
EUROPEAN
ISLAMOPHOBIA
REPORT

2015

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

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INTRODUCTION

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ

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

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

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

Contribution of this report

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

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

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

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

What is Islamophobia?

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

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

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

Central findings

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

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

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

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

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

Policy Recommendations

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

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

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
LITHUANIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2015

BIRUTĖ SABATAUSKAITĖ, EGLĖ URBONAITĖ TILINDIENĖ, KAROLIS ŽIBAS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Lithuania, 2,727 residents consider themselves Sunni Muslims.¹ The Institute for Ethnic Studies reports that the multiple terrorist attacks in Paris and the public discussions negatively influenced the attitude of Lithuanian society towards Muslims.² Compared to the previous annual public opinion polls, negative attitude in 2015 significantly increased towards Muslims (73 %) and refugees (72 %). The predominantly Muslim Tatar community traces its history in Lithuania to the 13th – 14th centuries and is perceived significantly positively compared to ‘recent immigrants’.

Developments and incidents. The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has reported 4 discrimination cases on the ground of religion (Islam) during the last 4 years. There is no data available on hate crimes towards Muslims.

Employment. During the past 5 years there were no employment-related incidents registered towards Muslims. Public opinion polls and interviews with the community’s representatives show there might be potential under-reporting.

Education. The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has reported one case of possible discrimination on the ground of religion (Islam). Incidents when certain university lecturers have unethically commented on Islam-related matters have been recorded by a non-governmental organisation.

Politics. Attitudes expressed by politicians of various parties span from ‘merely’ anti-migrant and anti-refugee to openly xenophobic and Islamophobic. Some attitudes promote positive dialogue, whereas measures have been taken to ensure effective integration.

Justice. There have not been any draft laws submitted in 2015 worsening the situation of Muslims. Legal amendments legalising religious slaughter of animals came into force. Discussions were initiated to prohibit face covering as a preventive measure for ensuring national security.³ This initiative was recognised as unnecessary and as serving to frighten society by relating all refugees to potential terrorists.

Media. Islamophobia in the media is analysed in the broader context of xenopho-

1. This amounts to 0.09 % of the total population. The latest population census is from 2011; for more data, see http://statistics.bookdesign.lt/table_049.htm?lang=lt / <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/2011-m.-surasymas>

2. “The public opinion poll ordered by the Lithuanian Social Research Centre was carried out a week after the terrorist attacks in Paris (on November 19-29), thus the received results should be assessed as a primary reaction of people towards the news about violent attacks.”, Institute for Ethnic Studies at Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Public Opinion Surveys 2009–2015, <http://www.ces.lt/veikla-2/ziniasklaidos-stebesena/visuomenes-nuomones-apklausa/>

3. BNS, “A. Paulauskas: accepted refugees will have to adhere to our rules”, *lrt.lt*, 13 August, 2015, accessed 13 December, 2015, http://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/110882/a_paulauskas_priimti_pabegeliai_tures_laikytis_musu_taisykliu. BNS, lrt.lt, “A. Paulauskas: arrival of refugees will raise questions on wearing burqas. Criticised by human rights experts”, *delfi.lt*, 13 August, 2015, accessed 12 December, 2015, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/a-paulauskas-pabegeliu-atvykimas-iskels-ir-burkos-devejimo-klausima.d?id=68724682>.

bia and immigration issues, particularly the recent so-called ‘refugee crisis’, which brought various challenges such as the rise of anti-immigrant attitudes, in general, and anti-refugee messages in particular; the increase of xenophobic statements by public commentators and politicians; and new forms of opposition in cyberspace against ‘mass immigration’ and refugee relocation programmes.

Cyberspace. There is a strong link between the so-called ‘refugee crisis’, refugee quotas and the emergence of new xenophobic and Islamophobic initiatives in cyberspace. Some of these go far beyond cyberspace and should be considered as an open incitement of hatred against immigrants (refugees) in general and Muslims in particular.

SANTRAUKA

2727 Lietuvos gyventojai save laiko musulmonais sunitais⁴. Etninių tyrimų instituto ataskaitoje teigiama, kad 2015 m. lapkričio mėn. įvykdytos teroristinės atakos Paryžiuje, kiti šiemet įvykdyti teroro aktai ir jų aptarimas Lietuvos viešojoje erdvėje turėjo neigiamos įtakos Lietuvos gyventojų nuostatomis musulmonų ir pabėgėlių atžvilgiu. Lyginant su ankstesnių metų apklausomis, galima pastebėti, kad žymiai išaugo Lietuvos gyventojų dalis, teigianti, kad pablogėjo nuomonė apie musulmonus (73 proc.) ir pabėgėlius (72 proc.). Dažniausiai musulmonais save laikanti totorių bendruomenė, kurios istorija Lietuvoje siekia XIII-XIV a., vertinama daug pozityviau nei „naujieji imigrantai“.

Pokyčiai ir incidentai: Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnybos ataskaitose užfiksuoti keturi diskriminacijos musulmonų atžvilgiu atvejai. Atskiros informacijos apie neapykantos nusikaltimus musulmonų atžvilgiu nėra.

Užimtumas: Per paskutiniuosius penkerius metus darbo srityje nebuvo užfiksuotas nei vienas incidentas musulmonų atžvilgiu. Visuomenės nuomonės tyrimai, interviu su bendruomenių atstovais rodo, kad galimai nepakankamai kreipiamasi į oficialias institucijas.

Švietimas: Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnyba praneša apie vieną diskriminacijos dėl asmens religijos (Islamo) atvejį švietimo srityje. Nevyriausybinė organizacija praneša apie neetiškus universiteto dėstytojų komentarus su Islamu susijusiomis temomis.

Politika: Skirtingų partijų politikų požiūriai skirtingi – nuo anti-imigracijos ir anti-pabėgėlišių nuomonių iki tų, kurios yra atvirai ksenofobiškos ir islamofobiškos. Kai kurie politikai skatina pozityvų dialogą ir siūlo įvairias priemones efektyviai integracijai.

Teisingumas: 2015 m. nebuvo užregistruota teisės aktų projektų, kurie pablogintų musulmonų padėtį šalyje. 2015 m. įsigaliojo Gyvūnų gerovės ir apsaugos įstatymo nuostatos, įteisinančios religinėms apeigoms tinkamą gyvūnų skerdimą, ką pozityviai vertina musulmonų bendruomenė. Taip pat buvo inicijuotos diskusijos dėl veido dengimo viešoje vietoje uždraudimo, siekiant užtikrinti nacionalinį saugumą⁵. Pasirodė nuomonės laikiančios šią iniciatyvą nebūtina ir naudojama gąsdinti visuomenę, sulyginant visus pabėgėlius su potencialiais teroristais.

4. Tai sudaro 0.09% visos populiacijos. 2011 m. gyventojų ir būstų surašymo duomenys. Daugiau informacijos žr. http://statistics.bookdesign.lt/table_049.htm?lang=lt / <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/2011-m.-surasymas>

5. BNS, „A.Paulauskas: Priimti pabėgėliai turės laikytis mūsų taisyklių“, *lrt.lt*, 2015 rugpjūčio 13, žiūrėta 2015 gruodžio 12, http://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/110882/a_paulauskas_priimti_pabegeliai_tures_laikytis_musu_taisykliu. BNS, lrt.lt, „A. Paulauskas: pabėgėlių atvykimas išskels ir burkos dėvėjimo klausimą (Žmogaus teisių aktyvistai kritikuoja)“, *delfi.lt*, 2015 rugpjūčio 13, žiūrėta 2015 gruodžio 12, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/a-paulauskas-pabegeliu-atvykimas-iskels-ir-burkos-devejimo-klausima.d?id=68724682>.

Žiniasklaida: Islamofobija žiniasklaidoje analizuojama platesniame ksenofobijos ir imigracijos temų kontekste, ypatingai atsižvelgiant į vadinamą „pabėgėlių krizę“ ir su ja susijusius iššūkius: pastebimas anti-imigracijos bendrai ir anti-pabėgėliškų nuostatų augimas; viešų asmenų ir politikų ksenofobinių pareiškimų padaugėjimas; naujos opozicijos formos kibernetinėje erdvėje, nukreiptos prieš „masinę imigraciją“ ir pabėgėlių perkėlimo programas.

Kibernetinė erdvė: Pastebimos stiprios sąsajos tarp taip vadinamos „pabėgėlių krizės“, pabėgėlių priėmimo kvotos ir naujų ksenofobinių ir islamofobiškų iniciatyvų atsiradimo kibernetinėje erdvėje. Kai kurios jų peržengia kibernetinės erdvės ribas ir turėtų būti laikomos atviru neapykantos kurstymu prieš imigrantus (pabėgėlius) bendrai ir ypatingai prieš musulmonus.

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of the fact that the latest decades in Europe mark a period of intense international migration, which brought forth various challenges for national and international state policies and called for societies to deal with intercultural coexistence, Lithuanian society still remains homogeneous. For example, according to the latest data from the Migration Department (2015), at the beginning of 2015, there were approximately 40,000 foreigners in Lithuania, which is less than 1.5 % of the total population. The vast majority of foreigners come from non-Islamic countries and only few from Islamic ones. According to the latest population census in 2011, 2,727 residents in Lithuania considered themselves Sunni Muslims, which is 0.09 % of the total population. In 2001, this number was 2,860 or 0.08 % of the total population.⁶

Though, the number of Muslims in Lithuania is very small, societal attitudes towards Muslims are diverse. For example, considering such ‘traditional minorities’ as Tatars,⁷ attitudes are significantly more positive than towards those, who are considered to be ‘recent immigrants’ (third country nationals and refugees). This fact could be explained by public opinion polls, carried out by the Institute for Ethnic Studies. Merely, 8 people out of 100 would do not want to work with Tatar people compared to working with members of the Muslim community in general – In the latter case the number increases to 26 %.⁸ However, during the recent so-called ‘refugee crisis’ and, especially, after the terrorist attacks in Paris, attitudes towards immigration in general and refugees (especially, Muslims) in particular became more negative. For example, 50 % of respondents would not like to live in a neighbourhood with refugees, while 58 % would not like to live near Muslims. In addition, 86 % of respondents agree that refugees might increase the level of criminality in Lithuania; while 82 % think that refugees can trigger social disorder. These trends could be explained by the media response towards the so-called ‘refugee crisis’, immigration flows and the threat of terrorism. Currently, the mass media in Lithuania is the most common source of information on refugees, including Muslims. Eventually, the information prevailing in public discourse has larger importance to attitudes towards refugees and Muslim than direct experience (for more see Media Response).

6. For more data of the population census, see http://statistics.bookdesign.lt/table_049.htm?lang=lt / <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/2011-m.-surasymas>

7. The Tatar community traces its history in Lithuania to the 13th – 14th centuries and is predominantly Muslim. It is perceived positively by Lithuanian society.

8. Institute for Ethnic Studies at Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Public Opinion Surveys 2009–2015, <http://www.ces.lt/veikla-2/ziniasklaidos-stebesena/visuomenes-nuomones-apklausa/>

SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Provisions of the Law on the Welfare and Protection of Animals regarding the legalisation of religious slaughter of animals without prior stunning came into force on 1 January 2015 (adopted on 23 September 2014).⁹ The adoption and coming into force of these provisions have been recognised as a positive development by the Islam Education and Culture Centre.¹⁰

Incidents

In July 2014, the police checked the identity of every individual entering the building of the Islam Culture and Education Centre. This behaviour was recognised as racial profiling by the European Network Against Racism,¹¹ after which NGOs wrote a common letter to the Ministry of Internal Affairs asking for an apology from the Minister of Internal Affairs and a change of police strategies to counter terrorism, where “radical Islam” was mentioned. The Police Department reacted to the letter and deleted the words “radical Islam”, changing them to “violent extremism”.¹²

The Information Technology Department under the Ministry of the Interior, which collects information on crimes, does not break down the information on how many hate crimes were committed against Muslims. In general a very low number of hate crimes are officially recorded.

The Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson reports include the following information on religious discrimination: the office recorded one case of religious discrimination in 2013 after a complaint was submitted by Muslims residing in the Foreigners’ Registration Centre (see Justice system); one possible case of discriminations on the grounds of religion was reported in 2014 in the field of education (see section Education); and two complaints claiming religious discrimination in 2015. Both complaints in 2015 were submitted by the same person, currently serving a sentence in Pravieniškės Correction House-Open Prison Colony. The applicant reported the fact that the food in the facilities did not take into account his religious confession (Islam). The Ombudsperson recommended to the Prison Department that alimentation be provided taking into consideration a person’s religious beliefs

9. No. XII-1147, <http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/oldsearch.preps2?a=483037&b=>.

10. Interview with Aleksandras Beganskas, representative of the Islam Education and Culture Centre, 23 December, 2015.

11. The Islam Culture and Education Centre, members of the European Network Against Racism in Lithuania: Roma Community Centre, and the Centre for Equality Advancement, Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights wrote a joint letter to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. See: <http://manoteises.lt/naujiena/europos-neyvriausybinės-organizacijos-d-a-barakauskas-turi-atsiprasyti/>

12. The order of the Lithuanian Police Commissioner General regarding the “Enactment of Amendment of the long term programme of counter-terrorism measures of the Lithuanian Police and action plan for its’ implementation”, Lietuvos policijos generalinio komisaro 2014 m. rugsėjo 30 d. įsakymas Nr. 5-V-865 „Dėl Lietuvos policijos generalinio komisaro 2010 m. gruodžio 20 d. įsakymo Nr. 5-v-967 „Dėl Lietuvos policijos prevencinių kovos su terorizmu veiksmų ilgalaikės programos ir jos įgyvendinimo priemonių plano patvirtinimo“ pakeitimo“. For more see: <http://manoteises.lt/naujiena/policijos-diena-gera-zinia-neyvriausybinems-organizacijoms/>

as much as possible. In his second complaint the applicant complained that the open prison colony does not provide him with conditions to pray five times a day. The Ombudsperson found that there were insufficient grounds to assume that the applicant had been discriminated against because of his religion or other grounds.¹³

DISCUSSION OF ISLAMOPHOBIC INCIDENTS AND DISCURSIVE EVENTS IN VARIOUS FIELDS

Employment

The Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson reports that during the past five years there were no employment-related incidents discriminating against Muslims. Even though officially there are no Islamophobic cases, public opinion surveys and interviews with representatives of the community show that there might be potential under-reporting. Work migrants and inhabitants of smaller towns are less likely to complain for various reasons including fear of putting their job in jeopardy¹⁴ and not being able to identify discrimination.

While analysing possible discrimination cases, language and practice of religion have to be mentioned. Many foreign nationals state that language requirements are a major barrier to employment.¹⁵ In some instances, Lithuanian language requirements are unnecessary for competence in a specific job. It should be noted that there are less than 3,000 Muslim residents in Lithuania¹⁶ and Islam is little analysed; it is understood by wider society primarily via mass media. Hence, the lack of knowledge of the religion brings challenges to Muslim employees. Firstly, while looking for a job, clothing characteristic to Muslims becomes a barrier due to negative stereotypes about the Muslim community. Secondly, praying rituals are little known to Lithuanian society. A case when a Muslim employee could not pray at a workplace was solved when an agreement with the employer was reached.¹⁷

International companies are more inclined to hire foreigners than Lithuanian companies,¹⁸ and for the most part members of the Muslim community work in

13. Press release by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, 23 September, 2015, accessed 6 January, 2016, <http://www.lygybe.lt/lt/naujienos/pranesimai-ziniasklaidai/atsisakyta-nagrineti-karceryje-yq5v.html>

14. Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, *Annual Activity Report 2012* (Vilnius, 2013), p. 3, <http://www.lygybe.lt/lt/metines-tarnybos-ataskaitos.html>

15. Interview with the “Balturka” association, Baltic Turkish Culture Academy, 4 January, 2016.

16. In the population census of 2011, 2,727 Muslims were recorded. Statistics Lithuania, Population Composition, <http://osp.stat.gov.lt/services-portlet/pub-edition-file?id=22>

17. Birutė Sabatauskaitė, Eglė Urbonaitė, Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights, *ENAR Shadow Report 2011-2012. Racism and related discriminatory practices in Lithuania* (ENAR, 2013), <http://manoteises.lt/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/%C5%A0e%C5%A1%C4%97lin%C4%97-ataskaita-Rasizmas-ir-diskriminacija-Lietuvoje-2011-2012.pdf>

18. Ibid.

their own small, closed businesses where no Lithuanians are involved.¹⁹ Labour Exchange has no specific employment programmes for foreigners or for diversity in workplaces.²⁰ There is no official statistical data collected nationwide on employment rates, disaggregated by ethnicity, nationality or religion.

The Lithuanian Labour Exchange is responsible for granting work permits to foreigners who live in Lithuania with temporary work permits.²¹ According to Labour Exchange data, 3,743 work permits were issued to foreigners in the period of 2010-2012²² and 1,208 foreigners were unemployed. Therefore, foreigners with work permits comprised merely 0.12% of the Lithuanian labour market. The Muslim community comprises an even smaller percentage.²³ Issuance of work permits significantly dropped during the economic crisis in 2008, but since 2011 started growing again. Most work migrants are men.²⁴

The framework of Lithuanian society's perceptions can help to identify potential areas of discrimination. As observed by the Institute for Ethnic Studies, Lithuanian society (60.4 % of respondents) thinks that Lithuanian taxpayers fund the majority of immigrants in Lithuania;²⁵ 58% of the respondents thought immigrants come to Lithuania to work; and 45.3% that they are useful for the state economy.

The social distance between co-workers of different ethnicity or religion is relatively smaller and less pronounced than the negative social attitudes regarding living in neighbourhoods close to people of different ethnicity or religion: a public survey showed an increased number of people who would agree to work with Pakistanis, Turks, Kazakhs and Tatars – the groups of people who practice Islam in Lithuania. However, members of the Muslim community overall are the least favoured group in

19. Interview with the "Balturka" association, Baltic Turkish Culture Academy, 4 January, 2016.

20. The Lithuanian Labour Exchange under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Communication No. Ds-2405 to the inquiry (2012).

21. People who live in the country with permanent residence permits do not require a work permit.

22. The Lithuanian Labour Exchange under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Communication No. Ds-2405 (2012).

23. According to the association "Balturka", Baltic Turkish Culture Academy, there are around 200 Turkish people in Lithuania and their majority study or work in their own businesses. Ninety per cent of Turkish people in Lithuania arrive in the country on family reunification grounds.

24. Diversity Development Group, Institute for Ethnic Studies at Lithuanian Social Research Centre, *Trečiųjų šalių piliečių integracijos trajektorijos ir vertinimo mechanizmai. Imigracijos, migrantų integracijos ir pilietybės politikos teorinės ir empirinės sąsajos. Tyrimo ataskaita*, <http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Imigracijos-migrant%C5%B3-integracijos-ir-pilietyb%C4%97s-politikos-teorin%C4%97s-ir-empirin%C4%97s-s%C4%85sajos2.pdf> (2014), p. 98-108

25. This percentage is increasing compared to a similar survey carried out in 2010 (57.5 % shared the same thoughts). Institute for Ethnic Studies at Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Public Opinion Surveys 2009 – 2015, <http://www.ces.lt/veikla-2/ziniasklaidos-stebesena/visuomenes-nuomones-apklausa/>.

the workplace compared to other religions and confessions.²⁶ Respondents tend to assess ethnicity more favourably than religion.

In the long term, negativity towards the Muslim community appears to be slightly declining. However, data presented by the Institute of Ethnic Studies on public opinion polls carried out after the Paris attacks shows an increase of negative opinion towards refugees and Muslims (see Introduction).

Arrival procedures for labour migrants were simplified in 2011. The EU standards were transposed onto the national law to simplify arrival procedures for certain third countries nationals (students, scientists, highly qualified workers). Highly qualified workers now benefit from a simpler family reunification procedure. This procedure is not limited to religion, nationality or ethnicity.

Education

The Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has reported one case on possible discrimination on the ground of religion. The applicant filed a complaint as pre-schools and comprehensive education and social care institutions organise meals disregarding children and their parents' religion, beliefs and views. All people, attending pre-schools, comprehensive education and social care institutions have to eat meat, poultry, fish and eggs despite their religious and/or other beliefs. Such arrangements do not take into account, for instance, the fact that Muslims do not consume pork. The final decision by the Lithuanian Supreme Administrative Court is still pending; the Court will decide whether the Vilnius Public Health Centre properly evaluated the menu submitted to the applicant for consideration.²⁷

The NGO Tolerant Youth Association has conducted research on the content of school books in 2010.²⁸ Islam was not included as a separate topic of research in the study. However, the authors stated that multiculturalism, tolerance and discrimination have a very abstract and narrow meaning in school textbooks. Usually text books fail to include diversity issues and are limited only to ethnicity (sometimes including religion) and almost never cover race, gender, sexual orientation and disability. The research highlighted the need to implement skills-orientated methods to recognise and combat, inter alia, racism, xenophobia, ethnocentrism and hatred towards people confessing other religions. Ethnic (Lithuanians), political (Lithuania)

26. Ibid. Please indicate a group with which you would rather not work:

Muslims – 32.4 % (2009), 32.3 % (2010), 24.2 % (2011), 24.9 % (2012), 26 % (2013).

Pakistanis – 25.4 % (2009), 28 % (2010), 15.3 % (2011), 14.7 % (2012), 16 % (2013).

Turks – 20.1 % (2009), 16.4 % (2010), 8.8 % (2012), 10 % (2013).

Kazakhs – 17.2 % (2009), 16.7 % (2010), 8.5 % (2012), 10 % (2013).

Tatars – 13.4 % (2009), 12.9 % (2010), 7 % (2012), 8 % (2013).

27. Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, *Annual Activity Report 2014*, (Vilnius, 2015), p. 47, <http://www.lygybe.lt/lt/metines-tarnybos-ataskaitos.html>

28. Jolanta Reingardė, Nida Vasiliauskaitė, Rasa Erentaitė, *Tolerancija ir multikultūrinis ugdymas bendrojo lavinimo mokyklose* (2010), p. 97-98.

and religious (Catholic) communities shall not be identified as identical groups and Catholicism shall not be introduced as a characteristic of all of Lithuania's citizens or as universally common.²⁹

Discrimination in educational institutions is rarely observed due to the small number of Muslim people. However, incidents when certain university lecturers inappropriately commented on Islam-related matters were recorded.³⁰

Politics

Municipal council and local mayor elections took place in Lithuania in spring 2015. The debate on immigration, asylum seekers and Muslims did not occupy any particular role during the municipal election campaigns. The next parliamentary elections will be held in October 2016 so political campaigning is expected.

Some political decisions can be affiliated to the increase of negative public opinion towards Muslims in 2015, but these are not necessarily negative opinions expressed by politicians. Newly elected Vilnius City Mayor Remigijus Šimašius informed the public that a new mosque would not be built in Vilnius.³¹ According to the representative of the Muslim community in Lithuania (known to the authors of this research), the Mayor said that the decision not to provide a land to the Lithuanian Muslim community for building a mosque was due to the negative public opinion of Muslims.

Islamophobic or xenophobic discourse cannot be noticed when analysing the political party programmes (focusing on major political parties that have seats in parliament). The programmes for the 2016 parliamentary election have not been publicised yet.

An increase of Islamophobic attitudes among politicians can be noticed in the second half of 2015, mostly in relation to discussions on the so-called 'refugee crisis' in Europe, and a general increase of anti-asylum, anti-migration, racist and xenophobic views. Attitudes vary from those that are 'merely' anti-migrant and anti-refugee, to those openly xenophobic and Islamophobic, and are expressed by politicians from various parties. Politicians from the Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats party express different attitudes which vary from claims that the majority of

29. *Ibid.*

30. Interview with the association "Balturka", Baltic Turkish Culture Academy, 4 January 2016.

31. BNS, "R. Šimašius: a mosque will not be built in Vilnius", *Delfi.lt*, 24 September, 2015, accessed 16 December, 2015, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/r-simasius-vilniuje-mecete-nebus-statoma.d?id=69100754>.

Muslims support terrorist activities³² or making references to migrants as terrorists³³ to calling for the government's positive actions to have clearer integration steps for newly arrived refugees,³⁴ expressed by the leader of the party. Based on the analysis of public statements by the leaders and party members of the Labour party,³⁵ the Order and Justice party,³⁶ and the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania,³⁷ it seems that they all express anti-migrant and anti-refugee views. Some of them are mixed with Islamophobic attitudes or naming religion as a barrier for integration of refugees and/or migrants,³⁸ and the fear for the safety of Europe,³⁹ expressed both before and after Paris attacks. The Prime Minister stressed that every migrant will go through a thorough investigation to ensure they meet the requirements for refugee status and only when then will they be allowed to enter Lithuania.⁴⁰

32. Kęstutis Masiulis, "How to integrate terrorists?", *Delfi.lt*, 18 November, 2015, accessed 16 December, 2015, <http://www.delfi.lt/archive/article.php?id=69660054>. "Explosions in Paris, attacks on free press, and other forms of terrorism are made in the name of Alach and let's not pretend, the majority of Muslims support these activities".

33. Mantas Adomėnas, "M. Adomėnas. Beyond black and white: a lack of clear analysis on refugee matters", *Delfi.lt*, 27 September, 2015, accessed 16 December, 2015, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/m-adomenas-anapus-juoda-ir-balta-pabegeliu-klausimu-labiausiai-truksta-blaivios-analizes.d?id=68960070>. "The danger of radicalisation, fundamentalist 'Islamic purification' and 'return towards ancestors' values' always lie even within moderate Muslim communities".

34. Eglė Digrytė, "Gabrielius Landsbergis: if we accept as many refugees as Germany, we would have already 30,000 people", *15min.lt*, 9 September, 2015, accessed 16 December, 2015, <http://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/gabrielius-landsbergis-jei-pabegeliu-priimtume-kiek-vokieciai-vien-siomet-butu-30-tukst-zmoniu-56-526791>. "The problem is not related to a nation or religion, but arises from the social environment. We will know that our future is safe and secure, only if we answer the questions of how we would integrate refugees, which municipalities and schools and who will educate children" – Gabrielius Landsbergis, MEP, Leader of Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats.

35. Official page of the Labour Party, "Labour Party: Acceptance of refugees in Lithuania is a mistake", 22 July, 2015, accessed 17 December, 2015, <https://www.darbopartija.lt/naujienos/19312/>. "It's necessary to pay attention to the language, cultural and religious differences of these people and countries, where they are being sent and then it is not hard to understand that the integration cannot be smooth, but practically impossible" – a quote from the Leader of the Labour Party, MEP, Valentinas Mazuronis.

36. Rolandas Paksas, "R. Paksas: Let's get rid of pink glasses, not of automatic guns", 25 November, 2015, accessed 16 December, 2015, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/r-paksas-atsisakykime-ne-automatu-bet-roziniu-akiniu.d?id=69668700>. "It is constantly stressed that one cannot blame all Muslims and refugees for terror attacks. I do not. I only want to stress that no religion is peaceful. We had also bloodstained crusades against infidels. And we currently have another religion's 'crusade' and we have to adequately evaluate and properly defend ourselves."

37. "Three politicians working for Lithuania. And whom for are others working?" *Respublika.lt*, 23 September, 2015, accessed 17 December, 2015, <http://www.ve.lt/naujienos/lietuva/lietuvos-naujienos/trys-politikai-dirba-lietuvai-kam-dirba-kiti-1398660/>. "I think that Muslims could be accepted by Saudi Arabia and other rich Muslim countries, since they do not have anything in common with our worldview and there might be problems faced by them and us. And we could accept Christians." – Valdemar Tomaševski, MEP, leader of Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania.

38. For more see: Mečislovas Zasiurinskas, "M. Zasiurinskas. I pray for Paris, but think about Lithuania", *Delfi.lt*, 18 November, 2015, accessed 17 December, 2015, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/m-zasiurinskas-meldzi-uosi-uz-paryziu-bet-galvoju-apie-lietuva.d?id=69610652>.

39. "V. Mazuronis: pabėgėlių kvotos Lietuvai reikia atsisakyti", 30 November, 2015, <http://www.bernardinai.lt/straipsnis/2015-11-30-v-mazuronis-pabegeliu-kvotos-lietuvai-reikia-atsisakyti/137923>

40. Giedrė Baltrušytė, "A. Butkevičius: only those refugees that we have all information about will come to Lithuania", 17 November, 2015, <http://kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/lietuva/politika/butkevicius-i-lietuva-atvyks-tik-tie-pabegeliai-apie-kuriuos-zinosime-viska-720230>

Many politicians, it must be noted, are calling for discussions about refugees and/or migrants and expressing an opinion that “Lithuania is ready to accept refugees”.⁴¹ Many of these discussions are still mixed with the topics of public security and safety – nevertheless they are calling in favour of not naming every migrant a terrorist.⁴² Especially local level politicians have expressed a need for more objective information about refugees, a unified position by politicians on refugees, and a media position that will not divide society⁴³.

Justice System

There have not been any draft laws submitted in 2015 worsening the situation of Muslims. The Chairman of the Parliamentary National Security and Defence Committee expressed a need to prohibit the covering of the face as a preventive measure to ensure national security, while accepting refugees from Muslim countries.⁴⁴

The representative of the Islam Culture and Education Centre stressed that the “initiative of the ban of burqas in public spaces” was unnecessary and stressed that the Koran does not require the covering of a woman’s face, and it’s not a religious, but rather a cultural practice, not used by Muslims living in Lithuania and not widespread among the countries of origin of the refugees that might be accepted in Lithuania in the future.⁴⁵

The public initiation on the prohibition of burqas was seen as not relevant by the Prime Minister of Lithuania Algirdas Butkevičius, who expressed a need to concentrate on the integration of refugees and mentioned that similar questions, if needed, will be solved in the future.⁴⁶ A draft law, prohibiting the wearing of burqas or niqabs, was not registered as of 10 January, 2016.

41. Indrė Vainalavičiūtė, “Is Lithuania really ready to accept refugees?”, 23 October, 2015, <http://lietuovsdiena.lrytas.lt/aktualijos/ar-lietuva-tikrai-yra-pasirengusi-sutikti-pabegelius.htm>

42. “S. Skvernelis encourages not to fear refugees and a stricter collection of data”, 19 November, 2015 <http://lsveikata.lt/aktualijos/sskvernelis-ragina-nesibaiminti-nei-pabegeliu-nei-grieztesnio-duomenu-rinkimo-3910>, “It would be unfair, to put a sign of terrorist on every newly arriving person” – Minister of Interior S. Skvernelis.

43. “Refugees in Lithuania: integrated representatives of ethnic minorities or aliens?”, 14 October, 2015, <http://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/pabegeliai-lietuvoje-integruoti-tautiniu-mazumu-atstovai-ar-svetimsali-ai-56-533998>, “Šiauliai Vice Mayor Dr. Stasys Tumėnas noted that Lithuania had lived through history of war refugees of its own”, “Most important [...] is to have objective information on refugees, not only superficial articles in the media” – Šiauliai Adviser to the Mayor Vaidas Bacys. “In the opinion of Gediminas Grybė, Pakruojis district vice mayor, the media often divides society [...] why don’t politicians sit down and express a unified position on refugees, it would unify society”.

44. BNS, “A. Paulauskas: accepted refugees will have to adhere to our rules”, *lrt.lt*, 23 August, 2015, accessed 12 December, 2015, http://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/110882/a_paulauskas_priimti_pabegeliai_tures_laikytis_musu_taisykliu. BNS, lrt.lt, “A. Paulauskas: arrival of refugees will raise questions on wearing burqas. Criticised by human rights experts”, *delfi.lt*, 13 August, 2015, accessed 12 December, 2015, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/a-paulauskas-pabegeliu-atvykimas-iskels-ir-burkos-devejimo-klausima.d?id=68724682>.

45. Interview with Aleksandras Beganskas, representative of the Islam Education and Culture Centre, 23 December, 2015.

46. BNS, “Algirdas Butkevičius: refugee integration is more relevant than prohibition of burqas”, *15min.lt*, 13 August, 2015, accessed 12 December, 2015, <http://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/algirdas-butkevicius-aktualesnis-klausimas-uz-burku-devejima-pabegeliu-integracija-56-521625>.

According to the Human Rights Monitoring Institute, ensuring the replacement of pork dishes with only vegetarian options in the Foreigners' Registration Centre is not fully ensuring the implementation of the principle of equal treatment.⁴⁷ The Minister of Internal Affairs adopted provisions which enforced the change of pork products with other alternatives in accordance to a person's religious beliefs.⁴⁸ A complaint has been submitted by the inhabitants of the Foreigners' Registration Centre in 2013, asking to evaluate the provision of meals in the Foreigners' Registration Centre with consideration given to the individuals' religious beliefs. The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson recognised that the right to access food according to a person's religious beliefs was limited for a large number of people and that they, therefore, have experienced religious discrimination.⁴⁹ New complaints regarding the matter have not been submitted - positive legal developments were mentioned in section 4.

Media Response

No media and cyberspace monitoring research on asylum seekers and refugees, including Muslims, has been carried out in Lithuania in 2015. However, while analysing media content, related to Islamophobia, the so-called 'refugee crisis' and discussions on the refugee quota systems have to be emphasised. This is to say that the phenomenon of Islamophobia has to be analysed in a broader context of xenophobia and immigration issues, particularly the recent so-called 'refugee crisis', which brought forth various challenges such as the rise of anti-immigrant attitudes in general and anti-refugee attitudes in particular; the increase of xenophobic statements by public commentators and politicians; and new forms of opposition in cyberspace against 'mass immigration' and refugee relocation programmes (see below). In this context, some fragmented manifestations of Islamophobia in the media are identified. In general, these instances have a direct link to such external factors as the Charlie Hebdo attack, the so-called 'refugee crisis' and the terror attacks in Paris.

While analysing media response towards different immigration and ethnic/religious issues, emphasis should be given to the fact that publications on immigration issues in Lithuania appear after certain events. For example, articles are usually triggered by certain legislative developments, perceptions of threat (such as terrorism, crimes, riots, unemployment) and other challenges such as cultural incompatibility, racism and illegal work. This can be illustrated by the media attention to the recent so-called 'refugee crisis' and discussions on refugee relocations programmes.

47. Human Rights Monitoring Institute, *Human Rights Overview 2013-2014*, Lithuanian version (2015), p. 193-194.

48. An order by the Minister of Interior amending the order regarding the "Provisions regulating conditions and rules of temporary accommodation of foreigners within the Foreigners' registration centre", *Vidaus reikalų ministro įsakymas Dėl Lietuvos Respublikos vidaus reikalų ministro 2007 m. spalio 4 d. įsakymo Nr. 1V-340 „Dėl Laikinojo užsieniečių apgyvendinimo užsieniečių registracijos centre sąlygų ir tvarkos aprašo patvirtinimo“ pakeitimo*, Nr. 1V-42, 31 January, 2015, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/8e67fc008a6b11e3adad91663975b89f>.

49. Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, *Annual Activity report 2013* (Vilnius, 2014), p. 39-43, <http://lygybe.lt/lt/metines-tarnybos-ataskaitos.html>.

During 2015, public and media attention to asylum issues significantly increased as publications on the so-called 'refugee crisis' became frequent. Moreover, the so-called 'refugee crisis' received greater media coverage than issues related to labour immigration in Lithuania in 2005–2008, when the peak of labour immigration was identified, followed by intense debate on the securitisation of the immigration processes.⁵⁰ Looking deeper at the media response to the so-called 'refugee crisis', a division of opinions emerged as public commentators and politicians had (and still have) different attitudes towards the quota system and the voluntary acceptance of refugees. It seems that resistance towards accepting responsibility is much greater than a willingness to accept the quota. Moreover, an analysis of media coverage of the so-called 'refugee crisis' and relocation programmes revealed quite stable xenophobic manifestations on the one hand, and more fragmented Islamophobic attitudes, on the other. Concerning xenophobic manifestations, the media usually emphasised general challenges related to 'uncontrolled flows of asylum seekers and refugees' and its consequences, such as threat, terrorism and insecurity.⁵¹ Regarding Islamophobic statements, particular alleged challenges were considered, such as religion and integration failures.⁵² Usually, such challenges were reported while considering different (usually negative) experiences of Western European countries. However, the media still remains the only channel where the challenging situations faced by migrants and refugees can, at least, be given publicity. Due to the stereotypical coverage of refugees, however, such publicity tends to have negative undertones.

The newest research on media monitoring⁵³ illustrates both xenophobic and Islamophobic manifestations, where immigration in general is considered as a threat (using such words as 'wave', 'occupation' and 'influx'), while immigration of Muslims in particular is regarded through the metaphor of war, such as 'Muslims are conquering without weapons' or that they are an 'encroaching crowd of unexpected guests'.

The entire corpus of political and public debates around the so-called 'refugee crisis' can be illustrated through public opinion polls (or attitudes towards immigration and refugees). The analysis of public opinion polls⁵⁴ revealed that the mass media is perhaps the most important and most widespread form of public contact

50. For example, 'Immigration is a delay-action bomb', *delfi.lt*, 25.06.2006; 'Hundreds of thousands of migrant workers will flood Lithuania', *delfi.lt*, 07.07.2007; 'Newcomers from the East are occupying free workplaces', *delfi.lt*, 02.08.2005; 'The test of globalisation is waiting', *delfi.lt*, 11.04.2005; 'Chinese dream is their own Chinatown in Vilnius', *Balsas.lt*, 21.11.2007; 'Waiting for Chinatown', *VZ.lt*, 26.11.2008.

51. For example, 'K. Masiulis: How to integrate terrorists', *delfi.lt*, 29.11.2015; 'A. Kubilius: Middle East - refugees and terrorism: what awaits us and what we should do?', *tsajunga.lt*, 17.11.25; 'After terrorist attacks in Paris: do you feel safe?', *snaujienos.lt*.

52. For example, 'Europe, conquered by Islam, will fail as Constantinople', *sarmatas.lt*, 03.12.2015; 'S. Lapėnas. 56 % of migrants support terrorists of 'Islamic state'. What are we inviting to Lithuania?', *alkas.lt*, 17.11.2015.

53. For more details on media monitoring, see: <http://www.ces.lt/projektai/buve-projektai/migracijos-tyrimu-projektai/treciuju-saliu-pilicciu-integracijos-trajektorijos-ir-vertinimo-mechanizmai/>

54. For more see: <http://www.ces.lt/veikla-2/ziniasklaidos-stebesena/visuomenes-nuomones-apklausa/>

with immigrants and refugees (including Muslims). It can be argued that so far the information provided by mass media and the attitudes prevailing in public discourse have more relevance to the approach towards immigrants and refugees (including Muslim), and that they do not appear to affect (direct) social contacts.

No particular Islamophobic, anti-immigrant or anti-refugee campaigns in Lithuanian media have been identified with the exception of activities in cyberspace such as social media and blogs, fragmented and unpopular websites (see below).

Cyberspace

Contrary to traditional media channels, cyberspace could be characterised by its diversity of xenophobic manifestations, especially during the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ and after both terror attacks in Paris. Regarding Islamophobic manifestations in Lithuanian cyberspace, social media and traditional websites have to be emphasised. There is a strong link between the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ and refugee quotas on one hand, and the emergence of new xenophobic and Islamophobic initiatives in cyberspace, on the other. Some examples of Facebook groups include ‘Public committee against mass immigration’⁵⁵; ‘Lithuania is not a place for Syrian refugees’⁵⁶; ‘Lithuania is not the jungle of multiculturalism’⁵⁷; ‘Be Lithuanian, fight for Lithuania’⁵⁸; ‘Lithuania for Lithuanians’⁵⁹ and many other similar initiatives that spread xenophobic and Islamophobic messages and, at the same time, whose influence goes far beyond cyberspace. Some of these initiatives are initiating petitions against refugee relocation programmes and participating in demonstrations against immigration. No direct link between these initiatives and political parties, however, has been identified. Moreover, the content, which is published on the profiles of these initiatives, should be considered as an open incitement of hatred against immigrants (refugees) in general and Muslims in particular. Such incitements are not republished in traditional media channels.

At the same time, there are websites,⁶⁰ where anti-immigrant and anti-refugee attitudes are openly expressed. Though these cannot be directly linked to manifestations of Islamophobia, some of the published material is linked to refugees and immigrants from Islamic countries. These websites collect and publish one-sided and negative information about refugees in the EU and challenges raised by ‘mass immigration’.

55. For more see: <https://www.facebook.com/priesimigracija/>

56. For more see: <https://www.facebook.com/No.place.for.Syria/?fref=nf>

57. For more see: <https://www.facebook.com/seimininkai/>

58. For more see: <https://www.facebook.com/NestovekPoMedziu/?fref=nf>

59. For more see: https://www.facebook.com/lietuva.lietuviams.77/?ref=br_rs

60. For examples see: <http://kulgrinda.lt/>, <http://www.baltalietuva.eu/>, <http://www.respublika.lt/>, <http://sioe.blogas.lt/apie>, <http://www.patriotai.lt/>, <http://alkas.lt/?s=pabegeliai>, <http://www.respublika.lt/>

Central figures in the network of Islamophobia

There are no Islamophobic institutions or activists that are fostering Islamophobic campaigns, stirring up debates and lobbying for laws. However, there are few political organisations, which openly declare their anti-immigrant positions. This was especially visible during the debates on the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ and refugee relocation programmes as well as after the terror attacks in Paris. For example, during the congress of the Lithuanian Nationalist Union, Member of Parliament Naglis Puteikis rhetorically asked: “Have you already bought Arabic language textbooks? More ammunition Kurds will receive, fewer Arabs in Europe and Lithuania will survive”.⁶¹ It is one of many examples of how general xenophobic statements and anti-immigrant rhetoric can be directly linked to manifestations of Islamophobia or hatred towards immigrants from Islamic countries (for more about manifestations of Islamophobia in politics, see Politics).

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

As the majority of Lithuanian society has rarely personally met a Muslim person,⁶² the majority of information comes from the media. Few initiatives can be mentioned as countering Islamophobia and raising awareness on the topic.

‘Mišri šeima’, ‘Priimsiu pabėgėlių’ (‘Mixed family’, ‘Welcome Refugees’) – this initiative was started a year ago as a volunteer hub for sharing experiences on living in ‘mixed’ families. These initiatives later evolved into a “Welcome Refugees” campaign which is very active in raising awareness on Islam and refugees’ lives.⁶³

A programme for young journalists by the National Social Integration Institute.⁶⁴ This initiative educates young journalists, who are still studying or have recently graduated. Every participant of the programme has a mentor, who coaches and helps him or her develop an article. Two participants of the programme carried out an experiment by going into public space with a burka and niqab and writing about their experience and perceived judgements by society.⁶⁵

The public exhibition “Islam in Lithuania” by photographer Neringa Rekašiūtė opened a few days after the Paris attacks. The event was widely covered in the media.⁶⁶

61. For more, see ‘Congress of nationalists: more guns, less Arabs!’ Available at <http://lietuvosdiena.lrytas.lt/aktualijos/tautininkai-suvaziavime-daugiau-ginklu-maziau-arabu.htm>

62. Institute for Ethnic Studies at Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Public Opinion Surveys 2009–2015, <http://www.ces.lt/veikla-2/ziniasklaidos-stebesena/visuomenes-nuomones-apklausus/>

63. See more: www.priimsiupabegeli.lt, www.misriseima.lt

64. See more: www.zurnalistui.lt

65. See more: <http://www.media4change.co/lt/tyrimai/2907-3/>

66. See more: <http://unesco.lt/news/archives/2981>

Civil society organisations such as the association ‘Balturka’ implement projects that trigger discussions on multiculturalism and promote open society. These include workshops on Turkish culture and language in schools, blood donation campaigns for the National Blood Centre, and other intercultural projects.

The Islam Education and Culture Centre provides information to members of society on interpretations of Islam and Muslims in Lithuania, and engages in dialogues with the media, politicians and state institutions.

CONCLUSION: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLITICS AND NGOs

Employment

- Measures must be taken to protect victims of discrimination and to assist them in filing complaints against their employers and other perpetrators.
- In the light of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ and the influx of refugees, sensitive measures for integration have to be developed: guidelines for job hunting, work with potential employees to consider language requirements and cultural differences.
- Ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990).

Education

- Establish state-funded infrastructure and ensure that measures are taken to integrate children of migrant backgrounds, as well as children who learn in a language other than their mother tongue, into the education system.
- Involve journalists into proactive discussions about the promotion of diversity and the responsibility of the media in the formation of negative attitudes towards the Muslim community.
- Ratify the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960).

Politics

- Carry out continuous monitoring of politicians using hate speech, especially during election campaigns, to prevent Islamophobic hate speech from spreading.
- Highlight the political initiatives that are bringing positive changes to discussions of the possible solutions to the so-called ‘refugee crisis’.
- Justice
- Provide information and support to potential victims of hate crimes, hate speech included.
- Establish an effective mechanism of recording hate crime; if this is not possible, establish an alternative recording mechanism to evaluate hate crime.
- Initiate legal changes ensuring the proactive role of Office of the Equal Oppor-

tunities Ombudsperson, whereby it can bring cases of discrimination to court on behalf of victims of discrimination.

Media and cyberspace

- Implement a long-term monitoring mechanism to prevent ethnic and Islamophobic hatred in mass media and cyberspace.
- Initiate training courses for journalists on the following issues: how to shed light on issues such as the so-called ‘refugee crisis’, the threat of terrorism, and immigration.
- Initiate alternative media campaigns on informing the public about immigration, asylum seekers and other specific issues, which currently might be receiving inadequate coverage.

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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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