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EUROPEAN  
**ISLAMOPHOBIA**  
REPORT  

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2015

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ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

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# 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  
**CROATIA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2015

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VEDRAN OBUĆINA



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In 2015, Islamophobia was on rise due to numerous terrorist attacks, instability in the Middle East, and the so-called 'refugee crisis'. There were several cases of Islamophobia in this period in Croatia, connected to the murder of a Croatian citizen in Egypt, the refugee route through Croatia, and the use of Islamophobic discourse for political purposes. However, one can claim that the historical relations with Muslims, the media and political awareness, and a solid legislative framework block the appearance of stronger popular forms of Islamophobia in the country. This experience might be used as a 'Croatian model', an example of a country with a positive legislative framework and the presence of cooperation with the Islamic community instead of its alienation as a separate and hostile minority. This model can also act as a boundary for potential Islamophobia in the future based on Zagreb's Declaration of European Muslims.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY IN CROATIAN**

Islamofobija je tijekom 2015. bila u porastu uslijed brojnih terorističkih napada, nestabilnosti na Bliskom istoku i izbjegličke krize. Hrvatska je u to vrijeme doživjela nekoliko slučajeva islamofobije, povezane s ubojstvom Hrvata u Egiptu, izbjegličke rute preko Hrvatske i upotrebe islamofobije u političke svrhe. Ipak, povijesni odnosi s muslimanima, svjesnost medija i politike, te dobar zakonodavni okvir spašavaju Hrvatsku od snažnije islamofobije. Potrebno je iskoristiti to iskustvo kako bi se postavio "hrvatski model" a ujedno spriječila pojava islamofobije u budućnosti.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2016, Croatia will celebrate the 100th anniversary of Islam as a state-recognised religion. In 1916, Islam was recognised as such together with a number of Christian denominations and Judaism. This legal status of Islam is shared by only three other EU member states: Spain, Belgium and Austria. Concrete geographic and demographic circumstances, as well as historical experience, make Croatia unique among EU countries. Although never completely conquered by the Ottoman Empire, large parts of Croatia were historically under its rule. This contributed to a significant Islamic heritage and consequently a distinct Balkan cultural influence, which together with its Mediterranean and Central European components have formed Croatian culture. Croatian continental and coastal areas were the furthestmost provinces of the Ottoman Empire. It is only after the Austrian army occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina, and later annexed it to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, that the number of Muslim citizens increased in contemporary Croatia. In 1910, there were only 204 Muslims living in Croatia, but Islam was recognised as one of the official religions of the country in 1916. The first mosque was built in the navy headquarters in the port of Pula.

Croatia is a traditionally multicultural society, where Islamophobia has no deep roots, although the country itself is home to a predominantly Catholic society. However, the historical ambivalences made Croatia a place where people from different regions meet and trade. Thus, Croatia today has more than 22 national minorities. Throughout the last 100 years, Muslims have been regarded as ‘friends’ of the Croatian people, mainly focusing on Muslims originating from Bosnia or Albanian Muslims from Kosovo. Bosnian Muslims became a separate entity only in 1974; previously they were regarded as either Serbs or Croats of Islamic faith. In the Second World War, Bosnian Muslim leadership sided with the fascist Independent State of Croatia and formed an alliance where Croats were regarded as one nation with two faiths: Catholic and Islamic. The Vice President of the Independent State of Croatia Džafer Kulenović was the leader of the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation, while the Muslims comprised nearly 12 per cent of the Ustaše military and civil service authority.<sup>1</sup> Stunningly, the first big mosque in the Croatian capital Zagreb was built by Fascist rulers in 1943. Thus, even among the right-wing oriented Croats Muslims don’t present a significant threat - an attitude that is valid, however, only in relation to Balkan Muslims. At the same time, the Muslim population was engaged in the anti-fascist movements and in Yugoslavia were recognised as a special ethnic entity, today called Bosniaks. Despite a one-year war between Croatian and Bosniak forces in the 1990s, the two communities were allies against the Serbian invasion, and Croatia alone accepted thousands of Bosniak refugees during the war. Bosnia is still regarded as ‘our Islam’ and Islamic heritage

1. Velikonja, Mitja (1992) *Religious Separation and Political Intolerance in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Texas A&M University Press, p. 179.

and customs permeate Croatian everyday life – in cuisine, festivities, and cultural life. This is additionally accentuated by the building of mosques without major objections from the majority population, in times when surrounding countries are showing heavy Islamophobia towards the mosques built according to the Muslims standards, the role of the Islamic community in Croatia, and the Croatian legal framework.

According to the population census in 2011, 62,977 Muslims live in Croatia, i.e. less than three per cent of the total population. Muslims are active through the Islamic Community in Croatia, which has 22 local communities and its head office in Zagreb.

Research on public opinion regarding the perception of discrimination positions religious affiliation in the third place of self-identification criteria in Croatia, behind national identity and social status.<sup>2</sup> This is especially accentuated in states where there is one predominant religion versus societies where two or more religious communities with large membership coexist. Key problems recognised in societies with a predominant religion are, hostility in the public sphere and in media, the question of adaptation of religious practice, using or wearing religious symbols, access to schools with visible religious symbols, religious education, as well as hostility in the employment sector. Here members of other religious communities are denied access to jobs, advancement, and they often need to comply with rules which are against their religious beliefs.

This report focuses on Islamophobia in Croatia in 2015. This year witnessed a great shift in Croatia's self-positioning in regional and global terms. For quite some time, Croatian foreign policy was predominantly passive, focusing on its path to membership in the European Union and NATO, and reasserting its relations with neighbours, primarily those in Central and South Eastern Europe. However, political and social developments in the Middle East started to affect every day decision-making in Croatia, as the so-called 'refugee crisis' emerged stronger, and a Croatian citizen was killed in Egypt. Several significant incidents and developments occurred in the country during the period under review. A Croatian citizen, Tomislav Salopek, was beheaded by the Daesh terrorist group in Egypt in the middle of summer 2015, making him the first Croatian victim of extremist ideology. He was abducted by terrorists from his car and after short diplomatic and military measures, he was killed. This event provoked discussions about Islam and Islamic behaviour in various internet forums, where standard prejudices were voiced. Public media, however, stressed the messages by governmental bodies and various human rights organisations, which focused on explaining that public terrorism is not synonymous with Islam.

Croatia also experienced a large migration flow through its territory. When Hungary decided to close its borders with Serbia, effectively stopping migrants from

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2. Istraživanje o stavovima i razini svijesti o diskriminaciji i pojavnim oblicima diskriminacije (Survey on attitudes and awareness levels of discrimination and manifestations of discrimination); Ombudsman Office in the Republic of Croatia, Zagreb, 2012.

entering the European Union, refugees and other immigrants diverted to Croatia. More than half a million people crossed Croatia. The government, army, NGOs, and local people helped them with organised transportation, camps, medical help, translations, advice, etc. However, it also provoked a national discussion about refugees from Syria and migrants from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Migrants were also part of discussions where direct Islamophobia was detected. After the elections in November some right-wing political parties expressed rising Islamophobic standpoints, using the migration flow as a threat against local traditions, customs, and way of life. Direct international discussions in this regard also took place in late spring when the visiting theatrical production of Michel Houellebecq was cancelled due to security reasons, which made reference to the author's and the show's Islamophobic standpoints.

## **DISCUSSION OF ISLAMOPHOBIC INCIDENTS AND DISCURSIVE EVENTS IN VARIOUS FIELDS**

### **Employment**

In terms of employment, there was not a single case reported regarding Islamophobia in the workplace. However, Croatian attitudes changed drastically due to the so-called 'immigration crisis'. In 2015, Croatian citizens participated twice in a Eurobarometer survey on immigration. In the span of just half a year, their answers drastically changed. From spring 2015 until the end of the year, negative answers on migration rose by 10 per cent. Before, 43 per cent of the population had negative views on immigrants from outside the EU; now this has risen to 53 per cent. Positive attitudes are present in 41 per cent of population, which is again 4 per cent lower than in the previous survey. This is due to the fact that more than half a million immigrants, mostly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq passed through Croatia.

According to the EU agreement on quotas for refugees in EU member countries from September 2015, Croatia should accept up to 1,600 economic and political migrants. The rise of negative attitudes toward these migrants is partly connected to fear of change in the employment market. Entrepreneurs and unions are calming the situation. They remind the public that Croatia will accept a small number of migrants, who will not endanger workplaces, simply because there are fewer and fewer jobs available. They point to the necessity of integrating them in society and not placing them in a ghetto. However, in ten years Croatia will face a significant shortage of manual workers<sup>3</sup> and one policy to combat this problem will certainly be the acceptance of manual workers from abroad. Deficits are already visible in certain

3. "Unions: Refugees are not a threat", <http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/sindikati-izbjeglice-nisu-prijetnja-1045951>, accessed:5.1.2016

artisan workplaces; this shortage will be predominantly addressed with the labour of Muslim population from Asia and Africa and with technology solutions.

## **Education and culture**

History and religion are only two high school subjects where Islam is mentioned in the Croatian school curriculum. History lessons offer only basic knowledge of the Islamic world in the Middle Ages. Islam is introduced in a succinct manner as a religion based on the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad, and five pillars of the Islamic religion are mentioned. In the history class on the Arab conquests, a sentence states "The idea of holy war against the infidels (jihad) had a very important role in the Arab conquests",<sup>4</sup> thus giving a wrong impression of jihad and prejudicing students at an early age against jihad, jihadists, and the role of war in Islam. A substantial part of historical lessons is devoted to the Ottoman period in the Balkans, and especially to the Ottomans in Croatia and Bosnia. These lessons depict the Ottoman Empire as a strong state with a cruel ruling system in its provinces. They focus on battles and life under Ottoman rule and stress the conscription of janissaries and the transportation of local children to Istanbul. The Ottoman village system and economy are given a fair share of attention, as well as an analysis of the millet system for non-Islamic communities in the Empire. The rest of the history lessons are devoted to the fight against the Ottomans. Overall, the Ottoman Empire is considered to have had a negative influence on Croatian history, and on the history of the Balkan Peninsula, where they are presented as aggressors. The same role, however, is given to Venice, Italy, Hungary, and Austria during the various periods throughout history. An interesting turn of events in the Croatian understanding and perception of the Ottomans occurred with the Turkish soap opera *Suleyman the Magnificent*, which was aired in Croatia in 2014 and 2015. It quickly became one of the most viewed soap operas on Croatian national television and started a trend of learning the Turkish language.

Religion class is offered through various options. A student can choose between religious study and ethics study. Those who opt for religious study, can join the regular class of Roman Catholic religion study or may choose to have verified Sunday School class in their own religious community. The majority of students choose Roman Catholic religion study, where Islam is mentioned and discussed together with other religions in terms of interfaith dialogue and the dogmatic attitude of the Catholic Church to these religions. Overall, there is no Islamophobic content - notwithstanding the lack of discussion of Islam or the offer of any substantial knowledge of it.

In spring 2015, the staging of Michel Houellebecq's play in Dubrovnik's annual summer theatrical season provoked a discussion of his Islamophobic standpoints and

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4. *History 3* (Povijest 3), a reader for the third year of high school, Školska knjiga.

the issue of Islamic terrorism. Michel Houellebecq is a French writer, poet and laureate; his play was cancelled due to security reasons. His true name is Michel Thomas, and he is one of most controversial writers in France because of his attitude towards Islam. His play *Elementary Particles* caused massive debates in Croatia and his anti-Islamic attitudes came to the fore.<sup>5</sup> In Croatia, many writers supported Houellebecq's right of free speech, although nobody clearly pointed to the Islamophobic content of his work. The artistic director of Dubrovnik's summer plays Mani Gotovac made a public statement against the cancellation of *Elementary Particles*, stating it is "returning Croatia to the Middle Ages".<sup>6</sup>

The analytical work of the Croatian Security and Intelligence Agency (SOA) concluded that the play posed a security risk in the highly touristic environment of the old city of Dubrovnik. The document issued by SOA, which set a precedent in Croatian cultural history, pointed to the danger of "Islamic extremism" from neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>7</sup> A short time before the document was issued, a terrorist attack on Zvornik's police station in Bosnia and Herzegovina was carried out.<sup>8</sup> Based on a confirmed suspicion that there were active cells of militant fundamentalists there, SOA's security check concluded that the staging of the play posed too many dangers for the audience in Dubrovnik, based on its proximity to the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The SOA document, however, did not request that the play be removed from the programme, although the document clearly pointed to the fact that this would be a desirable outcome. The Ministry of Internal Affairs made only a sentence-long statement: "We inform you that the staging of *Elementary Particles* presents a security risk".<sup>9</sup> The Islamic Community of Dubrovnik, and the main office of the Islamic Community in Croatia, reacted negatively to the play. The final decision was correlated with the high tourist season and the importance of security as a criterion for choosing a holiday destination. The police and intelligence services researched in particular the history of Michel Houellebecq's Islamophobic activities and the reactions to them, and made this somewhat controversial decision. *Elementary Particles* was staged, however, but in another Croatian town.

5. Houellebecq started to describe Islam as "the most stupid religion" in 2001. He was accused of religious discrimination and of causing offence based on the adherence to the Islamic faith. He later made startling statements about the relationships between Jews and Muslims, favouring the Jewish side. He claims Islamophobia is an imagined concept and wrote a highly Islamophobic novel after the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attack.

6. "Mani Gotovac: Forbiddin Houellebecq is invitation to terrorists": <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/mani-gotovac-zabrana-houellebecqa-u-dubrovniku-je-poziv-teroristima/819856.aspx>, accessed: 4.1.2016

7. For information on what the secret service wrote in its report on the play of the controversial Frenchman in Dubrovnik see <http://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/procitajte-sto-je-tajna-sluzba-napisala-u-svom-izvjescju-o-zabranjenoj-predstavi-kontroverznog-francuza-u-dubrovniku/>, accessed.4.1.2016

8. "Bosnia: Gunman kills officer in Zvornik police station", <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32491026>, accessed 4.1.2016

9. "Because of security risk, Houellebecq's play canceled", <http://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/dubrovnik-zbog-sigurnosnog-rizika-skinuta-predstava-m-houellebecqa---385019.html>, accessed 4.1.2016

## Politics

Croatia held its parliamentary elections in November 2015. Two major parties, the conservative Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ) and the Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska partija, SDP) formed two large coalitions. HDZ led the Patriotic Coalition, a union of Christian democrats, conservatives, right liberals, and right-wing parties. SDP formed a coalition of leftist parties, left liberals, and regional parties. The surprise of these elections was the major success of a third party, MOST – a list of independent politicians. For almost two months MOST negotiated with both coalitions in an effort to make a grand coalition government. In the end, MOST agreed to form a government with the Patriotic Coalition led by a non-partisan economic expert.

Among the parties represented in the Patriotic Coalition, Hrast stands for the most right-wing and conservative political options. It labels itself a popular and Christian movement which introduces Croatian politics with new people, new ideas and new strategies. These new people are mostly unknown to the broader public and most of them have never taken part in the political arena. They feel Croatia has become a spiritual and material wasteland and want to fight against society's political, economic and moral crisis. The president of the Hrast Party – Movement for Better Croatia, and member of the Patriotic Coalition Ladislav Ilčić made several strong Islamophobic statements in the course of discussions over the government formation. His comments were made in a time of great influx of migrants through Croatia. Ilčić is an academic musician, born in the northern Croatian town of Varaždin. He is one of the founders and president of the NGO Grozd –Voice of Parents for Children, an organisation promoting the conservative upbringing of children and a conservative understanding of family, based on the TeenStar programme in the USA.

According to Ilčić, the refugees from Asia and Africa are stronger biologically than Europeans and millions of them will cross over to Europe. He made a controversial public statement on N1 TV stating that refugees' children are equal but not the same with children of European descent. The reason for this, explained Ilčić, is that the refugees have a different mentality which can change Croatian culture. He stated "There is a big difference between Muslims and Croats, in work habits, in worldview, ideals, attitude toward women. We are different. We are equally worthy, but we are different. Multiculturalism is dead, Angela Merkel said it too. States have to think about their own identity".<sup>10</sup> Ilčić believes Croatia should build a barbed wire around its borders, like Hungary. In this way, sovereignty and security can be established with entrance through gates. Otherwise,

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10. "Ilčić from Karamarko's coalition: Muslims are biologically stronger than Croats, imagine millions of them come", <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/ilcic-iz-karamarkove-koalicije-muslimani-su-bioloski-jaci-od-hrvata-zamislite-da-ih-dodje-milijun/860212.aspx>, accessed 6.1.2016

he claims, Croatia will be overcrowded with “millions of Muslims, with different mentality, which will change Croatian culture”.<sup>11</sup> Ilčić also stressed that the refugees will call their friends in the Middle East and invite them over because Croatia is letting refugees freely pass through.

The statements made by Ilčić were strongly discussed in public. The leader of the biggest Croatian political party and the head of the Patriotic Coalition Tomislav Karamarko stressed that this is not the stand of the coalition. Later on, Ilčić tried to further explain his standpoints. He said that the Muslims in Croatia have a similar mentality to Croats, but Arab Muslims do not, and there are strong problems of their socialisation and integration. Regarding the inflow of migrants, Ilčić clarified that he wants to close the borders to economic migrants and let in only refugees from Syria, whose lives are verifiably in danger. The Hrast party also made an official statement. Firstly, the party will make court objections against individuals who publicly accused Ilčić as a racist, fascist, Nazi or xenophobic person. The official statement claims Ilčić did not offend anyone and that the higher birth rate among Muslims is considered by Ilčić and the party as a positive phenomenon. It also stresses that his other statements were misunderstood and taken out of context.

Ilčić was also a guest in the popular political talk show *Otvoreno* (Open) on Croatian Radio-Television (HRT), together with the chief imam of Zagreb Mosque Mirza Mešić; the researcher from the Centre for Peace Studies Sandra Benčić; and demographer Stjepan Šterc. Ilčić again explained that he did not endorse extreme right attitudes, stressed he was telling the truth and that he was politically correct. Ilčić repeated that he believes in cultural differences and reminded everyone that they should act according to the constitution which states that Croatia is a country of Croatian people and national minorities. He also made another controversial statement: “We cannot say that it is the same if Croatian Muslims, Hungarians, Australians, Mexicans, or Iraqis live here. We have to keep to the constitution and build a responsible immigration policy. Muslims have weaker work ethics and it is a fact that they have more children”.<sup>12</sup> Mešić, an imam, said on the show that Ilčić should apologise to all Muslims in Croatia, which are fully integrated, as well as to the mothers of the 1,160 Muslims who died defending Croatia in the Homeland War of 1990-1995. Mešić reminded him that Muslims in Croatia are worried because the political right uses Islam and Islamic values for their own causes. ISIL, he stressed, “has taken a billion and half Muslims hostages and uses them as a political tool, while extreme right is counting more votes. Only an ignorant and extremely bad person can put Islam

11. Ibid.

12. “Ilčić: I am not an extremist, but Muslims have a weaker work ethic and more children”, <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/ilcic-nisam-ekstremist-ali-muslimani-imaju-slabije-radne-navike-i-vise-djece/861195.aspx>, accessed 6.1.2016

in the context of terrorism and violence”.<sup>13</sup> Ilčić responded that he does not want to have bad relations with the Islamic community in Croatia. He reminded him that the Hrast party, while it was still an NGO, took part in five initiatives with the Islamic community that were oriented towards the protection of family, marriage and children. Ilčić also reminded the public that he had received the award for promoting religious freedom in 2013.

There were no political statements more radical than Ilčić’s about migrants and Muslims. His comments about barbed wire brought back deep and highly disturbing memories for the Croatian people. He forgets that concentration camps also had barbed wire alongside the door through which people entered in a civilised manner - much like how he described the potential barbed wire on the Croatian borders. Ilčić fails to see the resemblance of the barbed wires on borders today with the barbed wires on the borders of ex-Communist states. A vast portion of European citizens today associate barbed wire with the times of the totalitarian rule of their countries. When Hungary and Slovenia started to build barbed wire, citizens organised themselves and discouraged this troublesome decision. On the Croatian-Slovenian border citizens from both sides put Christmas decorations on the wires and played volleyball and tennis, ridiculing the decisions of the Slovenian government.

Ilčić’s biological determination of Muslims is also worrisome. His idea of a million Muslims in Croatia is problematic, as only 20 people asked for asylum in Croatia, and there is no proof that they are all Muslims. However, Ilčić continues to express doubts only about Muslims coming to Croatia and Europe; if a million non-Muslims and non-Croats come to Croatia, wouldn’t they also change Croatia dramatically? The problem with Ilčić’s statement is that he deliberately focuses exclusively on a single religious community and makes discriminatory claims about it. Furthermore, the argument of biological strength is a racially dubious idea, similar to the totalitarian ideas of Nazism, fascism, and racial segregation in the USA and South Africa. Birth rates are demographically based on the development of a country’s social and pension systems and Ilčić does not take into account that the third and fourth generations of Muslims living in Europe have the same number of children as their non-Muslim compatriots.

The stress on the cultural closeness with Croatian Muslims has further right-wing connotations. The vast majority of Croatian Muslims are of Bosnian descent. In a way, Bosnian and Croatian Muslims are regarded as ‘our own’, a fact that also has some positive consequences: namely, Croats are traditionally close to the Muslim customs and it is customary for state officials to celebrate Muslim holidays. Croatian national symbols such as Ante Starčević have stated that the Islamic faith is not a negative influence on the Croatian spirit, but a positive one. In his words, religion

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13. Ibid.

does not determine a nation: “A Croat can be a Catholic, an Orthodox, a Protestant, a Muslim, an atheist... but let him be a Croat”.

## Media

In response to the debates provoked by Ilčić, several commentaries were made. Among them, one oriented in his defence was written by conservative public commentator Ivica Šola and published in the daily newspaper *Slobodna Dalmacija*, a regional daily widely read in Dalmatia and southern Croatia, where Šola is a guest columnist. The newspaper sells over 35,000 copies daily and has a solid standing as the primary voice of the important region of Dalmatia. In this article Šola claims that political correctness is the “AIDS of thought, a virus of Orwellian new speech, causing auto-censorship”.<sup>14</sup> In his opinion, the suffix ‘phobia’ is an invention in the service of the political and social agendas of people who don’t have the same opinions as others and can cause havoc. In the case of Islamophobia, Šola believes it has two major functions: to silence not only critical but tolerant Europeans and also Muslims themselves. He writes “when a European points to the problematic things in the Islamic faith, he becomes an Islamophobe”.<sup>15</sup> According Šola, this term is oriented against the Muslims who criticise their own faith and its integrity, who ask for family reforms, equality between the sexes, and who defend the Muslim right to apostasy. These voices are challenged by fatwas, sometimes even murder. Šola believes this is the right Islam, because it is backed by the Qur’an and Islamic law tradition. He calls on Islamic religious dignitaries to display more self-criticism and less self-defence. He especially pointed to Mešić, who he believes makes a dichotomy between the morally decadent West and the proud and authentic Islam. Mešić wrote an article in a daily newspaper where he claimed Europeans will suffer a demographic deficit due to their materialism, hedonism, lust, homosexual lifestyle, and the limited care for their children and parents. As an alternative, Mešić pointed to the youth of Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan who care for family relations, marry early, love their family and their faith. As a result, Mešić claimed Muslims become “a danger” for old Europe, making the way for the rise of xenophobia, Islamophobia, racism, etc. Šola makes a clear attack on this way of thinking, pointing to the fact that Mešić can freely express his worldview, but in Islamic states many can’t. He compares Western countries, where Muslims can freely build mosques and the Islamic world where it is “a sensation to build a church”; also reminding his readership of the suffering of Christians in the Middle East today. Šola wonders

14.”I, an Islamophobe Šola? Why not!”, <http://www.slobodnadalmacija.hr/Hrvatska/tabid/66/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/308311/Default.aspx>, accessed 6.1.2016

15. Ibid.

why Muslims come to Europe, if it is a land of decadent, morally corrupt, racist populations. He ends this contentious article with the claim: “Regarding the ‘tolerant’ treatment of non-Muslims in the Islamic states, which rational man could not be an Islamophobe? In this context, I am Islamophobe, why not!”<sup>16</sup>

Overall, in 2015, Islam was massively present in the media, which carries the risk of different understandings, misinterpretations and misuses, both from the media networks and from those who wish to achieve their own goals by misusing the media space and religion. This risk potentially can provoke a deeper divide between cultures and civilisations, and can provoke a negative perception of Islam. Discriminatory and hate speech in Croatia is predominantly oriented towards members of the national minorities and is an activity against the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities in the Republic of Croatia. This is especially evident in the media world, even when there is no influx of news. Among the 145 radio stations in Croatia (only 10 are non-profit radios), none belonging to national minorities or religious minorities, although national TV and radio stations have programs and feature shows about the religious and national minorities, and in their languages. The massive presence of Islam and Islamic topics is related to the political and social turmoil in the Middle East, Daesh terrorism, and the so-called ‘refugee crisis’. Most reported news is agency news from foreign (predominantly Western) news agencies. As such they bring mainstream Western information to the Croatian public. The uncritical choice of words and audiovisual content brings prejudices with it. Images from war zones often depict ruined old medieval cities catering to the ethnically colourful European collective imagination of Muslims; exclusively crying veiled women; exclusively bearded armed men. In the backgrounds mosques, religious buildings or bazaars are often shown. The visual content brings together the Islamic call “Allahu Akbar” and the warrior call among terrorists. Everything points to a picture in which the media presents the Islamic world as backward, violent, authoritarian and repressive.

Uncritical wordings often follow such images and videos. Most media uncritically use and abuse the term ‘jihad’ and call terrorists ‘jihadists’. The same wording is present when naming terrorists ‘Islamist militants’ or ‘Islamic fundamentalists’, giving the impression there is not a sufficient understanding of the difference between Islamism as a political-social movement and Islam as a religion. The media very rarely uses terms such as ‘Wahhabi’ and ‘Salafi’; as a result they are not considered as schools of thought in Islam but as violent and ultra-conservative movements and terrorist ideology.

The Internet became more oriented towards Islamophobic content in the time of the tragic event of the killing a Croatian professional in Egypt by a Daesh terrorist group. Strong fears of a possible outbreak of Islamophobia were felt in July, after a Cro-

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16. Ibid.

atian worker in Egypt, Tomislav Salopek, was abducted, held hostage and decapitated by the terrorist organisation ISIL or Daesh. For ten days, institutions knew nothing about him and on 5 August, Daesh released a video in which the group claimed they would execute Salopek if the Egyptian government did not release “Muslim women” from jails within 48 hours. The video showed Salopek who confirmed his abduction. The group identified themselves as the ‘Sinai Province of the Islamic State’. Almost instantly a diplomatic initiative from the Croatian side started to develop. The Croatian Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Vesna Pusić travelled to Cairo with Salopek’s wife and talked to the Egyptian Foreign Minister Saleh Shoukry. In the meantime, the 48 hours ended and there was no news regarding the fate of Salopek. The Croatian President Kolinda Grabar Kitarović talked to Egyptian President Abdul Fatah al-Sisi about the matter and Croatian Chief Mufti Aziz Hasanović contacted the religious and state institutions in Egypt. A hard period without any news followed. In the end, Daesh released photographs of a decapitated man, claiming it was Salopek. The photo was not published in Croatian media out of respect for the victim.

Internet forums are full of prejudices toward Muslims, using the words ‘terrorism’, ‘terrorist’, ‘fundamentalists’, ‘extremists’ and “backward’ in connection to the words ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’. References are made to Muslims as those who cannot “enjoy alcohol” or wondering how anyone can make such tough regulations forbidding the enjoyment of Croatian pork specialties such as prosciutto, thus expressing strong prejudice toward the Islamic diet. In 2015, the Centre for Halal Certification partook in large media and public campaigns in an effort to change the views on halal foods and many Croatian companies achieved halal certification - although mostly as a way to export halal products and services to the Balkans and the Middle East. Sensationalist web portals, particularly *dnevno.hr* promoted these prejudices throughout the year. This specific web portal expresses a dominant nationalist and Catholic orientation, is opposed to leftist political forces and liberalism, as well as to Serbian nationalism. Its feature stories are sensational and focus on conspiracies, Masonic traitors and communist threats. The website’s owner, Michael Ljubas, has a dubious business background and also owns *dnevno.rs*, a web portal in Serbia with a similar style but with a stress on Serbian Orthodoxy and Serbian nationalism. Other media outlets throughout the year tried to discover more information about extremist groups, using predominantly the contents of foreign and Western sources. Few local experts, including the author of this report, were helpful in making this debate and reports as truthful as possible. Most media tried to divert anger and prejudices toward simplistic explanations of Islamic beliefs and the Croatian government tried to expose these attitudes as well. Direct accusations and slanderous labelling was attached to Wahhabism and Salafism in reports, although there was no substantial evidence that their authors in fact understood what these terms really mean.

## Justice system

Croatia hosts one of the most advanced legal frameworks regarding the position of religious communities. The latter have the right to independently and freely set their internal organisation, management, hierarchy, representation and content of faith; to establish connections with members of their faith abroad; and to control whether a religious community spreads intolerance and hatred toward other religious community or citizens. The law stipulates free exercise of religion in religious institutions and in open space. Religious communities can freely and in accordance with the law open schools and universities, as well as special religious schools. The pre-school generation can also have, upon request, a special upbringing in religious kindergartens. All religious communities can have their leaders in medical and social institutions, in prisons, armed forces, police, etc.

An important aspect of the Croatian legislative model is the fact that the Islamic community in Croatia is not an immigrant one, but a native one. In other European countries, Muslims usually gather in special national groups, for example Turkish or Algerian Muslim communities. This adds to the inconsistency in the understanding of the faith and its weaker standpoint in wider society.

The Croatian ombudsman is the prime medium for tackling Islamophobia at the state level. Its office presented an initiative for regulation change based on the objections received by the institution. In one specific step, the ombudsman office made concrete changes based on the objections of people who could not use their photographs with hijabs for driving licences or identity cards. In 2015, the Ministry of Internal Affairs accepted religious or medical reasons for covering parts of one's head.<sup>17</sup> The ombudsman's office also points to the need for better implementation of existing regulations, for the use of horizontal directives and for the strengthening of national bodies with mandates on fighting discrimination based on religious affiliation. In the end of the year, Lora Vidović, the ombudsman, became president of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions with plans to also focus on tackling the Islamophobia. In an interview given in December 2015 she admitted, however, there was no official research by her office on rising Islamophobia in Croatia.<sup>18</sup>

This legal framework pleases the Islamic community and Muslims in Croatia.<sup>19</sup> Muslim leaders often point to the fact that this legal model can be used as a role model for European Islam. In 2006, a Declaration of European Muslims was signed in Zagreb. It is based on the Rawlsian principle that a free and rational

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17. "Discrimination based on religion: experiences of Equality Institutions in Europe", <http://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/dis/cld/674-diskriminacija-na-osnovu-vjere-iskustva-tijela-za-jednakost-diljem-europe>, accessed 29.12.2015

18. "Vidović: We don't have concrete data of rising Islamophobia in Croatia", <http://hr.n1info.com/a90312/Video/Vidovic-Nemamo-konkretno-podatke-o-povecanoj-islamofobiji-u-Hrvatskoj.html>, accessed 29.12.2015

19. "Muslims satisfied with their position in Croatia", <http://www.index.hr/mobile/clanak.aspx?category=vijesti&cid=831294>, accessed 15.12.2015

person concerned with furthering his or her own interests is accepted in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association, thus making Europe “a house of social contract”.

## CONCLUSION

### Policy recommendations for politics and NGOs

As can be seen in the previous sections, due to the number of Muslims living in Croatia, and the lack of immigrants residing permanently in the country, Croatia has comparatively fewer cases of Islamophobia. There is a strong divide between the approach to the local Muslims, mostly originating from Bosnia and Kosovo and now second- or third-generation Croats, and to the Muslims from around the world. Bosnian and Kosovo Muslims are regarded as ‘our neighbours’, although with a kind of backward background, in some instances. Muslims from other countries were until recently quite a distant occurrence. In 2015, this changed as thousands of immigrants passed through Croatia and after a Croatian citizen was killed by a Daesh terrorist group. This dichotomy is vividly evident in the discussion between Ilčić and Mešić in a live TV debate. The former points to Muslims from the Middle East and regards ‘them’ as different (‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy), thus giving a political impetus to the prejudicial characterisations of Muslims as backward, terrorists, fundamentalists, extremists, violent toward women, bearded, and savage; Mešić meanwhile draws attention to the illogical approach to Muslims and Islam. On the one hand, there is a right-wing politician who despises and fears the arrival of Muslim immigrants, who “bear many children” and “posit a threat to Croatian culture”. On the other, the exact same right-wing politics favour Bosnian Muslims as a part of the Croatian nation with an Islamic faith and describe them as part of the Croatian cultural heritage.<sup>20</sup>

The lack of serious debate in the broader public sphere, however, is a worrying sign of the possibility of more Islamophobia in the future in Croatian society. Many news reports focus on sensationalist and stereotypical coverage of events and personalities from all around the Islamic world. The broader public might be under the influence of a Turkish historical soap opera that offers a new portrayal of history (the grand vizier is a Croat, albeit a rather negative character in the series), but the fear of migrants is based on the overall negative news reports from the Middle East and beyond. Islam is always presented in the media as connected to war, terrorism and accidents, such as the big accident during the Hajj in Mecca. A small section of the public orients itself to the more quality media and to academic discussions. Out of all the Islamic states, only Turkey and Iran enjoy a fairly positive image, mostly in terms of their economic advancements.

20. Croatian culture is based on three cultural traditions: Catholic Central European, Catholic Mediterranean and Catholic-Muslim Balkan.

Given that the legal framework and the role of the Islamic community in Croatia are regarded positively by Muslims, there is a need to strengthen public awareness of these achievements, to make a horizontal approach and to promote more public-oriented actions in recognising the present and past characteristics of Islam in Croatia and abroad. The year 2016 will be paramount in this regard, as it is the year when the Islamic community and Croatia will celebrate the 100 years of Islam as a nationally recognised religion.

**The Croatian state should:**

- Give institutional focus to the Croatian legislative integrative solutions on the EU level.
- Support the national standardisation of halal products and make this the role model in the EU.
- Continue the Islamic education of Croatian soldiers serving in various international missions in Islamic countries, such as Afghanistan.
- Respect the rules and guidelines giving legislative exceptions based on religious beliefs.
- Work harder on detecting hate speech and discrimination based on religion, especially in the political and media realms.
- Give the ombudsman additional power and financial means to conduct regular and official national reports on Islamophobia on a yearly basis.
- Support the creation of local interdisciplinary groups, consisting of local authorities, local religious leaders and NGOs, oriented towards the resolution of Islamophobic and other discrimination cases in the field. The example given in Kosovo is helpful in this manner. With the involvement of decision makers in society a solid bridge between the political and religious spheres can be built and special teams dedicated to the inter-religious dialogue can tackle any negative situations that occur.

**The Croatian education system should:**

- Include religion study in schools apart from faith-based teaching. The political and public support of different interpretations of religious teachings that reduce misunderstanding and conflict can also be supported in this way, as well as the visits to mosques and Islamic centres.
- Give substantially more length to the information offered at high school on Islam, in cooperation with the Islamic community in Croatia.
- Introduce Islamic studies to Croatian universities, either by making it a subject of special study or adding specialised subjects in various faculties (e.g. Islamic Law, Islamic Economics, Islamic Culture, Comparative Religious Studies, etc). Without this education, Croatian citizens lack basic understanding and knowledge of Islam, leading to ignorance, prejudices, and consequently the rise of Islamophobic attitudes.

**NGOs should:**

- Foster and facilitate interfaith dialogue and cooperation. The role of the religious clergy and laity can be increased, as well as the awareness of policymakers and their receptivity to the potential contributions in fighting the discrimination, marginalisation, and victimisation of the religious minority.
- In cooperation with cultural and educational institutions, and the embassies of Islamic countries organise substantially more public events focused on understanding Islam and Muslims, through art, discussion, food, music and movies. The old tradition of exchanging greetings on Eids (bayrams, religious holidays) and sharing iftar meals during the holy month of Ramadan, is a good starting point.
- Work on independent reports on Islamophobia on the local and state levels.

**The media should:**

- Provide education for journalists, including visits to Muslim countries.
- Control hate speech and hidden Islamophobia in reports.
- Insist on broadening horizons through networking, mutual learning, fostering common values and making quality ethical and spiritual decisions within universal values. The media itself can contribute significantly to these processes by keeping an objective and critical approach and not employing sensationalism which gives rise to different phobias and damages peace and stability. The openness of religious communities to the media and their perseverance in preventing deviant interpretations is also necessary for achieving the goals of this process.

The Syrian philosopher Sadiq al-Azm has remarked that the question remaining about the future of Europe is “Will it be an Islamised Europe or a Europeanised Islam?” (Lewis, 2007:19). The question – and the answer – clearly has the Muslim advantage in sight. Bernard Lewis argues the Muslims have fervour and conviction, which in most Western countries are either weak or lacking. Muslims are mostly convinced of the rightness of their cause, whereas Westerners spend their time in self-denigration and self-abasement. Muslims have loyalty and discipline, as well as demography. But, Muslims are also painfully aware that they lack solid education and come from relatively underdeveloped countries. The difference in the terminology of freedom is as well a sign of the troubled understanding between East and West. This troubled understanding is evident in the Zagreb Declaration of European Muslims, albeit with propositions that are becoming increasingly more and more utopic. Instead, it seems the Europe is really turning more and more Islamophobic, with mainstream governments issuing drastic anti-immigration laws and moving against religious traditions. As Islam is not recognised as an official religion in many countries, Muslim communities are left without the possibilities of choosing their places of worship,

without standardised halal certification and without many other things that sustain the practical life of a believer. In these circumstances it is vital to point to the different solutions, as the one offered in Croatia. Using art, culture, and the legal framework, the Croatian solution is trying to focus European societies on the notion that Islam is part of Europe and not something alien to it. After all, Christianity, Judaism - both regarded as the foundations of modern European cultures - and Islam stem from the same environment and the same geographic location. In a way, all that is Western is in fact Eastern. Architecture is definitely the most visible sign of societal relations. European cultural landscapes are the product of centuries of architectural and cultural traditions residing in the particular environment of national cultures. With the exclusion of the Balkan countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia or Albania, most of these national cultures are either non-religious or they adhere to some form of Christianity coupled with the influence of the Jewish European tradition. In the last 50 years, and particular in the last 20 years, these countries have experienced the immigration flows from all around the world, and Islam became the largest growing religion in Europe. In time, it caused problems in the urban design. Muslim places of worship have particular layouts that follow precise religious rules. Recently, European countries refused to acknowledge the rights of Muslim communities to build mosques with minarets, apparently because it ruins the cultural landscape of their countries. The Alpine countries Switzerland and Austria were very loud in expressing their views that minarets cannot be built under the Alps. A similar Catholic society, Croatia, however, has three mosques in a country where Muslims count for less than two per cent of the population. Croatia lies at the crossroads of East and West and although nominally Western and a Catholic country, it understands the notion of 'raw cosmopolitanism', where cultures and religions mix into what the Iranian administration called a "dialogue among civilisations". As a consequence, the urban design in Croatia is characterised by the incorporation of Muslim symbols and mosques in its cultural and natural environment, best seen in the case of the Rijeka Mosque. As such, Croatia might become a case study for the solution of many multi-religious and multicultural problems in contemporary Europe. Rijeka Mosque is a symbol of the strength of architecture. It follows the approach defined by the active relationship of architecture and its social context, and mediates between society, politics, economy, philosophy, on one side, and the form, art and faith, on the other. On the micro level, this transcoding gives a vital idea of how it should be done on the macro level. It involves the legal framework, government approval, but also the duties and responsibilities of the Muslim community living in a particular place, town or country. Foremost, it is the compliance with the loyalty to one's country of residence and the understanding of the local culture. Architectural visibility makes a perfect blend of both.

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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.

