
EUROPEAN
ISLAMOPHOBIA
REPORT

2015

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’,¹ 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’.² 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”.³

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.

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
**CZECH
REPUBLIC**
NATIONAL REPORT 2015

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The most significant developments in 2015 related to Islamophobia are the increase in public display of aggressive intolerance in the form of demonstrations, which took place repeatedly in numerous cities across the Czech Republic and the change from groups that are active only on social media and occasional demonstrations (in much smaller numbers than online) to the establishment of a future political party (currently still registered only as an association) called 'Block Against Islam', led by the leading representative of Islamophobia, Associate Professor of Entomology, Martin Konvička. His party entered a coalition with other two parties to compete at the coming regional elections with support of their Islamophobic worldview from the highest level of power in the country, namely the President of the Czech Republic Miloš Zeman. It should be stressed, however, that the Prime Minister, the Minister for Human Rights, and the Minister of Justice condemn the polarising and simplified views of the President. President Zeman however gave support to extremists by standing on the same stage with Mr. Konvička during the National Day celebration on 17 November, 2015.

Islamophobia has become connected to the issues of the so-called 'refugee crisis'. In the minds of many, refugees are Muslims only and arguments against immigration and asylum policy become one with arguments against Muslims and Islam. Incidents of violence directed at mosques, mostly vandalism and Islamophobic obsessions with pigs have occurred. In addition, it seems that a few women who wear hijabs or even non-Muslim women who use scarves, for example, for medical reasons, have become subjects of harassment and verbal abuse which has increased the polarisation of society. On a positive note, 2015 saw the development of voluntary groups and initiatives helping refugees and countering extremist discourse. Czech volunteers have gained international acclaim for their efforts in helping refugees both in their country but especially abroad (Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia). Czech academics signed a petition against xenophobia. Certain Christian groups expressed their views in the petition, which stated "We refuse every initiative to provide help to refugees based on ethnic or religious adherence. Dividing people in need based on faith or ethnicity goes against the humanist tradition and spirit of the Czech Constitution. It also goes against the Biblical testimony and Christian tradition not to limit help to one's fellow people to co-religionists only."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY IN CZECH

Nejdůležitější aspekty týkající se islamofobie v roce 2015 jsou: Nárůst veřejných projevů agresivní intolerance v podobě opakovaných demonstrací v různých městech v České republice

Změna ze skupin aktivních převážně na sociálních sítích a při příležitostných demonstracích (které ovšem většinou přitahovaly daleko menší počet osob, než-li tomu bylo online) na etablování politického hnutí pod názvem Blok proti Islámu, pod vedením hlavního představitele islamofobie, docenta entomologie, pana Martina Konvičky. Jeho hnutí vstoupilo do koalice s dalšími dvěma subjekty a hodlá se ucházet o hlasy voličů v nadcházejících krajských volbách.

Podpora islamofobních názorů ze strany nejvyšších pater moci, a sice ze strany samotného prezidenta ČR, pana Miloše Zemana. Nutno dodat, že předseda vlády, ministr pro lidská práva a ministr spravedlnosti odsuzují polarizující a zjednodušující názory prezidenta. Pan Zeman však poskytl podporu extremistům tím, že při oslavách 17.listopadu vystupoval na podiu společně s nimi, resp. současně s panem Konvičkou.

Islamofobie splynula s xenofobií, která je namířená převážně proti uprchlíkům. Mnozí se domnívají, že všichni uprchlíci jsou muslimové a argumenty proti imigraci obecně a proti azylové politice se sloučily s argumenty proti muslimům a Islámu.

Objevují se incidenty násilí zaměřeného na mešity, většinou ve formě vandalismu a incidenty týkající se islamofobní obsesi vepřový masem. Kromě toho, oběťmi verbálního obtěžování se stávají ženy, které se zahalují, ať už se jedná o muslimky (kterých je velmi málo) nebo ne-muslimky, zahalující se z jiných, např. zdravotních, důvodů. Většinou se jedná o verbální, ale někdy i o fyzické útoky.

Zvyšuje se polarizace postojů ve společnosti, což vede (jako pozitivní důsledek) k rozvoji dobrovolnických hnutí a iniciativ pomáhajících uprchlíkům a bojujících proti extremismu. Českým dobrovolníkům se dostalo mezinárodního uznání díky jejich úsilí pomáhat uprchlíkům, a to jak v ČR, zvláště pak ale v zahraničí (v Maďarsku, Srbsku, Chorvatsku, Makedonii). Čeští akademici iniciovali a podepsali petici proti xenofobii. Některá křesťanská hnutí vyjádřila svůj pohled na věc v petici, říkající: „Odmítáme jakoukoli iniciativu poskytující pomoc uprchlíkům na základě jejich etnicity nebo náboženského přesvědčení. Rozlišování lidí na základě víry nebo etnicity je v rozporu se zásadami lidskosti a duchem české Ústavy. Takové rozlišování je zároveň v rozporu s biblickými svědectvími a křesťanskou tradicí, které odmítají, aby byla pomoc poskytována pouze spoluvěrcům.“

INTRODUCTION

Regarding the situation of the broadly defined term ‘Muslim’, authors agree that the best way to describe the current state of affairs in the Czech Republic is “Islamophobia without Muslims”. This formula pertains to the low number of actual Muslims in the country that include visible and invisible Muslims (e.g. converts or Bosnian Muslims). According to the last census of 2011, 1.943 persons declared Islam as their faith and 1.442 were registered as members of the Center of Muslim Communities.¹ Given that declaring religious denomination is entirely voluntary according to Czech law, there are estimates that there are approximately 19.000 Muslims in the Czech Republic.² This number includes Czech converts (a very small number), spa tourists, asylum applicants, refugees, immigrants with various residence permits and Czech citizens of migrant background. The Muslim migration to the Czech lands has a complex history; currently most Muslims are from Bosnia and Herzegovina - a consequence of the war in Bosnia during the 1990s-, from ex-Soviet republics, mostly from Caucasus, but also from Egypt, Syria and other Middle-Eastern countries. According to another source, the Muslim community has 11.235 members living in the country, which constitutes 0,1 per cent of the total population. The same source, quoting a sociological study on the life of Muslims in the Czech Republic commissioned by the Ministry of Interior, states that most of its members are university graduates and secondary-school leavers who arrived in then Czechoslovakia in the 1980s and 1990s to study. Most of them came from Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. According to the same study, Muslims are economically successful thanks to their education and their number, unlike in many other European countries, is not expected to grow.³

According to the magazine *Týden*, there are four mosques and nine Muslim places of prayer in the Czech Republic; mosques can be found in Prague, Teplice – Nové Lázně, Hradec Králové, where the locals have initiated a petition against it, and Brno. There is a house of prayer in Brno, which is connected with a language school. In Karlovy Vary, in Western Bohemia, it is situated in the Thermal Hotel. In Kolová, near Karlovy Vary, the house is administered by Kazakh Muslims, *Týden* writes. In Prague there are five houses of prayer. One is situated in a hall of residence, another is visited mainly by Turks. One near the centre of Prague is operated by the Islamic Foundation in the Czech Republic. The newest house of prayer was opened nearby, and another

1. Český statistický úřad, “Obyvatelstvo podle náboženské víry v krajích”, [2. Daniel Topinka, Tomáš Janků, Lenka Linhartová, Jan Zadina, “Muslimové imigranti v České republice: etablování na veřejnosti”, \[3. Prague Post, Czech Muslims are numerically negligible, \\[120\\]\\(http://www.praguepost.com/czech-news/43767-czech-muslims-are-numerically-negligible”, accessed 15 January, 2016.</p>
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<div data-bbox=\)](https://vdb.czso.cz/vdbv2/faces/cs/index.jspx?_afzpage=vystup-objekt-vyhledavani&str=&evo=&verze=-1&pvo kc=&nahled=N&sp=N&nuid=&zs=&skupId=&filtr=G-F_M-F_Z-F_R-F_P-S-_null_null_&katalog=all&z=N&vyhltext=n%C3%A1bo%C5%BEenst-v%C3%AD&udIdent=&pvo=SLD9100PU-KR&pvoch=&z=T#w=”, accessed 20 January, 2016.</p>
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one in Prague is connected with an education centre. Plzeň, the Western Bohemian regional capital, also has one Muslim house of prayer in a hall of residence.

Given that the current number of inhabitants in the Czech Republic is 10.546.120,⁴ we can see that Muslims, even according to the estimates, represent a tiny fraction of the total number of people living in the Czech Republic. Thus we may conclude that the Muslim community in the Czech Republic is both small and very heterogeneous and diverse.

Another important contextual remark is that, unlike Western Europe, the primary source of migration to the Czech Republic is labour, entrepreneurship and study, not so-called humanitarian migration or migration due to family reunification rights. Therefore, people of immigrant background are hardly ever recipients of welfare services and are employed in percentages higher than the nationals.⁵ The biggest migrant groups are from Ukraine, Vietnam, Russia and other EU states.

SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE COUNTRY

It is important to understand that, due to the low numbers and visibility of Muslims in the Czech Republic, a huge portion of the incidents of Islamophobia happen online. Cyber hate speech and cyber hate crime are the main settings in which we encounter Islamophobic discourse. It is also true that this kind of aggressive intolerance toward Muslims spills over to concrete acts of violence or attacks on Muslims and their symbols but its main source is online. However, the open and unlimited hate gave rise to the creation of a new political coalition comprising of three subjects: the Block Against Islam, the Dawn of National Coalition and the Freedom Party, which hopes to gain votes at regional elections in 2016. While discourse on migrants and asylum seekers was a part of election campaigns in previous periods, it has never become a major subject and it was impossible to gain votes based solely on promises to become tougher with migrants. Compared to the West, in the Czech Republic there have been very few to none election debates on immigration. The country has a very restrictive asylum policy but it is also necessary to stress that it is rarely the target country for migrants. Even during the current unprecedented migration wave, we can see that refugees seek to leave the country and proceed to Germany and other Western states. This is partly due to the aforementioned lack of generous welfare programmes. At the same time, the Czech Republic has a relatively open labour-driven immigration policy, hence the number of immigrants is not dramatic but is growing moderately. All these factors have

4. Český statistický úřad, <https://www.czso.cz/>, accessed 19 January, 2016.

5. Jana Vavrečková, Ivo Baštyř, Indicators of the integration of the third-country nationals into Czech society in the context of requirements of European institutions", *Výzkumný ústav práce a sociálních věcí*.

contributed to the lack of the political manipulation of the subject of immigrants and Muslims up to now. For the first time recently we see the development of institutional political structures which focus almost exclusively on stopping an 'Islamic invasion' and closing the borders - and as a side effect the reduction of constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties. The current migration wave, despite the fact that again it failed to bring any significant numbers of refugees, gave rise to the mobilisation of some Czechs on the grounds of national defense, on the one hand, and, on the other, the great mobilisation of volunteers who help refugees.

Some authors believe that the main target of hate in the Czech Republic has changed: while previously it was the national minority of Roma, currently the group is Muslims, Muslim immigrants, and immigrants from Africa in general. Even the Czech Security Information Service, the counter-intelligence body, states in its annual report for 2014 that anti-Romani events decreased while extremist agitation against Muslims increased.⁶

Before turning to specific forms of Islamophobia in the country, we should stress that, due to the low number of Muslims, not all its forms defined in this report are relevant and due to the prescribed format not all incidents in the given period (2015) can be mentioned.

DISCUSSION OF ISLAMOPHOBIC INCIDENTS AND DISCURSIVE EVENTS IN VARIOUS FIELDS

Employment

Muslims as well as migrants generally come to the Czech Republic mostly for work. They are often successfully employed and those Muslims, who studied in the country, are sometimes engaged in professions that are socially highly esteemed. We are not aware of any systematic discrimination in employment based on an affiliation to Islam. It should be stressed though that migrants coming from Muslim-majority countries are often self-employed, work in businesses run by members of their own group and are concentrated in certain professions/businesses.

Education

The Czech Republic is among the most secular countries in the world with one of the largest percentage of people without faith. Information about religion is, therefore, offered in social science-type subjects and focuses more on the history of religions rather than the dogmas themselves. Religions are in this sense treated equally, although there is a Christian tradition in the country.

6. Romea, Czech counter-intelligence says number of anti-Romani events fell in 2014, extremists agitating against Islam instead, <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-counter-intelligence-says-number-of-anti-romani-events-fell-in-2014-extremists-agitating-against-islam-instead>, accessed 13 January 2016.

There is no openly Islamophobic curriculum in education materials, however, there is a tendency to block information about Islam found in mainstream media that offers a narrative of a dangerous, backward religion. Thus a concise handbook and course for secondary-school students aimed at providing information about the country's Muslim community and the history of Islam was derailed by the Education Ministry. Initially, the project - which also touches upon contemporary problems and developments - was backed by the Education Ministry, which, however, later withdrew support. The handbook was titled *Muslims Through the Eyes of Czech Students* and one of its authors, Shadi Shaanah, the founder of Czech Arab Centre for Cultural Dialogue, speculated that the Education Ministry bowed under pressure of anti-Muslim groups in the wake of the senate elections.⁷

Politics

As mentioned above, the Czech President openly professes his disdain for Islam, describing all Muslims as belonging to an “anti-civilization” that the West and Israel – portrayed as the last European cultural bastion against the Muslim invasion – have to fight.

On the more local level, Daniel Kalenda, a local councilor in the town of Liberec and member of the Czech Christian Democratic Party (KDU-ČSL) who made hateful, pejorative remarks about the refugees who perished in a truck in eastern Austria near the Hungarian border, has been stripped of his party membership by party leaders. Kalenda posted the following remarks, among others, on social networking sites: “God, 71 dead on a highway in Austria... And should we be crying? They say they ran out of air the minute the doors were closed. What do you expect? You shouldn't be so stupid as to get into a truck like that. The very best thing of all would be for them to stay home. They say the world is crushed [by this news]... I am not mourning them, I'm not sorry for them... Not at all! This element doesn't belong here, they are filth and scum.”⁸

Media

Printed media have been divided into boulevard yellow press, which publishes usually sensationalist information mostly on refugees but generally emphasises news related to Muslims, to the mainstream media, which provide some context information, and to the minority press, which tries to transmit a more nuanced and complicated message, plus supports groups that advocate help to refugees and learning about Islam.

The situation regarding Islamophobic discourse is much worse on social media and media that publish only electronic versions. This will be discussed in length in the section on cyberspace, but here we can quote an example of a woman who is

7. Český rozhlas, “A project for schools about the Czech Muslim community and Islam which a local group tried to derail” <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/czech-life/a-project-for-schools-about-islam-and-the-czech-muslim-community-which-a-vocal-group-tried-to-derail>, accessed 23 January, 2016.

8. Romea, “Daniel Kalenda”, <http://www.romea.cz/en/stitek/daniel-kalenda>, accessed 23 January, 2016.

currently under investigation for claiming on her Facebook page that a group of Arab refugees killed all the cattle of a local farmer and that only a horse that was safely locked in a barn survived. She further claimed that police arrested 10 people and further 80 were caught when they forcibly occupied a local house. Needless to say, none of this actually happened and the police have indicted the woman for spreading false information and fearmongering.⁹

Justice system

The justice system has not seen many cases involving Muslims so far but there are ongoing systemic issues related to the registration of the main Muslim organisation as representative of Islam in the Czech Republic. Namely, the Muslim community is the only religious community that has been registered in the Czech lands since the 1930s but whose registration was not automatically extended in 1991.

The Centre for Muslim Communities was registered in 2004, however, as a religious organisation without special rights. These special rights include teaching at schools, concluding marriages, establishing religious schools, sending religious representatives to the army and having access to public finance according to a special law. In order to attain these special rights a religious organisation has to be present on the Czech territory for at least 10 years (something Islam meets already for decades) and have 10.000 registered members.¹⁰

There has been a petition initiated to prevent Muslims from reaching this stage and the possibility of Islam obtaining the special rights enjoyed by other religions in the country is one of the Islamophobes' fearmongering tactics.¹¹

Generally, justice and the political representation system in the Czech republic are guided by laws and even when power is involved, such as the case of the Czech Senator Vladimír Dryml, who verbally abused a medical doctor from Yemen, the state reacted by, in this case, ordering the senator to pay a fine.¹²

Cyberspace

The bastion of Islamophobia is online. Due to anonymity (or difficulties in establishing the identity) and to cyberspace's interactive nature, Islamophobes, racists and other proponents of hate speech and advocates of collective punishment have found a thriving environment online. The limited nature of this report allows us to focus on only a few and the most visible such instances.

9. Lidové noviny, "Arabští uprchlíci podřezali sedlákovi zvířata, lhala žena na síti. Hrozí jí trest." http://www.lidovky.cz/zena-sirila-poplasnou-zpravu-o-migrantech-hrozi-ji-stihani-p4j-/zpravy-domov.aspx?c=A150721_130707_In_domov_ELE, accessed 23 January, 2016.

10. Ministerstvo kultury, "Zvláštní práva církví a náboženských společností". <http://www.mkcr.cz/cirkev-a-nabozenske-spolecnosti/zvlastni-prava-cirkv-a-nabozenskych-spolecnosti-223918/>, accessed 8 February, 2016.

11. Islam v ČR nechceme, "Proč petice proti přiznání zvláštních práv Ústředí muslimských obcí?", accessed 8 February, 2016.

12. The case dates from 2014.

The Facebook page ‘We Don’t Want Islam in the Czech Republic (IVCRN)’¹³ serves as an open space for expressing intolerance, hatred, playing random YouTube clips, presenting news without context, and verbally punishing people who oppose xenophobia and Islamophobia. The page is also used to mobilise its followers for anti-Islam demonstrations - as mentioned in the list of incidents - and has currently over 50.000 followers.

The IVCRN’s Facebook page led to the presence of another Facebook page titled ‘Block Against Islam (BAI)’, which has been recently removed by Facebook administrators for breaching unspecified terms of use. It is not clear why this page was removed and not IVCRN. ‘Block Against Islam’, however, has ambitions to become a registered political organisation and to participate in local elections.

In terms of actions stemming from hatred against, among others, Muslims, the hacker group called ‘White Media’ has challenged current laws regarding protection of privacy. This group not only published details about individual foreigners, including their personal IDs, pictures and where they can be found but hacks into activists’ emails and the web pages of their organisations and then publishes pictures of their children or their intimate conversations with their partners. The Czech law proved unwilling or unable to deal with this breach. Recently, however, this group, which is registered like many similar ones in the US, hacked private emails of the Prime Minister. There is now hope that something will finally change in this respect.

Central figures in the Islamophobia network

Apart from institutionalising Islamophobia via the aforementioned political coalition, the worrisome development is the institutional support given to Islamophobic attitudes by some members of the establishment, most notably by the Czech President Miloš Zeman. President Zeman has become notorious internationally for his openly Islamophobic remarks. The 8th Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Islamophobia Report of 2015 took notice of President Zeman’s remarks: “Following the derogatory statements made by the Czech President, Miloš Zeman, on 26 May 2014 saying that ‘Islamic ideology rather than individual groups of fundamentalists was behind violent actions similar to the gun attack at the Jewish Museum in Brussels’, the OIC Secretary General expressed disappointment, underlining the Czech President’s statements on Islam were in line with his statements in the past, when he linked believers in the Quran with anti-Semitic and racist Nazis. The Secretary General declared that such statements not only show President Zeman’s lack of knowledge and misunderstanding of Islam, but also ignore the historical facts that anti-Semitism and Nazism were European phenomena through and through, while they had no roots in Islam, neither as a religion nor as a history or civilisation; and

13. <https://www.facebook.com/ivcrn.news/>, accessed 8 February, 2016.

that President Zeman's statements were nothing more than misinformed stereotyping and Islamophobic."¹⁴

It is significant how in 2015 'Block Against Islam' transformed from a social media phenomenon into a Facebook group/page called 'We Don't Want Islam in the Czech Republic' (the Czech acronym IVCRN) and led by associate professor and entomologist Mr. Martin Konvička into a future political party. Konvička was charged on 18 November with inciting hatred against Muslims because of remarks he posted on Facebook. These remarks include sending Muslims to concentration camps, promising to grind Muslims into a meat and bone meal after winning the elections, etc. He also calls Islam a "freak show", says Islam is bad and ugly and that Muslims lie when interpreting the Quran. Konvička's Bloc has been called a xenophobic sect by Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka (Czech Social Democratic Party - ČSSD). However, the Czech President stood on the podium with Prof. Konvička for the celebration of 17 November, the country's National Day. Several politicians, university rectors and students subsequently criticised the event, asserting that President Zeman had politically exploited the occasion and behaved like an enemy of democracy.¹⁵ The president's spokesperson later claimed that he was unaware of who he had shared the podium with. It is nonetheless worrisome that, apart from the open call for the annihilation of Muslims, the president's views coincide with views of a representative of extreme Islamophobia.

A recent interview (January 2016) states the following: "According to Czech President Miloš Zeman, the mass migration of refugees to Europe has been organised by the Muslim Brotherhood. In an interview for Czech Radio Plus on Monday, the head of state suggested that the Sunni Islamist organisation could not declare war, so it was trying to gain an upper hand through the migrant crisis. As in his recent Christmas address, the president referred to the influx of refugees as an 'invasion'. Mr Zeman cited two sources as having apparently confirmed his view: Morocco's foreign minister and the crown prince of the United Arab Emirates. The former, he said, recently told him that the Muslim Brotherhood had ambitions of ruling not only the Muslim world but the entire globe."¹⁶ Despite the fact that the president's ideas sounds slightly less radical than the claims of 'Block Against Islam', which is now banned on Facebook, the former are far more significant and influential. It should be stressed, however, that his views are countered by the prime minister and other

14. Eight OIC Observatory Report on Islamophobia, http://www.oic-oci.org/oicv2/upload/islamophobia/2015/en/reports/8th_Ob_Rep_Islamophobia_Final.pdf, p. 50., accessed 25 January, 2016.

15. Romea, Czech authorities indict leader of anti-Islam movement for inciting hatred on Facebook, <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-authorities-indict-leader-of-anti-islam-movement-for-inciting-hatred-on-facebook>, accessed 17 January, 2016.

16. Český rozhlas, "Zeman tells Czech Radio mass migration to Europe organized by Muslim Brotherhood" <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/news/zeman-tells-czech-radio-mass-migration-to-europe-organized-by-muslim-brotherhood>, accessed 18 January, 2016.

ministers in the government. He does remain, nonetheless, a source of concern when it comes to the future of Czech society.

Another important actor for xenophobia and Islamophobia is Member of Parliament Tomio Okamura, who is half-Japanese half-Czech, who provoked by endorsing a highly questionable text by his deputy on his Facebook page. In it, he suggested Czechs should shun Muslim-owned businesses or should provoke Muslims by walking pigs in the vicinity of mosques. At first, part of the Muslim community shrugged off the rhetoric; later though, representatives considered filing charges for hate speech which at the end they did not.¹⁷

OBSERVATIONS ON CIVIL SOCIETY, POLITICAL ASSESSMENTS AND INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN TO COUNTER ISLAMOPHOBIA

There are two types of initiatives that counter Islamophobia: one is by formally registered civil society organisations and the other is by the voluntary sector.

Among the former we could stress the ‘Hate Free Culture’ initiative, which is partly funded by the Czech government and which introduces awareness by raising campaigns on how to recognise and fight hoaxes, which are often the main weapons of Islamophobia. There are many others, too.

The volunteer sector saw the rise of an incredible phenomenon, in which people mobilised, organised, donated money, goods and time to helping refugees, who are mostly from Syria but also other Muslim-majority countries. According to Prague Daily Monitor, “over 1,500 volunteers from the Czech Republic have been helping the refugees abroad since early September, Zuzana Lenhartova, from the ‘We Are Helping Fleeing People’ group, told CTK yesterday. They have organised help at the border crossings through which the refugees are coming, providing them with food and clothing, Lenhartova said. The operation and material for the people in need costs them on average 20,000 crowns a day, she added. The help by Czech volunteers has been praised by Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka (Social Democrats, CSSD) and Deputy Prime Minister Pavel Belobradek (Christian Democrats, KDU-CSL). Human Rights Minister Jiri Dienstbier (CSSD) said the work rendered by Czech men and women in the camps and on the borders was very visible. Without it, the influx of refugees would be uncontrollable, he added. Groups of volunteers work alternately abroad. They pay their trips from their own means. They gain the money for material help to the people in need mostly from their families, relatives and friends.”¹⁸

17. Český rozhlas, “Muslim community weighs charges against Okamura over anti-Muslim statements” <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/curaffrs/muslim-community-weighs-charges-against-okamura-over-anti-muslim-statements>, accessed 19 January, 2016.

18. *Prague Daily Monitor* “Over 1,500 Czech volunteers helping refugees abroad,” <http://www.praguemonitor.com/2015/11/27/over-1500-czech-volunteers-helping-refugees-abroad>, accessed 15 January, 2016.

CONCLUSION: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLITICS AND NGOS

Based on the report the following recommendations can be formulated:

- It is necessary to diversify information about Islam and Muslims in general and particularly information pertaining to local Muslims. This is an area that media and civil society organisations are already partly engaged in but where they can play a decisive future role. This should be an assignment for the Czech Muslim community as well.
- Politicians and publically engaged persons should be held responsible for their statements. If someone is advocating for concentration camps for anyone, including Muslims, that person should be held legally and socially responsible for their words.
- Czech volunteers, who have shown enormous courage and willingness to serve, should become more visible in public space, their stories and motivations studied and shared more widely.
- The system of monitoring incidents of hate toward Muslims online should be established following the example of the UK-based system called ‘Tell Mama’. With the help of such a system it would be possible to monitor and study trends in Islamophobia in the Czech Republic.

CHRONOLOGY

16 January, 2015

- In the evening, some 300 people attend a protest against Islam on Prague’s Hradčany Square. The event was organised by the group ‘We Do Not Want Islam in the Czech Republic’ who have been increasingly vocal in protesting the presence of Muslims in the country.

31 January, 2015

- Some 400 people attend a protest against Islam at Prague’s Old Town Square organised by the group ‘We Do Not Want Islam in the Czech Republic’. After the gathering, the protesters are set to march to the seat of the Interior Ministry in Prague’s Letná. Among those who attended the protest are a number of politicians, including Tomio Okamura, leader of the controversial Dawn Party, and Jana Volfova, head of the non-parliamentary Czech Sovereignty movement. Around forty people also attend a gathering in support of minorities.

14 February, 2015

- Some 600 demonstrators take part in an event in Brno on Saturday protesting against Islam, while not far away around 200 people demonstrate in favour of religious freedom and tolerance. Neither event saw any incidents requiring police intervention. Organisers of the larger protest said they wanted to stop the spread of Islam in the Czech Republic; protestors carried placards featuring a mosque and minarets inside a ban circle. Populist politicians such as the Dawn movement's Tomio Okamura in recent weeks stoked anti-Muslim sentiments, suggesting Czechs, for example, should boycott kebab stands.

12 August, 2015

- In the morning, followers of 'We Do Not Want Islam in the Czech Republic' and the 'Bloc Against Islam' groups instal replicas of the torsos of women stoned to death in order to warn of the danger of Islam.

1 July, 2015

- Several hundred people demonstrated in Prague the day before against the Czech Republic receiving refugees. They claimed that the recent decision of the Czech government to voluntarily receive several hundred migrants was a 'dirty trick'. The 'Anti-Islam Bloc', which convened the demonstration together with the 'We Don't Want Islam in the Czech Republic' movement, plans to run candidates in next year's regional elections. About 30 counter-protesters also turned out, with some even throwing eggs at a speaker addressing the demonstration.

17 August, 2015

- Scientists and other staffers of the Czech Republic's academic and research institutions signed a petition against the growth of xenophobic sentiment in Czech society. They also expressed their disturbance by the activity of extremist groups, which in their view is not being sufficiently counterbalanced. Their challenge, entitled Academics against Fear and Indifference was published online on this day and was signed by more than 400 researchers and university staff.

19 August, 2015

- Unidentified assailants break two windows at a mosque on Vídeňská Street in Brno. They are said to have used iron bars to smash the mosque's windows.

3 September, 2015

- Human rights advocates and Jewish groups express outrage after the authorities in the Czech Republic wrote numbers on the skin of migrants who were pulled off trains this week, a move they said summoned memories of the Nazi era. The Czech officers used felt-tip pens to write the numbers on the hands of some of more than 200 mostly Syrian migrants at Břeclav railway station.

28 October, 2015

- In Brno, Prague, and several other cities in the Czech Republic, hundreds of people gather for demonstrations against migration, with police in Brno estimating that about 1.500 people turned out. Most of the events (in Brno, Ostrava, Prague and Ústí nad Labem) were convened by the ‘Bloc against Islam’ (Blok proti islámu) and Dawn National Coalition (Úsvit-Národní koalice).

13 November, 2015

- CTK news reports that unknown perpetrators vandalised the Brno mosque on the night of 12 November pouring motor oil on the building’s façade and doors. Security cameras reportedly show two people, a man and a woman, pouring something on the walls and door of the mosque before making off.

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.



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