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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  
**GREECE**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2015

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ALEXANDROS SAKELLARIOU



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines Islamophobia in Greece during 2015 taking under consideration all the European and global developments that might have influenced the appearance or the rise of Islamophobia, including the refugee and migrant flows, the rise of Daesh/ISIL and the terrorist attacks in Paris, to mention the most important ones. The report is based on data collected from electronic media, the press, the Internet, communication with NGOs (e.g. The Hellenic League for Human Rights), with the General Secretariat for Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice, and from interviews with people specialising on Islam in Greece. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with representatives of Muslim groups and organisations.

Islamophobia in Greece is present in specific fields, for example the far right and particularly the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn and in other circles such as parts of the Orthodox Church of Greece. The Greek authorities cannot be characterised as Islamophobic, but due to their inability to implement the existing legislation, e.g. on the construction of an official mosque in Athens, they are perceived as such. According to the existing data and information, Islamophobia is marginal in education, in the workplace and in the justice system, but seems to be on the rise in the media, the Internet and social media, which are privileged places for such views to flourish.

On the counter-Islamophobia level a central state policy is lacking and there have been only secondary and fragmented initiatives. This vacuum could be addressed through principal measures taken towards confronting Islamophobia. First of all, there is a need for an observatory authority that will monitor and record Islamophobic incidents either of violent character or on the level of public discourse. Especially for schools and for the media this vacuum is crucial. Seminars could be organised for groups of civil servants, who have frequent contacts with Muslims, like police officers, coastguards, migration officers, but also for journalists who directly or indirectly might reproduce Islamophobic views. The Orthodox Church of Greece could also play a crucial role, ceasing to reproduce or accept Islamophobic views and ideas and taking a firm moderate stance on the issue. Overall, the lack of knowledge about Islam seems to play a fundamental role in the emergence of Islamophobia; this lack causes people to turn to other sources of information and this may have serious implications in their understanding of Islam.

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ ΣΤΑ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ

Η παρούσα έκθεση εξετάζει την Ισλαμοφοβία στην Ελλάδα για το έτος 2015 λαμβάνοντας υπόψη όλα τα σημαντικά γεγονότα τα οποία έλαβαν χώρα σε ευρωπαϊκό και παγκόσμιο επίπεδο και τα οποία ενδεχομένως να συνέβαλαν στην εμφάνιση ή στην αύξηση της Ισλαμοφοβίας, όπως οι μεταναστευτικές και προσφυγικές ροές, που κορυφώθηκαν στη διάρκεια της χρονιάς, η ενίσχυση του λεγόμενου Ισλαμικού κράτους, αλλά και οι τρομοκρατικές επιθέσεις στο Παρίσι (Ιανουάριος και Νοέμβριος). Το υλικό που παρουσιάζεται στην έκθεση προέρχεται από τα ηλεκτρονικά ΜΜΕ, τον τύπο, το διαδίκτυο και τα κοινωνικά δίκτυα, επικοινωνία με ΜΚΟ (π.χ. την Ελληνική Ένωση για τα Δικαιώματα του Ανθρώπου), με τη Γενική Γραμματεία Ανθρωπίνων Δικαιωμάτων του Υπουργείου Δικαιοσύνης, αλλά και από συνεντεύξεις με ειδικούς σχετικά με το Ισλάμ στην Ελλάδα. Επίσης, διενεργήθηκαν συνεντεύξεις με εκπροσώπους Μουσουλμανικών ομάδων και οργανώσεων.

Το κύριο συμπέρασμα της έκθεσης είναι ότι η Ισλαμοφοβία στην Ελλάδα διαπιστώνεται, κυρίως, σε συγκεκριμένους κύκλους, όπως για παράδειγμα στους χώρους της ακροδεξιάς και ειδικότερα στο κόμμα της Χρυσής Αυγής, αλλά και σε άλλες ακροδεξιές ομάδες, καθώς και σε χώρους, όπως η Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία, όπου καταγράφεται στον δημόσιο λόγο ορισμένων Μητροπολιτών. Από την άλλη μεριά οι ελληνικές κρατικές αρχές δεν χαρακτηρίζονται από Ισλαμοφοβικές απόψεις, τουλάχιστον όχι σε κεντρικό επίπεδο. Παρά ταύτα η κωλοσιεργεία τους στην εφαρμογή νόμων, όπως εκείνου για την κατασκευή ενός Ισλαμικού τεμένους στην Αθήνα, που έχει ψηφιστεί από το 2006 και ακόμα εκκρεμεί, ενδέχεται να δημιουργεί την εντύπωση ότι βασίζεται σε Ισλαμοφοβικές αντιλήψεις. Με τα υπάρχοντα ελλιπή δεδομένα, η Ισλαμοφοβία φαίνεται να είναι περιθωριακή στους χώρους της εκπαίδευσης, της εργασίας και της δικαιοσύνης. Από την άλλη μεριά φαίνεται να έχει ισχυρά ερείσματα και να αυξάνεται στα ΜΜΕ, στο διαδίκτυο και στα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, τα οποία αποτελούν εύφορους χώρους για την ανάπτυξη και την καλλιέργεια αυτών των απόψεων.

Ως προς την αντιμετώπιση της Ισλαμοφοβίας απουσιάζει μια κεντρική κρατική πολιτική και λαμβάνουν χώρα μόνο δευτερεύουσες και αποσπασματικές δράσεις από ιδιωτικούς και δημόσιους φορείς. Μεταξύ των πιθανών δράσεων θα μπορούσαν να είναι η δημιουργία ενός κοινού ή περισσότερων παρατηρητηρίων για την καταγραφή Ισλαμοφοβικού λόγου και πράξεων στους χώρους της εκπαίδευσης, της εργασίας και των ΜΜΕ, διότι διαπιστώνεται ότι υπάρχει ένα σημαντικό κενό. Η διοργάνωση σεμιναρίων για δημοσιογράφους και δημόσιους υπαλλήλους που έρχονται σε επαφή με Μουσουλμάνους, όπως οι αστυνομικοί, οι λιμενικοί, υπάλληλοι των γραφείων μετανάστευσης, θα ήταν μια άλλη πρόταση προς εφαρμογή. Επίσης, η Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία θα μπορούσε να διαδραματίσει έναν σημαντικό ρόλο ελέγχοντας και εμποδίζοντας την αναπαραγωγή Ισλαμοφοβικού λόγου από συγκεκριμένους Μητροπολίτες και λαμβάνοντας μια περισσότερο μετριοπαθή στάση. Συνολικά, θα μπορούσε να υποστηριχθεί ότι η έλλειψη γνώσης για το Ισλάμ, φαίνεται να αποτελεί σημαντικό παράγοντα για την άνοδο της Ισλαμοφοβίας καθώς σε συνδυασμό με τις διεθνείς εξελίξεις στρέφει τους ανθρώπους σε άλλες αμφιλεγόμενες πηγές πληροφόρησης, προκειμένου να ενημερωθούν και αυτό ενδέχεται να έχει σοβαρές επιπτώσεις στην κατανόηση του Ισλάμ.

## INTRODUCTION

When talking about Islamophobia in Greece, it is crucial to have in mind that debates on Islam are deeply rooted in and strongly intertwined with the experience of a long Ottoman occupation and its collective interpretations. The Ottoman rule was a serious trauma and crucial juncture in the creation of the collective identity of the Greek people and the Ottoman past is still present in the predominant memories of the national self and 'Other'. This was moreover bolstered by ongoing conflicts between Greece and Turkey such as the Greek-Turkish war of 1897, the 'Asia Minor Catastrophe' of 1922 and the Turkish intervention in Cyprus in 1974, as well as more recent crises during the 1980s and 1990s. As a consequence, despite all the contemporary developments that are related with the rise of 'radical Islam', this historical past should always be taken under consideration when it comes to the issue of Islamophobia in the country.

In Greece there are three main fields that have played a crucial role in the reproduction of Islamophobia in the public domain: the political field, i.e. political parties and organisations mainly of the right and the far right; the religious field, i.e. certain Church figures of the Orthodox Church of Greece; and finally the media.

This report is based on various data that were collected during 2015 and takes under consideration European and global events that might have influenced the appearance or the rise of Islamophobia. The collected material came from electronic media, the press, the Internet, communication with NGOs<sup>1</sup> (e.g. Amnesty International/Greek division and The Hellenic League for Human Rights), the General Secretariat for Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice, and from interviews conducted with people specialising on Islam in Greece and whose views on the issue could be useful. Finally, interviews were conducted with representatives of Muslim groups and organisations. However, it is almost impossible to cover every aspect of the issue and moreover collect every single existing material on Islamophobia especially when it comes to the Internet. This report's main goal is to map Islamophobia in Greece covering the main fields (education, workplace, media, politics, justice, etc.) and examine the gaps in policies towards countering anti-Islamic discourse and attitudes.

## SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN GREECE DURING 2015

There are three main developments that have influenced discourses and attitudes about Islam in Greece during the year under review. The first was the issue of the construction of an official Islamic mosque in Athens. The problem of the construction

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1. Following research it has emerged that NGOs do not have any data regarding Islamophobia in Greece - an issue that has to be addressed since such a data collection mechanism could be useful.

of a central mosque in Athens dates back to the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Given the lack of a proper mosque in Athens, Muslims operate prayer houses on their own in former warehouses or basements of buildings. In the past some researchers have argued that there were around sixty such prayer houses<sup>3</sup> while more recent estimates put their number at around 100 all over the country.<sup>4</sup> All these unofficial and in many cases illegal places are situated in neighbourhoods near the centre of Athens, where most migrants live. The first official prayer house in Athens was established in the early 1990s, on the roof of a luxury hotel located in the city centre and served the devotional needs of Muslim businessmen from the Middle East.<sup>5</sup> There have been at least five laws since 1890 on this issue, the latest voted in 2006 and followed by various amendments. To this day, however, the mosque has not yet been constructed. During 2015, the new left government decided to proceed with the construction of the official mosque and in that direction voted an amendment of the existing legislation regarding certain technical issues. This caused furious debates in the public sphere and in parliament, especially by the far right, which will be discussed in the following sections. The majority of MPs have agreed on these amendments; those who reacted and didn't vote in their favour were the MPs of GD and of Independent Greeks (ANEL). All other MPs from the left, the communist party, the conservative party (New Democracy), the socialists (PASOK) and the centre (Potami) voted in favour of the amendment. In these debates MPs of all parties argued that the construction of the mosque is a necessity and that the Greek state has delayed proceeding with its establishment.

The second major event was, and of course still is, the so-called 'refugee crisis' that started in the spring and escalated during the summer. It has to be noted that during the first eight months of 2015 more than 700,000 refugees and migrants came to Greece searching for a path to other European destinations<sup>6</sup> while in December this number reached 800,000.<sup>7</sup> This development was used by political agents, particularly of the far right, who immediately connected the migration/refugee issue with Islam.

The third event - or actually two events - has been the attacks in Paris, the first in January and the second in November 2015. These events had an immediate impact

2. Konstantinos Tsitselikis, "Religious Freedom of Immigrants: The Case of Muslims," in *Greece of Immigration*, eds. Miltos Pavlou and Dimitris Christopoulos, (Athens: Kritiki, 2004), 267-302 [in Greek].

3. Mehmet Imam and Olga Tsakiridou, *Muslims and Social Exclusion* (Athens: Livanis, 2003) [in Greek].

4. Personal interview with the President of the Pakistani-Hellenic Cultural Association conducted on 23 July, 2015 in Athens.

5. Dimitris Antoniou, "Muslim Immigrants in Greece: Religious Organization and Local Responses", *Immigrants & Minorities*, 22 (2-3) (2003): 165.

6. For more information see the UNHCR database <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83>, accessed 29 December, 2015.

7. For more information see the IOM <http://www.iom.int/news/irregular-migrant-refugee-arrivals-europe-top-one-million-2015-iom>, accessed 22 December, 2015.

on the Greek context. After these attacks the rise of Islamophobic discourse was obvious in the media and in other fields (e.g. among politicians and Church figures), a fact that is highlighted in this report. Especially the attack in November was linked to the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ since, as it was argued, some of the suicide bombers entered France through Greece as Syrian refugees or had travelled to Greece in the past before the attacks. This interconnection gave rise to various voices asking for the country’s protection from the thousands of migrants and refugees that are Muslims in their vast majority, implying that terrorist attacks are possible in the future in the case that some of them were to remain in Greece.

## **DISCUSSION OF ISLAMOPHOBIC INCIDENTS AND DISCURSIVE EVENTS**

### **Employment**

There have not been any reports of Islamophobic attitudes in the field of employment in Greece. Muslims themselves mentioned in the interviews conducted for this report that they don’t face such issues in their workplace. The only issues raised are related to the lack of flexibility from the part of their employers regarding the exercise of their religious duties, namely prayer and especially the Friday prayer. It is highly possible that discriminations in the workplace are mostly related with the migrant identity first and foremost and secondly, if any, with the religious identity of the person involved.

### **Education**

Education is also a field where no data is available since the Ministry of Education lacks an observatory authority on issues related to religious discrimination in schools. Sporadic references are made about verbal disputes among students of different religions, but again no specific data is available and no conclusions can be drawn. Though the Orthodox religion has a central and dominant place in Greek schools including the curriculum, Islam has a separate, albeit marginal, place in school religious textbooks and generally is presented in an objective way. However, Islam receives negative connotations when it comes to history textbooks, since it is directly related with the Ottoman past and the Greek-Turkish relations, and this was evident especially in the past.<sup>8</sup>

### **Politics**

Islamophobia has played a crucial role in the political domain in 2015 and is linked to two critical issues that are still causing ferocious debates in the Greek public

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8. Loris Koullapis, “The presentation of the period 1071-1923 in Greek and Turkish textbooks between 1950-2000”, *Internationale Schulbuchforschung, Das Osmanische Reich im Schulbuch/The Ottoman Empire in Textbooks* 24 (3) (2002): 279-304.

sphere. The first one is the issue of the construction of an official mosque in Athens and the second is the issue of the migrant and refugee waves - the two issues are usually interconnected.

The major player in this field is Golden Dawn (hereafter GD) a far right political party with neo-Nazi ideology. GD's power and electoral success erupted at the peak of the economic crisis in 2012, but the first signs were obvious earlier in the 2010 local elections when the party gained 5.29 % of the votes and elected a city councillor in Athens. In the 2012 June elections, GD succeeded in winning 6.92 % of the votes and gaining 18 seats in the Greek Parliament, while in the first elections in May it won 6.97 % of votes and 21 seats. In January 2015, GD won 6.28 % of the votes and 17 seats, while in September 2015 it won 6.99 % of the votes and 18 seats. In the European elections of 2014, GD scored its highest percentage with 9.39 % and 3 seats in the European Parliament. Regarding the issue of the construction of a mosque in Athens during the relevant discussions in the Greek Parliament in May, a GD MP argued that, if the mosque is built, Greece will become Islamised and Greeks will listen to the muezzin from the minarets experiencing in this way a new Ottoman rule. GD thus argues that it will fight against the Islamisation of Greece, a course that contradicts Greek tradition and culture.<sup>9</sup> The party also complained against the government in regards to the migration/refugee issue:

“You [the government] want to eliminate values like fatherland, religion, family, Orthodoxy. You are the best companion of our enemy, Turkey, which is very happy seeing hundreds of thousands of illegal migrants coming to Greece.”<sup>10</sup>

In May 2015, after the government passed an amendment for the existing legislation on the mosque of Athens, GD reacted and voted against it. They also declared their disagreement during their annual commemoration rally for the fall of Constantinople on May 29.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore they declared their negative stance through the party's official newspaper. (Figure 1)

During the electoral campaign of the second elections of 2015, in September, a GD MP, Ilias Kasidiaris, during his visit in the island of Kos, where thousands of migrants and refugees were arriving, argued that the citizens of Kos should vote for GD if they don't want their island to become “Pakistan”,<sup>12</sup> referring to a place full of Muslims. This kind of rhetoric is very common in the party's public discourse and is used to intimidate society and present Islam and Muslims as a threat to Greece, to

9. Parliament Proceedings, 27 April 2015, Session KH [28], 49; Parliament Proceedings, 8 May 2015, Session AH [38], 264.

10. Parliament Proceedings, Session EB [62], 24 June 2015, 336.

11. Golden Dawn, “The Hellenic Dawn for Athens Says a Sound NO to the Mosque in Votanikos”, accessed 30 December, 2015, <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/hchhro-ochi-ths-ellhnikhs-aughs-gia-thn-athhna-sto-tzami-sto-botaniko>.

12. Stohos, “If You Vote for SYRIZA You Will Become Pakistani”, 26 August, 2015, accessed 14 December, 2015, [http://www.stoxos.gr/2015/08/blog-post\\_6624.html](http://www.stoxos.gr/2015/08/blog-post_6624.html).

the country's sovereignty and national identity. The same arguments were presented in September 2015 during a discussion in the Municipal Council of Athens, where GD is present since 2010. In this discussion the mayor of Athens was accused of supporting 'illegal' migrants and turning huge parts of Athens into "Islamabad".<sup>13</sup>



Figure 1: The official Newspaper of GD. The headline reads "A mosque in Greece? Neither in Athens, nor in any other place!"

Throughout the year, as in the previous ones, and on a regular basis, GD reproduced this kind of Islamophobic discourse through the party's official website, especially in regards to the aforementioned critical issues, but also after any terrorist attack in Europe or other Western societies by the members of the so-called 'Islamic State' or other radical groups. More references to this kind of discourse will be presented in the relevant section on cyberspace.

However, it is not only GD that equates migrants and refugees with the threat of Islam thus reproducing a sense of panic about Islam and Muslims. During this summer a moderate MP of the conservative right-wing party Nea Dimocratia (New Democracy), Niki-

tas Kaklamanis, argued through his Twitter account that what takes place on the Greek islands is not an influx of migrants, but a guided invasion of Islamists.<sup>14</sup> Anti-Muslim discourse was also expressed by MPs of the right-wing party of New Democracy during the discussion on the Mosque of Athens arguing that Muslims are against the Western way of life.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, MPs of ANEL (Independent Greeks, a right-wing populist party which participates in the coalition government with the left), similarly argued that Muslims can't be acculturated and cannot adjust to Greek society.<sup>16</sup> Christos Nikolopoulos, who is now an independent MP but was formerly an MP of ANEL, also argued that through refugees Islam threatens to alter the Christian synthesis of the Greek and European populations.<sup>17</sup>

13. Golden Dawn, "Kasidiaris to Kaminis: You Turned Athens into Islamabad", accessed 14 December, 2015. <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/kasidiarhs-se-kaminh-ekanes-thn-athhna-islamampant...-eisai-lathrodmarchos>.

14. Newsit, "Nikitas Kaklamanis: A Guided Landing of Islamists is Taking Place in Our Islands", accessed 14 December, 2015. <http://www.newsit.gr/politikh/Nikitas-Kaklamanis-Sta-nisia-mas-ginetai-kateythynomeni-apovasi-islamiston-/425307>.

15. Parliament Proceedings, 24 June 2015, Session EB [62], 71.

16. Parliament Proceedings, 12 May 2015, Session M [40], 176.

17. See [http://www.nikosnikolopoulos-anatropi.gr/?section=14954&language=el\\_GR&itemid751=5076&itemid730=19237&detail730=1](http://www.nikosnikolopoulos-anatropi.gr/?section=14954&language=el_GR&itemid751=5076&itemid730=19237&detail730=1), accessed 8 February, 2016.

Islamophobic discourse is central in the far right political circles but marginal in other political formations. However, there isn't a strong opposition to these Islamophobic views and the majority of other parties are mostly silent, with the minor exception of some MPs of the left and the Communist Party, who oppose labelling migrants and refugees as 'dangerous' and 'terrorists'. Nevertheless, in the course of 2015 and based on the political developments, politicians especially of the conservative party - moderate ones and not ones with an extremist background - have more frequently expressed Islamophobic opinions. It seems that probably due to the strengthening of GD, right-wing parties are trying to follow their xenophobic agenda in order to maintain their political power, especially in areas where many migrants and refugees are living or arriving.

## Media

Before referring to the Islamophobic discourse that has been reproduced through the media in Greece during 2015, the lack of an observatory authority that would monitor all media (television, radio, Internet and the press) and document possible cases of anti-Islamic discourse, has to be noted.

In some cases, like the crash of the airplane of German Wings in the Alps in March 2015, a mainstream television station (Mega Channel) in the first two days of the incident reproduced unconfirmed rumours that the plane might have been crashed by Islamists or that the co-pilot was suspected of having links with Daesh/ISIL. Of course, this was directly related to the international climate of fear of Islam: it was first reported in international media and only taken up by the Greek media, which, it has to be noted, follows international precedents. The majority of TV stations in 2015 reproduced for the most part news and videos of the violent acts of Daesh/ISIL, e.g. propaganda videos of decapitations, of other forms of execution, of the military training of children, the destruction of antiquities, etc. In opposition to these barbaric acts, there was an almost complete lack of positive images of Islam.

Apart from TV stations, certain newspapers focused primarily on the supposed 'violent character of Islam', especially after the two terrorist attacks in Paris, in January and November 2015. The majority of the articles or news reports dealt exclusively with the brutal acts of Daesh/ISIL, thus creating and reproducing the image that Islam and Muslims are violent. In addition, the majority of mainstream media usually relate the issue of the flows of migrants and refugees with Islam and the threat their presence might pose for the country. In contrary to this, only a few articles in the press in 2015 presented alternative images.<sup>18</sup>

Mainstream newspapers host views of columnists who reproduce Islamophobic discourse. After the November attack in Paris a well-known author who has

18. Olga, Klontza, "After Paris You Will See Us with Suspicion", *To Vima*, 22 November, 2015, accessed 14 December, 2015, <http://www.tovima.gr/politics/article/?aid=755951> and Maria, Louka, "Islam in Greece", *To Vima*, 19 October, 2015, accessed 14 December, 2015. <http://www.tovima.gr/vimagazino/views/article/?aid=746397>.

spoken against Islam and the multicultural model before, wrote a brief article in the newspaper Athens Voice attacking Islam. In this article she argued that Islam is not a religion like every other, that its nature is warlike and envious and that it is a political programme and an ideology of barbarisation. Furthermore, she argued that moderate Muslims are very rare if any and she added that she agrees with a saying of Marco Polo, that a fanatic Muslim is the one who cuts your head, while a moderate one holds your head for it to be cut. In her view, Islam is monolithic and has remained the same since the Middle Ages and the West should react against this threat.<sup>19</sup> She expressed similar views in her interview in a mainstream newspaper, Kathimerini, about two weeks later, supporting the argument that violence is an endogenous problem of Islam and that it is Muslims' fault that they were unable to be incorporated in Western societies.<sup>20</sup>

Another well-known columnist in the same newspaper, Kathimerini, argued that despite the fact that Islam should not be completely identified with terrorism it is clear that it is closely related with terrorism, arguing that the answer to the question of why young Muslims are becoming violent is not an issue of inequalities but of the religion of Islam



Figure 2: Front page of Eleftheri Ora (16 November, 2015) a few days after the attack in Paris. Among others we read “Be prepared for defence and survival! You have no idea the hell Greece will face!”

and of the imams and their preaching. He additionally argued that not all cultures and civilisations are able to evolve and surpass these fundamentalist trends that exist in every religion, implying that Islam belongs to this category. He wondered where these peaceful Muslims everyone mentions are and why they are not reacting.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, what should be underlined is that newspapers of the far right, like, among others, the official newspaper of GD that was mentioned above, present a clear Islamophobic discourse. The far right newspaper Eleftheri Ora (Free Hour), for example, has used headlines like the following when referring to Islam: “Islam declared war on Europe”; “The antichrist will come from

19. <http://www.athensvoice.gr/article/city-news-voices/%CF%80%CE%BF%CE%BB%CE%B9%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%B7/rock-and-roll-will-never-die>, accessed 14 December, 2015.

20. Sissy, Alonistiotou, “Moderate Islam is a Myth”, *Kathimerini, Arts & Letters*, 29 November, 2015, 4.

21. Takis, Theodoropoulos, “Imam’s Language”, *Kathimerini*, 19 November, 2015, accessed 14 December, 2015, <http://www.kathimerini.gr/839161/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/h-glwssa-toy-imamh> and Takis, Theodoropoulos, “What about Islam’s Responsibilities?” *Kathimerini*, 18 November, 2015, accessed 14 December, 2015. <http://www.kathimerini.gr/839026/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/kai-oi-ey8ynes-toy-islam>.



Figure 3: “A rabbi, an imam and Tsipras [the Greek PM] are Islamising Greece”, Eleftheri Ora (22 September, 2015).

Islam”; “The massacre of the Europeans by the Islamo-Fascists just began: Hell is coming for Greece” and “Illegal migrants in Kos were shouting Jihad-Jihad”.

Another far right newspaper Empros (Forward) continuously reproduces such views and ideas on Islam directly connecting the migrant-refugee issue with terrorism and violence, with headlines like “Greece in the mercy of Islamists: Mosques are nurseries for terrorists”.<sup>22</sup>

From the above examples, which are just a fraction of the whole, we can conclude that not only the circles of the far right or other extremists are currently expressing Islamophobic views, but also people from the political centre and columnists of mainstream media.

### Justice system

There are no laws and regulations with an Islamophobic background in the Greek justice system. On the contrary, with the anti-racist law of 2014 anyone who publicly, through the Internet or the press excites or incites others to acts of violence, discrimination or hatred based on religion, among others, is punished with a fine and imprisonment. However, the non-implementation of the law in regards to the construction of a mosque seems to reproduce inequality regarding religion in Greek society. Keeping in mind the aforementioned debate in Greek parliament on the construction of a mosque in Athens, it would appear that this issue has been used for Islamophobic purposes especially by the far right. It should be stressed, though, that according to other views the delays in the mosque’s construction are unrelated to Islamophobia and are a result of state bureaucracy. Thus, although the state has decided on the construction, the implementation of the law might find various obstacles either technical such as permits or financial such as lack of funding.

### Cyberspace

Cyberspace is the place where one can find a variety of anti-Islamic views but at the same time it is very difficult to study and monitor every website, Facebook page, blog or Twitter account. As it might be expected websites and blogs of the far right

22. Golden Dawn, “Read the Newspaper Empros Published on Saturday 10, 2015”, accessed 14 December, 2015, <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/diastase-sto-empros-pou-kukloforei-to-sabbato-10-ianouariou-2015>.

are dominated by Islamophobic views, particularly connected with the flows of migrants and refugees and with the terrorist attacks that took place during 2015 in Paris. Because of the quantity of the material, only a random selection of cyberspace Islamophobic discourse is going to be presented in this report.

A website that repeatedly reproduces this kind of discourse is the official website of GD, that actually contains the arguments and ideology of the party mentioned in the above relevant section.<sup>23</sup> Another website that reproduces such discourse is *ethnikismos.net* (*nationalism.net*). This is another website defending and reproducing nationalist and racist ideas. It is not clear who is behind it, but it is related with GD since one can find its link in GD's official website, while in *ethnikismos.gr* there are many references to GD's activities presented in a positive manner. Here one can find similar views and arguments about Islam and Muslims. Articles like "Islam out of Europe!" or "When we say no, we mean no! No to a mosque in Athens",<sup>24</sup> are only some of the many that have been uploaded in this website. Most of the articles are accompanied by images that reproduce Islamophobia. (Figure 4) This website re-



Figure 4: Image from the website *ethnikismos.gr*.

produces all possible stereotypes e.g. that Islam means violence, that all Muslims want to impose Sharia in Europe, that Islam accepts pedophilia or that a Muslim man should beat his wife, etc.<sup>25</sup>

Other websites or personal blogs follow the same stereotypes about Islam,<sup>26</sup> but space is limited in order to present each one of them, while the vast majority

23. For more information see Alexandros Sakellariou, "Anti-Islamic Public Discourse in Contemporary Greece: The Reproduction of Religious Panic", in *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity*, eds. Arolda Elbasani and Olivier Roy, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 54-57.

24. Georgios, Dimitrakopoulos, "Islam out of Europe", *Ethnikismos.net*, 15 May, 2015, accessed 30 December, 2015. <http://ethnikismos.net/2015/05/15/%CE%B5%CE%BE%CF%89-%CF%84%CE%BF-%CE%B9%CF%83%CE%BB%CE%B1%CE%BC-%CE%B1%CF%80%CE%BF-%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BD-%CE%B5%CF%85%CF%81%CF%89%CF%80%CE%B7/> and S. Paidakos, "When We Say No, We Mean No", *Ethnikismos.net*, 13 May, 2015, accessed 30 December, 2015. <http://ethnikismos.net/2015/05/13/%CE%B-F%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%BD-%CE%BB%CE%B5%CE%BC%CE%B5-%CE%BF%CF%87%CE%B9-%CE%B5%CE%BD%CE%BD%CE%BF%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%BC%CE%B5-%CE%BF%CF%87%CE%B9/>.

25. Koni, Krystalidou, "Cultural Lessons from Islam: How to Beat Up Your Wife", *Ethnikismos.net*, 26 June, 2015, accessed 30 December, 2015, <http://ethnikismos.net/2015/06/26/%CE%BC%CE%B1%CE%B8%CE%B7%CE%B-C%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B1-%CF%80%CE%BF%CE%BB%CE%B9%CF%84%CE%B9%CF%83%CE%B-C%CE%BF%CF%85-%CE%B1%CF%80%CE%BF-%CF%84%CE%BF-%CE%B9%CF%83%CE%B-B%CE%B1%CE%BC-%C2%A8%CF%80%CF%89%CF%83/> and *ethnikismos.net*, "This is the Legal Pedophilia Islam Promotes: Bridges of Six Years Old!", 11 March, 2015, accessed 30 December, 2015, <http://ethnikismos.net/2015/03/11/%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%BF%CF%85-%CE%B7-%CE%BD%CE%B-F%CE%BC%CE%B9%CE%BC%CE%B7-%CF%80%CE%B1%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%85-%CF%80%CF%81%CE%B-F%CF%89%CE%B8%CE%B5/>.

26. See for example <http://www.pronews.gr/portal/index.php>, accessed 30 December, 2015.

use similar wording and up to a certain point similar texts. It is not easy to trace the links between those who are behind them but it is evident that they belong to the far right and that they support GD's activities. In none of these websites are international links traceable. There is a group on Facebook that is against the construction of the Islamic mosque in Athens.<sup>27</sup> Its main slogan is "No to mosques, no to Islamisation, no to the replacement of Greeks [by Muslims]". However, apart from the Islamic focus, various posts are uploaded regarding the economic and political crisis in Greece, as well as ones regarding the flow of migrants and refugees. In short, it should be noted that in cyberspace one can find a great variety of Islamophobic discourses, particularly in the field of right-wing extremism.

### Central figures in the network of Islamophobia

Some of the metropolitans of the Orthodox Church of Greece have been outspoken against Islam, considering it a major threat for the West in general and for Greece in particular. The Metropolitan of Piraeus, for instance, is against the construction of a mosque in Athens and against the establishment of a department of Islamic Studies in the Theological School of Thessaloniki. He claims

"Among religions Islam is the only religion that is aggressive, violent and fundamentalist, because the Koran teaches violence and Holy War (Jihad) against the infidels in order to prevail."<sup>28</sup>

Metropolitan Amvrosios of Kalavryta, a region in central Greece, has expressed similar views arguing that the arrival of Muslim migrants targets the alteration of the country's character, since in two or three decades "Islamists-migrants will dominate Greece and the Greeks will be foreigners in their country. Every village and city will be full of minarets and mosques"; this is why, he believes, the flow of Muslim migrants is considered a great danger for Greece.<sup>29</sup>

Such views among Church officials are not new and can be traced back many years. Meanwhile, the Ottoman rule is used by the Church in order to spread panic about the dangers deriving from Islam.<sup>30</sup> However, not only high-ranking Ortho-

27. See their Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/OxiTzami/?fref=ts>, accessed 30 December, 2015.

28. Serafeim, Metropolitan of Piraeus, "Comments on the Conference: Religion and Violence", 6 May, 2015, accessed 30 December, 2015, <http://www.imp.gr/home-4/anakoino8enta-deltia-typoy/anakoino8enta-deltia-typoy-2015/50-%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%BF%CE%B9%CE%BD%CF%89%CE%B8%CE%AD%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%B1-%CE%B4%CE%B5%CE%BB%CF%84%CE%AF%CE%B1-%CF%84%CF%8D%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%85-2015/921-%CF%83%CF%87%CE%BF%CE%BB%CE%B9%CE%B1%CF%83%CE%BC%CF%8C%CF%82-%CF%83%CF%85%CE%BD%CE%B5%CE%B4%CF%81%CE%AF%CE%BF%CF%85-%CE%B8%CF%81%CE%B7%CF%83%CE%BA%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%B1-%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%B9-%CE%B2%CE%AF%CE%B1.html>.

29. Amvrosios, Metropolitan of Kalavryta, "A Collective Effort for the City of Egion", 22 April, 2015, accessed 30 December, 2015. [http://mkka.blogspot.gr/2015/04/blog-post\\_22.html](http://mkka.blogspot.gr/2015/04/blog-post_22.html).

30. Alexandros Sakellariou, "Anti-Islamic Public Discourse in Contemporary Greece: The Reproduction of Religious Panic", in *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity*, eds. Arolda Elbasani and Olivier Roy, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 49-54.

dox priests reproduce this kind of discourse. Lower-ranking members of the clergy have expressed similar views on Islam and have associated it with the threat they see coming with the growing number of Muslim migrants and refugees. According to an article published this year:

“If this uncontrolled illegal entrance of migrants in our country continues with the same rapid rate our future will be dark. [...] Critical thinking does not exist within the circles of Islam, because Islam is pre-modern. This means that whenever the religious authorities give an order their [i.e. Muslims’] transformation will be immediate and terrifying. When ‘Allah Akbar’ will be heard in the neighbourhoods of Athens it will be too late for tears”.<sup>31</sup>

The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church, however, has never taken a hostile stance against Islam and Muslims on the whole. It has also never, however, punished or strongly disapproved of Islamophobic statements and announcements. It is worth mentioning that GD very often reproduces these public announcements from Church officials especially on the party’s website, arguing in favour of the importance of such views for the Greek nation. On the other hand, there are some Metropolitans like Amvrosios or other lower-ranking priests who are supportive of GD.

Apart from the Church and of course from the far right party of GD, there are also other groups who are fighting against the construction of a mosque in Athens. Residents of Athens and of the region where it has been decided that the mosque will be built have formed a reaction group and a committee against the mosque. In May and June 2015, they organised two rallies in Athens against the construction of the mosque: the first was in front of the Council of State and the second in the War Museum of Athens. In their call for the second rally they argued that there is a conspiracy against Greece and that the main goal is the Islamisation of the country through the arrival of migrants and, of course, through the construction of the mosque.<sup>32</sup> The images that accompanied this call by the committee against the construction of the mosque can be seen below in the form they were distributed in various networks. In the first one (Figure 5) a huge mosque dominates the city of Athens and in the second (Figure 6) one can see the division of Muslims into fanatics and moderates. The fanatics are those who set the fire and the moderates those who hold the bomb.

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31. Dimitrios, Theofilou, “The Immigration Issue, its Godless Humanistic Approach and the Orthodox Christian Approach”, *Amen*, 13 September, 2015, accessed 30 December, 2015, [http://www.amen.gr/article/to-metanastef-tiko-zitima-i-athriski-oumanistiki-proseggisi-tou-kai-i-orthodoksi-xristianiki-theorisi-tou?utm\\_source=nl&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=daynl&utm\\_content=latest](http://www.amen.gr/article/to-metanastef-tiko-zitima-i-athriski-oumanistiki-proseggisi-tou-kai-i-orthodoksi-xristianiki-theorisi-tou?utm_source=nl&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=daynl&utm_content=latest).

32. Greek National Pride, “Invitation to a Rally against the Construction of an Islamic Mosque”, 6 June, 2015, accessed 30 December, 2015, <http://national-pride.org/2015/06/06/%CF%80%CF%81%CE%B-F%CF%83%CE%BA%CE%BB%CE%B7%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%BF-%CE%BA%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B1-%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%83-%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B5%CE%B3%CE%B5%CF%81%CF%83%CE%B7%CF%83-%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85-%CE%B9/>.



Figure 5: A huge mosque dominates Athens.



Figure 6: Moderates - Fanatics

### Islamophobia in everyday life

Islamophobia is an aspect of the everyday lives of Muslims living in Greece. First of all, it has to be noted that no major attacks have been noticed, however, there are some minor ones during the year that need to be mentioned. At least two attacks took place in two prayer houses, one on the island of Crete and the other in Komotini, in Northern Greece where a native Muslim minority lives.<sup>33</sup> According to those specialising on Islam in Thrace, which differs from Muslim migrants, the attack in Komotini is related primarily with nationalism and only on a second level, if any, with religious motives. Since the Muslims of Thrace are of Turkish origin issues of national identity come first.



Figure 7: Arson targeting a mosque in Komotini, Western Thrace, in April 2015.

In addition, some of the Muslim interviewees mentioned they face Islamophobic verbal attacks, e.g. negative comments, in their everyday lives, particularly women who wear the hijab. These incidents cannot be verified since usually they are not reported to the police and, as it was mentioned, they are reduced to hate speech. Through my contacts with Muslims in Greece it became evident

that not all of them perceive Islamophobia as a hate crime. This is probably one reason behind the lack of any existing data. The other reason might be that many Muslims are afraid to go to the police and mention such oral or even physical attacks. That is probably why the Racist Violence Recording Network<sup>34</sup> has not recorded any racist attacks based on religious prejudices to this day.

33. "Arson Attack in a Prayer House for Muslims in Heraklion", *Flashnews*, 23 November, 2015, accessed 30 December, 2015, <http://flashnews.gr/post/250367/epithesh-me-gkazakia-kai-krotida-se-xwro-proseyxhs-moysoylmanwn-sto-hrakleio>, and "A Mosque in Komotini in Flames", *Newsbeast*, 17 April, 2015, accessed 30 December, 2015, <http://www.newsbeast.gr/greece/arthro/811114/stis-floges-tzami-stin-komotini>.

34. <http://rvrn.org/>.

## **OBSERVATIONS ON CIVIL SOCIETY, POLITICAL ASSESSMENT AND INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN TO COUNTER ISLAMOPHOBIA**

No specific actions have been taken in order to counter Islamophobia on a central level by state authorities, but some initiatives have occurred nonetheless. In 2015, the Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims: Addressing Islamophobia through Education was translated into Greek under the auspices of the National Commission for Human Rights and the Centre of Intercultural Research and Educational Intervention of the University of Athens. These guidelines were conducted by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and more particularly the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) in collaboration with the Council of Europe and UNESCO. The guidelines were presented to the public in Athens on 28 April. However, to this moment the guidelines have not been used to educate teachers at schools and have not reached the educational community in any way. They are only available online and have been sent to certain networks and individuals.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, in April the Journalists' Union of Athens Daily Newspapers organised a seminar under the topic "Xenophobia and the Mass Media" in which the author of this report made a presentation on Islamophobia and anti-Islamic discourse in the media and in the public sphere in general. In this seminar not only journalists, but teachers, police officers and members of NGOs participated. In addition, in September the network against the far right of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Athens in its regular meeting discussed the issue of Islamophobia after a presentation delivered by the author of this report.

On the civil society level, discussions about Islamophobia, what it is and how it could be confronted, have been organised by leftist and anti-fascist groups and organisations. The Muslim Association of Greece has participated in discussions about Islam and Islamophobia that have been organised in Athens and Volos, a city in central Greece, in March and May 2015 respectively. On 31 October a "Walk against Islamophobia" was organised in a central neighbourhood of Athens by an LGBTQ group in collaboration with the Allies against Islamophobia, i.e. a group of human rights NGOs.<sup>36</sup>

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35. OSCE/ODIHR, "Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims: Addressing Islamophobia through Education", accessed 30 December, 2015. <http://www.osce.org/el/odihr/120161?download=true>.

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## CONCLUSION:

### Policy recommendations

The main conclusion of this report is that Islamophobia in Greece is not dominant in the public sphere. It is present in certain circles like the far right and particularly the neo-Nazi party of GD and in various other circles like the Orthodox Church of Greece. As in other societies, the Internet and social media are a privileged space for such views to flourish. On the counter-Islamophobia level there have been only secondary and fragmented initiatives. A central policy is lacking and this could be addressed by some basic measures that could be taken in the direction of confronting Islamophobia. First of all, there is a need for an observatory authority that will monitor and record every Islamophobic incident either of violent character or on the discourse level. Especially for schools and for the media this vacuum is crucial. This is a first step in order to then be able to take policy measures against Islamophobic attitudes. Education could play a major role through seminars organised for teachers. In addition, the recently translated guidelines of OSCE/ODIHR must be used in the same direction. Seminars should be offered to other groups of civil servants as well who have contact with Muslims like, among others, police officers, coastguards and migration officers - and, of course, journalists. These seminars could include both information on Islam and on how one should deal with Islamophobia. The Orthodox Church of Greece could also play a crucial role by ceasing to reproduce and accept Islamophobic discourse. Overall, and based on previous opinion polls, the lack of knowledge about Islam seems to play a fundamental role in the emergence of Islamophobia; the absence of accurate information makes people turn to mass media or the Internet so as to be informed and this may have serious implications for their understanding of Islam.

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24 June 2015, Session ΞΒ [62]

**Contacts/ Interviews**

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2. Hellenic League for Human Rights
3. The Racist Violence Recording Network
4. General Secretariat for Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice
5. Muslim Association of Greece
6. Pakistani-Hellenic Cultural Association
7. Arab-Hellenic Cultural Centre
8. Ptolemaios Cultural Centre/islamforgreeks.gr
9. George Mavrommatis, Associate Professor at the Democritus University of Thrace, Department of Education Sciences in Early Childhood, specialist on the Muslim Minority of Thrace
10. Konstantinos Tsitselikis, Professor at the University of Macedonia, Greece, Department of Balkan, Slavic & Oriental Studies, specialist on Islam in Greece

**CHRONOLOGY****28 March, 2015.**

- Public discussion in Athens entitled “Islam in the West: Victimization, Fear and Exploitation”.

**April-May 2015.**

- Refugee and migrant flows through the Aegean Sea start to rise.

**1 April, 2015.**

- Seminar organised by the Journalists’ Union of Athens Daily Newspapers entitled “Xenophobia and the Mass Media” including a presentation “Islam, Islamophobia and the Understanding of the Religious Other”.

**17 April, 2015.**

- Mosque arson in Komotini, Thrace.

**28 April, 2015.**

- Presentation of the translation of the Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims: Addressing Islamophobia through Education.

**12 May, 2015.**

- Rally against the construction of a mosque in Athens.

**15 May, 2015.**

- Public discussion in Volos, Central Greece, entitled “Muslim World and Islamophobia”.

**May 2015.**

- An amendment on the legislation for the construction of a mosque in Athens voted by the Greek Parliament. Reactions by populist and far right parties and groups.

**8 June, 2015.**

- Rally against the construction of a mosque in Athens.

**June-August 2015.**

- Refugee and migrant flows continue to rise and surpass 100,000 during August.

**25 September, 2015.**

- The network against the far right of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Athens discussed the issue of Islamophobia in “Islamophobia and anti-Islamic Discourse in the Public Sphere: Definitions, Agents, Confrontation”.

**31 October, 2015.**

- Walk against Islamophobia in Athens organised in a central neighbourhood of Athens by an LGBTQ group in collaboration with the Allies against Islamophobia, a group of human rights NGOs.

**November 2015.**

- Mosque arson in a prayer house on the island of Crete.



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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