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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  
**FINLAND**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2015

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LINDA HYÖKKI, PIA JARDI



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Finland has a relatively proportionally small amount of Muslims, about 60.000-65.000 in a country of 5,5 million people. The largest ethnic Muslim group residing in Finland are Tatars who came to the country at the end of the 19th century. Today though, most Muslims are from Arab countries, Somalia or the Balkans. The amount of converts is also growing.

The results of data analysed in this report show that Islamophobia is rising in an alarming way throughout public discourse, including media, politics and especially in the realm of cyberspace and social media. Other academic research cited in this report has shown that Islamophobia is one of the reasons of Muslim radicalisation and why some Muslims decide to leave Finland and move to Syria.

In particular it is important to note the role of populist right-wing politics and how different politicians and other actors associated with the Finns Party are actively involved in spreading or supporting Islamophobic discourse.

The report draws attention especially to the nature of the arguments that are used in Islamophobic discussions; cyberspace especially reveals itself as a problematic field to combat Islamophobic content. Fake news websites such as MV-Lehti and expressively Islamophobic websites and blogs are increasingly popular. It is alarming that some politicians refer to these websites and thus as 'authoritative persons' lead people to give them special attention and recognition.

A particularly popular topic of discussion is the feared 'Islamisation' of Finland firstly through refugees and secondly through measures and actions taken to raise the awareness of Islam and to combat misinformation, such as broadcasting readings of the Quran on national radio. Projects that are run under the umbrella of multiculturalist policies such as a planned construction of a Central Mosque receive negative feedback and raise unease.

There are NGOs that are trying to fight racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia through different projects and initiatives, but in general there is an alarming need for education about Islam and Muslims in all areas of society including schools (teachers and non-Muslim pupils), politicians and media reporters. Similarly, Muslim citizens need training and access to information on their rights and the possibilities to fight hate speech and, for example, discrimination in the job market.

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Suomessa on väkilukuun nähden suhteellisen pieni muslimivähemmistö. Maassa asuu n. 60 000 – 65 000 muslimia, maan n. 5.5 miljoonan henkilön väkilukuun verrattuna. Ensimmäinen Suomessa vakituisesti asunut ja edelleen asuva etninen muslimiryhmä ovat tataarit, jotka tulivat maahan 1800-luvun loppuvaiheessa. Nykyään suurin osa Suomessa asuvista muslimeista on kuitenkin kotoisin alun perin arabimaista, Somalias-ta tai Balkanin alueelta. Islamiin kääntyvien etnisten suomalaisten määrä on nousussa.

Raportin analyysit tuovat esille, miten islamofobiset asenteet ovat Suomessa hälyttävissä määrin nousussa niin julkisessa diskursissa, poliittisessa keskustelussa, mediassa sekä eritoten internetin maailmassa ja sosiaalisessa mediassa. Tieteelliset tutkimukset, joihin tässä raportissa viitataan, ovat tuoneet esille, miten islamofobia on yksi osasyistä nuorten muslimien radikalisoitumiseen ja täten myötävaikuttanut heidän päätöksiinsä lähteä Suomesta ja muuttaa Syyriaan.

Populistinen oikeistopolitiikka ansaitsee islamofobian kannalta erityishuomiota. Kuten raportin analyysit tuovat esille, varsinkin Perussuomalaisten poliitikot ja puolueeseen liittyvät muut henkilöt ovat aktiivisesti osallisina islamofobisen diskursusin levittämisessä.

Raportti ottaa huomioon erilaiset argumentit, joita käytetään islamofobisessa keskustelussa. Internet on osoittautunut erittäin vaikeaksi alueeksi taistella islamofobiaa vastaan. Feikkiuutissivustojen (esimerkiksi ”MV-Lehti”) sekä peittelemättä islamofobista sisältöä levittävien nettisivustojen ja blogien suosio on kasvanut vuoden 2015 aikana. Hälyttävää tässä on se, että muun muassa poliitikot viittavat ja jakavat linkkejä tällaisille sivustoille omissa kirjoituksissaan ja täten ”johtohahmoina” antavat kyseisille sivustoille erityishuomiota ja hyväksyntää.

Erityisen usein keskusteluissa viitataan pelättyyn Suomen islamisaatioon, jonka sanotaan johtuvan sekä pakolaisten suuresta määrästä että myös sellaisista toimenpiteistä ja aktiviteeteistä, joiden on tarkoitus lisätä tietoa ja tarjota parempaa ymmärrystä islamista, kuten YLE:n radiossa järjestetty Koraaanin luenta. Projektit, joita järjestetään monikulttuuristen toimintalinjojen muodossa, kuten Helsinkiin suunniteltu suurmoskeija, saavat monet ei-muslimit rauhattomiksi ja projektia on kritisoitu negatiiviseen sekä islamofobiseen sävyyn.

Vuoden 2015 aikana muutamat kansalaisjärjestöt ovat järjestäneet tapahtumia sekä projekteja, joiden avulla on koitettu kitkeä rasismia, muukalaispelkoa sekä islamofobiaa. Mutta, raportin analyysit tuovat kokonaisuudessaan ilmi sen, että Suomessa niin kouluissa (opettajien sekä oppilaiden osalla), politiikassa sekä mediassa työskentelevien henkilöiden saralla on hälyttävä tarve valistaa kansalaisia islamin opeista ja muslimeista, jotta yhteiselo aiheuttavat väärinkäsitykset saadaan kitkettyä. Myös muslimien on saatava koulutusta ja tietoa oikeuksistaan ja heille tarjolla olevista mahdollisuuksista taistella vihapuhetta sekä esimerkiksi työmarkkinoilla esiintyvää syrjintää vastaan.

## INTRODUCTION

Muslim presence in Finland dates back to the early 19th century, as the first permanent Muslim residents (Tatars and Kazakhs) came to the country as soldiers of the Russian army. Through the Freedom of Religion Act that came into force in 1923, Islam was legally recognised as a religion.<sup>1</sup> Today the Tatars in Finland are a well-established religious, cultural and linguistic Turkic minority community with approximately 600 members.<sup>2</sup>

Finland has neither a colonial past nor did it receive immigrants as guest workers after the Second World War. It was only in the 1990s that the Muslim population started growing rapidly due to UNCHR refugee quotas. Most of the non-ethnic Finnish Muslims are Arabs (Iraqis), Somalis, Kurds, Turks, Kosovo Albanians, Persians and Bosniaks. Therefore, most of the foreign Muslims in Finland have a refugee background; family reunification, study, work purposes and other private reasons have also contributed to the immigration of Muslims to Finland. This differentiates Finland's Muslim population profile from that of many Central European countries.

According to The Statistics Finland (Tilastokeskus) in 2014, the overall amount of Muslims by 31 December, 2014 was 12.327.<sup>3</sup> The problem of defining the number of Muslims in Finland lies in the absence of census data based on religious affiliation. Moreover, the national statistics include only those individuals who are registered as practitioners of Islam and are members of Islamic congregations or communities. But the majority of Muslims in Finland are not officially registered in state-recognised religious (Islamic) organisations - by the end of 2015, 36 such organisations were registered with the National Board of Patents and Registration (Patentti- ja rekisterihallitus).<sup>4</sup> Thus, the total amount of Finland's Muslim population has been estimated by Finnish researchers of Islam at 60.000-65.000; the majority are Sunni and only 10 per cent are Shi'i (Pauha & Martikainen 2014: 218-219).

So far there have been no academic studies or surveys conducted on Islamophobia in Finland, but a recent study on radicalisation and social exclusion of

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1. Teemu Pauha and Tuomas Martikainen, "Finland," in *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, Volume 6, ed. Nielsen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 218.

See also, Martikainen, Tuomas, "Muslimit suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa," in *Islam Suomessa. Muslimit arjessa, mediassa ja yhteiskunnassa*, ed. Martikainen et al. (Helsinki: SKS, 2008), 62-84.

2. Teemu Pauha and Tuomas Martikainen, "Finland," in *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, Volume 6, ed. Nielsen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 219.

3. Based on a retrieval from the population structure PX-Web database. All age groups and both sexes included. [http://pxnet2.stat.fi/PXWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin\\_\\_vrm\\_\\_vaerak/065\\_vaerak\\_tau\\_206.px/table/tableView-Layout1/?rxid=fa508304-89bd-4a2e-acce-4957c20f2ceb](http://pxnet2.stat.fi/PXWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin__vrm__vaerak/065_vaerak_tau_206.px/table/tableView-Layout1/?rxid=fa508304-89bd-4a2e-acce-4957c20f2ceb) (last accessed 6.1.2016).

4. <http://yhdistysrekisteri.prh.fi/ryhaku.htx> (last accessed 6.1.2016). Retrieval from the register was conducted among religious communities with names containing the words 'Islam' or 'Muslim' and their derivatives.

the Muslim youth and its effects on young Muslims' motivation to leave for Syria in order to join the rebel fighters or ISIS has established how Islamophobia has played a role in this social phenomenon.<sup>5</sup>

For the purpose of this study, fourteen Muslim individuals whose relatives or friends have left for Syria, were interviewed.<sup>6</sup> The results show, how an Islamophobic atmosphere manifested in the media, politics, Internet forums and discussion groups resulted in the radicalisation of these individuals (SYPONUR p. 18-19). Especially the political right-wing party True Finns (Perussuomalaiset) were seen as Islamophobic and using an Islamophobic discourse "as a shortcut to publicity" (SYPONUR p. 25). Also there have been incidents of harassment and violent attacks against Muslims in public spaces, especially women wearing the Islamic headscarf (SYPONUR p. 18, 22).

The respondents believe that the rising Islamophobia in society has had a "central role" in comparison to other factors such as the socio-economic situation of the "foreign fighters" in motivating individuals to go to Syria and that many Muslims have started to question whether they want to stay in Finland with their children whose future scares them (SYPONUR p. 18-19). Moreover, the respondents explained how many ordinary Muslims fall victims to Islamophobic harassment because of ISIS. The media is said to be an important tool for the radicalisation of Finnish people against Muslims as news reporting from the Middle East is claimed to be poor. Some of the respondents compared the atmosphere of the 1990s to the current situation and explained how before prejudices and xenophobic ideas were not explicitly directed towards Muslims (SYPONUR p. 19-20). Thus, today Muslims are seen as 'the enemy', not 'Finnish' and without human dignity (SYPONUR p. 21).

## **SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE COUNTRY**

### **The planning of a central mosque in Helsinki**

The construction of a large central mosque in Helsinki - up to 20.000 m<sup>2</sup> - is a joint project of the Forum for Culture and Religion FOCUS, the Finnish Muslim Union and other Muslim associations. It has been endorsed by the deputy mayor and other relevant actors in Helsinki. The Network for the Muslim Affairs has also endorsed it. The necessity for such a mosque has been explained by the Muslim population's need to feel fully included in Finnish society and on equal footing with Christians and Jews who all already have their respective houses of worship. So far the only building constructed as a mosque is in the town of Järvenpää, but as it belongs to the Tatar community, the membership of its congregation is limited to Tatars.

5. For the full SYPONUR report, see [http://sockom.helsinki.fi/info/notat/notat\\_1505.pdf](http://sockom.helsinki.fi/info/notat/notat_1505.pdf) (last accessed 10.1.2016).

6. The authors claim that by the time of the study approximately 70 individuals were known to have left for Syria by the Finnish Security Intelligence Service (SUPO).

Since the news about the project started spreading to the media in May 2015 the responses on many accounts have been antagonistic. Only a few days after the first news report, a citizens' initiative for a legal draft against the mosque construction was proposed. It was argued that the planned mosque would only increase the radicalisation of Muslims and cause noise, pollution and disorder. The organiser further argued that "In no other religion other than Islam has there been as much violence and hate as well as killing and terrorism. Thus the mosque would be a disturbance and an insult for the representatives of other religions as it would force people to listen to Islamic preaching which is a violation of freedom of worship." The initiative, however, had received only 10.566 statements of support by the last possible date of collection (30.11.2015) and it would have needed 50.000 signatures to be submitted to parliament.<sup>7</sup>

There has been at least one demonstration against the mosque project organised by the non-governmental organisation Finnish Defense League (Against radical Islam - for freedom and democracy), which however gathered only around 150 participants. The youth branch of the right-wing party True Finns published a statement against the mosque and called the plan "mad and something that only a senile person or a social-democrat would support". According to the Chairman Jarmo Keto "Islam as an ideology is responsible for many conflicts and terror attacks. Thus such a mosque project is an irresponsible idea."<sup>8</sup>

The involvement of Bahrain's royal house in the project as a financial supporter has especially been criticised. This has served as a point for Helsinki's Shi'i community to connect the mosque project to Salafism - Bahrain is being supported by Saudi Arabia to fight the Shi'i in the country - and to possible threats of radicalisations.<sup>9</sup> Hereby news about the Sunni-Shi'i fights were used to support the idea that the planned mosque project would not be inclusive. Also rumors about violent clashes between the Sunni and Shi'i communities on the streets spread; these rumors aimed at making Finnish people afraid of Muslims. The Islamophobic blogger Paavo Tajukangas wrote that this would be the time "to differentiate between Muslims and Muslims as it is not the Tatars or Finnish converts who want the mosque but 'real' Muslims from 'real' Muslim countries such as Somalia, Pakistan and Afghanistan." Tajukangas gave examples from neighbouring Sweden where he claimed mosques are the source of extremist jihadists and the Islamisation of Finland should be stopped since after one mosque there will be more.<sup>10</sup>

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7. For the citizens' initiative in the Finnish language, see <https://www.kansalaisaloite.fi/fi/aloite/1303> (last accessed 22.1.2016).

8. For the statement in the Finnish language, see [http://www.ps-nuoret.fi/helsinki/files/2015/07/2015\\_07\\_22\\_kannanotto\\_suurmoskeija.pdf](http://www.ps-nuoret.fi/helsinki/files/2015/07/2015_07_22_kannanotto_suurmoskeija.pdf) (last accessed 10.1.2016)

9. For an interview with Madjid Bahmanpour, secretary for culture of the Shi'i Resalat Association, see <http://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/a1438228003618> (last accessed 22.1.2016).

10. <http://paavotajukangas.com/2015/05/28/suomeenko-suurmoskeija/> (last accessed 10.1.2016).

## Radio broadcasts of the Quran

In March 2015, the Finnish public broadcasting company YLE started a programme in which 60 episodes featuring the Finnish translation of the Quran by Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila were broadcasted. The aim of the programme according to YLE was to raise awareness and spread cultural knowledge in a diverse world.<sup>11</sup> The programme was welcomed with different sentiments and Islamophobic discourse was also present. As can be seen in the discussion on the official YLE Facebook page<sup>12</sup> the main criticism was based on the argument that YLE is funded by public tax money thus Quran readings should not be broadcasted as the majority of Finnish society is non-Muslim.<sup>13</sup>

Some of the more radical discussions can be seen, among others, in the openly anti-Islamic blogs Ibn Matti and James Gonzo. The former, which also provides its readers with links to radically Islamophobic websites such as *Islamin aikapommi*, sarcastically argues that the programme serves the purpose of public education in general knowledge as it is necessary for everyone to know “how ISIS follows the path of Muhammad when they force their prisoners to be sex slaves”.<sup>14</sup> James Gonzo, who calls himself a “politically incorrect repository of truth” is rather more straightforward in his rhetorics. While commenting on the Quran-reading programme, he argues, that Islam has nothing to do with Finnish culture or history (as *Mein Kampf* by Hitler also does) but is a fascist and a sexist worldview. Moreover, James Gonzo wonders, whether the staff of YLE brought trouble on themselves by taking the risk of reading the Quran publicly as it is such a holy book for Muslims that “if anyone cuts anything out of the Quran, it provides enough reason for Muslims to murder that person”.<sup>15</sup>

The programme was also discussed in an Islamophobic way by political personalities who are representatives of the True Finns Party (*Perussuomalaiset*). The topic was brought into discussion by the MP Maria Tolppanen on her personal Facebook page as a public post when she argued that the reading of the Quran on radio would provoke more fighters to join ISIS as they would get acquainted with Islam through the programme.<sup>16</sup> In addition, one of the candidates in the 2015 parliamentary elections, Meiris Suominen, commented on her blog that the Quran reading constitutes an incitement to hatred against Christians since the Quran “states that the infidels should be killed”.<sup>17</sup>

11. [http://yle.fi/radio/ylerradio1/ohjelmat/tunnetko\\_koraania\\_nyt\\_siihen\\_voi\\_tutustua\\_yle\\_radio\\_1ssa/7823613](http://yle.fi/radio/ylerradio1/ohjelmat/tunnetko_koraania_nyt_siihen_voi_tutustua_yle_radio_1ssa/7823613) (last accessed 10.1.2016).

12. <https://www.facebook.com/suomenyleisradio/posts/10152769948211902> (last accessed 10.1.2016).

13. It is worth noting that the YLE broadcasts the Lutheran mass weekly and the Orthodox liturgy twice a month.

14. <http://ibnmatti.blogspot.com.tr/2015/03/koraani-kuuluu-suomalaisen.html> (last accessed 10.1.2016).

15. <https://jamesgonzo.wordpress.com/2015/02/23/yle-pakkoverolla-antisemitismia-seksismia-islamofasismia-ja-pedofiliaa/> (last accessed 10.1.2016).

16. <https://www.facebook.com/maria.tolppanen.7/posts/10205928353954146?pnref=story> (last accessed 10.1.2016).

17. <https://blogit.perussuomalaiset.fi/meiris-suominen/monikulttuurin-edistamista-vai-vihanlietsontaa/> (last accessed 10.1.2016).

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

### Employment

In general there is no explicit discrimination against Muslims in job markets; there are no laws prohibiting Muslims from applying for any jobs. It is, thus, possible to wear the Islamic headscarf in governmental positions. In hospitals the staff is allowed to wear a headscarf and some hospitals provide their own scarves for hygienic purposes.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, there are no restrictions for teachers to wear the Islamic headscarf at work.

There are nevertheless some individual cases from time to time, where for the most part Muslim women have faced discrimination. A case that was resolved in 2013 was first taken to the ombudsman and then to court where the employer was sentenced to pay fines. Two supervisors had to pay fines: one 620 Euros and the other 640 Euros. Yet, both denied charges. The court decided that the headscarf was not a justifiable reason to annul a contract as it does not hinder the performance of an employee in packing tasks or as a salesperson.<sup>19</sup>

Discrimination against Muslim women also sometimes occurs in vocational schools, when women are told (without legal justification) that one cannot wear the hijab when working in customer service such as in hairdressing salons or as a cosmetologist. The incidents have been reported to the Islamic Council of Finland.<sup>20</sup>

In 2014, one distinctive case became public when a woman was rejected in the application process for the Police Academy due to her headscarf. She did pursue the case against the police, only informed the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman and gave an interview for the press in which she discussed whether a Muslim woman with a headscarf should be accepted into the police forces. Then Minister of the Interior, Päivi Räsänen, stated that police officers should represent the public authority and not a particular religious community through their uniform and should thus show their neutrality. Moreover, she asserted that “surely some of the Muslim women could take off their headscarves while performing their job tasks”.<sup>21</sup>

Most victims of discrimination in the job market, however, are ethnic foreigners. In these cases employers sometimes think that the foreign jobseeker does not know his/her rights or does not have the strength to fight the case in court. In general, these cases are indeed not taken forward to authorities but reports are heard directly from the affected persons in personal communications.

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18. See, for example, how medical professionals are instructed to clean their headscarves when applicable in the Helsinki area hospitals <http://www.hus.fi/ammattilaiselle/hoito-ohjeet/infektioidentorjuntaohjeet/Documents/2.4%20TY%C3%96VAATETUS.pdf> (last accessed 10.1.2016).

19. <http://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/a1395632489645> (last accessed 22.1.2016).

20. [www.sine.fi](http://www.sine.fi) (last accessed 12.2.2016).

21. [http://yle.fi/uutiset/voisiko\\_suomalainen\\_poliisi\\_naytaa\\_talta/7145449](http://yle.fi/uutiset/voisiko_suomalainen_poliisi_naytaa_talta/7145449) (last accessed 22.1.2016).

## Education

Finland offers religion lessons from primary school to high school and each child has the right to attend lessons of his/her own particular religion if there are more than three students from the same religion in the school.

Isra Lehtinen, a frequently cited Muslim activist and a school teacher of Islam, notes that after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, she got complaints from her pupils stating that even other teachers had asked Muslim pupils while referring to the terroristic attacks “Why are you doing this?” Similarly, other pupils had made rude comments and accused the children or their fathers of “shooting people”. She tried to empower her Muslim pupils.

Two years ago Lehtinen conducted a non-published seminar work on depictions of Islam in the three most common books in the ‘world religions’ course at the upper secondary education level (Lutheran religion teaching). Her analysis revealed a stereotypical and Orientalist presentation of Islam, especially regarding the role of women (two out of three books).<sup>22</sup>

## Politics

### Perussuomalaiset (Finns Party)

The Finns Party whose current chairman is Timo Soini was founded in 1995 and emerged in the 2015 Finnish parliamentary elections as the second largest party in terms of seats and thus joined the government coalition. The party endorses openly ethnic-nationalist and populist ideologies and several of its members on occasion have given Islamophobic statements. One of the party’s prominent figures is Jussi Halla-Aho, who has now transferred to the European Parliament as a party representative. He still continues to comment on national issues, however, in his personal blog Scripta, where for example in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attacks he compared Islam to Nazi Germany - an ideology, he claimed, whose adherents commit violent acts which at the time seem “normal and logical”.<sup>23</sup>

Especially during 2015 the chairman of the party’s youth wing, Sebastian Tynkkynen, has been in the headlines of news magazines. Tynkkynen, who has also previously published Islamophobic writings in his personal blog stating that “Islam is a threat to the whole world”<sup>24</sup>, was interviewed in January 2015 to explain the caricature competition under the topic ‘Islam’ that the Finns Party Youth had announced would commence on 13 January.<sup>25</sup> According to Tynkkynen, the campaign was a necessary sign to show how his organisation did not approve of the self-censorship of certain journals and

22. Isra Lehtinen, personal communication (24.1.2016). Isra Lehtinen teaches Islam in primary school, secondary school and upper secondary level.

23. [http://halla-aho.com/scripta/muutama\\_sana\\_pariisista.html](http://halla-aho.com/scripta/muutama_sana_pariisista.html) (last accessed 7.1.2016).

24. <http://blogbook.fi/sebastiantynkkyenen/islam-on-uhka-koko-maailmalle-myos-suomelle/> (last accessed 7.1.2016).

25. For the full-length podcast see <https://www.radiohelsinki.fi/podcast/34822/?Perussuomalaisten+nuorten+islam-pilapiirroskilpailu+puhuttaa> (last accessed 7.1.2016).

newspapers following the incidents in Paris and was thus an effort to defend freedom of speech and to raise awareness on the “true nature of Islam”. In the interview he stated that “Islam is difficult for Western countries” and on several occasions he referred to the “teachings of Islam” which he finds violate human rights.

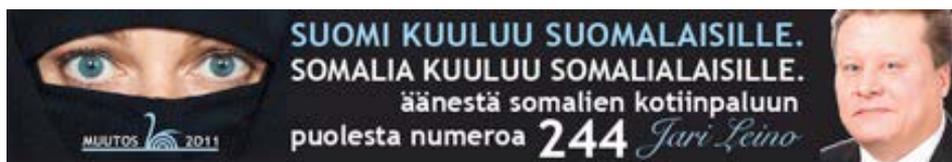
Tynkkynen argued, that Islam along with suppressing women, is violent since many Muslims follow the example of Muhammad whose life “was violent and who had many people killed and married underage girls”. He labelled the teachings of Muhammad as gross. Tynkkynen’s antipathy towards Muhammad can also be seen in later comments such as one of his blog postings where he calls Muhammad “a prime butcher”.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Tynkkynen argued in the interview that Muslims would try to set their own requirements for societal life (for example the unlawfulness of homosexuality) “as soon as Muslims become the majority or if there are enough of them”. Thus, alongside the typical generalisations and stereotypes Tynkkynen uses in his speech, he also manifests the fear of a “manipulative Islam” and “a creeping sharia”.

The caricature campaign was eventually cancelled a week after its announcement, without any further comments from Tynkkynen regarding the reasons behind the decision.

### **Muutos 2011 (Change 2011)**

The Muutos 2011 party was founded in 2009 but did not receive enough votes to enter the parliament in the 2011 or the 2015 parliamentary elections. Thus it was removed from the party register in 2015 and operates currently under the name ‘Muutospuolue’ (Change Party).<sup>27</sup>

Especially during the 2015 parliamentary elections the party’s campaign material consisted of Islamophobic images and slogans. The materials promoted nationalistic-ethnic agitation that was combined with Islamophobic stereotypes. For the campaign of the party’s Chairman Jari Leino a picture of a woman wearing a black face veil was published as a poster in the newspaper *Vantaan Sanomat*. The poster was entitled “Finland belongs to the Finns, Somalia belongs to the Somalis. Vote in support for Somalis returning back home.” Although, the aimed juxtaposition of the veiled Muslim woman and the slogan about Somalis seemed rather paradoxical since the woman behind the veil had blue eyes, the message created an image of a Finland where (Muslim) Somalis were not welcomed.



26. <http://sebastianitynkkynen.com/2015/11/16/vakivalta-islamin-hyvaksi-on-tutkitusti-laajasti-hyvaksyttya-muslimien-keskuudessa/> (last accessed 7.1.2016).

27. <http://muutospuolue.fi/> (last accessed 10.1.2016).



The blue-eyed woman with a face veil was also used as a model in other campaign material ( see below) such as the poster for the candidate James Hirvisaari with the rhetoric question “Tomorrow’s Finland?” and “Get immigration under control!” as slogans. The second poster implies the Islamophobic idea of a “creeping sharia”:

not only does Muslim immigration have to be stopped but in addition Islam is seen as manipulative and as causing an Islamisation of Finland.

### James Hirvisaari

James Hirvisaari became a member of Parliament with the Finns Party in 2011 but was dismissed from the party in 2013 due to his visitor, Seppo Lehto, taking a picture of himself in parliament while giving the Nazi salute. Hirvisaari then joined Muutos 2011 and was able to found a one-person parliamentary group. In the 2015 elections he did not receive enough votes to continue as an MP and thus his political career came to an end. Hirvisaari is openly racist and stated in his personal blog that Finland should follow the example of Swiss immigration policies and prevent the number of Muslim immigrants from exceeding 1 % of the total population because “Muslim culture does not respect Western culture after the Muslim population has increased over the critical amount.”<sup>28</sup> On 12 March, 2015, Hirvisaari held several speeches at the plenary session of parliament and commented on the report of the government on human rights. Among other things in this specific hate speech targeting Muslims he argued that “Islam poses a security threat in Finland”; “the Islamic invasion is knocking at our doors”; “Islam is a dangerous religion that will destroy this nation” and that “If the world would be healthy, surely practicing Islam would be forbidden completely”.<sup>29</sup>

### Media

Due to the increased number of incoming refugees public discourse has shown signs of a growing unease from the side of ‘ethnic Finns’ who have expressed their fears of an increase of criminality and especially of rapes by refugees. These fears as well as the fear of radical Islamism have been discussed on several TV shows broadcasted by the National Broadcasting Company YLE. The perceived threat of increasing criminality or rape cases in these instances is explained by the refugees’ ‘cultural background’

28. <https://jameshirvisaari.wordpress.com/2015/01/12/148-pyhan-lehman-teurastus-prosenttikin-voi-olla-liikaa/> (last accessed 10.1.2016).

29. For the plenary session protocol, see [https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/poytakirja/Documents/ptk\\_172+2014.pdf](https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/poytakirja/Documents/ptk_172+2014.pdf) (last accessed 10.1.2016).

which is grounded in Islam that is seen as a violent religion that does not respect women.<sup>30</sup> As most of the refugees come from majority-Muslim countries, Islamophobia has been among the topics discussed in these programmes and the focus has been on arguing whether or not the refugees can be integrated into society based, for example, on statistical evidence about how prone to violence people from certain countries are and how their values are not compatible with Finnish ones.

There were also several headlines in the press about the talk show 'Enbuske 360' (MTV3 Channel) which aired on 21 November<sup>31</sup> and where the moderator Tuomas Enbuske had invited the businesswoman Lenita Airisto and the writer Jari Keränen as guests. The programme started with a discussion on the so-called 'refugee crisis' and its solutions but then diverted to the topic of Muslim women and their integration. Airisto started to compare the integration of men and women and commented how she sees the integration of the latter impossible because Muslim women in Islamic clothing are unable to play football or basketball (Muslim men are able to do so), which has been used as an integration tool. She also claimed Muslim women were unaware of their religion's teachings and mentioned that the Feminist Association Union (Naisasialiitto Unioni) should start teaching Muslim women that the Quran does not prohibit playing ball games.

Thereupon Tuomas Enbuske started talking about the "chauvinistic practices" in Muslim countries, referring to women's Islamic dress and called the black abaya and the face-covering niqab a "damn black frock" and claimed that Muslim women would not wear these kind of clothes voluntarily.

The programme caused much unease among the Muslim community of Finland and the Nuoret Muslimit ry (Association of Muslim Youth) published a critical statement<sup>32</sup> which expressed their hope that MTV3 Channel would rethink their stance in regards to racism, Islamophobia and discrimination, and that similar discussions would not be broadcasted in the future.

As an answer to the criticism the following week Tuomas Enbuske invited the Muslim activist Maryam Askar to his programme together with Lenita Airisto so as to talk about the "hassle", as Airisto had called the responds to her and Enbuske's comments. Whereas Enbuske at the end apologised for his generalising statement about Islamic dress not being a voluntary decision of Muslim women, Airisto stated that the Muslim women "should not be allowed to dress in the Islamic dress" because the veil "takes away a woman's identity".

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30. These programmes are 'Pelottava ääri-islam' broadcasted on 22 January; 'Kioski' broadcasted on 24 February and 'A2 pakolais-ilta' on 6 October.

31. The recorded programme 'Huomenta Suomi' (12.11.2015) can be found online at <http://www.katsomo.fi/#/ohjelma/33001003/huomenta-suomi> (last accessed 8.1.2016).

32. <https://www.facebook.com/nuoretmuslimit/posts/995608900461655> (last accessed 8.1.2016).

## Justice system

The Constitution of Finland guarantees rights for all citizens, regardless of one's religion. However, some issues are not guaranteed equally to every religious group/community. The Constitution offers two religious communities legal status: the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church. These two, for example, have a right to collect membership fees by taxes and are entitled to support from governmental financial sources for their services; other religious communities are not entitled to these privileges. This legal situation cannot be interpreted as Islamophobic per se as it does not only affect the Islamic community, but nonetheless it is worth mentioning as it puts Muslims in a disadvantaged position regarding, among others, the facilitation of prayer rooms and burial grounds. Also it is worth considering the legal status of the Muslim organisation entitled Islamic Council of Finland (SINE), which has obligations towards the government such as cooperation and reporting similar to the Orthodox and Lutheran Churches, but the unequal status of Islam before the law means that the Muslim community's work is unpaid while workers of the other religious communities receive salaries from the state.<sup>33</sup>

## Islamophobic arguments in legislative motions

### *Motion to ban circumcision as part of a religious tradition*

In December 2015, the Member of Parliament Vesa-Matti Saarakkala (Finns Party) submitted a motion to change the Criminal Law Article 21 to criminalise the circumcision of boys under the age of 18 for religious reasons and referred in his motion to previous cases concerning Muslim boys' circumcisions. The reasoning for this motion was that under Finnish law an individual has the right of physical integrity and parents should not be allowed to decide on behalf of their children in questions concerning such medical operations; children should have the right to make such decisions when they have reached 18 years of age.<sup>34</sup>

If a parent takes his/her child to a doctor because a circumcision has negatively affected the child's health, the doctor is obliged to make a child welfare complaint to the Social and Health Department. The Social and Health Department then examines the announcement and acts according to protocol. If the parents can prove that the doctor has performed the circumcision in an appropriate manner, they rest the case. If they find the opposite, charges can be brought against the parents in court. Two such cases have been taken to court. In the first, the parents were not sentenced because the judge ruled the circumcision was properly (medically) performed but in the second, the par-

33. The special status of the Lutheran Church is formulated in the Constitution of Finland, Section 76 entitled The Church Act. For the unofficial English translation of the constitution, see <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaanokset/1999/en19990731.pdf> (last accessed 12.2.2016). Finnish legislation also includes a special act regarding the Orthodox Church, <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2006/20060985> (last accessed 12.2.2016). Pia Jardi, vice-chairwoman of the Finnish Islamic Council, personal communication (12.2.2016).

34. Motion LA 52/2015 vp: [https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/Lakialoite/Documents/LA\\_52+2015.pdf](https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/Lakialoite/Documents/LA_52+2015.pdf)

ents were sentenced to pay fines because the circumcision had not been performed in a proper place by a doctor. Both cases were reported to the Islamic Council of Finland.

*Citizens' initiative to ban religious slaughter and to change Animal Protection Law Article 33 by removing Article 33 b.*

Kevin Magnus Servin<sup>35</sup> started to collect signatures for the legislative motion OM 192/52/2015 on 25 November, 2015, to ban religious slaughter in Finland. His reasoning for the motion is based on the argued cruelty of religious slaughter practices. In his initiative he referred to Islam and Judaism, but only gave examples from Islam. The motion has collected 3.742 signatures between 21 November, 2015 and 20 January, 2016.<sup>36</sup> To be submitted to parliament it needs to reach 50.000 signatures within 6 months of its initiation. In 2013, the Islamic Council of Finland<sup>37</sup> gave a statement to the Committee of Agriculture and Forestry about religious slaughter which was taken into consideration when the law was last reviewed.

### **The Bilal Philips case**

In March 2014, the media published news about the Muslim lecturer Bilal Philips coming to visit Finland for an Islamic event. In the press, he was pictured as a radical and homophobic person and right-wing politicians argued in favour of refusing him entry to Finland. The former Member of Parliament and current Member of European Parliament Jussi Halla-Aho (Finns Party) submitted a written question and requested for a report from then Minister of the Interior Päivi Räsänen on the matter. His question was whether the government was aware of the kind of religious preaching that takes place in the events that are visited by the Muslim minority and whether the government thinks that such internationally well-known radical Muslim preachers such as Bilal Philips whose entry into several other countries has already been refused would facilitate the integration of Muslims in Finnish society or pose a threat to internal security.<sup>38</sup> Halla-Aho furthermore argued that all radical Islamic organisations should be banned and the immigration law should be changed so that radical Muslim lecturers' entry into the country could be refused at the border. The issue here is who should be the one to determine radicalism in these cases.

The Finnish National Broadcasting Company (YLE) discussed the case in the prime-time programme 'A-studio'; the invited guests were Jussi Halla-Aho and Mo-

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35. Servin is a private person. Any Finnish citizen entitled to vote can organise a citizen's initiative for a bill or a proposal for a bill drafting process. See <https://www.kansalaisaloite.fi/fi/ohjeet/briefly-in-english> (last accessed 12.2.2016).

36. The citizens' initiative OM 192/52/2015 in Finnish: <https://www.kansalaisaloite.fi/fi/aloite/1697> (last accessed 22.1.2016).

37. Mentioned in parliamentary documents <https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/sivut/trip.aspx?triptype=ValtiopaivaAsiakirjat&docid=mmvm+5/2013> (last accessed 22.1.2016).

38. Official document KK 170/2014 vp: [https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/Kysymys/Documents/kk\\_170+2014.pdf](https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/Kysymys/Documents/kk_170+2014.pdf) (last accessed 22.1.2016).

hamed Abdirahim Hussein from the Center Party.<sup>39</sup> In the end, Bilal Philips entered Finland, held his lectures and a press conference.

## Cyberspace

### MV-Lehti (MV-Magazine)

MV-Lehti is a so-called fake news website that functions as a counterpart to the traditional journalistic news services and claims to deliver the “truth that the mass media is hiding”.<sup>40</sup> It was founded in 2014 by Ilja Janitskin who currently resides in Spain. Charges have previously been pressed against MV-Lehti for defamation, yet so far the Finnish police has not been able to pursue any criminal charges as the provider of the magazine is not located in Finland and it is rarely known who is behind the published articles. According to a survey conducted by the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) the attractiveness of fake news websites such as MV-Lehti is based on the public’s disappointment in the “manipulation, control and lies” of traditional journalistic news services.<sup>41</sup>

Alongside presenting Islam as barbaric and Muslims as prone to violence, an example of the ‘Islamisation of Finland’ discourse spread by MV-Lehti is an article written by a member of the Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset) Jaana Pedersen who in her text criticises the current Finnish government’s actions regarding refugee politics. As in many of MV-Lehti articles, the use of statistics and phrases like ‘studies have shown’ intend to give the reader a reliable picture of the ‘truth’ that is provided by the magazine. Pedersen claimed that at the time (September 2015) the refugee flow into the country was 1.000 persons per day and if each of the refugees with the help of the family reunification programme later brings 10 new immigrants to Finland, it will increase the amount of immigrant citizens to 3.6 million which would mean that the Finnish population would become a minority. Thus, Pedersen argued that politicians support the Muslim invasion of Finland and the future Islamisation of the country. She believes that even if the refugees get Finnish citizenship “they will never become such Finns like the autochthonous population.”<sup>42</sup> The ‘creeping sharia’ argument is also evident in Pedersen’s text as she anticipates that as a result of the current refugee politics even she will be forced to wear a burka in the future.

### Paavo Tajukangas

Paavo Tajukangas is a website administered by an anonymous writer who seems to be based in Sweden, as most of the website’s articles concern issues on immigration

39. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUSW13Y2mxE>

40. The name of the magazine is an abbreviation of the Finnish equivalent for “what the f\*\*k” (Mitä vittua).

41. [http://yle.fi/uitiset/kansa\\_on\\_kyllastynyt\\_manipulointiin\\_kontrolliin\\_ja\\_valehteluun\\_\\_taman\\_vuoksi\\_mv-lehtea\\_luetaan/8409302](http://yle.fi/uitiset/kansa_on_kyllastynyt_manipulointiin_kontrolliin_ja_valehteluun__taman_vuoksi_mv-lehtea_luetaan/8409302) (last accessed 10.1.2016).

42. <http://mvlehti.net/2015/09/19/lakimies-suomen-tyhmin-hallitus-toteuttaa-suomen-islamisaatiota-ja-miehitysta/> (last accessed 9.1.2016).

and Islam in Sweden.<sup>43</sup> The website, however, is in the Finnish language and the writer comments frequently on similar issues concerning Finland. The aforementioned MV-Magazine frequently reposts texts from Paavo Tadjukangas. The website has, for example, a subtopic entitled “Why does the Islamic world not develop?”<sup>44</sup> in which the writer has posted a translated text from the article “Cultural psychology: How Islam managed to stay medieval for 1,400 years” by a rather prominent Danish Islamophobe, Nicolai Sennels, which was published at <http://10news.dk/> a fake news website similar to MV-Lehti. In this publication, Sennels argues that among other things Muslims live according to traditions that are “criminal and inhumane”, that Muslim parents raise their children by constantly threatening them with violence and death so that the children do not leave their religion and traditions, and that Muslim wives are treated by their husbands like slaves and they have no rights to education.<sup>45</sup>

### **Islamin aikapommi (Timebomb Islam)**

Islamin aikapommi (Timebomb Islam) is a website/blog containing subtopics such as “Punishment of Allah”, “What is Islam really?” and “What the West should know”.<sup>46</sup> This site is commonly referred to in other Islamophobic websites and even by the politician and MEP Jussi Halla-Aho in his personal blog Scripta; its writer and/or administrator is unknown. The contents of the site are through and through anti-Islamic. The subtopic “What the West should know”, for instance, is a Finnish translation of the book *Islam 101* written by Gregory M. Davis, who is a film producer with no academic background in Islam.

Borrowing from the book, *Islamin aikapommi* uses concepts such as *taqiyyah* to prove the evilness of Islam arguing that Muslims are trying to deceive the West in regards to Islam’s true nature by using lies. The website states “Due to the state of war between *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-Harb*, *ruse de guerre*, i.e., systematic lying to the infidel, must be considered part and parcel of Islamic tactics. The parroting by Muslim organisations throughout *dar al-Harb* that ‘Islam is a religion of peace,’ or that the origins of Muslim violence lie in the unbalanced psyches of particular individual ‘fanatics,’ must be considered as disinformation intended to induce the infidel world to let down its guard.”<sup>47</sup>

The blog section on the website contains postings about topics such as ‘Islam and Pedophilia’ and ‘Islam is not a religion’; the latter arguing that “Islam is not in the first place a religion but a political ideology similar to fascism and militaristic-expansionist apocalyptic death cult, which aims at the oppression of the whole world

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43. <http://paavotajukangas.com/> (last accessed 10.1.2016).

44. <http://paavotajukangas.com/miksi-islamilainen-maailma-ei-kehity/> (last accessed 10.1.2016).

45. For the original article in English, see <http://10news.dk/?p=675> (last accessed 10.1.2016).

46. <https://aikapommi.wordpress.com/> (last accessed 9.1.2016).

47. Original English can be found at <http://www.jihadwatch.org/islam-101> (last accessed 9.1.2016).

under Allah's law, shari'a."<sup>48</sup> In many sections, the website refers to the American Islamophobic website Jihad Watch and uses the Salafist website Islam Q&A as a source, a kind of 'fatwa bank'. This and the website's general attitude towards source criticism is manifested also in the way the site encourages its readers to quote from the website without giving any reference to the source.<sup>49</sup>

Alongside those individuals already mentioned in different sections of this report, another figure who frequently has something to say is Seppo Lehto, who claims to be a nationalist patriot. In the past, he has been sentenced to prison for his gross and racist writings about racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, but he continues to have several blogs<sup>50</sup> and frequently posts videos on Youtube. The contents of his posts contain radical, brutal and vulgar language and deal mostly with immigration criticism and the Islamisation of Finland. He is the creator of caricatures depicting Muhammad as a pig which he has published on his blogs. Before the Finnish parliamentary elections in April 2015, he published an endorsement video in which, among other things, he objected to the planned construction of the central mosque in Helsinki and told Muslims to "go to hell". Considering Lehto's previous criminal sentences regarding hate speech on the Internet, the fact that his blogs are hosted under a URL specific to the Turkish provider of the service should protect him from getting his writings removed from the Internet.

### **Observations on civil society, political assessments and initiatives undertaken to counter Islamophobia**

Similarly to many other European countries, a public social experiment was organised in Finland in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attacks. Because of the vast media coverage of the terror attack and the fears and suspicions towards Muslim populations that emerged in its wake, this social experiment aimed at creating a bond of trust between strangers, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In Finland the experiment was initiated by the programme 'Kioski' which is broadcasted by the National Broadcasting Company YLE.

The first experiment was conducted by one of Kioski's journalists, Petski, who is an ethnic Finn. He stood in a square in front of a big shopping mall with two signs that had the messages "Muslim, I trust you" and "I am a white Finnish man, if you trust me, hug me!"<sup>51</sup> For the second experiment two young Muslim activists, Sadek Elwan and Maryam Askar stood for the same purpose in the hall of the main railway station in Helsinki. Their signs had the message "I am a Muslim whom the world has

48. <https://aikapommi.wordpress.com/2008/01/17/islam-ei-ole-uskonto/> (last accessed 9.1.2016).

49. <https://aikapommi.wordpress.com/voit-siteerata-vapaasti/> (last accessed 9.1.2016).

50. <http://ajatukxia-maahanmuutosta.blogspot.com.tr/> , <http://maahanmuuttorealisti.blogspot.com.tr/> , <http://tampereen-kuntavaaliedokas.blogspot.com.tr/> and <http://maahanmuuttokriitikko.blogspot.com.tr/> (last accessed 10.1.2016).

51. To watch the video of the experiment, see <https://vimeo.com/120477690> (last accessed 9.1.2016).

labelled terrorist. If you trust me, hug me!”<sup>52</sup> Both experiments received vast amount of positive feedback.<sup>53</sup> Maryan and Sadek were very happy with the result and said that the individuals who showed them friendliness by participating in the hug campaign had said encouraging words in solidarity with the two young Muslims.

RASMUS Ry is a national association that fights racism and xenophobia as well as hate speech in the media and in people’s everyday lives. Their ‘KAAMOS’ initiative aims especially at influencing youth attitudes towards diversity and multiculturalism. In 2015, the ‘KAAMOS’ initiative launched a project for schools, youth centres and diverse events with a poster exhibition. RASMUS Ry Executive Director Mona Magi explains that Muslims and Islam were taken into account in the posters aimed at pointing out the Muslim Tatar soldiers’ contribution to the Winter War.<sup>54</sup>

USKOT-Foorumi (National Forum for Cooperation of Religions in Finland)<sup>55</sup> has been active in giving positive statements alongside other religious leaders in efforts to fight against hate and discrimination, and in support of the Muslim community. Different Islamic communities have also made efforts to open the dialogue with all parties and the government by arranging dialogue events. The Islamic Council of Finland has been giving statements invoking the nation to come out in public, show solidarity and firmly support Islam as a religion of peace.

The National Movement against Racism “Meillä on unelma avoimen ja monikulttuurisen Suomen puolesta” (“We have a dream for a multicultural and open Finland”) was able to organise an event in only a few days where approximately 15.000 people participated in support of all those who have been victims of racist attacks and hate speech, mostly Muslims.

During the writing process of this report, Linda Hyökki, the author, was harassed in an Islamophobic manner due to her activities while researching this report. Hyökki requested information on Islamophobic websites and Facebook groups in a Facebook group of the national anti-racist association RASMUS RY. This request was picked up by a private person who posted a screenshot of her message on his Facebook wall. From there, the post spread to the aforementioned blog Paavo Taju-kangas and the fake news website MV-Lehti. On both platforms Hyökki was verbally harassed and slandered, and she also received death threats.

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52. To watch the video of the experiment, see <https://vimeo.com/120698737> (last accessed 9.1.2016).

53. An anonymous source sent a letter to Kioski’s redaction and explained that the campaign was an effort to understand how difficult the life for those who are labelled as terrorists can be <http://kioski.yle.fi/omat/nain-halaus-kosketti> (last accessed 9.1.2016).

54. The Winter War was fought between the Soviet Union and Finland in 1939-1940.

55. <http://www.uskot-resa.fi/>

## CONCLUSION

### Policy recommendations for politics and NGOs

The refugee influx is stirring up the debates and as a result Muslims of Finnish and other ethnicities are inevitably falling victim to hate speech even though they might not have anything to do with the refugees. Considering the Islamophobic attack against the author of this report, Linda Hyökki, the alarming aspect of the nature of the current Islamophobic discourse is that it has become so straightforward, vulgar and brutal. It is not about a mere criticism of Islam as a religion and questioning its principles, but individual people are attacked in ways that would have been unthinkable 10 to 20 years ago, when the frustrated xenophobic discussions were still conducted anonymously on different platforms. Moreover, Muslim persons are labelled terrorists based solely on their religious affiliation; the labelling of convert Muslims as traitors of the Finnish nation who should be executed for treason is also common.

### Recommendations for policymakers would be thus:

- Empowering the police force to combat hate speech.
- Re-considering the current definition of hate speech which is rather vague in Finnish criminal law.
- More effective monitoring of social media such as the monitoring of Facebook and net-etiquette.
- Monitoring of websites such as MV-Lehti and reporting their harmful contents to the police.
- Workshops organised by NGOs for the Muslim community on how to counter hate speech and discrimination and regarding their rights in the case of being discriminated or harassed on grounds of their religious affiliation.
- Workshops organised in collaboration with NGOs and Muslim communities, targeting the non-Muslim population in order to provide authentic information on Muslims and Islam.
- Politicians, public officials and local authorities should participate in educational seminars on Islam so that they can rely on authentic information instead of stereotyping and misleading information from weak sources.
- Misinformation disadvantages the projects that the Muslim community is trying to develop which leads to a need of tighter cooperation between public offices and Muslim communities. Especially when the government, local authorities or NGOs plan programmes on counter-terrorism or special youth programmes they need to be in close contact with the Muslim community at large and not only with one mosque community or association. When inclusion becomes an integral part of policies, misinformation and conflicts between individual Muslim groupings can be avoided.

## CHRONOLOGY

### January 2015

- Charlie Hebdo shootings occur in France.
- The youth branch of the Finns Party announce a caricature competition under the title 'Islam'.
- The 'Scary radical Islam' (Pelottava ääri-islam) programme is broadcasted on TV (YLE).

### February 2015

- The 'Kioski' programme (YLE) posts the videos of the social experiments 'If you trust me, hug me!' on social media.

### March 2015

- Radio broadcasts (YLE) of the Quran start.
- Member of Parliament James Hirvisaari (Muutos 2011 –party) holds an anti-Islamic speech in the plenary session of parliament.

### April 2015

- Seppo Lehto, an Islamophobic citizen, published an endorsement video for the Finns Party in which he told Muslims "to go to hell".
- Muutos 2011 party uses campaign materials with Islamophobic contents.
- Finnish parliamentary elections are held and the Finns Party emerge as the second largest party in terms of seats.

### May 2015

- Construction plans for a central mosque in Helsinki are published in the press.
- A citizen's initiative against the central mosque starts collecting signatures.

### July 2015

- 'We have a dream' (Meillä on unelma) event/demonstration collects 15.000 participants who support the idea of a multicultural Finland.

### September 2015

- Several Islamophobic discussions on different channels of social media are stirred up by the increasing number of refugees in the country.
- MV-Lehti publishes an article on the Islamisation of Finland written by a member of the Finns Party Jaana Pedersen.

### October 2015

- MV-Lehti and the blog Paavo Tajukangas start an Islamophobic campaign against the author of this report, Linda Hyökki.
- A special talk show night on refugees is broadcasted on TV (YLE).

**November 2015**

- ‘Enbuske 360’ (MTV3 Channel) invites Lenita Airisto and Jani Keränen as guests. The discussion diverts from the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ to Islamophobic comments on Muslim women.
- The Association of Muslim Youth (Nuoret Muslimit ry) release a statement against the programme ‘Enbuske 360’ and MTV3.
- Muslim activist Maryam Askar is invited to a review of the programme’s episode.
- Kevin Magnus Servin starts to collect names for the legislative motion OM 192/52/2015 as a citizen’s initiative to ban religious slaughter in Finland.

**December 2015**

- Member of the Parliament Vesa-Matti Saarakkala (Finns Party) submits a motion to change Criminal law Article 21 to criminalise the circumcision of boys under 18 years of age for religious reasons.
- The SYPONUR report on Muslim youth is released naming Islamophobia as one of the reasons behind Muslim radicalisation.



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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