
EUROPEAN
ISLAMOPHOBIA
REPORT
2016



ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

EUROPEAN
ISLAMOPHOBIA
REPORT

2016

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)



COPYRIGHT © 2017 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: 978-975-2459-00-7

Cover and Layout: Erkan Söğüt

Printed in Turkey, İstanbul by Turkuvaz Haberleşme ve Yayıncılık A.Ş., 2017

**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 currently Fulbright–Botstiber Visiting Professor of Austrian-American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He is a lecturer and researcher at the Department of Sociology and Political Science at the University of Salzburg. Hafez earned his PhD in Political Science from the University of Vienna and has been teaching at numerous universities across the world. He has been a visiting scholar at Columbia University. Hafez is the founding editor of the *German-English Islamophobia Studies Yearbook* (www.jahrbuch-islamophobie.de). He was awarded the Bruno Kreisky Award for the political book of 2009 for his German anthology *Islamophobia in Austria*, which he co-edited with Prof. John Bunzl. He has published more than 10 books and 40 articles. His articles have appeared in high-ranking journals such as *Patterns of Prejudice*, *Austrian Journal of Political Science*, *Discourse and Society*, *German Politics and Society*, *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, *Journal of Black Studies*, and many others. E-mail: farid.hafez@sbg.ac.at

For more information about the EIR:

www.islamophobiaeurope.com

islamophobia@setav.org

THE STATE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ

This is the second edition of the annual *European Islamophobia Report (EIR)* which was presented for the first time in 2015. New countries are included in this year's *EIR*; while 25 countries were covered in 2015, the report for 2016 includes 27 country reports. *EIR 2016* is the result of 31 prominent scholars who specialise in different fields such as racism, gender and Islamophobia Studies. In the years to come we will attempt to include more countries in our report. Our final aim is to cover and monitor the developments of Islamophobia in all European countries.

Islamophobia has become a real danger to the foundations of democratic order and the values of the European Union. It has also become the main challenge to the social peace and coexistence of different cultures, religions and ethnicities in Europe. The country reports of *EIR 2016*, which cover almost all the European continent from Russia to Portugal and from Greece to Latvia, clearly show that the level of Islamophobia in fields such as education, employment, media, politics, the justice system and the Internet is on the rise. Since the publication of the last report there is little improvement. On the contrary, one can see from the country reports that the state of democracy and human rights in Europe is deteriorating. Islamophobia has become more real especially in the everyday lives of Muslims in Europe. It has surpassed the stage of being a rhetorical animosity and has become a physical animosity that Muslims feel in everyday life be it at school, the workplace, the mosque, transportation or simply on the street.

The refugee movement and the turmoil it has created in Europe, the unprecedented rise of far right parties all across the continent and the UK's Brexit decision, which took many by surprise, have revealed the importance and relevance of this report, which covers incidents and developments in 2016. The short-term political significance of Islamophobia is as much relevant as Islamophobia's structural dimension. As mentioned before, small successes can be witnessed in some European countries yet great challenges lie ahead for deepening the values of human rights and freedom of religion in Europe.

The Rise of Islamophobia

As a survey conducted by the Chatham House Europe Programme shows, public opposition to any further migration from predominantly Muslim states is by no means confined to Trump's administration (implementation of the 'Muslim-Ban'). Respondents in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain and the UK were presented with the statement 'All further migration from mainly Muslim countries should be stopped'. As the report reveals, the majorities in all but two of the ten states agreed to this statement, ranging from 71% in Poland, 65% in Austria, 53% in Germany and 51% in Italy to 47% in the United Kingdom and 41% in Spain. In no country did the percentage that disagreed surpass 32%.¹

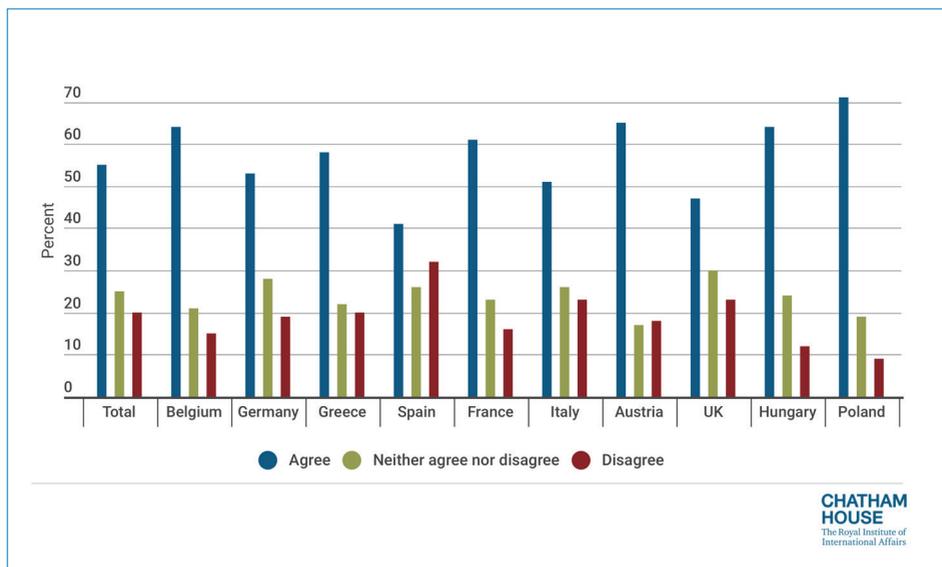


Figure 1: Public opposition to any further migration from predominantly Muslim states in Europe.²

The findings of this report go hand in hand with similar surveys on this topic. The Ipsos Perils of Perception Survey 2016 found that the current and the future Muslim population in Europe are enormously overestimated in most countries. Out of the list of all 20 countries where respondents overestimated the Muslim population by more than 10%, 12 are European, while the USA and Canada are among the remaining 8 countries. When asked "Now thinking about 2020, out of every 100 people, about how many do you think will be Muslim?", the top 20 countries where proponents overestimated the Muslim population again were in majority European (11). The average guess in France is that 40% of

1. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/what-do-europeans-think-about-muslim-immigration#sthash.O6J7kQrj.dpuf>

2. Chatham House, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/what-do-europeans-think-about-muslim-immigration>

the population will be Muslim in 2020 when the actual projection is 8.3%. Italy comes third with 26% overestimation, and Belgium and Germany fourth with 24% overestimation.³

Connecting this to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, we can suggest that this overestimation is connected to unfavourable views regarding Muslims. The report states,

“Opinions of Muslims vary considerably across Europe. Half or more in Hungary, Italy, Poland, Greece and Spain have a very or somewhat unfavorable view of Muslims. And in Italy (36%), Hungary (35%) and Greece (32%), roughly a third hold very unfavorable opinions. Majorities in the other nations surveyed express positive attitudes about Muslims. Nonetheless, at least a quarter in each country have negative views of Muslims.”⁴

These numbers are not shocking if we look at the incidents of Islamophobia and its pervasiveness in power structure across Europe. Muslims are seen as the enemy ‘within’. There is wide consent in Western societies to Muslims not being seen as equal citizens. Othering and differential treatment may also overlap with the dehumanization of Muslims. Thus, physical attacks and political restrictions can often be carried out and even defended in an atmosphere of wide distrust and enmity. Islamophobia is by no means confined to the working poor or the middle class, who have been misinformed about Islam and Muslims. It is especially true for the so-called educated elite. Discriminating policies like the ban of the hijab for certain professions, the ban of the niqab in public, bans of minarets and other laws restricting Muslim’s freedom of religion speak volumes. If politicians can take such decisions and the media, along with large parts of society, accept them, why should we wonder about the strong opposition to immigration of Muslim people in Europe?

Hence, these numbers reveal the necessity of the *EIR*, which looks at the challenge of Islamophobia from a qualitative and not a quantitative research perspective. Its aim is to document and analyse trends in the spread of Islamophobia in various European nation states. There cannot be a claim of full comprehensiveness, since European nation states by majority still lack data collection. Hence, a central recommendation of the *EIR* is that Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hate crime should be included as a category in European nation states’ statistics – a development that has not occurred as of yet. The *EIR*’s primary contribution is to reveal the tendencies of Islamophobia and to give representative examples of its overall unfolding in the investigated states.

3. <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/ipsos-mori-perils-of-perception-charts-2016.pdf>

4. <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/07/Pew-Research-Center-EU-Refugees-and-National-Identity-Report-FINAL-July-11-2016.pdf>

Recognition of Islamophobia

There are various definitions of Islamophobia. However, the definition of Islamophobia used by the *EIR*, as defined by its editors, is as follows,

“When talking about Islamophobia, we mean anti-Muslim racism. As Anti-Semitism Studies has shown, the etymological components of a word do not necessarily point to its complete meaning, nor 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, because Islamophobia tells us more about the Islamophobe than it tells us about the Muslims/Islam”.⁵

We think that with this definition, we clearly address many of the suspicions, which are put against the term as such. As a matter of fact, while supranational institutions such as the OSCE embrace the terminology Anti-Semitism, the OSCE still refuses to use Islamophobia, which we see as part of the problem. Again, we recommend that Islamophobia/anti-Muslim Racism or anti-Muslim hate crime should be included in the collection of “equality data” in all European states. Institutions such as the OSCE need to establish solid monitoring and recording mechanisms for discrimination, hate crime and hate speech towards Muslims. In order to have reliable data, it has to be segregated by bias/category and also segregated by gender. This is even more problematic in countries that do not allow collection of data on religion or race. This seemingly egalitarian approach in reality hides the discrimination of Muslims. Also, response mechanisms seem to be unclear and not adequately used. When there is an incident of discrimination/hate crime/hate speech, there are different response mechanisms available, yet, none of these are familiar to the vast majority of Muslim citizens of European countries. Thus, we recommend that response mechanisms should be made more available, accessible and clear. Last but not least, an empowerment of the Muslim community is needed to strengthen critical citizenship and help European states deepen their democracies.

5. Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2015*, Istanbul, SETA, 2016, p.7.

Policy Recommendations for European Countries

The authors of every respective national report have suggested specific recommendations regarding the country they have covered. The following list of recommendations serves to underscore some of these recommendations and to add some additional suggestions on the supranational level.

We think it is important for civil society to understand that Islamophobia is a problem of institutional racism. The illusion that Europe is a post-racial society prevents large parts of European societies from recognising the severe challenge of Islamophobia to local societies. The focus has to shift from Muslims' actions to those of European societies. Racism, including Islamophobia, tells us more about the racists than about their imagined scapegoat or their victims. Hence, Islamophobia reveals aspects of Europe and the internal problems European societies continue to face. A recognition and a critical consciousness of this societal disease is of utmost importance to be able to create more just societies in Europe. At the same time, Muslims must be allowed to enjoy their spaces of freedom like other dominant religious and political groups in European societies without being securitised or criminalised. The securitisation of Islam, especially policies countering violent extremism and their impact on the freedom of religion of belief for Muslims, and even freedom of movement or free assembly have to be challenged by all democratic forces in Europe. Communities must be consulted and human rights frameworks must be respected. National security is not among the criteria that should permit the limitation of freedom of religion or belief.

We especially urge politicians to speak out against Islamophobia as one of the most pressing forms of racism in our days. Europe needs more courageous politicians who do not only challenge the politics of right-wing populist parties, but also challenge institutionalised forms of racism targeting Muslims in the fields of employment, education, state bureaucracy, and media. We also call for journalists and editors to challenge Islamophobic reporting in their news media and give space to more balanced views. Generally, the issue of religious literacy is a huge problem that does not only concern media but also the police, prosecutors and civil servants. We see that people simply lack basic knowledge on Islam and Muslims' practices. We see a need for the introduction of more comparative religion courses, or religious teaching, in a formal and informal educational setting.

We see that Muslim women are among the most vulnerable direct victims of Islamophobia. ENAR has conducted a report on the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women and presented 37 recommendations, which we can only underscore given the findings of our report.⁶ Women who are visibly Muslim are socially ostracised in many places. The combination of internal community prob-

6. http://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/forgottenwomenpublication_lr_final_with_latest_corrections.pdf

lems, discrimination (education and employment) and hate crimes against Muslim women (data shows that it is 70% more likely for a muslim woman to be attacked in the street) are leaving their horrible mark on Muslim women. Hence, the protection and the empowerment of Muslim women have to be on the central agenda of states and NGOs. The ruling of the European Court of Justice regarding Esmâ Bougnaoui's dismissal by a French company for wearing a hijab when dealing with clients as unlawful discrimination is an important step towards equality and an anti-discriminatory society.⁷ At the same time, the case of Belgian Samira Achbita vs. Belgium, where it was argued that a dismissal due to the headscarf would be permissible against the backdrop of a general prohibition of all outward signs of political, philosophical and religious beliefs exhibited by employees in the workplace, is worrying and challenges the reality of a diverse Europe.⁸

7. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/14/world/europe/france-head-scarf-court.html?_r=0

8. <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=179082&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=678370>

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
ALBANIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2016

BESNIK SINANI

The Author

Besnik Sinani is a PhD fellow at Free University of Berlin, Germany. His project explores modern constructions of Islamic religious orthodoxy, as well as religion, society, and politics in contemporary Saudi Arabia. He holds an MA in Near East Studies from New York University, where he wrote his thesis on the transformation and transportation of religious ideas by focusing on Albanian imams educated in Saudi Arabia. He is contributing author of *Applying Sharia in the West: Facts, Fears, and the Future of Islamic Rules on Family in the West (2013)* published by Leiden University Press. Since 2009, he has written for various publications in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo on religion and secularism, religious extremism, and Islamophobia. E-mail: bs1387@nyu.edu.

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: Besnik Sinani (2017): *Islamophobia in Albania. National Report 2016*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2016*, Istanbul, SETA, 2017.

Executive Summary

Following the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris in 2015, the Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama, spoke of the danger of religious extremism, while drawing attention to the potential threat of Islamophobia, inspired, as he stated, by right-wing movements and political parties in Europe. It was the first time that an Albanian official admitted the threat, or even the potential of Islamophobia in Albania, a nominally Muslim majority country that prides itself on religious tolerance. Despite this open admission, there have been no government policies to address such a threat, or even attempts to collect data on the reality of Islamophobia, its nature, its scope, and the affects it has in the Muslim community and society at large. Otherwise, public intellectuals, analysts, and pundits in Albania deny the possibility of Islamophobia in a Muslim majority country. Despite the lack of studies and reports on the state of Islamophobia in Albania, or recognition of its very existence, there are enough indications of the presence of persistent patterns of Islamophobia that are reflected in the discourse of political leaders, in media, school textbooks, violent incidents, and arbitrary arrests. Contrary to some reports, Islamophobia in Albania is not a recent phenomenon, and to a large extent is not driven – as it is believed to be the case in other European countries – by emigration or terrorist attacks. Islamophobia in Albania is entrenched in the political identity of the post-communist Albanian state, and its aspiration to become ‘European’. It reflects and recycles the anti – Muslim and anti – immigrant rhetoric of European Islamophobia to stigmatize its own citizens of the Muslim faith, perpetuating patterns of discrimination that undermine overall social cohesion.

Përmbledhje Ekzekutive

Pas sulmeve të Charlie Hebdos në Paris në vitin 2015, Kryeministri i Shqipërisë Edi Rama foli rreth rrezikut të ekstremizmit fetar teksa tërhoqi vëmendjen rreth mundësisë së rrezikut të Islamofobisë të frymëzuar, siç tha ai, nga lëvizje dhe parti politike të djathta në Europë. Ishte hera e parë që një zyrtar shqiptar pranonte rrezikun apo qoftë mundësinë e shfaqjes së Islamofobisë në Shqipëri, një vend nominalisht me shumicë muslimane, që krenohet me tolerancën e vet fetare. Megjithë këtë pranim, nuk ka patur asnjë politikë qeveritare për të adresuar një rrezik të tillë, apo qoftë përpjekje për të mbledhur të dhëna rreth realitetit të Islamofobisë, natyrës e kapacitetit të saj, si dhe efektit që ka mbi bashkësinë muslimane dhe shoqërinë në tërësi. Në të kundërt, intelektualë publikë, analistë e ekspertë në Shqipëri mohojnë mundësinë e egzistencës së Islamofobisë në një vend me shumicë muslimane. Megjithë mungesën e studimeve apo raportimeve rreth stadi të Islamofobisë në vend, apo qoftë edhe mohimin e egzistencës së saj, gjenden mjaftueshëm tregues të prezencës së vazhdueshme të formave të Islamofobisë, të cilat reflektohen në ligjërimin e udhëheqësve politikë, në media, tekstet shkollore, incidente të dhunshme, dhe arrestime arbitrare. Përkundër disa raporteve, Islamofobia në Shqipëri nuk është një fenomen i kohëve të fundit, dhe përgjithësisht nuk është e motivuar – siç besohet të jetë në vende të tjera europiane – nga emigracioni apo sulmet terroriste. Islamofobia në Shqipëri i ka rrënjët në identitetin politik të shtetit shqiptar post – komunist, dhe aspiratën e tij për tu bërë ‘europian.’ Ajo reflekton dhe riciklon retorikën e islamofobisë europiane për të stigmatizuar qytetarët e saj të besimit musliman, duke vazhduar forma diskriminimi dhe duke dëmtuar kohezionin e përgjithshëm social të vendit.

Introduction

In 1967, Albania became the only country in the world to officially ban the practice of religion. The communist regime that came out of the Second World War demolished temples, closed down religious educational institutions, and imprisoned and executed members of the clergy. The Penal Code of 1977 made it a crime to propagate religion. In 1990, as the regime was facing its eminent downfall, following the events in Eastern Europe, the last communist leader, Ramiz Alia, took steps towards liberalization of religious services. Generations of Albanians had grown up not only alienated from their religious tradition, but also having gone through a system of education, and state-run cultural and political indoctrination that vilified religion and religious practices. In addition, the political process that brought the end of communism in Albania was perceived as a political vision directed towards Western Europe. The emerging political and cultural establishment of Albania saw the religious tradition of the majority of Albanians, Islam, as an impediment to ‘joining the European family’. It is against this background, that a towering figure of Albanian literature, Ismail Kadare, asked the last communist leader, Ramiz Alia, to allow the opening of Christian churches but not mosques. In his own words, this would repair the ‘historical accident’ that separated Albanians from their natural European family by being part of the Ottoman Empire for five centuries and the conversion of the majority of Albanians to Islam. In a similar vein, former deputy Prime Minister of Albania, Gramoz Pashko (1991-1995), stated in a paper he wrote on Christianity that the only hope for Albania is its young generation ‘which has loved European Civilization and Christian values’. Commenting on Pashko’s writing, scholar Maria Todorova points out that ‘[this] frank appeal to Christian values from a country that before it became atheist was 70% Muslim bespeaks the naiveté and straightforwardness of the Albanian political discourse that has not yet mastered the ennobling façade of the pluralist vocabulary’. She further adds: ‘It is, however, also a tribute to the sound political instincts of the new Albanian political elites who have not been duped by the pretence of supra-religious, non-racial, and non-ethnic universalism and pluralism of the European or Western discourse’.¹

In 2005, addressing an audience at the Oxford Union in the United Kingdom, the former President of Albania (2002-2007), Alfred Moisiu, declared that in their essence Albanians are Christians and Islam is not an original religion of the Albanians.² In 2012, a journalist asked the same series of questions to a number of politicians, one of them being: in what historical event would you wish to have been part of? Quite a few politicians responded by saying in the defence of Constantinople – the name of Istanbul under the Byzantine Empire -, an event that, in their view,

1. Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

2. Alfred Moisiu, “Fjala e mbajtur ne Unionin e Oxfordit,” [Speech presented at the Oxford Union], retrieved January 2006, from <http://www.president.al/english/pub/info.asp?id=1089>.

marked the tragic fate of Albanians. One of them described the conversion of Albanians to Islam as an act of ‘becoming yellow and black’ clearly using racist markers. The Head of the National Library of Albania, Dr. Aurel Plasari, called the conversion to Islam of Albanians ‘the Albanian betrayal of Jesus Christ’.³ These declarations are not motivated as much by a theological stand per se, as by identity politics that consider Christianity as an integral part of Western Civilization where Albania wants to integrate, and Islam as a marker of the backward East, and the Ottoman past from where Albania wants to escape. That is why the much-debated census in 2011 was seen by many as an opportunity for Albanians to remove the negative marker – in the eyes of Europeans – of being known as a Muslim majority country. Albanian politicians like the speaker of the Albanian Parliament have repeatedly stated that any obstacle towards European integration, like the failure to get visa liberalization with the EU in 2013 was due to Albania being seen as a Muslim country. It has to be noted that, the EU report mentioned failures of the Albanian government to meet its obligations and made no mention of religion. The fact that the only countries left out of the visa liberalisation agreement in 2013 were countries with majority Muslim or considerable number of Muslims (Albanian, Kosovo, Turkey, and Bosnia and Herzegovina) was used by these politicians to shift the debate from their own failures to religious identity politics.⁴ In a number of interviews with Western TV channels in 2015, the Prime Minister Edi Rama repeatedly stated that Albania is not a Muslim country.⁵ Paradoxically, in other interviews he warned European leaders that if EU fails to integrate Albania, the Albanian people might be attracted to alternatives such as the DAESH.⁶ The message to the Albanian population was clear: Islam and Muslims are not accepted in Europe. That is why in Albania since the fall of communism the primary targets of Islamophobia throughout ‘the years of transition’, have been the visible signs of Muslim presence: headscarves, beards, and mosque constructions. Current political leaders have modified their discourse into seemingly embracing the notion of religious diversity and tolerance as a national value, but as a review of school textbooks shows (see below), the Albanian state is committed to an identity construction that casts a shadow or at times fully negates the historical presence, the contribution, and significance of Islam and Muslims in the history of Albania.

3.E-Zani I Nalte, “Ekstremistet e medias Shqiptare,” *e-zani.com*, (June 1, 2012), retrieved December 27, 2016, from <http://www.e-zani.com/2012/06/01/ekstremistet-e-medias-shqiptare/>.

4. Anton Cara, “Dridhe Like me Konferencen Islamike,” *e-zani.com*, (December 23, 2013), retrieved December 27, 2016, from <http://www.e-zani.com/2013/12/23/dridhe-like-konferencen-islamike/>.

5.Panorama Online, “Rama, në ‘France24’: S’jemi vend mysliman, por europian. Europë nuk është një klub i krishterë,” *panorama*, (June 14, 2014), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.panorama.com.al/rama-sjemi-vend-mysliman-por-europian-europa-nuk-eshte-nje-klub-i-krishtere/>.

6.E-Zani I Nalte, “Edi Rama perdor karten islamike,” *e-zani.com*, (July 3, 2015), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.e-zani.com/2015/07/03/edi-rama-perdor-karten-islamike/>.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Education

On 22 September, 2016, Imam Muhamed Sytari, Mufti of Shkodra,⁷ one of the largest cities in the Northern region of Albania, posted on his Facebook page a comment about his son's 5th grade textbook that teaches students about the history of their city. As he points out, in a city where at least half of the population is of Muslim faith, out of over 30 famous writers, historical figures, actors named in the textbook, there is only one Muslim in the entire list otherwise composed of historical figures of the Catholic faith. There is a citadel on a hill overlooking the city and a temple that served as a Christian chapel before the Ottoman army took control of the citadel and transformed it into a mosque for the soldiers stationed there. It is commonly referred in many texts as a church/mosque. It has been a site of some communal dispute since occasionally Christians have performed the Sunday Mass in front of the ruins of the temple claiming it as a Christian house of worship (the latest incident was this year's Christmas Mass). Muslims have protested these moves and have occasionally conducted prayers in order to claim it as a Muslim temple. The textbook clearly sides with the Christian community by presenting the disputed edifice with a visible minaret as a church. The Mufti goes on to say that he has been raising concerns regarding such textbooks since 2008. He states that these kinds of texts are driven by Islamophobia and by an agenda to diminish the role of Muslims in the history of country.

It is not the first time the issue of textbooks is debated in the context of a Christian bias. In 2014, Professor of Sociology at the University of Tirana Enis Sulstarova wrote about his findings from a comparative study of school textbooks. The textbooks he reviewed, as he points out, present tenets of the Christian faith, like the miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ, as a historical fact, not as information on what Christians believe. On the other hand, aspects of the Muslim faith, like the Muslim belief on the origins of the Black Stone in the Holy Mosque in Mekkah, are rendered a 'superstition'.⁸ Even textbooks of mathematics are commonly peppered with information on Christian celebrations or Christian saints. Muslim parents, activists and bloggers have raised these issues on social media, blogs, and newspaper articles. The situation described by the Mufti in 2016, therefore, is not new; rather it is a continuation of the same patterns of bias in textbooks in the Albanian educational system.

The issue of the textbooks reflects a wider debate on the review of history textbooks, a debate that has exposed the fusion of Islamophobia, violation of secular-

7.H. Omari, "Teksti shkollor diskriminues "Vendlindja ime", *e-zani.com*, (September 22, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.e-zani.com/2016/09/22/teksti-shkollor-diskriminues-vendlindja-ime/>.

8.Enis Sulstarova, "Nga mohimi ne predikim: Mrekullia e ringjalljes ne librat shkollore te histories," *e-zani.com*, (April 24, 2014), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.e-zani.com/2014/04/24/nga-mohimi-ne-predikim-mrekullia-e-ringjalljes-ne-librat-shkollore-te-historise/>.

ism in promotion of Christianity,⁹ and anti-Turkish rhetoric. In 2013, the Turkish government requested from the Albanian government the review of textbooks that contain anti-Turkish hate speech. A number of public figures, the writer Ismail Kadare being the best known among them, initiated a petition against the review, which gave rise in both Albania and Kosovo to media and political debates that often involved anti-Turkish hate speech.¹⁰ It was quite telling that the governments of both Greece¹¹ and Serbia had posed similar requests to the governments of both Albania and Kosovo,¹² with no reactions whatsoever, despite the fact that the conflict with Serbia is quite recent. The petition was not signed by some of the best-known Albanian historians and others from the academic community considered it an act of intimidation against historians. These representative cases show, however, that the recent concerns raised by the Mufti of Shkodra, mentioned above, are neither isolated cases, nor recent, but rather continuations of government education policies and ideological stands of the cultural establishment that expose an agenda that aims at diminishing the contribution of Muslims, and violates the secular principles of the country by promoting Christianity, while encouraging and propagating negative views of Islam, Turkey and the Turkish people.

Media

For many years now, the media has been one of the main sources feeding Islamophobia. The Deputy Chairman of the Albanian Muslim Community recently went on record accusing pundits for fueling the flames of Islamophobia.¹³ His comments followed the publication and book signing of the latest book by Mustafa Nano, a pundit accused on various occasions of fueling bigotry against Muslims. The author depicted the Muslim presence and Muslim prayers as worrying and threatening to Albanian secularism. Mustafa Nano has a long history of controversial views towards the Muslim community. In the past he has written that Muslims have to prove to the rest of society that they don't represent a threat to the country. He has a long history of writing and representing Muslims as a threat.

9.E-zani I Nolte, "Tekstet shkollore shkelin laicitetin edhe ne oren e matematikes," *e-zani.com*, (April 30, 2014), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.e-zani.com/2014/04/30/tekstet-shkollore-shkelin-laicitetin-edhe-ne-oren-e-matematikes/>. See also: Elton Hatibi, "Serigrafi matematikore me Nene Terezen." *e-zani.com*, (September 5, 2015), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.e-zani.com/2015/09/02/serigrafi-matematike-me-nene-terezin/>.

10.Enis Sulstarova, "Peticioni i/kunder diktatit." *e-zani.com*, (May 8, 2013), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.e-zani.com/2013/05/08/peticioni-ikunder-diktatit/>.

11.E-zani I Nolte, "Greqia kerkon ndryshimin e historise: Qeveria thote PO, «patriotet» ne heshtje," *e-zani.com*, (November 19, 2014), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.e-zani.com/2014/11/19/greqia-kerkon-ndryshimin-e-historise-qeveria-thote-po-patriotet-ne-heshtje/>.

12.Besnik Sinani, "Defter Turk," *e-zani.com*, (May 6, 2013), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.e-zani.com/2013/05/06/defter-turk/>.

13.Albeu, "Intervista/ Gazmend Aga: Maks Velo ka frike nga myslimanet! – Ja garancia ime per te," *albeu.com*, (November 2, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.albeu.com/shqiperi/intervista-gazmend-aga-maks-velo-ka-frike-nga-myslimanet-ja-gara/268068/>.

In the same meeting, another author, Maks Velo, added, “We are not a country of Islam, Islam is over there in Saudi Arabia.... Islam doesn’t offer guaranties... it threatens to destroy Europe.”¹⁴ This author caused uproar in 2014 when in an interview he set to explain why he “hates Muslims and Northern Albanians”.¹⁵ Following public reactions he later apologized. A year later, in 2015, while depicting Albania as a country that doesn’t understand art due to being oriental and Islamic, he made negative comments against Syrian refugees.¹⁶ The same author, wrote an article titled “What is wrong with Islam these days.”¹⁷ According to Nano, the real problem with Islam is not DAESH, but non-violent Muslims who hold views and values incompatible with European values. The problem is their religion. At the same time, he emphasizes that the Quran furnishes the justifications for violence used by DAESH. He has dedicated part of his writings and time on his talk show (Zululand)¹⁸ this year to condemning two Albanian football players who play respectively for Arsenal and FC Koln, who refused to wear a t-shirt with a beer logo or appear in front of journalists while advertising beer.¹⁹ He delegitimizes their free expression of belief and conscience by depicting them as examples of the Muslim threat.

It has to be noted that when covering events like the latest arrests, media coverage of arrests has been, as some journalists have pointed out, biased. For example, newspapers have called individuals arrested as ‘jihadists’ and ‘terrorists’ before they have been sentenced.²⁰

Despite the fact that many newspapers declare that they edit the comments of their online pages, based on ethical considerations, the comments remain the crudest examples of Islamophobia, calling for violence against Islam and Muslims. Newspapers have not blocked contents that fuel hatred or call for violence against Muslims.

14. Balkan Web, “Maks Velo sulmon myslimanët: Nuk jemi vend islami, kjo fe s’jep garanci,” *Gazeta Shqiptare*, (October 30, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.balkanweb.com/site/maks-velo-sulmon-myslimanet-nuk-jemi-vend-islami-kjo-fe-sjep-garanci/>.

15. Maks Velo, “Pse Jam Anti Verior dhe Anti Musliman,” *Gazeta Tema*, (September 7, 2014), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.gazetatema.net/web/2014/09/07/maks-velo-pse-jam-antiverior-e-antimysliman/>.

16. Mapo, “Shpërthen Maks Velo: Jemi vend islamik dhe oriental,” *mapo.al*, (September 10, 2015). retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.mapo.al/2015/09/shperthen-maks-velo-jemi-vend-islamik-dhe-oriental/>.

17. Mustafa Nano, “Cfare ka qe nuk shkon me Islamin ne ditet e sotme,” *panorama*, (September 6, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.panorama.com.al/cfare-ka-qe-nuk-shkon-me-islamin-ne-ditet-e-sotme/>.

18. TemA Televizion, “Much Nano përfytyron një bisedë të Mërgim Mavrajt me Zotin në ditën e gjykimit,” *Gazeta Tema*, (July 14, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.tematv.al/2016/07/14/much-nano-p%C3%ABrfytyron-nj%C3%AB-bised%C3%AB-t%C3%AB-m%C3%ABrgim-mavrajt-me-zotin-n%C3%AB-dit%C3%ABn-e-gjykimit>.

19. Cork Gaines, “Muslim footballer tries to remove beer bottle from his press conference but is overruled by club official,” *Business Insider*, (October 17, 2015), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.businessinsider.com/muslim-shkodran-mustafi-beer-bottle-press-conference-2015-10?IR=T>.

20. Mapo, “‘Xhihadistët’ dalin para gjykatës: S’duam avokat, na mbron Zoti.” *mapo.al*, (November 7, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.mapo.al/2016/11/xhihadistet-dalin-para-gjykates-nuk-duam-avokat-na-mbron-zoti/>.

While the language of hate in the comment space is not exclusively reserved against Muslims, and various authors have identified it as a space that fuels extreme views,²¹ Muslims remain one of the main targets of hate comments. Media critics have pointed out that there are enough indications to conclude that anonymous comments online are often organized and sponsored for political reasons and that these type of comments radicalize and transform the content of the news.²²

The latest terrorist attack in a Christmas Market in Berlin, like other recent terrorist attacks in Europe, was reflected in negative media portrayals of Albanian Muslims. The director of the daily newspaper *Mapo*, Alfred Lela, wrote an editorial commenting on the attacks.²³ He positions Albanian Muslims who call their coreligionists to refrain from celebrating the end of year holidays in a dichotomy of good and evil. Good is represented by the festive atmosphere of Christmas festivities and the Christian values that motivate welcoming refugees in countries like Germany, while evil is represented by the attacker who follows “the lie of virgins” (promised in paradise), and the Albanian Muslims who ask their coreligionists not to celebrate end of year holidays. The author compares the expressions of Muslim religious views with those of terrorists. These positions are consistent with views expressed by the author following previous terrorist attacks in Europe. In the past, the author has contributed to the denial of the existence of Islamophobia.²⁴ He was the journalist who interviewed the author Maks Velo, where he declared his hatred for “Northerners and Muslims.” Following the blowback, Lela wrote an article in defense of the views of Maks Velo, even after the author had publically apologized. One Muslim commentary saw Lela as part of the controversy, using the interview to promote his personal views.²⁵ Following the attacks in Brussels in 2015, Lela wrote that the current situation resembles pre-WWII Europe, where Islamic fundamentalists have replaced Nazis.²⁶ The wave of terrorist attacks, writes Lela, is coming towards Albania. Following the Paris attacks he reminded readers that Albanians are not immune to the

21. See for example: Interview with Ardian Vehbiu, “Shoqeria Shqiptare eshte e paqete me veten dhe politiken,” *Gazeta Tema*. (June 2, 2014), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.gazetatema.net/web/2014/06/02/intervista-ardian-vehbiu-shoqeria-shqiptare-eshte-e-paqete-me-veten-dhe-politiken/>.

22. Ardian Vehbiu, “Kur te vijne mendte...,” *Peizazhe te Fjales*, (March 3, 2013), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://peizazhe.com/2013/03/03/kur-te-vijne-mendte/>.

23. Alfred Lela, ““Myslimanët” e Shkupit, George Frendo, dhe Krishtlindja,” *mapo.al*, (December 24, 2016); retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.mapo.al/2016/12/myslimanet-e-shkupit-george-frendo-dhe-krishtlindja/>.

24. Alfred Lela, “Perqafimi i modelit te krishtere nuk perben islamofobi,” *Gazeta Dita*, (November 11, 2012), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.gazetadita.al/perqafimi-i-modelit-te-krishtere-nuk-perben-islamofobi-2/>.

25. H. Omari, “Alfred Lela si apologjet i urrejtjes,” *e-zani.com*, (September 16, 2014), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.e-zani.com/2014/09/16/alfred-lela-si-apologjet-urrejtjes-2/>.

26. Alfred Lela, “Menekken Pis, kush mund te pshurre mbi fitilin e terrorizmit,” *mapo.al*, (March 23, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.mapo.al/2016/03/manekken-pis-kush-mund-te-pshurre-mbi-fitilin-e-terrorizmit/>.

threat of Islamic terrorism, which in the view of the author represents the “Third World War”. He follows by arguing that ‘the clash of civilizations’ is manifested also within Albania.²⁷ He sees the visit of the Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Albania in that same period of time as a manifestation of this tension. He concludes, nevertheless, that in order to defeat terrorism, an alliance with the ‘good’ Muslims is needed. Following the arrest in March 2014 of nine Albanian Muslims charged with aiding the recruitment of fighters to join the Syrian conflict, he called for restricting the religious liberties of Albanian Muslims for the sake of guaranteeing the liberties of the rest of society.²⁸

Justice System

On May 3, 2016, nine individuals of the Muslim faith accused of recruiting fighters to join DAESH, facilitating their travel arrangements, and preaching about jihad were collectively sentenced to 126 years in prison.²⁹ Their lawyer declared for the media that the decision is a mark of shame for the Albanian judiciary system, since, according to him, it was a decision against freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. He also complained about what he called “lack of transparency”. As recorded court depositions indicate, Quranic verses quoted by the alleged terrorists were used as evidence of their commitment to an extremist ideology.³⁰ Similar sentiments have been expressed by journalists who, while agree that the accused might hold extreme views, still hold that the decision appears to be politically motivated, disproportionate, and the media reporting biased.³¹ Since their arrest in 2014, Muslim leaders, like the Head of the League of Albanian Imams Justinian Topulli have expressed their concerns about the way authorities have handled the case and the fact that the media coverage has fuelled Islamophobia in the country.

Following Israeli Mossad notifications of an eminent terrorist attack in a football match between Albania and Israel (see below), some 150 Muslims were arrested for questioning, including imams who, according to many reports, are known to have spoken openly against DAESH and terrorism. A well-known public intellectual, Fatos Lubonja, referred to these arrests as a clear violation of human rights and

27. Alfred Lela, “Terrorizmi i Parisit dhe aleanca qe na duhet ne Tirane.” *mapo.al*, (November 21, 2015), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.mapo.al/2015/11/terrorizmi-i-parisit-dhe-aleanca-qe-na-duhet-ne-tirane/>.

28. Besnik Sinani, “Ne dhe Myslimanet’-Remix,” *Gazeta Dita*, (March 24, 2014), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.gazetadita.al/shenim-ne-dhe-myslimanet-remix/>.

29. Balkan Web, “Gjykata dënon xhihadistët me 126 vjet burg. Të akuzuarit kërcënojnë gjyqtarët,” *Gazeta Shqiptare*, (May 3, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.balkanweb.com/site/gjykata-denon-xhihadistet-me-126-vjet-burg-te-akuzuarit-kercenojne-gjyqtaret/>.

30. Official Youtube-Channel of *Gazeta Impakt*, “Mbrojtja e Genci Abdurrahman Balles ne gjyqin e xhihadistëve (The Defense of Genci Abdurrahman Balla in the jihadists court case),” (May 11, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8XsKhpD78s>.

31. Andi Bushati, “Rreziku i gjykimit të islamistëve,” *Lapsi*, (April 6, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.m.lapsi.al/ide/2016/04/06/rreziku-i-gjykimit-t%C3%AB-islamist%C3%ABve#.WCX1-yMrly4>.

called them ‘a fascist act’; another journalist invited to the same panel, Andi Bushati, echoed the sentiment that the arrests constituted ‘a fascist act.’³²

Some of the people stopped for questioning have reported violation of legal procedures, and the application of psychological pressure on them and family members with medical conditions. The arrests were conducted in the early hours of the morning (around 5 a.m.). The authorities did not press charges, did not present arrest warrants, those arrested were questioned without the presence of an attorney, and held longer than the period envisioned by the law. One of those questioned reported that the actions of the police have resulted in a sense of fear in the community, and animosity from his neighbors.³³

One of those arrested was a citizen of Kosovo and a Muslim preacher who at the time was visiting Albania. He reported that when the police stopped the vehicle he was driving, he was ordered out of the car together with his companions, weapons were pointed at them, and he was assaulted in his head and ribs. They were taken to the police station in the city of Shkodra handcuffed, where they were photographed, held for a long period of time in physically challenging and painful positions. The Kosovar imam reported that throughout the interrogation he was never told why he was arrested, or asked about the football match between the Albanian and Israeli teams. He was never issued an arrest warrant, or documents proving that he was held for interrogation, and no charges were pressed against him. The imam ended the interview asking for the reason for this treatment of Muslims, and for the use of violence against them. One of those arrested called for society to raise concerns against arbitrary arrests, and violation of civil rights. Among others, the Mufti of Shkodra has protested the spectacular arrests that brought tension to the entire community. He added that tainting a whole community because of the perceived activities of few fuels animosity in the country.³⁴ He stated that these events are indicative of attempts by the authorities and the media to paint a picture of Islam as representing a threat to the security of the country.

Physical and Verbal Attacks

In the first week of August, a Muslim woman was physically attacked in a public bus by another woman who shouted at her, “You are terrorists.” The incident was reported in community media outlets. An author writing about the incident reported that after her article reporting on this case, other Muslim women wearing the headscarf

32. Official Youtube-Channel of *News 24*, “Te Paekspozuarit nga Ylli Rakipi ne News 24: Komunistet e rinj (The New Communists),” (November 24, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hH4rb1TkKMU>.

33. Official Youtube-Channel of *Gazeta Impakt*, “Te arrestohesh per Izraelin (Getting arrested for Israel),” (November 23, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JUG9nYb6Hk>.

34. Te Sheshi, “Muhamed Sytari: të paudhët provokuan muslimanët shkodranë; e vërteta për ceremoninë e 13 priftërinjve,” *Të Sheshi*, (November 11, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://tesheshi.com/muhamet-sytari-te-paudhet-provokuan-muslimanet-shkodrane-e-verteta-per-ceremonine-e-13-prifterinjve/>.

contacted her, and reported to have faced similar attacks, which they preferred not to report to the authorities. The victim of this attack during an interview did not show her face and gave only her first name. The Mufti of the northern city of Shkodra, Muhamed Sytari, mentioned this incident in his weekly Friday sermon, as an indicator of growing Islamophobia in the country.³⁵

Invited to a talk show, Muslim activists reported that the climate of prejudice against Muslim women who wear the hijab continues unchanged in the decades since the fall of communism.³⁶

In September 2016, the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sebastian Kurz drew the attention of local media and the Muslim community by declaring that in Kosovo, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, women are getting paid to walk in the streets ‘covered’. He mentioned these claims in reference to the growing threat of radicalism, marking Muslim practices and forms of identification as forms of extremism.³⁷ Among the responses from Muslim women, some noted with sarcasm that the payment they have “received is a whole life payment... of unending challenges”.³⁸

In November 2016, four Muslims were arrested in the northern city of Shkodra.³⁹ The arrests have been linked to the arrival of the Israeli football team (see above).⁴⁰ The football match against the Israeli national team mobilized more than 2,000 Special Forces. The office of the Public Prosecutor told the daily *Panorma* that the arrests followed notifications by the Israeli agency Mossad, claiming that the arrested men were planning to plant explosives during the match.⁴¹ The four arrested men have denied the charges of affiliation with DAESH, recruiting people to fight for DAESH, or planning to plant a bomb at the match between the Albanian and

35. Official Youtube-Channel of *Gazeta Impakt*, “Dhune islamofobike ne Shqiperi (Islamophobic Violence in Albania),” (August 8, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zNB-t2VytY>. See also: Facebook page *World Hijab Day – Albania*, from <https://www.facebook.com/WorldHijabDayAlbania/>.

36. Official Youtube-Channel of *RTV Klan*, “Besimtare te paragjykuara! (Prejudice against female believers),” (May 26, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0sGJ4OkH8mo>.

37. Opinion, “Ministri austriak: Një Shqipëri, femrat paguhen që të mbulohen,” *Opinion*, (September 19, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://opinion.al/ministri-austriak-ne-shqiperi-femrat-paguhen-qe-te-mbulohen/>.

38. Te Sheshi, “Përgjigje kryediplomatit austriak për mbulesën tonë: ja pse ajo nuk blihet e as shitet me para”, *Të Sheshi*, (November 11, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://tesheshi.com/pergjigje-kryediplomatit-austriak-per-mbulesen-tone-ja-pse-ajo-nuk-blihet-e-shitet-para/>.

39. Java News, “Te arrestuarit ne Shkoder, dyshime per sulm kunder kombetares se Izraelit,” *javanews.al*, (November 11, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.javanews.al/te-arrestuarit-ne-shkoder-dyshime-per-sulm-kunder-kombetares-se-izraelit/>.

40. Top Channel, “2 mijë forca policore dhe Garda për sigurinë ndaj Izraelit,” *Top Channel*, (November 11, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://top-channel.tv/lajme/artikull.php?id=340266#k2>.

41. Tema Online, “Besimtarët e arrestuar në Shkodër, do vendosnin bombë në ndeshjen me Izraelin?” *Gazeta Tema*, (November 8, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.gazetatema.net/web/2016/11/08/besimtar-et-e-arrestuar-ne-shkoder-do-vendosnin-bombe-ne-ndeshjen-me-izraelin/>.

Israeli national teams.⁴² They have further stated that they have been targeted due to their faith.⁴³ The match was eventually moved to another Albanian city, Elbasan.

On May 26, 2016, a media analyst, Kastriot Myftaraj, pressed charges against the Quran.⁴⁴ The case he brought before the court and reported in the media demands for the Quran to be banned as a book that “contains plans of genocide against humanity, feeds religious, ethnic, and racial hatred, as well as insults and humiliates part of the population.” It clarifies that it does not refer to a particular translation of the Quran, but to all its translations and claims that the books of the other religious traditions in Albania do not contain similar language. The Quran, according to the deposition, “is a manual of guidelines given to a violently active minority of the population in order to achieve submission and control of the tolerant majority”. It has to be noted that the author is not new to the Islamophobia rhetoric. Following the massacre of young activists in Norway in 2011 by Anders Breivik, Kastriot Myftaraj wrote that Breivik was a hero fighting the collaborators of Muslim invaders. His articles were translated and published in the *Gates of Vienna* blog (later closed), believed to have been one of the ideological resources used by Anders Breivik. Kastriot Myftaraj had in other occasions glorified the massacre of Srebrenica, where more than 8000 Muslim men from Bosnia were executed by the Serbian military, and has called for ethnic cleansing of Muslims in the Balkans. Myftaraj has never been charged with hate speech. To the contrary, at times he is lauded as a valuable analyst by mainstream pundits and is often featured on various TV shows. To this day, the Court of Tirana, where the case against the Quran was submitted, has not made known its position on the case.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Albanian citizens of the Muslim faith do not stand in opposition to the Albanian ambitions of joining the European Union, and an overwhelming majority of religious and community leaders have strongly condemned political militancy that claims motivation in religion. It is incumbent on the Albanian government, therefore, which, declares its mission to join the EU, not to engage and fuel anti-Muslim sentiments and not to portray the Islamic faith of its citizens as a hindrance to European integration or as a scapegoat to justify the failures of government reforms. Albania can show commitment to a vision of a European Union that stands committed to

42. Mapo, ““Xhihadistët” dalin para gjykatës: S’duam avokat, na mbron Zoti” *mapo.al*, (November 7, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.mapo.al/2016/11/xhihadistet-dalin-para-gjykates-nuk-duam-avokat-na-mbron-zoti/1>.

43. Java News, “4 terroristet e Shkodres merren ne pyetje: Jemi arrestuar per shkak te besimit fetar,” *javanews.al*, (November 6, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.javanews.al/4-terroristet-e-shkodres-merren-ne-pyetje-jemi-arrestuar-per-shkak-te-besimit-fetar/>.

44. Kastriot Myftaraj, “Padia e rrallë: Kallzohet Kurani në Tiranë, “përmban plan gjenocidi”,” *mapo.al*, (May 26, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.mapo.al/2016/05/padia-e-rralle-kallzohet-kurani-ne-tirane-permban-plan-gjenocidi/1>.

the values of democracy, civil liberties, rule of law, freedom of religion and diversity. It is incumbent on the government of Albania, therefore, to assure the Albanian citizens of Muslim faith that their legal rights and civil liberties will be respected, and their religion will not be vilified. At this moment, the most urgent matter relates to the latest arbitrary arrests in November 2016 of over 150 citizens of Muslim faith and addressing the concerns of the community is of paramount importance.

- The Albanian government should commit to an independent investigation regarding the latest arrests of 150 citizens of Muslim faith, reports of use of violence while in police custody, and violations of legal procedures during the arrests and during interrogations.
- The Albanian government should commit to training its law enforcement personnel in respecting the rule of law and the civil liberties of all its citizens, even during arrests.
- In cases when there is a legal case against supporters of extremist groups like the DAESH, the judiciary should ensure that the law is applied, and those accused are granted their legal rights. Independent observers have noted that at the time of the arrests there was no legal framework for them and that the sentence given was disproportionate compared to other major crimes in recent Albanian history.
- The judiciary should review its admission of quotations of Islamic Scripture, namely the Quran, as proof of criminal activity. Such admissions violate freedom of religion and stigmatize law-abiding Muslims citizens.
- Cases of violence or abuse against people targeted because of their religion should be investigated and prosecuted.
- The government of Albania should not use the Muslim identity of its citizens as an excuse for its failures in the path to European integration.
- The Albanian government and especially the Ministry of Education, which is in charge of school textbooks, should review textbooks for content that unfairly portrays components of the Muslim faith; should uphold the principles of secularism and refrain from promoting religions considered 'European'; and should review textbooks for content that fuels ethnic and religious hatred against other people, such as the people of Turkey.
- The Albanian government in cooperation with the Union of Journalists should review the legality of policies that address hate speech in the comment space of online media.
- The Albanian government should reconsider the legal framework that addresses hate speech against groups or individuals that call for violence and/or ethnic cleansing of Muslims; promotes and celebrates crimes of right-wing extremists; and seeks to intimidate citizens in regard to their free exercise of religion.

Chronology

- May 26, 2016: A media analyst, Kastriot Myftaraj, pressed charges against the Quran. The case he brought before the court and reported in the media demands for the Quran to be banned as a book that “contains plans of genocide against humanity, feeds religious, ethnic, and racial hatred, as well as insults and humiliates part of the population.”
- May 26, 2016: Invited on a talk show, Muslim activists reported that the climate of prejudice against Muslim women who wear the hijab continues unchanged in the decades since the fall of communism.
- August 7, 2016: In the first week of August, a Muslim woman was physically attacked in a public bus by another woman who shouted at her, “You are terrorists.”
- September 22, 2016: The Mufti of Shkodra reported cases of Islamophobia in school textbooks.
- September 19, 2016: The Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs accused Muslim women in the Balkans of receiving payments in order to wear the hijab.
- November 6, 2016: 150 Muslim men were arrested without charges; reports of violence and procedural irregularities.

This is the second issue of the annual *European Islamophobia Report (EIR)* which was presented for the first time in 2015. New countries are included in this year's *EIR*; while 25 countries were covered in 2015, the report for 2016 includes 27 country reports. *EIR 2016* is the result of 31 prominent scholars who specialise in different fields such as racism, gender and Islamophobia Studies.

Islamophobia has become a real danger to the foundations of democratic order and the values of the European Union. It has also become the main challenge to the social peace and coexistence of different cultures, religions and ethnicities in Europe. The country reports of *EIR 2016*, which cover almost all the European continent from Russia to Portugal and from Greece to Latvia, clearly show that the level of Islamophobia in fields such as education, employment, media, politics, the justice system and the Internet is on the rise. Since the publication of the last report there is little improvement. On the contrary, one can see from the country reports that the state of democracy and human rights in Europe is deteriorating. Islamophobia has become more real especially in the everyday lives of Muslims in Europe. It has surpassed the stage of being a rhetorical animosity and has become a physical animosity that Muslims feel in everyday life be it at school, the workplace, the mosque, transportation or simply on the street.

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.

