
EUROPEAN
ISLAMOPHOBIA
REPORT

2015

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

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SETA | FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH

Nenehatun Caddesi No: 66 GOP Çankaya 06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE

Phone:+90 312.551 21 00 | Fax :+90 312.551 21 90

www.setav.org | info@setav.org | @setavakfi

SETA | İstanbul

Defterdar Mh. Savaklar Cd. Ayvansaray Kavşağı No: 41-43

Eyüp İstanbul TÜRKİYE

Phone: +90 212 315 11 00 | Fax: +90 212 315 11 11

SETA | Washington D.C.

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 1106

Washington, D.C., 20036 USA

Phone: 202-223-9885 | Fax: 202-223-6099

www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org | @setadc

SETA | Cairo

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

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

ABOUT EDITORS

Enes Bayraklı

Mr. Bayraklı earned his BA, MA and PhD from the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna, and conducted research for his PhD thesis at the University of Nottingham in Britain between 2009 and 2010. He took office as a deputy director at Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in London in 2011-2013. Mr. Bayraklı also served as the founding director of Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers in Constanta and Bucharest during the period of August-December 2012. Mr. Bayraklı has been a faculty member in the Department of Political Science at the Turkish-German University since 2013. His fields of research include the Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy, Cultural Diplomacy, Foreign Policy Analysis, German Politics and Foreign Policy. bayrakli@tau.edu.tr

Farid Hafez

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

For more information about the EIR:

www.islamophobiaeurope.com
islamophobia@setav.org

INTRODUCTION

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ

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

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

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

Contribution of this report

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

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

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

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

What is Islamophobia?

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

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

“When talking about Islamophobia, we mean anti-Muslim racism. As Anti-Semitism studies have shown, the etymological components of a word do not necessarily point to its complete meaning, nor to how it is used. Such is also the case with Islamophobia studies. Islamophobia has become a well-known term used in academia as much as in the public sphere. Criticism of Muslims or of the Islamic religion is not necessarily Islamophobic. Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilising and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat – real or invented – and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/rights/definition of a constructed ‘we’. Islamophobia operates by constructing a static ‘Muslim’ identity, which is attributed in negative terms and generalised for all Muslims. At the same time, Islamophobic images are fluid and vary in different contexts as Islamophobia tells us more about the Islamophobe than it tells us about the Muslims/Islam”.

Central findings

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

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

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

2. “L. Simon: Szaporodjunk!”, *Népszabadság Online*, 05.09.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, http://nol.hu/video/lSimon-a-szaporodasban-latja-a-jovot-1573295?utm_source=mandiner&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=mandiner_201601.

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

Policy Recommendations

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

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

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
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NATIONAL REPORT 2015

ZSOLT SEREGHY

THE AUTHOR

Zsolt Sereghy is a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Political Science, Vienna University, Austria. His current research focuses on the nexus between Europe's Muslim communities, migration, and political and medial securitisation. He holds a Magister degree in Oriental Studies from the Vienna University and an M.Litt. degree in Middle Eastern and Central Asian Security Studies from the University of St Andrews, Scotland. His research interests include the securitisation of Islam and Muslim migrant communities in Europe, as well as Middle East politics in general and Lebanese politics, educational policies and pop culture in particular. Sereghy published a number of articles, most recently 'Vienna Must Not Become Istanbul – The Securitization of Islam and Muslims in Austria' (in: Suleiman, Yasir (ed.), *Muslims in the UK and Europe*, Centre for Islamic Studies of the University of Cambridge, May 2014). Currently, Sereghy is also working on a project exploring socio-political activism in Lebanese pop culture. He resides in Beirut and Vienna. zsolt.sereghy@gmail.com

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hungary is a country with a very small but well-integrated Islamic community and historically rather positive public attitudes towards Islam. Until recently, there has been no considerable public or political interest in the religion per se or in Muslims in the country or elsewhere in the world. For the larger part of the 20th century, the image of Islam in Hungary was largely formed by Orientalist essentialisations and imported stereotypes based on world affairs; however, due to the lack of the country's colonial experience and following waves of Western European style Muslim immigration, Islam remained fundamentally more distant, exotic and less known. However, as a result of global events and increasing exposure to Western European debates surrounding the religion and its followers, Hungary has been experiencing a slow but gradual shift towards adopting Islamophobic perceptions and discourses in the past decade. This slow process found new winds to its sails this year, as global events hit closer to home and Europe's unfolding so-called 'refugee crisis' turned the Hungarian public into a witness that was directly involved rather than a distant observer as it had been up to this point. By 2015, the debate on Islam - mainly in the context of the so-called 'refugee crisis' and immigration - became one of the most prominent and omnipresent topics in Hungarian media and politics. As a general observation, the lack of popular knowledge about Islam seems to have rendered the religion susceptible to popularist fearmongering by the current conservative government and created the space for an increasing number of Islamophobic utterances that remain uncontested in the country's current political atmosphere. This report investigates discursive events in connection with anti-Muslim attitudes which occurred in Hungary in the past year and aims to put them into their domestic and transnational contexts. The report is based on a survey of relevant discourses taking place in Hungarian media outlets and the country's political arena as well as on a number of expert interviews from the fields of journalism, NGOs and the country's Islamic community conducted in November 2015 in Budapest.

ÖSSZEFOGLALÓ

Nagy általánosságban Magyarország, egy igen kis létszámú, ám általánosan jól integrálódott muszlim kisebbség hazájaként történelmileg inkább pozitívan tekintett az iszlámra. Egészen a közelmúltig a magyar közvélemény nem mutatott különösebb érdeklődést sem az iszlám vallás, sem annak hazai vagy külföldi követői iránt. A XX. század legnagyobb részében a magyarországi iszlámképet leginkább az orientalista tradíció romantizáló leegyszerűsítései és a világ eseményein alapuló importált sztereotípiái formálták, viszont a magyar történelem a nyugat-európaival ellentétes fejleményei, mindenek előtt a gyarmatosítás és az azt követő magyarányú muszlim bevándorlás elmaradása miatt nagyon sokáig egy távoli, egzotikus, kevéssé ismert vallásként kezelte az iszlámot. Azonban az elmúlt évtized globális eseményeinek, valamint a Nyugat-Európával való fokozottabb kapcsolat hatására a magyar közvélemény muszlimokról alkotott nézetei és a közélet iszlámról folytatott vitái lassan iszlámellenes irányba kezdtek elmozdulni látszani. Ezen folyamatot nagyban felgyorsították az elmúlt év terrorcselekményei valamint európai menekültválsága, mely utóbbi Magyarországot immár az események színhelyévé változtatta. 2015-re az iszlámról, az esetek túlnyomó többségében a menekültválság és a tömeges bevándorlás kontextusaiban folytatott társadalmi viták a magyar média és politikai élet legfontosabb és leggyakoribb témájává vált. Általánosan megfigyelhető, hogy az iszlámot övező magyarányú informálatlanság következtében a vallás és követői egyre inkább a hatalmon lévő konzervatív kormány populistá félelemkeltő politikájának eszközévé degradálódnak, mely egyre inkább teret enged iszlámellenes megnyilvánulásoknak. Ezen jelentés számot vet az elmúlt év magyarországi iszlámellenes diszkurzív eseményeivel és azok hazai és nemzetközi kontextusával. A jelentés alapjául a hazai média és politikai élet meghatározó vitáinak elemzése illetve 2015 novemberében a sajtó, a hazai iszlám közösség illetve civil szervezetek egy-egy képviselőjével folytatott szakértői interjúk szolgáltak.

ISLAM IN HUNGARY

Despite continuous presence since the 10th century onwards, 150 years of Ottoman rule over large parts of the country and the legal recognition of its community as early as 1916,¹ Islam in Hungary today has a very low number of followers and no historically indigenous community comparable to those of, for example, Romania or Poland.² During the most recent official census of 2011, 5.579, or 0,056 per cent of the country's legal residents indicated their affiliation to, almost exclusively, Sunni Islam.³ Of these, 4.097 (73,4 %) declared themselves Hungarian, while 2.369 (42,5 %) as Arab by ethnicity.⁴ However, various estimates put the number of the country's Islamic community between 25.000⁵ and 50.000.⁶ Even so, with a share of well under 1 per cent (0,1 or 0,3 % respectively) of the overall population, Islam can be considered a marginal and invisible religion in the country. Currently, there are two officially recognised Islamic religious organisations, both Sunni, working in Hungary: the Hungarian Islamic Community (MIK - Magyar Iszlám Közösség) and the Church of Muslims of Hungary (MME - Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza).⁷ A formerly third organisation -but still the largest-, the Islamic Church (IE - Iszlám Egyház) had its officially recognised status as a church revoked in 2012. On the government level, the community is represented by the Islamic Council of Hungary (MIT -Magyarországi Iszlám Tanács), an umbrella organisation jointly created by the MIK and the MME in 2011 and recognised as one of the country's 32 churches by parliament in 2012.⁸

As earlier studies suggest, until the late 1990s Muslims living in the country or Islam itself as a religion were not receiving much public, media or political attention,

1. The act granting state recognition to the Hanafi branch of Sunni Islam as one of Hungary's official denominations is the second piece of legislation of this kind in Europe after the Austrian part of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire did the same in 1912. Both acts were the direct result of the incorporation of Muslim-majority Bosnia and Herzegovina into the Empire in 1908.

2. Renata Włoch, "Islam in Poland", *International Journal of Sociology*, 39:3(2009): 58-67.

3. "10. Vallás, felekezet", in: 2011. Évi Népszámlálás (Budapest: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 2014), 160.

4. Hungary's Central Statistics Office allows the declaration of more than one ethnicity, thus the sum of residents declaring Hungarian and Arab ethnicity is higher than those declaring their affiliation to Islam. Also, there is no distinction made between the passport countries of residents with Arab ethnicity. "A népesség nemzetiségi, anyanyelv, családi, baráti közösségben használt nyelv és kulturális kötődés szerint", *Központi Statisztikai Hivatal*, 17.04.2013, accessed 29.12.2015, http://www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/tablak_teruleti_00.

5. "Muslim Population by Country", *Pew Research Centre*, 2011, accessed 28.12.2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/table-muslim-population-by-country/>.

6. Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza, accessed 28.12.2015, <http://iszlam.com/kerdes-valasz/altalanos-kerdesek/item/2093-magyarorszagon-hany-fore-teheto-az-iszlam-hivok-szama-es-a-tobbseg-siita-vagy-szunnita>.

7. According to Hungarian legal practice, all religious organisations, Christian or not, seeking recognition by the state are referred to with the term 'church' (*egyház*) originating from Christian ecclesiastic practice.

8. "Nyilvános a lista az elismert egyházakról", *HVG*, 23.04.2012, accessed 29.12.2015 http://hvg.hu/itthon/20120423_elismert_egyhazak.

nor were they subject to any notable prejudice or negative attitudes.⁹ Nonetheless, over the last decade attention on global events such as 9/11, 7/7 and the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East as well as increasingly negative media coverage has largely modified and escalated prejudice within, but also outside of, Western Europe. Even in an East-Central European country like Hungary with a generally rather insignificant emphasis laid on Islam - and on occasion a positive emphasis - and no significant Muslim community, attitudes that are critical towards Islam or overtly anti-Muslim attitudes have increased. Referred to as ‘Islamophobic without Muslims’¹⁰ Hungary has been increasingly showing cases of intolerance, negative attitudes, essentialisation and fear towards Islam. Also, not surprisingly, Hungary has not been exempt from the Europe-wide phenomenon of overestimating Islam’s demographic strength within the population. As a recent Ipsos MORI poll found, similarly to the publics in all the observed European countries, the Hungarian public has also greatly overestimated the portion of the country’s Muslims putting their number at 7 per cent against what in reality is well below 0,1 per cent.¹¹ This data is all the more remarkable because unlike its Western European counterparts Hungary has not just a differing number of and experience with Muslim minorities, there has also been no violent occurrences committed by Muslims or in the name of Islam.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN 2015

The year 2015 has been an unusually turbulent year for both the country and its Muslim communities. While the observable exposure to and import of Western European perceptions and discourses has been a slow but ongoing process in the past decade, a number of global events and processes including the ongoing war in Syria, the rise of the Islamic State, and, most prominently, the unfolding of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ and the resulting debates about resettlement quotas within the EU have been dominating domestic discourses and brought about rapid changes in attitudes.

One of the most significant turning points came with the attack against the offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris on 7 January, 2015. On the fringes of the Paris VIP march held in support of free speech and tolerance on 11 January, PM Viktor Orbán called for an end of economic immigration as “migrants from other cultures bring only trouble and danger” and announced his determination to keep migrants out of Hungary.¹²

9. György Lederer, “Islam in East Europe”, *Central Asian Survey* (2001): 12–28.

10. Michał Buchowski and Katarzyna Chlewińska, “Tolerance and Cultural Discourses Diversity in Poland” (Florence: European University Institute, 2010) (project: Accept Pluralism), 32-33.

11. “Daily Chart: Islam in Europe”, *The Economist*, 07.01.2015, accessed 30.12.2015, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2015/01/daily-chart-2>.

12. Andrew Rettmann, “Orban demonises immigrants at Paris march”, *EUobserver*, 12.01.2015, accessed 30.12.2015, <https://euobserver.com/justice/127172>.

The Europe-wide so-called ‘refugee crisis’ was the single most decisive event of the year and continues to have far-reaching consequences. According to Eurostat, the highest number of first-time asylum applicants in the third quarter of 2015 was registered in Germany and Hungary (both with slightly over 108.000 applicants or 26 % each of total applicants of EU member states), with mostly Muslim Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis among the top three citizenships of asylum seekers. With nearly 100.000 more first-time asylum applicants Hungary saw its number of asylum seekers rising notably 13 times compared to the same quarter of 2014.¹³ Despite the fact that almost all refugees leave the country for other EU destinations such as Germany or Sweden, for the first time the Hungarian public had a first-hand experience with unidentifiable, foreign, unknown, mostly Muslim masses to the country that generally evoked distrust, fear of cultural estrangement and the perception of being threatened. Both from the side of politics and the media the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ has been tackled solely in terms of security policy, instead of from social, economic or cultural points of view.¹⁴ On the right end of the political and media spectrum Orbán’s ‘migrant-Islam-terrorism nexus’ and ‘Christian Europe must be saved from Islam’ doctrines became the standard argument justifying a number of domestic and international measures.

In May, the government launched a questionnaire poll on ‘immigration and terrorism’ in order to justify its opposition to the EU’s refugee policy. The highly unsuccessful populist move was framed by an aggressive billboard campaign urging refugees - in Hungarian - to respect the country’s laws, customs and not to take away Hungarians’ jobs.¹⁵

In order to counter the massive influx of refugees during the late summer, Hungary closed its borders first with Serbia and later with Croatia. In response to widespread popular fears from the large number of foreign refugees and the threatening emergence of radical right-wing political forces - most prominently the notorious right radical Jobbik party - the government’s rhetoric has been increasingly employing the ‘Islamophobia card’ in order to secure popular support. The same attitude keeps informing the government’s vehement opposition to the EU’s proposed refugee resettlement quota system, heavy critique on Germany’s refugee policy and the demonisation of Western European multiculturalism.¹⁶

13. “Asylum Quarterly Report”, *Eurostat*, 09.12.2015, accessed 03.01.2015, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_quarterly_report.

14. Interview conducted with Omar Adam Sayfo, publicist on Islam, Budapest: 12.11.2015.

15. Nick Thorpe, “Hungary’s poster war on immigration”, *BBC News*, 14 June, accessed 03.01.2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33091597>.

16. “Orbán Viktor: A multikulturalizmus párhuzamos társadalmakat hoz létre Európában”, *Hiradó*, 23.10.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, <http://www.hirado.hu/2015/10/23/orban-viktor-a-multikulturalizmus-parhuzamos-tarsadalmakat-hoz-letre-europaban/#>.

DISCUSSION OF ISLAMOPHOBIC INCIDENTS AND DISCURSIVE EVENTS

Politics

Hungary's self-image as a battered, ethnically uniform Christian nation-state prevails as a result of the country's ethno-religious homogeneity coupled with its relative linguistic and cultural isolation through its non-Indo-European native tongue and unique culture, a national psyche based on historical 'victim narratives' of subsequent foreign invasions and the constant struggle for national survival. It also offers an explanation why anti-Islamic rhetoric has found so many willing listeners within domestic publics. From early on, the government and the right-wing political spectrum in general started to use Islam as one of the main arguments in the country's stand-off with Brussels on handling the so-called 'refugee crisis' and its refusal to accept the proposed EU-wide refugee resettlement quota system. Both towards domestic and foreign audiences Orbán and his allies developed an often repeated mantra referring to Islam in contrast to Christian/European culture and the PM often styled himself as the sole defender of Christian Europe. In frequent media utterances, for instance, Orbán justified the Hungarian people's unwillingness to live with Muslims by evoking the country's 150 years of experience under Ottoman rule;¹⁷ he refused to accept Islam as part of Europe declaring it much stronger than European Christianity;¹⁸ he called for blocking Muslim migrants to "keep Europe Christian";¹⁹ and insisted on Hungary's right to decide with whom it wishes to live. Other government politicians were similarly ferocious in making Islamophobic remarks. For instance, the leader of Fidesz' parliamentary club Antal Rogán warned of a future "United European Caliphate",²⁰ 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".²¹ However, facing domestic and international critique, from September on Orbán started to make more nuanced remarks on Islam, e.g. acknowledging its

17. Robert Mackey, "Hungarian Leader Rebuked for Saying Muslim Migrants Must Be Blocked 'to Keep Europe Christian', *The New York Times*, 03.09.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/04/world/europe/hungarian-leader-rebuked-for-saying-muslim-migrants-must-be-blocked-to-keep-europe-christian.html?_r=1.

18. "Orbán: 'Az iszlám nem volt soha Európa része'", *HVG*, 16.10.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, http://hvg.hu/itthon/20151016_Orban_Az_iszlam_soha_nem_volt_Europa_resz.

19. Mackey, "Muslim Migrants Must be Blocked".

20. 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/>.

21. "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.

“civilisational achievements” and securing friendly relations with Turkish and Gulf partners even if he was not ready to increase the number of Muslims in the country.²²

The same, if not more, blatantly Islamophobic rhetoric is characteristic of many pockets of the Hungarian conservative and extreme right, and some of the dignitaries of Christian churches.²³ For instance, far right Jobbik who used to sympathise with Islam by connecting its own anti-Semitic agenda with the anti-Israelism of a part of the Muslim world and who had referred to the religion as “humanity’s last light in the darkness of globalisation and liberalism” in 2013 has increasingly adopted an Islamophobic stance.²⁴

In general terms, as Islam is a foreign, relatively unknown religion for the majority of Hungarians, the current climate enables Islamophobic political rhetoric and fearmongering to serve as a useful tool - not a goal - for political agendas. While tapping into popular fears against ‘the unknown other’ has traditionally been a more favoured strategy of the far right, the conservative government’s fears that the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ might bring new wind to the sails of Jobbik and the like resulted in its openly declared goal²⁵ to monopolise Islamophobic sentiments by demonising Islam and depicting the Prime Minister in the role of a strongman in charge.

LEGAL SYSTEM AND AUTHORITIES

According to the president of MME, Zoltan Sulok, Islam being one of the country’s long-recognised religions, faces no legal obstacles: Muslims are guaranteed freedom of religion and there are no Hungarian laws contradicting Islamic practices.²⁶ On the other hand however, the year’s so-called ‘refugee crisis’ made it clear that Hungarian authorities have severe difficulties handling cultural differences. The police and the notoriously underfinanced and underprioritised Immigration Authority have no programmes to train personnel in intercultural interaction or sensitivity about cultural/religious background. Accordingly, dealing with Muslim women or with inmates, for example, during Ramadan remains problematic and there were minor incidents based on mocking religion or mishandling copies of the Qur’an. However, the majority of such incidents are likely to remain unreported.²⁷ Also, since the beginning of

22. “Orbán “kétkulacos” muszlimbarátsága”, *Népszava*, 02.10.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, <http://nepszava.hu/cikk/1071820-orban-ketkulacos-muszlimbaratsaga>.

23. Tamás Velkei, “Az iszlám terjesztése a migránsok célja”, *Magyar Nemzet*, 17.09.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, http://mno.hu/magyar_nemzet_belfoldi_hirei/az-izslam-terjesztese-a-migransok-celja-1304680.

24. Tibor Lengyel: “A Jobbik kivívta az iszlám haramját”, *Origo*, 12.08.2015, accessed 04.01.2016, <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20150812-kivivta-a-jobbik-maga-ellen-az-izslam-haramjat.html>.

25. “Orbán “kétkulacos” muszlimbarátsága”, *Népszava*.

26. Gergely Szilvay, “A szeretet vagy háború vallása az iszlám?”, *Mandiner*, 22.04.2015, accessed 03.01.2015, http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20150421_a-szeretet_vagy_a-haboru_vallasa_az-izslam.

27. Interview conducted with Júlia Iván, senior legal officer at the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, a human rights organization working on the legal protection of refugees, Budapest: 12.11.2015.

the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ and the government’s increasing Islamophobic reactions, both Muslim communities and NGOs sense a deterioration of formerly good and cooperative relations with state authorities.²⁸

MEDIA AND CYBERSPACE

Hungary’s media environment, a privately owned sector that has suffered from increased state regulation since the Fidesz government’s coming to power, continues to be under government pressure to influence coverage.²⁹ Similarly to the country’s political landscape, Hungarian media is also characterised by a stark left-right divide where political and ideological allegiances are more or less the norm. While Islam has only recently been picked up as a topic of heightened interest at all, the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ led to the securitisation of the religion and allowed for intensive media attention. Not surprisingly, state-controlled and pro-government media outlets serve as the prime tool of spreading the government’s anti-Islamic stances. According to the 2015 Islamophobia Report published by MIK, the community has been facing “mass attacks” by certain media outlets,³⁰ while the community’s efforts to support refugee aid efforts³¹ have largely been ignored. Self-declared ‘experts’ are frequent guests who provide simplistic and often highly populist and Islamophobic answers about current events and Islam itself. Many of these increasingly popular ‘independent’ commentators, who in reality express right-wing or pro-government ideas, such as György Nógrádi and Georg Spöttle contribute to the spreading of essentialised anti-Islamic stereotypes and calculated fearmongering. Against this backdrop, the report mentions a number of other media outlets that have been seeking to provide more balanced narratives.³² It has also been observed that in many pockets, media reporting on immigration, and thus Islam, became increasingly more nuanced and managed to move beyond the hitherto uniform authority-style factual reporting of events to covering individual stories that have been better researched.³³ Nevertheless, it has been also observed that liberal outlets often express their fear of Islam and mass immigration.³⁴ Also, certain

28. Ibid. and interview conducted with István Tóth, vice-president of the Islamic Church of Hungary (MIK).

29. “Hungary: 5-year decline in press freedom” *Freedom House*, 2015, accessed 03.01.2016, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/hungary>.

30. These include state radio and television channels *Kossuth Rádió* and *M1*, conservative news channel *Hír TV*, pro-government dailies *Magyar Nemzet* and *Magyar Magyar Idők*, as well as *ATV* channel and *Hetek Magazin* belonging to the Faith Church, a large and influential Pentecostal Christian Zionist sect. “Iszlamofóbia, 2015, Magyarország”, *Magyarországi Iszlám Közösség*, 02.01.2016, accessed 06.01.2016, <http://magyariszlam.hu/mikmagyar/news.php>.

31. Robert Samuels: “As hostility flares, Hungary’s Muslim community mobilizes to aid refugees”, *The Washington Post*, 22.09.2015, accessed 03.01.2015.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/hungarys-tiny-muslim-community-mobilizes-to-help-refugees/2015/09/21/35a8b72a-5a63-11e5-8475-781cc9851652_story.html.

32. These include the private broadcasters *RTL Klub* and *TV2*, *Klub Rádió*, the online news sites *Origo* and *PestiS-rácok* as well as the liberal daily *Népszabadság* and the weekly *HVG*. “Iszlamofóbia, 2015, Magyarország”, *Magyarországi Iszlám Közösség*.

33. Interview with Dr Júlia Iván.

34. Ibid.

moves from MIK, such as declaring government parties “haram”³⁵ or calling homosexuals “Allah’s filthiest creatures”³⁶ were rather counterproductive for Islam’s media image.

While there is no sign of organised anti-Islamic networks of media outlets or public figures, the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ has increased the vehemence of traditionally right-wing, xenophobic internet portals and popular ‘like hunting’ news sites such as *kurucinfo.hu* or faith- and Church-affiliated *vigyazo.hu*. It has also led to the creation of explicitly anti-migrant sites such as *napimigrans.hu* (lit. ‘daily migrant’) with content bordering on hate speech.³⁷

In general terms, the media outlets are plagued with a high degree of misconceptions, misinformation, the lack of knowledge and an oversimplified portrayal of Islam, as well as the absence of scientifically competent, ideologically neutral, non-partisan commentators who would be able to analyse Islam-related content for a generally not too well-informed audience and debunk widespread misconceptions and stereotypes about Muslims.

EDUCATION

It can be argued that Hungary’s rich Islamic history and ties to Muslim-majority regions are ignored and omitted from general history curricula. According to a study, the overwhelming majority of history textbooks tend to be Eurocentric and are inadequate in terms of providing students with a balanced knowledge of Islam and Islamic societies. Even if reference is made to, e.g. the rise of Islam, the Ottoman Empire, or de-/colonisation, the portrayal of non-European regions remains marginal, schematic and lacking critical analysis.³⁸ Also, as István Tóth, vice-president of MIK remarks, contrary to other churches, the Islamic community is not allowed to review the content on Islam in curricula.³⁹

While originating in 19th-century philological Orientalist traditions, contemporary Hungarian Orientalist academia consists of two ideologically different camps: a liberal branch represented by Budapest’s Eötvös Lóránd University and a Christian-conservative branch centered around Péter Pázmány Catholic University and its doyen, Arabist Miklós Maróth. The latter branch has a heavy research focus on Oriental Christian studies and its researchers often feature in pro-government media as Middle

35. “Harammal, vallási tiltással reagált a Magyar Iszlám Közösség Orbán Viktor miniszterelnök péntek reggeli rádióinterjújára”, *Híradó*, 04.09.2015, accessed 04.01.2016, <http://www.hirado.hu/2015/09/04/tilalmat-hirdettek-a-fidesz-ellen-a-magyar-muszlimok/>.

36. “Magyar Iszlám Közösség alelnöke: A homoszexuálisok Allah legmocskosabb teremtményei”, *Mandiner*, 08.10.2015, accessed 04.01.2016, http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20150908_magyar_iszlam_kozosseg_alelnoke_a_homoszexuálisok_allah_legmocskosabb_teremtményei.

37. Interview with Omar Adam Sayfo.

38. Zsuzsanna Mikáné-Szolnoki, “Az arab világ és az iszlám - A magyar középiskolai történelem tankönyvek összehasonlító elemzése”, *Elektronikus Könyv és Nevelés*, Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár, (2003) 5:1

39. Interview with István Tóth.

East experts.⁴⁰ For instance, in recent interviews on the so-called ‘refugee crisis’, Maróth warned against the coming Islamisation of the continent⁴¹ and the loss of Europe’s Christian culture.⁴² Due to the traditional lack of sociology or political science-oriented liberal Middle East experts in the country, such views usually remain unbalanced.

CONCLUSION

Policy recommendations for political actors and NGOs

Hungary has had a fundamentally different experience with the integration of its Muslims than Western Europe due to their small number, their usually high educational level and for the most part their successful integration. It is important to note however that even if the upkeep of religious practices do play a significant role in the personal lives of foreign-born Hungarian Muslims, the external identification of these immigrant groups by the host society is more likely to be based on their ethnic origin, not religious affiliation. Thus, good relations with one’s ‘Iraqi GP’ or ‘Syrian grocer’ won’t necessarily be translated into or seen as representative to the perceptions of Islam and Muslims in general. This, as well as the low number of Muslims, also means that the average Hungarian is likely to have little or no direct contact with Muslims on a daily basis.

Nevertheless, the past year has shown how as a result of increasing Islamophobic utterances in politics and in many pockets of the media the population’s irrational fears of Islam can be framed as a matter of national security. This process made clear that widespread ignorance about Islam among the population makes the religion and its followers prone to being misused as political tools. To counter this, Islam needs to be explained and made familiar both by its community and by non-partisan, politically neutral commentators. Also, Islamophobic utterances need to be countered in meaningful, professional ways both by the community and engaged NGOs or lobby groups. There is a genuine need to address the very existence of Islamophobia and to point at negative perceptions, prejudices and discriminations targeting Muslims. Authorities should be more aware and sensitive to both Islam and Islamophobic incidents; the need for intercultural training as well as a system enabling open and confidential reporting of Islamophobic incidents is much needed. Most importantly, the Muslim community and NGOs cooperating with Muslims in the country should both strive for increased interreligious and intercultural exchanges and dialogues between Muslim and non-Muslim Hungarians to enable more personal and institutional contact.

40. Interview with Omar Sayfo.

41. “Maróth Miklós: Európa megszűnhet Európa lenni”, *Mandiner*, 22.09.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20150922_maroth_miklos_europa_megszunhet_europa_lenni.

42. “Valós veszély a párhuzamos társadalmak kialakulása L. Simon szerint”, *Mandiner*, 04.11.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20151104_valos_veszely_a_paruhuzamos_tarsadalmak_kialakulasa_l_simon_szerint.

CHRONOLOGY

11 January

- At the Paris rally the Charlie Hebdo attacks of 7 January Orbán announces a nexus between immigration, Islam and terror.

May

- The government launches a large-scale billboard campaign against immigrants in support of the National Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism, a questionnaire campaign linking migrants with terrorism.

13 July

- The beginning of the erection of a fence on the border with Serbia.

25 July

- At his speech at the annual Tusványos Summer University in Băile Tuşnad, Romania, PM Orbán announces his determination to “keep Hungary Hungary” and to “avoid becoming the Marseille of East-Central Europe”.

3 September

- At a Brussels news conference PM Orbán invokes Hungary’s 150 years under Ottoman rule as a reason why “Hungarians don’t want to live with Muslims again”.

4 September

- In response to PM Orbán’s comments, the MIK declares its support and cooperation with the government “haram” for the country’s Muslims.

7 September

- At a Budapest diplomats’ conference, PM Orbán assures the audience of his appreciation for Islam in a political sense in order to keep up good relations with Hungary’s Turkish and Gulf allies even if Hungary “does not wish to increase its Muslim population”.

8 September

- The footage of Hungarian camerawoman Petra László tripping a refugee with child at the Serbian border causes global outrage.

15 September

- The government declares a state of emergency in two counties along the Serbian border.

15 September

- In a public broadcaster interview PM Orbán acknowledges Islam’s “civilizational achievements” but describes it as a culture and way of life that is not adaptable

to European Christian values and its notions of gender equality, marriage and sexuality. He also warns of “the emergence of parallel societies” and Christianity “losing the demographic game” if Muslims are allowed into Europe en masse.

16 September

- Hungarian police clashes with migrants at the Röszke border station.

17 September

- In a joint interview with Die Presse, Die Welt, The Times and Le Monde, PM Orbán deems Muslims “impossible to integrate” and his determination to avoid the “emergence of parallel societies and Muslim demographic booms as happening in the West”.

13 November

- The Paris massacre is heavily condemned by all major parties and is used as justification for the conservative Islamophobic stances.

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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