrement stating “Je ch\*e dans ta geule sale bougn\*l” (“I sh\*t in your gob dirty w\*g”). The letter appears to be very similar to the letter received by politician Mahinur Özdemir a few days earlier<sup>27</sup>.
- 7 December, 2015. The CICB receives reports of a male school teacher accusing three students of being terrorists<sup>28</sup>.
- 8 December, 2015. Belgian newspaper La Capitale publishes reports of Belgian Muslim deputy receiving online Islamophobic abuse. The comments posted on social media stated “Jamal Ikazban le représentant des mosques radicales qui prône haine du juifs dans les quartiers” (“Jamal Ikazban, the representative of radical mosques that promote hating Jewish people in the suburbs”)<sup>29</sup>.

23. Libre, La. (2015): *Eric Zemmour: «La France devrait bombarder Molenbeek» (vidéo)*. La Libre 2015 [cited 21.11.2015 2015]. Available from <http://www.lesoir.be/1045840/article/actualite/france/2015-11-17/eric-zemmour-france-devrait-bombarder-molenbeek-video>.

24. RTBF (2015): *“Alerte anthrax” à la grande mosquée de Bruxelles: probablement de la farine* 2015 [cited 02.12.2015 2015]. Available from [http://www.rtbf.be/info/regions/bruxelles/detail\\_menace-terroriste-alerte-anthrax-declenchee-a-la-grande-mosquee-de-bruxelles?id=9148278](http://www.rtbf.be/info/regions/bruxelles/detail_menace-terroriste-alerte-anthrax-declenchee-a-la-grande-mosquee-de-bruxelles?id=9148278).

25. CCIB, Collectif Contre L'Islamophobie en Belgique. (2015b): *Islamophobie en Belgique; Bilan des Actes Islamophobes Post-13 Novembre 2015*. Brussels: Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Capitale, La. (2015): *Molenbeek: Jamal Ikazban dépose plainte pour des propos tenus sur Vivacité* 2015 [cited 19.12.2015 2015]. Available from <http://www.lacapitale.be/1441560/article/2015-12-10/molenbeek-jamal-ikazban-depose-plainte-pour-des-propos-tenus-sur-vivacite>.

- 13 December, 2015. A Muslim female teacher reports not being allowed to give a lesson in a public institution because she is wearing the Islamic headscarf<sup>30</sup>.
- 15 December, 2015. A Muslim police officer anonymously reports an increase in the circulation of Islamophobic mail in his area of work<sup>31</sup>.
- 15 December, 2015. A young Muslim mother is refused access to Cirque Bouglione on the grounds of her headscarf<sup>32</sup>.
- 16 December, 2015. The Brussels leader of the political party Mouvement Reformateur, Vincent De Wolf, issues a statement calling for the removal of faith symbols, notably including the Islamic headscarf, from public service roles<sup>33</sup>.
- 18 December, 2015. The CICB releases a statement indicating the sharp rise in Islamophobic attacks on Belgian Muslims is directly attributed to the Paris attacks. A total of 47 attacks are reported during the period between 13 November and 16 December, 2015. Attacks were physical, verbal, and also took place online. The official publication launched by the organisation was initially published in French, however many of the Islamophobic reports detailed by the group have been included in this chronology.
- 18 December, 2015. Le Soir publishes an article which reported an increase in the violent nature of Islamophobic attacks in Belgium, particularly since the Paris attacks<sup>34</sup>.
- 24 December, 2015. In his Christmas and New Year speech, King Philippe of Belgium pays particular attention to the Paris attacks and their consequences on Belgium and Belgian society. During his speech he recognises the challenges facing Belgian society, reaffirms the need for unity across Belgian society and speaks out against hate speech.

## COUNTER-ISLAMOPHOBIA INITIATIVES

Although the incidences of Islamophobia in Belgium are growing in number and complexity, the country is also home to numerous local, national and pan-European counter-Islamophobia initiatives. The section below details some of these organisations and highlights selected anti-Islamophobia projects led by these groups.

### European Network against Racism

The European Network against Racism (ENAR) is a Europe-wide anti-racism move-

---

30. CCIB, Collectif Contre L'Islamophobie en Belgique. (2015b): Islamophobie en Belgique; Bilan des Actes Islamophobes Post-13 Novembre 2015. Brussels: Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Soir, Le. (2015): *Vincent De Wolf: «Pas de voile dans la fonction publique»* 2015c [cited 2015.12.20 2015]. Available from <http://www.lesoir.be/1070889/article/actualite/belgique/politique/2015-12-16/vincent-wolf-pas-voile-dans-fonction-publique>.

34. Soir, Le. (2015): *L'Islamophobie Devient Plus Violente*. Le Soir 2015a [cited 20.12.15 2015]. Available from <http://www.lesoir.be/1072749/article/actualite/belgique/2015-12-18/l-islamophobie-devient-plus-violente>.

ment located in Brussels. The umbrella organisation was founded in 1998 and consistently leads campaigns to counter discrimination faced by European minorities, such as anti-Gypsyism, anti-Afrophobia and counter-Islamophobia projects. In its fight against Islamophobia during 2015, ENAR has participated and facilitated numerous anti-Islamophobia projects, including gathering online information detailing the state of Islamophobia in Europe and participating in local counter-Islamophobia initiatives. The organisation's senior policy officer, Julie Pascoët, oversees much of the organisation's work in the fight against Islamophobia. She stated that during 2015 and in particular the backlash encountered by Muslim communities following events in Paris the need to take Islamophobia more seriously has arisen and therefore in her capacity at ENAR she has

“...coordinated the design of a full-fledged advocacy strategy for combating Islamophobia, involving local and national anti-racist and human rights organisations. The idea was to increase our advocacy work at different levels in order to mutually support our efforts at local, national and European level, to increase our influence, with the final aim to make a concrete improvement for victims on the ground.”

ENAR is also currently compiling its *Forgotten Women: The Impact of Islamophobia on Muslim Women* project, which investigates the gendered effects of Islamophobia in eight European countries, including Belgium. Given that this report, along with others, have highlighted the disproportionate way in which Islamophobia affects Muslim women, the initiative led by ENAR represents a timely and much needed contribution to the study and fight against Islamophobia.

### **Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations**

The Forum of Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO) was founded in 1996 and represents young Muslims from across 23 European countries, including Belgium. The Brussels-based organisation provides training advocacy for Muslim youth on a variety of issues. President Yousef Himmat and former President, Intissar Kherigi came forward to contribute to this section of the report, and articulated the concerning nature of Islamophobia in Europe by stating

“It is a complex and multifaceted problem that is limiting the ability of the Muslim community, especially young people, to realise their potential...It affects how young European Muslim people see themselves and their place in European society... their sense of belonging and confidence, employment prospects, civic participation and life chances.”

FEMYSO continuously works to creatively tackle this widespread and deep-rooted problem by coordinating numerous seminars, providing training opportunities and study sessions. The organisation is also invited to participate on counter-Islamophobia programmes and has worked with the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and United Nations in the past. FEMYSO is also



invested in researching the effects of Islamophobia on Muslims and especially Muslim youth across Europe, including Belgium<sup>35</sup>.

### **The Counter-Islamophobia Collective in Belgium**

The Counter-Islamophobia Collective in Belgium (CICB) is perhaps the country's foremost anti-Islamophobia organisation. The group focuses its efforts on documenting and countering anti-Muslim hate in Belgium. The organisation works across the Belgian linguistic communities and is therefore able to report and provide support for both Flemish and francophone victims of Islamophobia. The CICB was founded in September 2014 and its formation was inspired by its French counterpart, the Counter-Islamophobia Collective in France. During 2015, CICB has been especially active in the fight against Islamophobia, many of its activities have been outlined in section three of this part of the European Islamophobia Report.

### **KifKif**

The Belgian association KifKif is based in Flanders and focuses on combatting prejudice in the region. As part of their commitment to the fight against discrimination in Dutch-speaking Belgium, the organisation has team members dedicated to reporting, monitoring and combatting Islamophobia. For example, in 2015, KifKif ran a series of training workshops in Antwerp related to understanding and countering anti-Muslim stereotypes, among others, in the media.

### **Muslims' Rights Belgium**

Muslims' Rights Belgium (MRB) is a francophone Belgian counter-Islamophobia organisation. MRB's primary objectives include combatting Islamophobia and enabling victims of anti-Muslim hate to continue to contribute to Belgian society. Since its formation in 2012, MRB has published an annual report detailing the accounts of Islamophobia in francophone Belgium that they have received.

## **CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

To summarise and conclude, this report has demonstrated the extent of anti-Muslim prejudice and its manifestations in Belgium during the course of 2015. Principal findings that emerge from this overview include the following observations: firstly, like the other reports presented in the chronology, there is a growing presence of Islamophobia in Belgium. Documenting these events in a timeline demonstrated how anti-Muslim acts in Belgium are strongly shaped by external factors. In 2015, Islamophobia in Belgium was most significantly influenced by factors in France,

---

35. Ray, Elsa, Samy Debah, Raouda Ghenania, Youssef Himmat, Najatte Kaaouis, Intissar Kherigi, and Marwan Muhammad. (2014): *Islamophobia in Europe: Description of a Scourge*, Report on Islamophobia in Europe. Brussels: IMAN. Easat-Daas, Amina. (2013): *European Muslim Youth and the Rise of the Far-Right Anti-Muslim Narrative*. Brussels: FEMYSO.



such as the Charlie Hebdo shootings in January 2015 and the terrorist attacks that took place across Paris in November 2015. To a lesser extent anti-Muslim incidents in Belgium were also shaped by European factors, such as the rise of PEGIDA across Europe, and internal factors such as halal food.

The review of the nature and scale of Islamophobia in Belgium in 2015 also indicated that anti-Muslim prejudices disproportionately affect women and to a lesser extent young people. Belgian Muslim women are targeted in particular due to their often visibly Muslim appearance. The work undertaken by Belgium-based organisations such as FEMYSO and ENAR into the effects of Islamophobia on these groups in conjunction with the observation that Muslim women and youth are comparatively affected to a greater extent by Islamophobia in Belgium underlines the importance of such projects.

At the outset of this section of the European Islamophobia Report the report explored the way in which key Belgian anti-Islamophobia initiatives define Islamophobia; however, the information presented in section three, and in particular the Siroperie Meurens case, highlighted that not only Muslims and those presumed to be Muslim are targeted by Islamophobia, but those thought to be affiliated or supportive of Muslims are also negatively affected by its consequences. Therefore, based on this observation it is perhaps appropriate to consider Islamophobia as something that affects Muslims, presumed Muslims and those affiliated with and supportive of Muslims and also physical sites linked to these individuals.

Outlining selected counter-Islamophobia projects highlighted both the extent of anti-Muslim acts in Belgium and also the outstanding work undertaken by these numerous initiatives to counter normalisation of Islamophobic discourses in the country, to compile statistical and qualitative reviews of the severity of the problem, and perhaps most importantly, to provide support for those subject to Islamophobia in Belgium. Nonetheless, in spite of the extensive work that these groups are engaged in, anti-Muslim prejudice and hate remains a growing problem in Belgium and it is in light of this observation that this national report puts forward the following recommendations:

**Defining Islamophobia.** On the national and European level, collectively employ a definition of Islamophobia that incorporates the range of individuals adversely affected by the phenomenon, including Muslims and those perceived as either being or affiliated with Muslims.

**Collaborative Working.** Organise a national platform where the numerous Belgian counter-Islamophobia initiatives can come together to combine their extensive efforts in order to successfully and efficiently tackle the growing problem of Islamophobia.

**Support.** The need for continued support for victims of Islamophobia, particularly for Belgian Muslim women and young Belgian Muslims. Collaborative working may enable Belgium's multiple anti-Islamophobia groups to provide specialised support

for those most targeted by the problem. These initiatives must also continue to be supported both financially and morally by Belgian political officials.

**Awareness.** Promote an increased awareness of the work undertaken by Belgian counter-Islamophobia projects, Islamophobia reporting facilities, and informing citizens of their rights in order to enable and empower victims in their everyday lives.

**Community Cohesion.** As stated by King Philippe in his end of year public address, Belgium and its diverse population must not be divided by all that has affected Belgium during 2015 and instead Belgians must come together and show zero tolerance for hate. Belgian politicians and counter-Islamophobia should be at the fore in promoting this and working together for a more cohesive and unified Belgium.

## REFERENCES

2015. Ritual Slaughter Besets Belgium Ahead of Eid al-Adha Holiday 2015 [cited 04.11.2015 2015]. Available from <http://www.news24.com/Green/News/Ritual-slaughter-besets-Belgium-ahead-of-Eid-al-Adha-holiday-20150922>.

Allen, Christopher. 2010. Islamophobia. Surrey: Ashgate.

Azzouzi, Karim. 2015. Communiqué de presse LMB: Attentat meurtrier contre l'hebdomadaire Charlie Hebdo. Brussels: Ligue des Musulmans de Belgique.

Bertossi, Christophe. 2012. "French Republicanism and the Problem of Normative Density." *Comparative European Politics* no. 10 (3):248-265.

Capitale, La. 2015. Molenbeek: Jamal Ikazban dépose plainte pour des propos tenus sur Vivacité 2015 [cited 19.12.2015 2015]. Available from <http://www.lacapitale.be/1441560/article/2015-12-10/molenbeek-jamal-ikazban-depose-plainte-pour-des-propos-tenus-sur-vivacite>.

CCIB, Collectif Contre L'Islamophobie en Belgique. 2015a. Communiqué de Presse: Islamophobie: J'écris ton Nom. Brussels: Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique.

CCIB, Collectif Contre L'Islamophobie en Belgique. 2015b. Islamophobie en Belgique; Bilan des Actes Islamophobes Post-13 Novembre 2015. Brussels: Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique.

CCIF, Collectif Contre L'Islamophobie. 2014. Annual Report 2014. Paris: Collectif Contre L'Islamophobie.

Deschouwer, Kris. 2009. *The Politics of Belgium*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Easat-Daas, Amina. 2013. *European Muslim Youth and the Rise of the Far-Right Anti-Muslim Narrative*. Brussels: FEMYSO.

El Jafoufi, Khalid. 2015. "Belgian Girl Halts Social Experiment after Earning a Headscarf for 10 Days." *Muslim*, 15.10.15.

European Commission. 2015. Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights: “Tolerance and respect: preventing and combating antisemitic and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe” 2015 [cited 2015.11.04 2015]. Available from [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/colloquium-fundamental-rights-2015/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/colloquium-fundamental-rights-2015/index_en.htm).

Events, Islamic. 2015. Des mosquées de la Province de Liège ouvrent leurs portes, 10.02.2015 2015 [cited 20.11.2015 2015]. Available from <http://www.islamic-events.be/2015/02/mosquees-province-liege-portes-ouvertes/>.

Eye, Middle East. 2015. “Syria’s Assad Meets Far-Right Belgian Politician.” Middle East Eye, 25.03.2015.

Holehouse, Matthew. 2015. “Belgian Fruit Syrup Faces Boycott Calls Over Halal Labelling.” The Telegraph, 17.08.2015.

Hudhayfa, Abu. 2015. Catholic school in Belgium bans long dresses unfairly targets Muslim students. Documenting Oppression Against Muslims 2015 [cited 20.10.2015 2015]. Available from <http://www.doamuslims.org/?p=2432>.

Karagiannis, Emmanuel. 2012. “European Converts to Islam: Mechanisms of Radicalization.” Politics, Religion and Ideology no. 13 (1):99 - 113.

Libre, La. 2015. Eric Zemmour: «La France devrait bombardier Molenbeek» (vidéo). La Libre 2015 [cited 21.11.2015 2015]. Available from <http://www.lesoir.be/1045840/article/actualite/france/2015-11-17/eric-zemmour-france-devrait-bombardier-molenbeek-video>.

MRAX, Mouvement Contre le Racisme, l’Antisémitisme et la Xénophobie. 2014. Rapport MRAX 2014. Brussels: Mouvement Contre le Racisme, l’Antisémitisme et la Xénophobie.

MRB, Muslims’ Rights Belgium. 2014. Islamophobie en Belgique Francophone: Rapport Annuel 2014. Brussels: Muslims’ Rights Belgium.

PEGIDA Vlaanderen. 2015. PEGIDA Vlaanderen 2015 [cited 20.12.2015 2015]. Available from [www.facebook.com/pegidavlaanderen](http://www.facebook.com/pegidavlaanderen).

Pew Forum. 2015. Religious Composition by Country 2010-2050. Pew Forum 2015 [cited 02.08.15 2015]. Available from <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/2010/percent/all/>.

Ray, Elsa, Samy Debah, Raouda Ghenania, Youssef Himmat, Najatte Kaaouss, Intissar Kherigi, and Marwan Muhammad. 2014. Islamophobia in Europe: Description of a Scourge, Report on Islamophobia in Europe. Brussels: IMAN.

Richardson, Robin. 1997. Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All. London: The Runnymede Trust.

RTBF. 2015. “Alerte anthrax” à la grande mosquée de Bruxelles: probablement de la farine 2015 [cited 02.12.2015 2015]. Available from <http://www.rtbef.be/info/>

regions/bruxelles/detail\_menace-terroriste-alerte-anthrax-declenchee-a-la-grande-mosquee-de-bruxelles?id=9148278.

RTL. 2015. L'exclusion de Mahinur Özdemir du cdH scandalise certains: "Cela ne va que cristalliser encore plus le débat". RTL Belgium 2015 [cited 05.06.15 2015]. Available from <http://www.rtl.be/info/regions/bruxelles/l-exclusion-de-mahinur-ozdemir-du-cdh-scandalise-certains-cela-ne-va-que-cristalliser-encore-plus-le-debat--727185.aspx>.

Soir, Le. 2015. L'Islamophobie Devient Plus Violente. Le Soir 2015a [cited 20.12.15 2015]. Available from <http://www.lesoir.be/1072749/article/actualite/belgique/2015-12-18/l-islamophobie-devient-plus-violente>.

Soir, Le. 2015b. "L'Exécutif des musulmans de Belgique appelle «les acteurs musulmans à condamner le terrorisme»." 08.01.15.

Soir, Le. 2015. Vincent De Wolf: «Pas de voile dans la fonction publique» 2015c [cited 2015.12.20 2015]. Available from <http://www.lesoir.be/1070889/article/actualite/belgique/politique/2015-12-16/vincent-wolf-pas-voile-dans-fonction-publique>.

Taylor, Sarah Joanne. 2015. "Belgium: PEGIDA Anti-Muslim March Attracts 200." Euronews, 03.03.2015.

Tunakan, BegÜm. 2015. "After France, Muslim Students in Belgium Banned from School." Daily Sabah, 31.05.15.

## ABBREVIATIONS

| Abbreviation | English  | Original Language  |
|--------------|--|--|
| CICB         | The Counter-Islamophobia Collective in Belgium           | French – Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en Belgique<br>Dutch - Collectief Tegen Islamofobie in België |
| CICF         | The Counter-Islamophobia Collective in France            | French- Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en France  |
| EMB          | The Belgian Muslim Executive                             | French - Exécutif Musulman de Belgique<br>Dutch - Executief van de Moslems de België                   |
| ENAR         | European Network against Racism                          |  |
| FEMYSO       | Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations |  |
| IMAN         | Islamophobia Monitoring and Action Network Project       |  |
| ‘ISIL’       | Islamic State of Syria and the Levant                    |  |
| LMB          | Belgian Muslim League                                    | French- Ligue des Musulmans de Belgique  |
| MRAX         | Movement against Racism, Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia    | French - Mouvement Contre le Racisme, l’Antisémitisme et la Xénophobie                                 |
| MRB          | Muslims’ Rights Belgium                                  |  |
| PEGIDA       | Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West | German - Patriotische Europäer Gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes)Appendices                      |
| VB           | Flemish Interest   | Dutch – Vlaams Belang  |



Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism poses a growing threat to the democratic foundations of European constitutions and social peace as well as the coexistence of different cultures throughout Europe. Both civil society actors and states should acknowledge the seriousness of this issue and develop concrete policies to counter Islamophobia.

As the leading think tank in Turkey, SETA felt an urgent need to address this problem. In fact, there are still people denying the very existence of racism against Muslims. Many state and civil society institutions, from the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) to the countless civil society organisations throughout Europe, have done priceless work to prove and establish the opposite. Yet, institutions like the FRA publish only irregular reports on a restricted number of countries while most civil society organisations tackle racism in general and only few focus on Islamophobia in particular -this is the urgent gap our report wishes to fill.

The European Islamophobia Report (EIR) is an annual report, which is presented for the first time this year. It currently comprises 25 national reports regarding each state and the tendencies of Islamophobia in each respective country. The current report features the work of 37 extraordinary scholars. In the years to come we will attempt to cover even more countries. This report aims to enable policymakers as well as the public to discuss the issue of Islamophobia with the help of qualitative data. At the same time, several of its unique characteristic features make a difference to the current state of the debate on Islamophobia. Studies on Islamophobia have in the past predominantly concentrated on Western Europe. This is especially the case with reports focusing on Islamophobia. The EIR is the first to cover a wide range of Eastern European countries like Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania and Latvia. This will enrich the debate on racism in general and Islamophobia in Europe in particular.

## 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. and Cairo. 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.



ANKARA • ISTANBUL • WASHINGTON D.C. • CAIRO

