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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

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

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.

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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”.

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.

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. Women who are visibly Muslim are socially ostracised in many places. The combination of internal community prob-

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 Esma 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

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Executive Summary

The most significant developments in 2016 related to Islamophobia in the Czech Republic are the continuation of display of aggressive intolerance in the form of demonstrations, which are getting more intrusive and are prompting debates about the limits of freedom of assembly; the failure of the attempt of Islamophobic parties to create coalitions for regional elections, which led to the fragmentation and proliferation of smaller Islamophobic initiatives; and the increased anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies within the mainstream political establishment across all parties. The line separating xenophobic and anti-xenophobic perspectives no longer runs between various parties but is often drawn between different individual politicians within the same party. The polarization on the issue of immigrants (most often perceived to be Muslims) has spread to wider society dividing it into blocks of those who oppose the “foreign threat” and call for national consolidation and those who advocate for compassion and, often as volunteers, help asylum seekers and immigrants. The deeper the polarization the more obvious it becomes that what is at stake is not only attitudes to immigration but that the two blocks (divided into sub-blocks) are in opposition regarding overall understanding of freedom, and the rights and responsibilities in Czech society. This is illustrated by the instance when a prominent member of the Czech parliament for the Social Democrats, Jeroným Tejc, proposed changes in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms to limit its article guaranteeing right of asylum. Another similar example comes from a well-known constitutional lawyer and vice-rector of Charles University, Aleš Gerloch, who proposed inserting the term nation into the Czech Constitution as the basis of statehood. All this could lead to unprecedented changes in the fundamental documents on which Czech society is based; if one change is allowed, others may follow easily and this time these changes may not be against asylum seekers or non-Czechs but might target other randomly chosen groups. The role of the media continues to be controversial, further contributing to the chaotic situation invoking alleged imminent dangers, which play well into the hands of Islamophobic attitudes. It is, however, important to stress that resistance also continues and involves individuals, initiatives and organizations, both formal and informal, and is particularly manifested in the form of volunteering in helping asylum seekers and immigrants.
Shrnutí

Nejdůležitější vývojové trendy v oblasti islámofobie v roce 2016 jsou: pokračování demonstrací, které svědčí o agresivní netoleranci. Tyto demonstrace se stávají čím dál tím více extrémní a vyvolávají otázky o limitech práva na shromažďování; selhání islámofobních stran při pokusu o vytvoření koalice před volbami, což vedlo k prolife-raci a fragmentaci menších islámofobních iniciativ; posílení proti-uprchlické a proti-muslimské rétoriky a politik v rámci mainstreamového politického establishmentu. Dělicí čára oddělující xenofobní od nexionofobní perspektivy nevede už mezi jednotlivými stranami, ale často vede mezitím jednotlivými politiky bez ohledu na stranickou příslušnost. Polarizace tykající se problematiky migrantů/tek (které jsou téměř vždy vnímáni jako muslimové) protérstá celou společností a rozděluje ji na bloky těch, kteří se staví proti „ohrožení cizinců“ a těch, kteří se přímo vyzývají za sociální a často, v roli dobrovolníků/c, pomáhají žadatelům o azyl a migrantům/kám. Čím silnější polarizace, tím více se stává zřetelným, že to o co jde, není pouze vztah k migraci ale, že vždy dva bloky (rozdělené dál na menší bloky) jsou v opozici, pokud jde o celkové chápání svobod, práva a odpovědnosti v české společnosti. Toto tvrzení lze ilustrovat na příkladu návrhu předního zástupce České strany sociálně demokratické a poslance, Jeronýma Tejce, který navrhoval upravit Listinu základních práv a svobod, aby omezil povinnost státu vyplývající z článku tykající se práva na azyl. Podobným příkladem je i návrh známého ústavního právníka a prorektora Univerzity Karlovy, Aleše Gerlocha, který navrhoval do Ústavy České republiky zařadit pojem národa jako nositele státu. Podobné iniciativy mohou vést k bezprecedentním změnám základních dokumentů, na kterých je česká společnost postavena a pokud umožníme podobné změny, nic nebrání tomu, aby byly požadované další a další – tentokrát neomezujucí práva žadatelů o azyl a ne-Čechů, nýbrž jiné líčebně vybrané skupiny. Role médií zůstává kontroverzní, často přispívající k chaotické situaci připomínající údajnou bezprostřední hrozbu a tímto nahrávající islámofobním postojům. Je však důležité zdůraznit, že odpor též přetrvává. Do něj se zapojují jak jednotlivci, tak i iniciativy a organizace, formální či neformální, zejména v oblasti dobrovolné pomoci žadatelům o azyl a migrantům.
Introduction

The Islamophobic way of thinking is inseparable from intolerance, hate and fear of immigrants. This way of thinking takes place even without the rise of immigration levels in the Czech Republic. Unlike other EU countries, the Czech Republic has not been a target country for refugees, whose numbers are in decline.¹ The first five months of 2016 saw 17% decline in asylum applications. It’s noteworthy that the main country of origin of asylum applicants was Ukraine, followed by Iraq² and China. During the same period only 122 persons were given asylum and 137 were given subsidiary protection.³ In 2015, 1,525 persons applied for international protection in the Czech Republic, 71 got refugee status and 399 received temporary protection. Top applicants came from Ukraine, Syria and Cuba.⁴

The numbers and some of the countries of origin are quite untypical for the rest of EU. In other words, even though there was enormous movement of people during 2015 and partly in 2016, none of it affected the Czech Republic and it had no impact on the reduction of hate and intolerance towards refugees and immigrants. On its part, the state keeps scores of people in detention camps for crossing the border without documents. The detention centers have been repeatedly criticised for their prison-like regime, the separation of families, the lack of provision of medical care but also for stripping the detainees of their belongings and then releasing them without money and with deportation orders.⁵

Significant Incidents and Developments

Since the number of Muslims is low in the Czech Republic, most of the hate speech directed towards them occurs online; the victims outside of cyberspace are Muslims, those perceived as Muslims, and activists or even some politicians advocating for a tolerant and inclusive society. Such activists and politicians are pejoratively called the “welcomers”, i.e. those who welcome refugees instead of stopping them from arriving to the country. Thus a group of roughly 50 people, including some described as neo-Nazis, walked through the second biggest city in the Czech Republic, Brno,

². This is mainly due to a programme run by a Czech NGO focused on moving Iraqi Christians to the Czech Republic.
looking for the deputy mayor and subsequently going to his house. After failing to find him, the group dispersed. The reason he became a target was that he had advocated for the rights of immigrants, refugees, Muslims, Roma and other vulnerable groups. Some reactions on Facebook accused the deputy mayor of treason.

In the political field, two trends are important to mention: one is a failed attempt of various Islamophobic, xenophobic and nationalistic initiatives, parties and groups to form a coalition before regional elections, and the other is the increasing penetration of those groups’ agenda into mainstream politics. Sometimes, it’s impossible to tell whether certain statements come from what is still regarded as the xenophobic fringe or from mainstream politicians. Thus, the First Deputy Prime Minister for the Economics and Minister of Finance Andrej Babiš, despite being of immigrant origin himself, said that the Czech Republic should not admit any immigrants, that they should be kept in Turkey or other surrounding countries so they can return to Syria, and that the example of Western countries showed that they can’t be integrated.

Martin Konvička’s movement made an agreement with a parliamentary party called “Dawn-National Coalition” and tried to call it the “Dawn with Block Against Islam”. However, the Ministry of Interior did not allow the use of the name citing that it violates equal rights and the freedoms of believers in Islam. The Dawn Party also submitted a proposal to the government to introduce a law that would ban “political Islam”. Both parties promised to sue the Ministry, however, before elections the coalition fell apart mostly for financial reasons. Following this, the Block Against Islam also fell apart and gave rise to an association called “Martin Konvička’s Initiative”. Another former member of Block Against Islam founded another party called “Alternative for the Czech Republic 2017” named after the German original. In the regional elections, where the issue of immigration is less relevant, none of the
parties exclusively focusing on stopping the “foreign threat” succeeded. However, a strongly anti-immigrant party of an ex-immigrant Tomio Okamura called “Freedom and Direct Democracy” was rather successful. Okamura’s party had separated from what became the aforementioned Dawn Party.

All this shows the strong proliferation in the political realm of groups hoping to capitalize on hate, fear and intolerance toward various groups, mostly Muslims, immigrants and Africans but also Roma, feminists, etc. Due to the reservoir of fear and hate, many members of mainstream parties adopted the same discourse as extremists. In addition to those mentioned above, the leading person in this regard continues to be President of the Czech Republic Miloš Zeman, who proposed in October that all refugees get transferred from Europe to “empty spaces in northern Africa” or to “uninhabited Greek islands”, which would, as a bonus, reduce the Greek debt. In the same interview, Zeman said that he is against “Islamic immigration” specifically because it is incompatible with European culture and particularly when it comes to attitudes to women. He also stressed there is a strong connection between the wave of immigrants and the wave of “jihadis” and compared himself to a prophet for warning against the radicalization of immigrants. The minister of Foreign Affairs in reaction to the interview said that relocating refugees to Greek islands is not the official Czech policy. A somewhat comical situation occurred when Zeman labeled the Workers Party of Social Justice, a long-standing far-right party of the more traditional type which existed before Islamophobia became prominent, as neo-Nazi. The party’s president responded by saying that his statements are part of mainstream politics and that he speaks in the same manner as President Zeman and if that’s being extreme and neo-Nazi, then he welcomes the president on the same boat.

Among numerous incidents, three stand out as particularly spectacular:

• The burning of the Quran accompanied by drinking beer, eating pork goulash, and promenading women dressed in swimming suits in front of the mosque in Brno organised by the Martin Konvička Initiative (MKI) in July 2016. He was later tried in court for the act of burning the Quran but was acquitted.

• To commemorate 9/11, the MKI organised a happening in front of the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Prague where the participants were dressed the way they imagine Muslims dress and brought a mobile toilet, draped it in black and threw stones at it in imitation of stoning of Kaaba. The happening was called “With Humor to Mecca” and included a banner that read “The one who lived with a little girl is a pedophile” in allusion to Muhammad’s marriage to Aisha. There were only 50 participants, who

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also attacked journalists and yelled “Gestapo, Gestapo” when police forced them to disperse. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the incident in strong terms.\textsuperscript{11}

- In August, the MKI staged an Islamic State invasion at the Old Town Square in Prague. Konvička, dressed in the white garb of a Muslim imam, drove into the tourist-packed Old Town Square in a jeep, accompanied by a camel and a group of “DAESH soldiers” dressed in army fatigues, brandishing imitation firearms and shouting “Allahu Akbar”. Prague Metropolitan Police Spokesperson Tomáš Hulan confirmed that the organisers had received permission for a “performance” to take place from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., including the use of imitation firearms. Interior Minister Martin Chovanec described the stunt as “an expression of political and civic cretinism.”\textsuperscript{12}

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Education

The issue of wearing a veil at school became a polarizing topic in two different cases. In the first case, a 17-year-old woman whose family immigrated to the Czech Republic from Yemen when she was 5 became the target of a hateful letter spread via Facebook, which demanded from the school principle to suspend her. The young woman decided to wear the hijab against her father’s advice and was also an activist


mediating between the Teplice Arab community – Teplice is a very popular spa town particularly for people from Arab countries - and Czech society. She cleaned the parks after Arab visitors and from her own pocket printed leaflets explaining to Arab visitors the way things work in Czech society. For this activity she received an award from the principal. The letter, written anonymously and spread by copy and paste on Facebook read:

“I am Czech and I’m afraid for my country and its future. This future is our children and our youth. I don’t want my children to be in danger from Islam and Muslims…Your school is attended by a Muslim woman Eman Ghaleb…we are inviting you, dear principle, to exclude her from your school since she represents danger for other students by spreading pro-Islam views at school... and for covering her head.”

The principle and many of her schoolmates stood firmly by Ghaleb completely rejecting the initiative suggested in the letter, an initiative that was thus totally defeated.13

In 2013, a young woman from Somalia and one from Afghanistan (both in their mid-20s) left Prague Health College because the principle (a woman) prohibited them from wearing veils. The women thought they would be allowed to wear a headscarf during lectures (not during the practical part of the curriculum); however, they found out it was impossible. The principle argued it’s against the school rules - each school in the Czech Republic creates its own set of regulations. In 2014, the Czech Ombudswoman issued an opinion that the school in question engaged in indirect discrimination by not allowing students to express their religion and that the school rules violate the Czech Constitution, school and antidiscrimination laws. For this opinion the Ombudswoman was brutally attacked online.14 In 2016, one of the students sued the school for discrimination; the case is still in progress.

Politics

It is not possible to cover all or even the majority of incidents regarding Islamophobia in politics within the scope of this report. Many of the incidents and processes from the realm of politics have already been mentioned. The focus of this report is on the most significant incidents both for Muslims as potential or real targets and for the basic freedoms and rights of Czech society. Thus a lawyer advocating Roma rights turned rabid Islamophobe, Klára Samková, at a seminar in the Czech Parliament in May entitled “Should We Fear Islam”, stated the following: “Islam assumes the right to build a parallel legal system, the foundation of Islam is criminal, Islam is the same as Nazism, fascism, and communism, it’s a state crime and criminal ideology”. When the Turkish and some other ambassadors stood up to leave, Samková added:

“You are on the path of murderers, nothing will be left behind you, the name of your religion will be pronounced with aversion”. In June, the same person demonstrated in front of the Turkish embassy in Prague: she cursed the Turkish ambassador three times and said “If you meddle in our affairs, we will send our sons after you”. It is noteworthy that she wasn’t indicted because her words were perceived as being within her right to freedom of speech. She was reported to the Czech Bar Association for allegedly breaking their codex but was acquitted for the seminar statements and the second incident is still being decided. The Samková case is also significant because of her reaction in regard to an incident on her Facebook profile: when confronted with the fact that she posted totally fake information on something related to Islam, a pure hoax, she responded “It is not true, but it could be true.” In my opinion, this is very challenging for those opposing Islamophobia as the primary focus of Islamophobes is not to establish facts but to express hate.

In November 2016, the most exposed Islamophobic figure, Martin Konvička, attacked his colleague from the University of South Bohemia, Salim Murad, on Facebook for an interview given by the latter. In the attack, Konvička, among other things, claimed that Murad, who has a Muslim-sounding name, was a fake Christian who is essentially lying about being Christian. It must be stressed that it is quite rare for Czech academics to lash out so openly and without any arguments against each other – the incident only shows how Islamophobic discourse expands the limits of various forms of violence. Almost 300 students signed the petition in support for Murad. In October 2016, in regional elections there were at least seven parties that presented themselves as anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, anti-Islam and nationalist. The Party of Direct Democracy was the only successful one; others competing were the Dawn movement, the far-right Workers’ Party of Social Justice (the Workers’ Party, its previous manifestation, was banned by a Czech court for spreading Nazi ideology), and the Republicans but also some completely new initiatives with almost undistinguishable names such as “No Illegal Immigrants - Let Money Go to Our People” and “No Illegal Immigrants - Let Money Go to Our Children”.

Media
Printed media is divided into the mainstream yellow press, which publishes usually sensationalist information mostly on refugees but generally emphasizes news related

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to Muslims; to the mainstream media, which provide some context information; and
to the minority press, which tries to transmit a more nuanced and complicated mes-
sage, plus supports groups that advocate help to refugees and learning about Islam.

However, sometimes even so-called mainstream media display manipulative at-
titudes. Thus Prima TV, the third most-watched TV station in the Czech Republic,
through its management gave producers clear instructions on the angle they must
take on the refugee “crisis” - it must be born in mind that most refugees are seen as
Muslims. The instructions were formulated by the vice-chairman of the board of
the holding which runs the station and the editor-in-chief. At the first meeting the
editors and reporters were told that a clear approach to the refugee “crisis” must be
taken by reporters, namely, refugees represent a threat, “we” are concerned about Is-
lamization, and “we” do not want to receive refugees. The message was also sent that
editors and reporters must identify with this approach and that anybody who did
not intend to accept it would henceforth be unable to work at FTV Prima. During
the second meeting the instructions in this regard were even more concrete. Certain
editors in the course of the meeting objected by stating that to dictate ahead of time
what their reporting should sound like would contravene the code of journalistic
ethics; such objections were rejected with the message that there was to be no balance
in the reporting and that ethics or objectivity were not to be issues at least for several
months to come. One reporter quit immediately after the meeting, while another left
this spring in connection with this “immigration edict”. The scandal of blatantly
manipulating news was discovered by the Czech non-governmental watchdog, Hlí-
dací pes. The same TV station earlier had published a report which sparked hatred
against Christian refugees from Iraq.

In general, cyberspace is the worst place for media manipulation. Thus, in June
a hoax was spread by employees at a gas station when they mistook Slovak Roma
who were heading back home to Slovakia after seasonal agricultural work for un-
documented migrants. They called the police but once the police arrived there was
nothing for them to do. Meanwhile the hoax took the form of a video on Facebook
which stated:

“More relocation of immigrants without the awareness of the broader public.
We deduce this because they are moving around at 1 a.m., without the assistance
of police. Naturally the media and the press are silent. Share so everybody can see

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18. Robert Břešťan/Hlídací Pes.org, “Czech Republic: Prima TV station told reporters to depict refugees as a risk and
would-be-fired.


20. Zdeněk Ryšavý, “Manipulative television report sparks hatred against Christian refugees from Iraq,” romea.cz,
what is actually going on in our country and how migrants behave here. Fortunately our staff was alert and managed to lock the door to the sales area in time."

The video was viewed 370,000 times and shared 12,000 times.21

Another form of Islamophobia in media is the constant spread of information on alleged imminent terrorist attacks. To illustrate this trend, we can refer to a story about a man who finds a wallet, gives it to his owner who turns out to be a Muslim. The Muslim, as a sign of gratitude, tells the man not to go to some place or use public transport or a specific metro line. People get scared by such false news and often notify the police.

The Berlin Christmas market terrorist attack was reported heavily in the Czech press. The parallel attack in Zurich was mentioned, too. It attracted less attention, in my opinion, because there were no fatal casualties. The situation was different in social media, where the Islamophobic groups expressed joy that the incident happened because it shows, what they’ve been claiming all along, that it is impossible to live with Muslims and that the German Chancellor’s policy of accepting immigrants is wrong.

Justice system
As mentioned in the 2015 report, the Muslim community is the only religious community that has been registered in the Czech lands since the 1930s but whose registration was not automatically extended in 1991. This means that although every Muslim is free to believe in his or her faith and enjoys the freedom of assembly the Muslim community has no so-called special rights recognized by the state such as teaching at schools, concluding marriages, establishing religious schools, sending religious representatives to the army and having access to public finance according to a special law. In order to attain these special rights a religious organization has to be present on Czech territory for at least 10 years (something Islam meets already for decades) and have 10,000 registered members.22

There is, however, a case that stands out: in 2014, police officers from the Department of Combat Against Organised Crime barged into a prayer room and a mosque during Friday prayers in Prague. They invited women, children and diplomats to leave, and ordered the remaining men to lie facing the floor and pointed weapons at them. The reason for the raid was the search for a man who was responsible for publishing a book a couple of years ago called Fundamentals of Tawheed by Bilal Philips. The book has been available online for years in many languages. It remained unclear why suddenly the police was looking for a representative of the Islamic Foundation and the book publisher, a Czech Muslim by the name of Vladimír

Sáňka, and what was the need for such dramatic measures. The prayer room is also used by many diplomats due to the centrality of its location. An Indonesian embassy employee later complained to the Czech Foreign Ministry for breach of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. To make things more absurd, in 2004, Sáňka had received an official appreciation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for his role in the release of Czech journalists kidnapped in Iraq. A commando from the aforementioned department went to Sáňka’s home and insisted that he came out of the shower to open the door, whereupon he was immediately handcuffed. Government officials spent 12 hours messing up Sáňka’s home and left with his computers, flash discs, CDs, DVDs and all the cash they found, which they never returned. They lead him to his car handcuffed so his neighbors could see what was happening. He was taken to the police station where they took his photo and fingerprints, put him in a detention cell and interrogated him the whole next day. The case against Sáňka’s publication of the aforementioned book lingered for 2 years, during which time he was labeled a dangerous Islamic radical. In 2016, Sáňka was acquitted by a court; however, the state prosecutor complained so the process still continues.23

Leading human rights NGO, Czech Helsinki Committee, holds that the mosque and prayer room raids and indictment of Vladimír Sáňka represent violations of the fundamental right of freedom of religion.24

Internet
The bastion of Islamophobia is online. Due to anonymity (or difficulties in establishing the identity) and to cyberspace’s interactive nature, Islamophobes, racists and other proponents of hate speech and advocates of collective punishment have found a thriving environment online. The limited nature of this report allows us to focus on only a few instances and those that are most visible.

The most important Facebook page for mobilization and action, ‘We Don’t Want Islam in the Czech Republic (IVCRN)’25 grew from 50,000 to 70,000 followers within the last year.

There are also many Islamophobic events online that are not organised and often these events are amplified by the nature of cyberspace. For example The Czech Organization for Aid to Refugees (OPU) has lodged a complaint against an unknown offender over a list of allegedly Muslim entrepreneurs seated in Teplice that has appeared on the Internet.


Martin Rozmek, the OPU director, said the author of the list has illegally handled other people’s private data, which could jeopardize the entrepreneurs and their families. The OPU received the list of more than a hundred names of Teplice entrepreneurs, including their addresses, by e-mail. The list was headlined “Islam – Entrepreneurs”.

“The list, together with the hate e-mail text and some xenophobic supplements, has been spread via the Internet. In addition, it includes a map on which the houses and work premises of owners with Arab-sounding names are marked in red. This may facilitate a possible attack on these persons and their homes,” the OPU said.26

Some online media, such as eurabia.cz, which is hosted by another generally extreme media channel called Parlamentnílisty, focused exclusively on the threat of Islamization. Eurabia claims to be neutral but its content focuses on selecting any news or analysis seeing Muslims and/or Islam as source of danger. Like other Islamophobic media, it also engages in bashing pro-refugee Czechs who are called by nationalists “the sunny people” (alluding to their hippy naïveté), Havlists (followers of the late president Václav Havel) and “those who believe in truth and love” (alluding to Havel’s words that truth and love must defeat lies and hatred uttered during the Velvet Revolution of 1989).

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Apart from Martin Konvička, associate professor of entomology at South Bohemian University in České Budějovice, who’s only agenda is to combat Islam and the perceived threat of Islamization, we should mention his long-term companion Petr Hampl, who is a sociologist and who founded the Alternative for the Czech Republic 2017 and who is sometimes called Konvička 2. As stressed before, there is a lot of Islamophobic discourse in society and the biggest danger is when it becomes part of mainstream ideology, which is, unlike Konvička and similar people, not focused exclusively on Islam. The examples of Islamophobic behavior by of the president, minister of finance and others are examples of this worrisome trend.

Another important propagator of xenophobia and Islamophobia is Member of Parliament Tomio Okamura, who is half-Japanese half-Czech. His party and coalition was the only openly and systematically anti-Muslim and anti-refugee party to gain votes in the regional election in 2016.

Another interesting phenomenon related to Islamophobia is its complex relation to issues of women in general and feminism in particular. This phenomenon deserves a deeper analysis and not only in the Czech Republic. Women can be found on both sides of the Islam debate and as an example of the Islamophobic side we can name a blogging page turned online movement called Angry Mothers, which can also be

regarded as the women’s section of We don’t Want Islam in the Czech Republic, the main online hub for Czech Islamophobia. The argument of Angry Mothers is that they are best qualified to warn about the dangers of Islamization and refugee influx because they are mothers and Czechs. They fetishize the role of mothers capitalizing on the special position that motherhood allegedly automatically brings. They claim that pro-refugee “sunny people” have no children, that’s why they don’t care who will live in the Czech Republic. In addition to this lie, they often repeat hoaxes, like other Islamophobic sources. Their founder, Eva Hrdinová, claims that they feel compassion for poor oppressed Muslim women but at the same time she thinks Muslim feminists can’t exist. Her target is Czech feminists who, in her view, welcome Islam. At the same time, she has no compassion for actual Muslim women/mothers fleeing violence often perpetrated by other Muslims.27

Civil Society and Political Initiatives Undertaken to Counter Islamophobia

A good source for following the issues related to Islamophobia both in Czech and English is website called Romea.28 The Czech prime minister recently replaced the Minister for Human Rights Jiří Dienstbier who has been vocal about the rights of everyone including refugees and Muslims with a new minister, Jan Chvojka, whose positions are not well known.

It’s noteworthy that many demonstrations organised by nationalists, xenophobes and Islamophobes are countered by people from civil society, including antifascists, civil society representatives and others. But sometimes individuals play a key role in countering Islamophobia: after the court session with the aforementioned Muslim student of a health school a group of protesters against Islam spotted a woman in hijab and promptly invited her to go back to Africa. When she replied in perfect Czech that she was born here, the group started inviting her to take the veil off but she responded that precisely because of people like them, she wouldn’t do it adding that she doesn’t judge people by how they dress and that one can be a good nurse with and without a veil adding that the Czech health system has bigger problems than the dress code among nurses. She finished by saying, the fact that we live in Prague, in Europe, means we can wear what we want on our heads and that that was the meaning of freedom. It turned out she was the representative of the management of the Green Party Monika Horáková.29

Also worth mentioning is the Charles University program that offers refugees the opportunity to join study programs in English for free (studying in Czech if free, studying in English is not). The university also offers to pay for refugees’ accommodation. Four faculties joined the initiative initially: the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Humanities, and the Philosophical and Pedagogical Faculties. Later, the Medical and Natural Sciences Faculties joined.30 The program started in 2015 and it was not possible to find out if any refugees are participating.

Some Catholic Church representatives, such as Tomáš Halík, showed exceptional understanding for refugees and generally displayed great support, tolerance and compassion. Halík is seen as one of the most prominent Catholic intellectuals – he is also a Catholic priest – within and beyond the Czech Republic. However, Cardinal Dominik Duka, who holds the highest position in the Czech Catholic Church, has warned against underestimating the danger of Islam and an open-door policy for refugees from the Islamic world. The question of whether Islam presents a danger to Europe and European values continues to divide the Czech Catholic community. In the wake of the murder of Catholic priest Jacques Hamel, Cardinal Duka wrote an article in which he says the act should serve as a memento to those who underestimate the danger of Islam and attribute terrorist acts to frustrated or mentally deranged individuals. The Catholic weekly failed to print the article, which then appeared on the Cardinal’s blog, and Tomáš Halík openly criticised Duka for failing to make a distinction between Islam and Jihadist terrorists.31 On their part, members of the Czech Muslim Community gathered outside a Catholic church in Prague in August to denounce violence and express solidarity with the victims of terrorist attacks, most particularly French priest Jacques Hamel murdered in France by Islamic militants. Many carried banners saying “Terrorism is not a religion” and some silently attended mass at the Church of the Most Sacred Heart of Our Lord in a show of respect for Christians.32

The book entitled *Atlas of Muslim Straw Men* by the eminent Czech Orientalist Bronislav Ostřanský was published in 2014. Its aim was to collect the most frequently mentioned Islam-related topics in the media and to show how they are distorted by critically examining them from the perspective of the more nuanced academic study of Islam. The book lost nothing of its urgency in 2016.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Based on the report the following recommendations can be formulated:\(^{33}\)

- It is necessary to diversify information about Islam and Muslims in general and particularly information pertaining to local Muslims. This is an area that media and civil society organisations are already partly engaged in but where they can play a decisive future role. This should be an assignment for the Czech Muslim community as well.

- Politicians and publically engaged persons should be held responsible for their statements. If someone is advocating for concentration camps for anyone, including Muslims, that person should be held legally and socially responsible for their words.

- Czech volunteers, who have shown enormous courage and willingness to serve, should become more visible in public space, their stories and motivations studied and shared more widely.

- The system of monitoring incidents of hate toward Muslims online should be established following the example of the UK-based system called ‘Tell Mama’. With the help of such a system it would be possible to monitor and study trends in Islamophobia in the Czech Republic.

Chronology

Many incidents of Islamophobia have been mentioned throughout this report; this is a small selection of other such incidents.

- In April, 16 Christian refugees from Iraq who were brought to the Czech Republic by the Generation 21 Foundation and who have been living in Brno decided to leave the Czech Republic. They retrieved their passports from the Czech authorities and wanted to go to Germany. Later the Czech Police arrested them several kilometres from the border with Germany. The group visited the Czech Interior Ministry in person to request that their status as protected refugees be revoked.

- In June, militant Bulgarian nationalists, who are infamous for hunting refugees on the Turkish-Bulgarian border, were guests in the Czech Parliament. They were invited by two MPs from the Dawn Party.

- In August, in Teplice, Martin Konvička distributed roses to Muslim and non-Muslim women together with a short letter warning against the enslavement by Islam. The majority of women rejected his offerings.

- In September, roughly 250 people, according to Czech Police estimates, assembled for a “Saint Wenceslas demonstration” in Prague on 28 September, a state holiday officially known as the Day of Czech Statehood. The event protested the alleged “Islamization” of Europe. Other demonstrations on the same theme

\(^{33}\)These recommendations remain the same as those in the 2015 report.
were convened by the Bloc Against Islamization and the Úsvit (Dawn) political movement in the towns of Most, Ostrava and Plzeň that same day. The largest demonstration, estimated at 400, was in Most. In the other cities approximately 100 people attended these events.

- In September, the Prague Police proposed charging four people for their role in a February incident on Thunovská Street in Prague during which a group of masked men assaulted demonstrators marching in support of immigrants.

- In September, opponents of Islam assembled in the upper part of Wenceslas Square in Prague. An event called “Solidarity with Refugees” took place in the lower part of Wenceslas Square at Můstek at the same time. The roughly 20 participants marched up the square under police supervision to watch the anti-EU demonstration.

- In November, someone threw a pig head in a plastic bag at the doors of the Brno mosque.

- In December, an audit of the security situation in the Czech Republic was published. The audit was commissioned by the Czech prime minister and was written by the most prominent Czech security scholars. They concluded that the threat of Islamic radicalism is low in the Czech Republic; however, they identified risks coming from “lonely wolves” and the merging of anti-refugee, anti-Muslim right-wing extremism with mainstream politics and society.
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.