
EUROPEAN
ISLAMOPHOBIA
REPORT

2015

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

EUROPEAN
ISLAMOPHOBIA
REPORT

2015

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)



COPYRIGHT © 2016 by SETA

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical or other means, without permission in writing from the publishers.

ISBN : 978-605-4023-68-4

Layout : Erkan Söğüt

Printed in Turkey, İstanbul by Turkuvaz Haberleşme ve Yayıncılık A.Ş., 2016

**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
LATVIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2015

ANITA STASULANE

THE AUTHOR

Anita Stasulane (1962), Professor of history of religions, Director of the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at Daugavpils University (DU), graduated from the University of Latvia (1985) and Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy (1998). She has been working mainly on the new religious movements and youth culture; currently she is conducting research on religious fundamentalism and Islamophobia. She has expertise in qualitative, including ethnographic, research methods and experience of working in international collaborative projects, including three EU Framework projects with her appointed as the DU team lead: FP6 project "Society and Lifestyles: Towards Enhancing Social Harmonisation through Knowledge of Subcultural Communities" (2006-2008), FP7 project "Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement" (2011-2015), and FP7 project "Measuring Youth Well-Being" (2014-2016). Anita Stasulane has an extensive management experience, and since 2006 she is the editor of *Kultūras Studijas* (Cultural Studies) issued by Daugavpils University. anita.stasulane@du.lv

Disclaimer: Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the European Islamophobia Report are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the European Islamophobia Report cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

To cite this report: Anita Stasulane (2016): *Islamophobia in Latvia: National Report 2015*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2015*, Istanbul, SETA, 2016.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Latvia, Islamophobia existed surreptitiously in premise before 2015, but the migrant and so-called 'refugee crisis' provoked a wave of anti-refugee and anti-Muslim rallies led by right-wing groups. Several protest rallies were organised in Riga in response to the government's plan to take in refugees in Latvia. Causes for an increase in Islamophobia in Latvia stem from activities of small and mutually uncoordinated groups. Aversion to, fear and hatred of Muslims are spread by organisations whose financial security is weak. Therefore, there is no network of Islamophobia in Latvia.

The terrorist attacks of 2015 have had a negative impact on the situation; they have strengthened stereotypes and prejudices towards Muslims. The most common stereotypes are as follows: Islam is a religion that encourages violence; Islam restricts the rights of women; and Muslims are a united monolithic community whose members are fundamentalists who want to introduce Sharia laws worldwide. Since people in Latvia have gaps in their awareness of Islam and not all of them have ever met a Muslim, the fact that Muslims are different not only by virtue of their ethnic or national origin but also by their socio-economic status and religious practice is generally disregarded. Recognition of diversity is an important step towards avoidance of simplifications; when presenting Islam as a monolithic religion, it is easy to start demonising it.

Islamophobia in Latvia manifests itself mainly as ill feeling towards the 'Other', fear of the unknown and hostility towards Muslims. The negative attitude towards Muslims stemming from aversion to their 'Otherness' has not grown into discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion of Muslims from social, political and civil life of Latvia. Anti-Muslim sentiment has not become violent; no physical attacks on Muslims due to religion have been recorded.

Anti-Muslim sentiments entered the public domain of Latvia and threaten to transform into the dominant reaction of Latvian society to challenges caused by globalisation. The issue of the reception of refugees in Latvia revealed the fragile border between prejudice and open hatred based on the impact of shadows of ancient phobias (anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia) and radical ideologies (national socialism, communism). Otherness is viewed as an enemy in Latvia, radicalism continues to strengthen and jeopardises the benefits of the recently regained freedom and democracy.

KOPSAVILKUMS

Pirms 2015. gada Latvijā islāmafobija pastāvēja slēptā veidā, bet imigrantu un bēgļu krīze izraisīja pret bēgļiem un musulmaņiem vērstu mītiņu vilni, ko vadīja labējā politiskā spārna grupas. Pret valdības plāniem uzņemt Latvijā bēgļus Rīgā tika sarīkotas vairākas protesta akcijas. Cēloņi islāmafobijas pieaugumam Latvijā meklējami nelielu un savstarpēji nekoordinētu grupu aktivitātēs. Nepatiku, bailes un naidu pret musulmaņiem izplata organizācijas, kuru finansiālais nodrošinājums ir vājš, tāpēc Latvijā nav izveidojies islāmafobijas tīkls.

2015. gada terorakti ir negatīvi ietekmējuši situāciju, nostiprinot stereotipus un veicinot aizspriedumus pret musulmaņiem. Visizplatītākie stereotipi: islāms ir reliģija, kas mudina uz vardarbību, ierobežo sievietu tiesības, musulmaņi ir vienota monolīta kopiena, kuras locekļi ir fundamentālisti, kas vēlas ieviest šari'a likumus itin visā pasaulē. Tā kā Latvijā trūkst izpratnes par islāmu un ne visi Latvijas iedzīvotāji ir kādreiz savā dzīvē sastapuši musulmani, tiek ignorēts, ka musulmaņi ir dažādi ne tikai pēc etniskās vai nacionālās izcelsmes, bet arī pēc sociāli ekonomiskā stāvokļa un reliģijas prakses. Daudzveidības atzīšana ir svarīgs solis ceļā uz to, lai izvairītos no vienkāršojumiem; prezentējot islāmu kā monolītu reliģiju, var viegli nonākt pie tā demonizācijas.

Negatīvā attieksme pret musulmaņiem, kas sakņojas nepatikā pret citādo, Latvijā nav pāraugusi diskriminācijā, marģinalizācijā un musulmaņu izslēgšanā no Latvijas sociālās, politiskās un pilsoniskās dzīves. Negatīvais noskaņojums nav sasniedzis vardarbīgu formu: fiziski uzbrukumi reliģijas dēļ musulmaņiem nav fiksēti. Latvijā islāmafobija izpaužas galvenokārt kā nepatika pret citādo, bailes no nepazīstamā un nepamatots naidīgums pret musulmaņiem.

Nepatika pret musulmaņiem ir ienākusi Latvijas publiskajā telpā un draud pārtapt par Latvijas sabiedrībā dominējošo reakciju uz globalizācijas izraisītiem izaicinājumiem. Jautājums par bēgļu uzņemšanu Latvijā atklāja, cik trausla ir robeža starp aizspriedumu un atklātu naidu, kura pamatā ir seno fobiju (antisemitisms, islāmafobija, homofobija) un radikālo ideoloģiju (nacionālsociālisms, komunisms) ēnu ietekme. Latvijā citādašs tiek uzlūkots kā ienaidnieks, radikālisms aizvien nostiprinās un apdraud nesen atgūtās brīvības un demokrātijas ieguvumus.

INTRODUCTION

Islam reached Latvia in the 19th century when, due to industrial development, Tatars entered Latvia from Lithuania. The first presence of Muslims in Latvia was documented in 1838, although the first official congregation was formed in 1902.¹ After World War II Latvia became isolated from most of the world. Therefore, the majority of Latvian Muslims are Soviet immigrants from the Soviet Central Asian and Caucasian republics, as well as the Volga region. The last Soviet census of 1989 reported more than 12,000 people of Muslim background (Tatars, Azeris, Kazakhs, Uzbeks) living in Latvia. Even though Latvia kept in touch with fellow socialist and communist countries from Africa and Asia, it attracted only a limited number of immigrants. Most often, they were young people who came to Latvia to study. The restoration of independence of the Republic of Latvia (1990) and accession to the EU (2004) translated into a moderate interest in immigration. Compared to older EU member states, Latvia has a lower GDP per capita and it provides less social capital for a foreigner to settle down and live.

Since the question regarding religion is not included in the population census anymore, precise data about the number of Muslims currently living in Latvia is not available. The number of practising Muslims indicated in reports to the Ministry of Justice by the Latvian Muslim community is quite small: in 2014, there were 320 Muslims in Latvia.² However, in interviews to the media Latvian Muslims have provided information about a different number of Latvian Muslims: a number reaching as many as 10,000.³ Assuming that the number of Muslims in Latvia does not exceed 0.4 % of the country's population⁴ and on the basis of the recent data on the population in Latvia⁵ we can estimate the maximum possible number of nominal Muslims in Latvia to be 7,600 out of the total population of 1.9 million. Since the Muslim community states that 10-20 % of Muslims are practising, we can estimate that there are approximately 760 to 1,500 practising Muslims.

1. The Latvian State Historical Archives. 1340, 1. No. 2799, p. 31.

2. "Survey of reports submitted to the Ministry of Justice by religious organisations in 2014", Latvijas Republikas Tieslietu ministrija, accessed December 5, 2015, <https://www.tm.gov.lv/lv/ministrija/gada-parskati/2014-gada-publikiskie-parskati>.

3. "Sieviešu apgraizīšana un Allāhs nav dievs – daži Latvijā izplatīti mīti par musulmaņiem", Delfi, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/sieviesu-apgraizisana-un-allahs-nav-dievs-dazi-latvija-izplatiti-miti-par-musulmaniem.d?id=46548331>.

4. Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska, "Muslims in Europe: different communities, one discourse? Adding the Central and Eastern European perspective," in *Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe: widening the European discourse on Islam*, ed. Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska, (Warszawa: Univerisity of Warsaw, 2011), 17.

5. By the end of 2015, the Central Statistical Bureau indicated that Latvia's population is 1.9 million. See: "Iedzīvotāju skaits un iedzīvotāju dabiskās kustības galvenie rādītāji pa ceturkšņiem un mēnešiem." Centrālās statistikas pārvaldes datu bāzes, accessed December 5, 2015, http://data.csb.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/SocIala/SocIala__isterm__iedz/IE0010m.px/table/tableViewLayout1/?rxid=7ee5bb2b-7c93-4ccb-8a34-1aa4ade09cc3.

SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

According to the Eurobarometer survey of 2015, Latvia ranks among the countries where “discrimination is rare”⁶: 32 % of those surveyed in Latvia have indicated discrimination based on ethnicity, whereas in Europe this number is 64 %; discrimination on the grounds of religion is at 14 % of those surveyed in Latvia and 50 % in Europe. Although discrimination based on ethnicity and religion in Latvia is significantly lower than on average in Europe, compared to the data of 2012 it is noteworthy that discrimination has also increased in Latvia:⁷ on the grounds of ethnicity by 6 % and on the basis of religion by 4 %.

The data resulting from the FP7 project Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement (MYPLACE)⁸ (2011-2015) show the attitude of Latvia’s youth (aged 16-25) towards minorities, including Muslims: 52 % of young people in Riga and 27 % in Daugavpils disagree that Muslims make a positive contribution to society; 33 % of the respondents in Riga and 17 % in Daugavpils think that it is right to be suspicious of Muslims.

In Latvia, Islamophobia existed in premise before 2015, but the migrant and so-called ‘refugee crisis’ provoked a wave of anti-refugee and anti-Muslim rallies led by right-wing groups. Several protest rallies were organised in Riga in response to the government’s plan to take in refugees in Latvia: the association Tēvijas Sargi (Guards of Fatherland) organised a picketing on 4 August, 2015 with the participation of approximately 1,000 people who held up posters reflecting sentiments of racism and Islamophobia; on 22 September, some 500 people participated in a rally “Against Immigration” organised by Tēvijas Sargi and the group Taisnīgums (Justice). The rally was concluded by a concert entitled “The Baltic Countries Are Ours”. On 5 November around 100 people responded to the call of Tēvijas Sargi and Taisnīgums to take part in a picket. They highlighted the potential threat posed by Muslim immigrants, promised to establish self-protection groups and organise civil disobedience campaigns. On 17 November a picketing organised by the association Antiglobālisti (Anti-globalists) brought together approximately 30 people who held a poster with the words “No to Allah Akbar terrorists in Latvia” thus protesting against the reception of refugees in the country.

Amid the so-called ‘migrant and refugee crisis’, the ill feeling of Latvia’s population towards Otherness has spiralled into a negative attitude towards Muslims. To

6. “Special Eurobarometer 437. Discrimination in the EU in 2015”, European Union Open Data Portal, accessed December 5, 2015, http://open-data.europa.eu/en/data/dataset/S2077_83_4_437_ENG.

7. In 2012, discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin in Latvia was calculated at 26 % and in Europe at 56 %. Discrimination on the grounds of religion in Latvia stood at 10 % and in Europe at 39 %. See: “Diskriminācija 2012. gadā”, Eurobarometrs, accessed December 5, 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_393_fact_lv_lv.pdf.

8. See: “MYPLACE: Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement”, accessed December 5, 2015, <https://myplaceresearch.wordpress.com>.

celebrate the Feast of Sacrifice (Kurban Bayrami), a carpet was spread outside the Islamic Cultural Centre in Riga on 24 September, 2015 and around 30 Muslims had gathered for a common prayer. The celebration had not yet really begun when the police arrived after being called by some inhabitants. The police found that Muslims had broken the law, since a public event was organised without prior coordination with the local government. The court will decide whether to fine the Islamic Cultural Centre. According to Latvian legislation, the organisers of the event may be subject to a fine of up to 2,900 Euro, i.e. about 10 Euro for each community member.⁹

Meanwhile, the act of vandalism, which took place on the night of 27 September, 2015, when the wall next to the Islamic Cultural Centre was sprayed with offensive graffiti in English “Your Allah – your problem! Go home!” can be classified as verbal abuse. Following this incident, the Muslim community of Latvia expressed concerns about Islamophobia, which is intensifying in Latvia.¹⁰

DISCUSSION OF ISLAMOPHOBIC INCIDENTS AND DISCURSIVE EVENTS IN VARIOUS FIELDS

Employment

Latvia’s labour market discriminates against five groups of workforce: young people (aged 15-24), people approaching retirement age (aged 50-64), people with disabilities, people with poor knowledge of Latvian, and women after a parental leave. The study *Discrimination in Latvia’s Labour Market*¹¹ found that respondents did not mention religion as one of the factors for which they have been refused employment. At the end of 2015, the average level of registered unemployment was 8.4 % of the total population that was economically active; studies about religion of the unemployed, however, have not been carried out. According to the head of the Arabic Culture Centre, there are about 200 people of Arabic origin living in Latvia.¹² They are well integrated, proficient in Latvian and employed in different professions (physicians, engineers, and businesspersons), not only as employees but also as em-

9. Odiņa Krenberga, “Par nepieteiktu svētku atzīmēšanu Rīgas māju pagalmā policija grib sodīt musulmaņus”, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/latvija/zinas/par-nepieteiktu-svetku-atzimesanu-rigas-maju-pagalma-policija-grib-sodit-musulmanus.a147196/>.

10. “Vandāļi apgāna mošeju Rīgā”, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/vandali-apgana-moseju-riga-islama-kulturas-centrs-bazijas-par-augoso-islamofobiju.d?id=46521323>

11. “Diskriminācija Latvijas darba tirgū”, accessed December 5, 2015, http://cilvektiesibas.org.lv/media/record/docs/2014/05/12/diskriminacija_lv_tirgu.pdf.

12. “Integration monitor”, Latvian Centre for Human Rights, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://cilvektiesibas.org.lv/lv/monitoring/4805/monitoring-news-2015-8-25-4805/>.

ployers.¹³ The Law on Trade Unions¹⁴ gives the right to form trade unions without any discrimination, i.e. membership in trade unions is open not only to citizens but also to non-citizens, EU citizens and third country nationals.

Education

In Latvia, education is open to all members of the public, regardless of their faith. The law in Latvia gives everyone the right to acquire a religious education in educational institutions of religious organisations. In the state schools, Christian faith education or ethics is a mandatory subject in forms 1-3. It is a child's parents who decide whether their child will acquire a Christian faith education or attend ethics class; the majority prefer to choose ethics rather than Christian faith. The results of the public opinion study *Good School: Wishes and Assessment* show that 56.4 % of the population believe that education is a private or family issue and that a school should not interfere in this matter.¹⁵ Other religious groups may provide religious education only in private schools.

The mandatory content of the educational programme in Latvia is determined by the State General Secondary Education Standard, which does not include issues of Islam directly. The issue of Islam is indirectly covered in the subject 'History of Latvia and the World'¹⁶ whose content focuses exclusively on the history of Europe. It is easy to note that information on Islam provided in textbooks has been prepared by using mainly information from encyclopaedias.

The secondary school optional subject 'Cultural Studies' (*Kulturoloģija*) covers a topic on cultural traditions, focusing on the contrast between sustainability of traditions in the East and their dynamic changes in the Western world. The topic 'Western and Eastern Culture' includes a clarification – "modernisation as a foundation for Western culture (liberalism, rationalism, creativity)."¹⁷ Such an interpretation associates the East with conservatism, irrationalism and non-creativity, and Islam is presented as a set of rigid and constant traditions, which have been preserved to the present day and which come into conflict with the modern world. This type of school curriculum creates a good breeding ground for the formation of religious prejudices.

13. "Abu Meri: jāatrod plāns, kā integrēt 250 cilvēkus, kas, visticamāk, būs sīrieši", TVNET, accessed December 5, 2015, http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/viedokli/572892-abu_meri_jaatrod_plans_ka_integret_250_cilvekus_kas_visticamak_bus_siriesi.

14. "Arodbiedrību likums", Latvijas Republikas tiesību akti", accessed December 5, 2015, <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=265207>.

15. "Laba skola: vēlmes un vērtējums", accessed December 5, 2015, http://media.wix.com/ugd/5e1eac_cb0d2ffcce-1c42c982e9df72d245603d.pdf.

16. "Noteikumi par valsts vispārējās izglītības standartu, mācību priekšmetu standartiem un izglītības programmu paraugiem", accessed December 5, 2015, <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=257229#piel14&cpd=1>.

17. *Kulturoloģija: Vispārējās vidējās izglītības mācību priekšmeta programmas paraugs*, (Rīga: Izglītības satura un ekaminācijas centrs, 2008) 21.

Politics

There were no manifestations of Islamophobia either in party programmes offered to voters before the last parliamentary (Saeima) elections (4 October, 2014) or during the election campaign. Since Latvia is geographically distant from the Middle East's conflict zones, its politicians had not assessed the potential risks, and the terrorist attacks and the so-called 'refugee crisis' of 2015 found them unprepared. Latvian President Andris Bērziņš expressed condolences to France concerning the bloody attack against the staff of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris and immediately named the approach to migration as the main issue to be dealt with during the Latvia Presidency of the Council of the EU (January 1 – June 30, 2015).¹⁸ Following the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November, 2015, statements made by politicians were sharp, negative and even hostile. Raivis Zeltiņš (National Union) strongly criticised the EU refugee policy: "The elite of European radical liberals has facilitated ethno-masochism [...] and unconditional love of Europeans for everything unknown, without thinking that this unknown hates all 'non-believers' despite their efforts to be good and tolerant".¹⁹ The National Union called to stop the refugee reception process²⁰ "to prevent risks related to the fact that terrorists will arrive in Latvia under the guise of asylum seekers."²¹ The attitude of representatives of the opposition parties towards refugees was equally resistant. Mārtiņš Bondars (Union of Latvia's Regions) worried that "refugees having infectious diseases [yellow fever] could arrive in Latvia, but the health care system of our country is not ready for this."²² Inguna Sudraba (From Heart to Latvia) expressed concerns that terrorism and crime can be imported together with refugees.²³ Andrejs Elksniņš (the union of parties Harmony) wrote on Twitter: "All refugees will go to the warm countries when winter comes,"²⁴ but the common position of the party is that the misguided policy of the ruling

18. "Bērziņš pēc "Charlie Hebdo" rosina runāt par ES migrācijas politiku", accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/latvija/zinas/berzinsh-pec-charlie-hebdo-rosina-runat-par-es-migracijas-polit.a112925/>.

19. "Šokējoši paredzamā Parīzē", accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.raiviszeltits.lv/sokejosi-paredzama-parize/#more-491>.

20. "NA aicina Vienotību apturēt bēgļu uzņemšanas procesu", accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.naciona-laapvieniba.lv/aktualitate/na-aicina-vienotibu-apturet-beglu-uznemsanas-procesu/>.

21. "OFICIĀLI: NA aicina apturēt bēgļu uzņemšanas procesu + dokumenta fotokopija", accessed December 5, 2015, <http://nra.lv/latvija/155642-oficiali-na-aicina-apturet-beglu-uznemsanas-procesu.htm>.

22. "Pastāv bažas, ka bēgļi Latvijā ieradīsies ar dažādām infekcijas slimībām, saka Bondars", accessed December 5, 2015, <http://skaties.lv/latvija/sabiedriba/pastav-bazas-ka-begli-latvija-ieradises-ar-dazadam-infekcijas-slimibam-sa-ka-bondars/>.

23. "Latvijai nav jāsolidarizējas ar citām Eiropas Savienības valstīm Āfrikas bēgļu uzņemšanā", accessed December 5, 2015, <http://nosirdslatvijai.lv/aktualitates/raksti/latvijai-nav-jasolidarizejas-ar-citam-eiropas-savienibas-valstim-afrikas-beglu-uznemsana.html>.

24. Andrejs Elksniņš, June 27, 2015 (7:59 a.m.), accessed December 5, 2015, <https://twitter.com/AndrejsElksnins/status/614810260017152000>.

coalition has led to the reception of refugees in Latvia.²⁵ Significantly, the negative attitudes towards minorities, xenophobia, as well as welfare chauvinism and exclusionism typical of the right have also been taken up by the left.

Media

The terms 'Islamic terrorists', 'Islamic radicals' and 'Islamic extremists' commonly used by Latvia's media have resulted in associating nearly every possible kind of atrocities with Islam. Fear of Islam and Muslims could be the definition of the emotional background prevailing in the media, including the largest daily newspapers *Diena*, *Latvijas Avīze, Neatkarīgā* (in Latvian), *Vesti Segodnya* (in Russian). Terrorism is the theme examined most often in analytical articles, interviews and information reports dealing with Islam. In Latvia, the media discourse on Islam focuses on international politics and the situation in Western Europe, i.e. it refers to peoples and events outside of Latvia with no relation to local reality. Only seldom is there any counterbalancing information on the local Muslim community. The fact that the media remember the Muslim community living in the country only after terrorist attacks contributes to the formation of Islamophobic attitudes.

Information on refugees from the Middle East is presented by using the metaphors 'wave', 'flow' or 'flood' thus highlighting the volume and strength of the phenomenon, i.e. the movement of refugees is reflected as a mass phenomenon that moves forward and has significant superiority which is difficult to control. The use of such metaphors is dehumanising, since people are conceptualised as an unwanted and devastating natural disaster.²⁶

Justice System

Article 99 of the Constitution of Latvia (*Satversme*) states that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. At the same time, Article 116 provides for the possibility to restrict expressions of religious conviction in order to protect the rights of other people, the democratic structure of the state, public safety, welfare and morals. No religion has the status of a state religion in Latvia. However, at the public administration level a distinction is made between the traditional religious organisations of Latvia (Evangelical Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Old Believers, Baptists, Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists and Jews) and new religions. The Council of Spiritual Affairs, which is a consultative body chaired by the prime minister, is composed of representatives of the traditional religious organisations. According to the Law on Religious Organisations (1995), a

25. "Lielākā daļa politiku iebilst pret bēgļu kvotām Latvijai", accessed December 5, 2015, http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/viedokli/561909-lielaka_dala_politiku_iebilst_pret_beglu_kvotam_latvijai.

26. Olga Procevska, "Migrācijas vilņi, bēgļu pārpludinātā Eiropa un dehumanizācijas metaforas Latvijā", accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.punctummagazine.lv/2015/09/15/migracijas-vilni-beglu-parpludinata-eiropa-un-dehumanizacijas-metaforas-latvija/>.

religious organisation may be registered by 20 citizens over the age of 18 registered in the Population Register. Asylum seekers, foreign staff of diplomatic missions and people having a special temporary status do not enjoy this right. Foreign missionaries, including Muslims, may preach only if the local religious organisations have invited them to do so.

In Latvia, it is only representatives of the traditional religious organisations who may teach religion at state schools to pupils whose parents have given their consent; funding for this purpose is provided by the state. Religious education typical for a specific ethnic minority can be received at state-funded ethnic minority schools on a voluntary basis. The ethnic minorities, which do not have their state-funded minority schools, may provide religious education at private schools.

The expected arrival of asylum seekers in Latvia has led to discussions about potential threats to public order and security. Muslim women's clothing completely covering a person's face and not allowing representatives of authorities to recognise and identify a person was regarded as one such threat. This raised concerns that terrorists can be present in public places unnoticed. Members of parliament from the Union of Latvia's Regions submitted a draft law "On Regulation of Covering a Person's Face in Public Places" to the Parliament of Latvia (Saeima). The draft law prohibited the presence of people with covered faces in public places. However, the majority of the Saeima rejected it on 24 September, 2015.

The encroachment on a person's religion is classified significantly lower than other hate crimes; for example, the maximum penalty for calling a Muslim derogatory names is short-term detention or community service, while a person can be sentenced to up to three years in prison for insulting somebody regarding his/her ethnicity.²⁷

Cyberspace

The portal focus.lv/tags/islams plays the most active role in publishing information on world events in relation to Islam or Muslims. The material available on the portal is mainly translations of information made public by world news agencies. The news portals delfi.lv, apollo.lv, tvnet.lv, kasjauns.lv (in Latvian) and vesti.lv; rus.delfi.lv; d-fakti.lv/ru; mixnews.lv/ru (in Russian) publish various information on Islam and Muslims, but, following the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November, 2015, the amount of information containing Islamophobic messages increased sharply. Online abuse also multiplied. One could read insulting readers' comments about Muslims who were equated with terrorists, while Islam was called the religion of death.²⁸ Islamophobia goes hand in hand with opposition to immigration. This is clearly pic-

27. "Informatīvais ziņojums par tiesisko regulējumu attiecībā uz atbildību par nacionālā vai etniskā naida izraisīšanu, aicinājumu likvidēt valstisko neatkarību vai graut teritoriālo vienotību un valsts simbolu zaimošanu", accessed December 5, 2015, <http://cilvektiesibas.org.lv/lv/database/informativais-zinojums-par-tiesisko-regulejumu-att-411/>.

28. "Comments on "Vilis Seleckis: Islāms – laiks nomest rozā brilles", accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.delfi.lv/news/comment/comment/vilis-seleckis-islams-laiks-nomest-roza-brilles.d?id=46723489>.

tured on the portal stopimigracija.lv, which has a pronounced Islamophobic nature. A common characteristic of all portals is that they speak about Muslims as threats to security and to public safety.

Central Figures in the Network of Islamophobia

The causes of the increase in Islamophobia in Latvia stem from activities of small and mutually uncoordinated groups. Aversion to, fear and hatred of Muslims are spread by organisations whose financial security is weak. Therefore, there is no network of Islamophobia in Latvia. Latvijas Nacionālā Fronte (The Latvian National Front) has been targeting immigrants of the Soviet time in its newspaper DDD for years, but currently it is targeting Muslim immigrants who are deemed more dangerous than Soviet colonists.²⁹ The newspaper DDD published Islamophobic poetry³⁰ and an article in which migration processes are treated as an organised international conspiracy: the arrival of refugees in Europe is compared to the Trojan horse, “infantry trained at reconnaissance schools will be among refugees. It will have to open the eastern border, organise unrest and capture strategically important facilities at the right time.”³¹ The group Antiglobālisti (Anti-globalists) has launched an active campaign “Stop Migration!” calling on the population to organise a public debate and decide whether resettlement of immigrants in the territory of their local governments is permissible. A military hand-to-hand fight group Tēvijas sargi (Guards of Fatherland) invited each and every nationally inclined Latvian “not to tolerate new crowds of immigrants”³² and organised a picketing in Riga against the reception of immigrants (4 August, 2015) during which the Islamophobic posters were used. The next campaigns, i.e. a protest rally on 22 September and a picketing on 5 November, were organised by Tēvijas sargi in cooperation with Taisnīgums (Justice), which advocates Latvian Latvia where racial uniformity has to be preserved.³³ This means that the consolidation process of radical right-wingers has started and can lead to the formation of a network of Islamophobia in Latvia.

A debate on the violent nature of Islam has been kept alive by several well-known people in Latvia such as the writer Nilss Sakss who announced “What happened in Paris is Islam. [...] Moreover, it is not an extreme, exotic branch of Islam, but rather a classical tradition.”³⁴ Vilis Seleckis has equated terrorism with Islam: “Why are the worshippers of Allah the ones who blow up planes, shoot children and women dead? [...] From the very outset, Islam has already served well as an ideological basis for

29.J. Liekmanis, “Bēglu jautājums,” *DDD* 16 (2015): 3.

30.Jānis Rīts, “Imigranti,” *DDD* 19 (2015): 4.

31.Joņš Čangaleišys, “Trojas zirgs,” *DDD* 15 (2015): 5.

32.“Tēvijas sargu manifesti”, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.nacionalisti.lv/raksts/1256/militarisms-drosiba/tevijas-sargu-manifests/>.

33.“Programma”, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.taisnigums.lv/p/programma.html>.

34.Nils Sakss, “Tas arī ir islāms”, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://puaro.lv/kars/nils-sakss-tas-ari-ir-islams/>.

on 10-22 September, 2015. Researchers of social sciences tackled problems on an academic level during these lectures.

Since schools in Latvia are not mono-ethnic, i.e. pupils representing various cultural environments and religions learn together in one classroom, teachers acquire intercultural education principles. Intercultural competences are currently included in subject standards, which are the key mechanism for the sustainable combating of intolerance and the prevention of new forms of intolerance in Latvia.

CONCLUSION: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLITICS AND NGOS

Islamophobia in Latvia manifests itself mainly as ill feeling towards the 'Other', fear of the unknown and hostility towards Muslims. The negative attitude towards Muslims stemming from aversion to their 'Otherness' has not grown into discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion of Muslims from social, political and civil life of Latvia. Anti-Muslim sentiment has not become violent; no physical attacks on Muslims due to religion have been recorded.

The terrorist attacks of 2015 have had a negative impact on the situation; they have strengthened stereotypes and prejudices towards Muslims. The most common stereotypes are as follows: Islam is a religion that encourages violence; Islam restricts the rights of women; Muslims are a united monolithic community whose members are fundamentalists who want to introduce Sharia laws worldwide. Since people in Latvia have gaps in their awareness of Islam and not all of them have ever met a Muslim, the fact that Muslims are different not only by their ethnic or national origin but also by their socio-economic status and religious practice is disregarded. Recognition of diversity is an important step towards avoidance of simplifications; when presenting Islam as a monolithic religion, it is easy to start demonising it.

Representatives of the state power have to call on Latvia's population to refrain from provocative actions against the cohesion of society and the peaceful coexistence of different religious communities. The following measures need to be taken to combat discrimination and to address problems of social marginalisation:

- An assessment and amendment of laws and regulations in relation to the wounding of religious feelings.
- The education of members of the public about diversity of religions.
- Informing Latvia's population about events taking place in various Islamic countries.
- Engaging the public in the elimination of intolerance and the promotion of tolerance.
- Monitoring intolerance on a regular basis.

The Muslim community of Latvia also has a great potential to facilitate peace and concord. Therefore, it should be involved in the dialogue and in the implementation of policies promoting human rights.

CHRONOLOGY

14.01.2015

- The Security Police started to assess statements made by Oļegs Petrovs, head of the Islamic Cultural Centre of Latvia, on a Latvian TV programme: “The editorial office of French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo had deserved punishment, but it could have been not so harsh, broken fingers would have sufficed”.

06.07.2015

- The government of Latvia agreed to accept 250 refugees.

04.08.2015

- A picketing against the reception of immigrants organised by Tēvijas sargi (Guards of Fatherland) with the participation of approximately 1,000 people.

24.08.2015

- Around 30 people took part in a picket supporting asylum seekers irrespective of their ethnicity and religion.

12.09.2015

- A picketing in support of refugees with the participation of some 100 people, mainly university students.

18.09.2015

- The government of Latvia agreed to accept 526 more asylum seekers on a voluntary basis.

22.09.2015

- Tēvijas sargi and Taisnīgums (Justice) organised a rally “Against Immigration” and a concert “The Baltic Countries Are Ours” in Riga gathering approximately 500 people.

27.09.2015

- During the night the wall next to the Islamic Cultural Centre in Riga was sprayed with offensive graffiti, a scrawl in English which read “Your Allah – your problem! Go home!”

29.09.2015

- The Islamic Cultural Centre expressed concerns about the development of Islamophobia in Latvia.

13.10.2015

- The spokesman of the Latvian Muslim community Robert Klimovičs announced that Latvia will be an Islamic state in 50 years because of the low fertility rate of Latvians.

05.11.2015

- Some 100 people participated in a picketing organised by Tēvijas sargi and Taisnīgums at the Saeima (Parliament). Its participants highlighted the potential threat posed by Muslim immigrants, promised to establish self-protection groups and organise civil disobedience campaigns.

17.11.2015

- A picketing organised by Antiglobālisti (Anti-globalists) at the Cabinet of Ministers with the participation of some 30 people.

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.



ANKARA • ISTANBUL • WASHINGTON D.C. • CAIRO

