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

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

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

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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.

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. 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.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN FRANCE
NATIONAL REPORT 2016

YASSER LOUATI
The Author

Yasser Louati is a French human rights activist who specialises on Islamophobia and national security policies. Until June 2016, he was the spokesperson for the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) and head of its international relations desk. Before joining the CCIF, he was a grass-roots activist within the French Muslim community working on better political representation and active citizenship. He is now launching Justice & Libertés Pour Tous (Justice and Liberties For All) an NGO focusing on Islamophobia and violations of civil liberties. He is a regular contributor to various international news outlets including Al Jazeera, France 24 and CNN, on questions of French politics, French Muslims, Islamophobia and human rights violations. His writings are published by Al Jazeera, Alternet, Middle East Eye, Liberation and the University of Berkeley’s Islamophobia Studies Journal among others. Before his commitment to working on Islamophobia, he was an aviation consultant in the Middle East and Africa. He was educated at the University of Paris in English and Literature.

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Executive Summary

France entered 2016 in a state of shock after a series of terrorist attacks that culminated in November 2015 with mass shootings that left over 130 victims and more than 200 injured. Later in the year, further attacks targeted the country like the Bastille Day attack that left 86 dead or the murder of two police officers in June.

In a country where Islamophobia has been a growing societal challenge for the past thirty years, it was anticipated that rampant racism, combined with terrorist attacks and a broken socio-economic model, would unleash hostilities towards a minority that is perceived as a foreign body that cannot be integrated even after four generations.

Structural discrimination against Muslims was demonstrated by the National Institute of Demographic Studies (INED) which concluded that integration was a “one way street”, that immigrants are structurally cast aside despite efforts to integrate.¹

Under the state of emergency which is still in effect, over 4,000 raids have been carried out with only 6 leading to investigations for terrorism. French anti-Islamophobia NGO C.R.I (Coordination Against Racism and Islamophobia) along with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch all denounced the deliberate targeting of Muslims and the ineffectiveness of the government’s antiterror strategy. They were further supported by a leaked document from the country’s domestic intelligence urging the government to switch strategy and stop the stigmatisation of Muslims.

In a climate of fear and exacerbated tensions, hate towards Muslims reached a peak during the burkini controversy with several seaside towns banning access to public beaches to women wearing it. Emboldened by recent events, anti-Muslim racist discourse was employed not only by traditional Islamophobes but also by the candidate running for presidency in 2017.

The Berlin attack in a Christmas market has so far not led to Islamophobic retaliation in France unlike during the aftermath of the Cologne attack which led to a violent ideological backlash following Kamel Daoud’s claim in The New York Times that Arabs are prone to sexism.

Résumé

La France est entrée en 2016 dans un état de choc après une série d’attaques terroristes qui ont culminé en novembre 2015 avec plusieurs fusillades qui ont laissé plus de 130 victimes et plus de 200 blessés. Mais d’autres attaques ont visé le pays comme l’attaque du 14 Juillet qui a laissé 86 morts ou le meurtre de deux policiers en juin à Magnanville.

Dans un pays où l’islamophobie est un défi sociétal de plus en plus important depuis trente ans, on s’attendait à ce que le racisme endémique, combiné à des attaques terroristes et à un modèle socio-économique brisé, déclenche des hostilités envers une minorité perçue comme un corps étranger qui ne peut pas être intégré même après quatre générations.

La discrimination structurelle contre les musulmans a été démontrée par l’Institut national d’études démographiques (INED) qui a conclu que l’intégration était une «voie à sens unique», que les immigrants sont structurellement abandonnés en dépit des efforts d’intégration.

Avec l’état d’urgence toujours en vigueur, plus de 4000 perquisitions ont été effectuées, souvent de manière brutale, mais seulement 6 d’entre eux ont mené à des enquêtes pour terrorisme. La Coordination Contre le Racisme et l’Islamophobie (CRI) ainsi qu’Amnesty International et Human Rights Watch ont tous dénoncé le ciblage délibéré des musulmans et l’inefficacité de la stratégie antiterroriste du gouvernement. Ils ont de plus été appuyés par un document confidentiel divulgué par les services de renseignements, demandant au gouvernement de changer de stratégie et d’arrêter la stigmatisation des musulmans.

Dans un climat de peur et de tensions exacerbées, la haine envers les musulmans a atteint un sommet avec l’hystérie autour du burkini avec plusieurs villes balnéaires interdisant l’accès aux plages publiques à toute femme qui le porte. Cela a libéré le discours raciste anti-musulman non seulement par les promoteurs traditionnels de l’islamophobie, mais aussi par les candidats candidats à la présidence en 2017.

L’attaque de Berlin sur un marché de Noël n’a jusqu’à présent pas conduit à des représailles islamophobes en France contrairement à la suite de l’attaque de Cologne qui a conduit à une réaction idéologique violente exacerbée par la tribune de Kamel Daoud dans le New York Times arguant que les arabe-musulmans ont un problème avec les femmes.
Introduction

France is home to the largest Western Muslim minority yet has managed to become the laboratory for Islamophobia by inspiring other Western countries with debates on religious neutrality in public space, adopting discriminatory laws and justifying the social death sentence of Muslim women wearing headscarfs who are excluded from schools, work and potentially from universities. With a deeply rooted, yet ignored colonial past French elites have been manufacturing the Muslim problem for decades with mainstream media confining the French Muslim community to the position of a “foreign body within the nation” and a justice system that fails to meet Islamophobic attacks with proper sanctions.

Year after year, statistics point to an ever-increasing number of such attacks from physical assault to daily “silent” cases like discrimination. Yet the state has not engaged in concrete steps to tackle Islamophobia and to give life to the French Republic’s claims of “Liberty, Equality and Brotherhood”. After an explosive 2015, 2016 was the year of state-sponsored Islamophobic violence under the state of emergency and the urge to find culprits after each terror attack.

Significant Incidents and Developments
A Year of State Retaliation: Mosques, Homes and Beyond

After the November 2015 terrorist attacks, the French state engaged in a brutal counterterror campaign that deliberately targeted Muslims, in addition to the systematic backlash from ordinary people and the hysteric news coverage. The state of emergency which was declared on the night of November 14, began with a series of brutal police raids, house arrests and ransacking of private spaces including mosques. Throughout the year, Muslim places of worship were under constant attacks. After brutally raiding several mosques, the government engaged in a series of mosque closures under the pretext of radical teachings without ever providing tangible proof to support the accusations.

Several mosques were attacked despite the state of emergency and a plan to protect religious sites as demanded by President Francois Hollande in July 2015 failed to provide adequate protection.

On 8 January, the Perpignan Mosque was tagged with “Get Out” graffiti, swastikas and desecrated with boar parts. A week later, the newly built mosque of Fréjus continued its year-long struggle against National Front Mayor David Rachline who ordered its closing. The General Prosecutor went even further and required that it be demolished. Nevertheless, the prefect ordered the mosque to be opened and put an end to the legal battle.

A few miles away, the Nice Mayor Christian Estrosi (Les Républicains) illustrated his hostility to the local Muslim community by engaging in a long battle with the En-
nour Islamic Institute which involved trying to have the institute shut down despite an initial agreement to go ahead with the project and after the mosque was ready to open. The face-off can be partly explained by the pressure from the National Front and its supporters who are violently opposed to it and in the context of local elections.

The battle was declared a lost one after the prefect and the administrative court dismissed the mayor’s appeal. Nevertheless, Christian Estrosi even managed to secure the support of the local Muslim umbrella organisation, the Regional Council of the Muslim Faith (CRCM), in order to launch a rival project.

From interviews with the Ennour Institute Imam Mahmoud Benzamia, it turned out that when the mayor of Nice supported their project, opposition to the project was not as loud because, at the time, it was located in a remote area. But as the area gained value because of real estate and commercial developments, the mosque found itself at the heart of a newly developed sector.

Furthermore, the continuous demonisation of mosques and Islamic institutions in the name of fighting “radicalisation” - a term that remains undefined to this day - and with several of them being ransacked by the police or gendarmerie in night raids, attacks against Muslim places of worship have become legitimised by the current discourse. According to the Domes & Minarets website, 40 mosques were attacked in 2016 and 20 were shut down by the government.

**State Violation of Laïcité: The Arbresle Mosque Case**

On 26 November, Michel Delpuech, prefect of the Rhone Alpes Department, decided to shut down the mosque without any justification. Such a decision was made possible thanks to the powers given to him by the state of emergency and the only documents he put forward were intelligence white papers accusing the mosque of being frequented by “radical Salafi preachers”. As highlighted by news website Lyon Mag, “the prefect omitted to mention that the Salafi preacher he referred to had spoken up against the attacks: ‘It is incumbent upon preachers, speakers and other journalists to unite their discourse by clearly announcing that they are disavowing themselves from these criminal acts. In the same way, I will say to my children and Salafi brothers of France: ... Warn against them, make clear to the people about their misguidance, their deviance, their evils and their dangerousness’.” Nevertheless, Prefect Delpuech demanded that the organisation dissolves, and elects a new board before allowing it to reopen. This resulted in members of the city hall becoming members of the board of the cultural association heading the mosque. Like in numerous cases around the country, such interference of the state in religious affairs raises serious concerns about laïcité and how it is constantly used to promote strict state neutrality.

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The year 2016 was marked by another terrorist attack which was carried out by a truck driver that ploughed through a crowd watching the Bastille Day fireworks on 14 July. Eighty-six people were killed during the attack, a third of which were Muslims. Despite the toll taken by the local Muslim community, the attack unleashed a wave of racist retaliation against them and opened the door for further discriminations.

A documentary was shot in order to give voice to the local Muslim community entitled “Nice, grief and disgrace. Facing hatred while mourning the dead”. The imam shared his powerlessness after spending “a week burying people, sometimes two generations at a time”.

From Theory to Practice: Increase of Attacks Against Muslims

In comparison to the exceptionally high level of Islamophobic attacks in 2015, 2016 marked a relative decrease in attacks declared by the victims. In an atmosphere of state of emergency and brutal retaliation from the state and the lack of will from the government to act, victims of Islamophobia are not given incentives to make their cases known either to the government or to NGOs which are themselves not capable of reaching out to every single victim.

According to the Observatory of Islamophobia, from 1 January to 30 June, 2016 (before the Bastille Day attack in Nice), 29 Islamophobic attacks and 40 threats were registered against 79 attacks (63% decrease) and 197 threats (79.7% decrease) for the same period in 2015. A total of 69 acts were reported.

For Lamia Guene, head of the Association Against Islamophobia and Racisms (ALCIR):

“the first targets of Islamophobia are Muslim women who suffer verbal and physical attacks because of their visibility. Muslim men are also discriminated against but more so at work.

The danger faced by Muslim women in this hostile and discriminatory climate is that they are excluded from debates, school and work, that they are considered provocative by the simple fact of wearing a veil and are no longer considered French citizens but as Muslims and completely dehumanised.”

In a recent interview, Abdel Aziz Chaambi, president of the Coordination Against Racism and Islamophobia (CRI), declared that they recorded a 130% increase in attacks against Muslims, while the proportion of women being attacked went from 80% to 90%. Furthermore, “the year 2016 was marked by the normalisa-

4.Interview with Lamia Guene (December 7, 2016).
5.Interview with Abdel Aziz Chaambi (December 21, 2016)
tion of the state of emergency and police brutality that we could do nothing about. The number of victims that have come to us has been multiplied by three and none of the cases led to an investigation on terror charges.”

**The 2016 Islamophobia statistics from the CRI are as follows:**

- 576 cases of Islamophobic attacks
- 356 cases are related to the state of emergency; 53 are currently being processed
- 95 cases are related to public services and administrations: schools, universities, city halls, hospitals, social services
- 87 cases are related to the labour market and training
- 38 cases involved verbal and physical assault in public spaces, which according to the CRI have spiked in the wake of the state of emergency

At the international level, the Council of Europe warned the French government about the normalisation of hate speech targeting Muslims. Thorbjorn Ragland, its general secretary, said “Hate speech, through its normalisation in the public sphere, remains a matter of concern”. The pan-European organisation further put pressure on France to sign Protocol 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights which prohibits any form of discrimination.

Eric Fassin, professor of Political Sciences at the University of Paris VIII, declared in an interview for the weekly *Politis* that “what is increasing is official racism.... Ordinary racism is being allowed from the top.” He went on to accuse Prime Minister Manuel Valls of “downplaying Islamophobia by refusing to use the term”.

**Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events**

**Employment**

In its report “The Economic Cost of Discrimination”, *France Stratégie*, a think tank under the authority of the Prime Minister, concluded that men of North African descent are among the most discriminated individuals in France with an unemployment rate of 18%. For M. Pisani-Ferry, the report

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allows to allocate responsibility on structural discrimination for its social and economic costs.

The economic cost of discrimination is estimated by France Stratégie at €150 billion or 0.3% of the GDP. Further questions remain in terms of the destruction of talent for those who never get the job they trained for on taxpayers’ money, or in terms of lost investment when a trained individual is pushed towards expatriation and puts skills acquired in French schools at the service of rival economies like the U.S. or the Gulf. The systemic and structural nature of discrimination if further highlighted by Jacques Toubon, the country’s Ombudsman in his latest report:

“Far from being an isolated phenomenon, discrimination linked to the origins when applying for internship or employment occurs “often” or “very often” for more than 60% of the respondents. Being perceived of Muslim descent increases the frequency of declared discriminations, especially for men.”

“Religious beliefs are much more often cited as grounds for discrimination by those seen as Arab (42%) than as Black (8%), even when they are also perceived as Muslim. Respondents are aware of the links established between Arab origin and supposed affiliation to the Muslim religion: persons seen as Arab think very largely that they are also considered Muslim.”

As in the previous years, the French state has not shown any real commitment to confront discrimination. A year later, studies from both government agencies and research centres confirm the structural nature of discrimination in France and how Muslims are by far the most targeted group. Yet, and as confirmed by the March 2016 report by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), France «does not intend in the near future to accede to Protocol No. 12” which sets out a general prohibition of discrimination; fully applying the existing criminal and civil law provisions to combat racism and racial discrimination; reinforcing the legal framework in civil and administrative law aimed at combating racial discrimination; and raising the awareness of members of the judicial service to the problem of racial discrimination and the difficulty of legally proving its existence.”


12.ECRI, “ECRI Report on France”.
Despite the converging reports from civil society and state-sanctioned human rights institutions on the alarming situation of racism and particularly Islamophobia, the French government’s position on racism differs. So far, the only visible initiatives were a series of communication campaigns aimed at raising awareness. The campaign can be seen on the government’s website.¹³

**Education**

Schoolbooks have been examined by academics Béatrice Mabilon-Bonfils and François Durpaire in their book *Fatima moins bien notée que Marianne* (Fatima getting lower grades than Mariane)¹⁴ where both criticised the misuse of laïcité, the rewriting of history, the constant negative portraying of Muslims and how school grades are affected by pupils’ religion. According to the authors, the Islamophobic bias is blatant and the state cannot be exempted from criticism.

According to Sociology Professor Raphael Liogier “No, anti-Muslim racism is not an invention of a sociologist but an empirically traceable reality.”¹⁵ In a country where 90% of Muslim students go to public schools, the study confirmed what was already being claimed by activists in terms of systemic discrimination and the fact that nothing was being done to make France’s public schooling system more effective in terms of developing an inclusive identity.

France’s schooling system is bound to remain an ideological battlefield. If Islamophobia is a violent topic today in France, it is also because the contribution of Muslims to France’s modern day achievements has been obliterated from common memory beginning with school history books. Be it from the wealth extracted from the colonies, the indigenous struggle against the Nazis, all the way to the liberation of Paris, the postcolonial struggles in France, or the first generations’ battles to demand equal treatment, young French Muslims are deprived of a sense of identity or a reason to believe they do belong to France just as much as France belongs to them.

**Politics**

The burkini hysteria which made headlines in the summer turned out to have been sparked by Nicolas Sarkozy. Indeed, according to members of his own political party *Les Républicains*, it was Sarkozy who called and pressured mayors from the party to issue the bans so he could spark a national debate.¹⁶ The timing was indeed perfect

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for occupying media space and making headlines: it was two weeks after the Bastille Day attack and during the month of August when there is very little political news and the country was still in shock.

The burkini hysteria has had permanent effects as it has further normalised racist rhetoric aimed at Muslims and made identity politics the centre of the upcoming presidential campaign. With the exception of Cécile Duflot (Green Party) and Benoît Hamon (Socialist Party), all candidates from the far left to the far right have jumped on the bandwagon and contributed to fuelling the debate on protecting laïcité against “Muslim demands” or to reasserting the superiority of French culture in regards to others.

For instance, former Prime Minister François Fillon, who is now running for the presidency, declared during a speech (28 August, 2016, Sablé sur Sarthe) for the right-wing primaries that France “should not feel guilty about exporting its civilisation to the peoples of Africa, North America and Asia” while the burkini hysteria was still raging.17

The debate further polarised French society and a climax was reached when four policemen surrounded a Muslim woman wearing a burkini and demanded she takes off her shirt on a public beach while the crowd was watching. The picture which went viral on social media and made headlines around the world. David Thompson, a French journalist specialised in terrorism, was prompted to condemn the act as he believed it would feed the narrative of DAESH for “decades to come”.18 (Figure 2)

The ground was already set for the burkini controversy to ignite. The terrorist attacks were not the only pretext to justify it. Once again, politicians and the media had already heavily contributed to exacerbate tensions and turn communities against one another.

On 13 April, in an interview to Libération, the Prime Minister once again sparked the debate on prohibiting the Muslim headscarf in universities. His position appeared to be isolated within his own government as the Minister of Education and the Secretary for Higher Education both expressed their

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opposition to the idea. Nevertheless, with the idea having already been suggested in 2015 by then State Secretary for Women’s Rights Pascale Boistard and given the continuous extension of the application of “religious neutrality” in a growing number of places, the ground is set for a possible banning of the headscarf in universities especially with France’s political centre of gravity shifting further to the right.

In order to have a (new) state approved representation for Muslims, the French government decided to establish the Foundation of the Deeds of Islam without consulting Muslims themselves. The government went even further by appointing Jean Pierre Chevènement, a former member of the colonial administration in Algeria, as its head. As the burkini debate was raging, his asking of Muslims “to remain discreet” further widened the gap between the Muslim community and the government that is perceived as perpetuating colonial practices and denying Muslims the right of self-representation.

**Media**

French Media have been part of the problem of rising Islamophobia for decades. As in other Western countries, French Muslims are traditionally portrayed as a foreign entity even when it comes to third- and fourth-generation French citizens. In his landmark investigation “The Imaginary Islam, the Media Construction of Islamophobia in France, 1975-2005”, Thomas Deltombe demonstrated that when dealing with Islam and Muslims in general, French media outlets always made sure that the subject is linked with international events such as the Iranian Revolution in the early 80s, the Algerian Civil War in the 90s and after 2001, with global terrorism.

Coverage of the 2015 attacks followed the same pattern. The question is no longer about confronting “religious extremism” but confronting “Islam” as such and its supposed inherent threat to French identity and the safety of France’s citizens.

Even as Muslims were brutally murdered by terrorists as was the case for Ahmed Merabet who was killed at gunpoint by one of the Kouachi brothers nearby the Charlie Hebdo building in January, Amine Ibnolmobarak, Salah Emad El Gebaly, the Saadi sisters Halima and Hodda or the 33 victims of the Bastille attack in Nice, few thought against putting terrorists and their victims in the same basket.

The idea that Muslims are by far the first targets of global terrorism and are not spared even when terrorism hits Western countries, does not weigh much in media reports. Given the traditional refusal to see Muslims as full-fledged citizens and instead viewing them either as refusing to assimilate or as incapable of becoming truly

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French, and associating them with foreign threats, the biased coverage of the 2015 and 2016 attacks only magnified what was already being expressed until then.

The Eric Zemmour example is the most prolific in terms of unapologetic Islamophobia by state-owned and private media outlets. Despite a series of condemnations for hate speech on public and private news outlets, he nevertheless remains one of the top polemists to be invited on French media.

In 2016, he was again invited for a book tour promotion for *A Quinquennium for Nothing* (picture above), *Chronicles from a Clash of Civilisation* with a spot by France 5 (public service) which according to cultural weekly *Télérama* “offered a boulevard to the delusions of Eric Zemmour”. The host, Anne Sophie Lapix, offered a platform to the polemist without the presence of a Muslim person to contradict him when he singled them out for being followers of a “dangerous book” and when he claimed that such a “dangerous book can only be followed by the letter without any precautions”.

His publisher, Albin Michel, even boasted about Eric Zemmour being called an Islamophobe so as to promote the book which confirms the potential profitability of the Islamophobia niche. In 2016 alone, the company published *Will Bells Still Ring Tomorrow?* by far right leader - and notorious critic of the presence of Muslims in France - Philippe de Villiers, in which he claims France is being Islamised and lost to a conquering Muslim population. The same company also published *Overcoming Islamic Totalitarianism* by former Prime Minister François Fillon and right-wing runner for the 2017 presidential election. All these books had aggressive book tours on private and state-owned media alike. This contribution from mainstream media which is met with complete silence from state officials, further confirmed the existence of state racism fuelled by normalised Islamophobia.

**Justice System**
Since the early eighties, several laws have been passed specifically targeting Muslims. Two topics emerge when analysing their content: the debate they sparked before being adopted and the end results once they were applied. These topics are identity and anti-terrorism.

The 2004, 2010, 2011 bans on the headscarf in public schools, the full-face veil ban and veiled caregivers respectively have set the necessary precedent to target Muslims on an arbitrary basis. The cases of schoolgirls being expelled for wearing long skirts in 2015 happened again in 2016 as expected, given the initial support offered by the Minister of Education Najat Vallaud Belkacem to the school principals behind the decisions.

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Tensions in schools confirms that they are at the heart of the battle for a new *laïcité*; this battle is being extended to the labour market with the labour reform (*loi travail*) that was passed in August 2016. The religious factor (*fait religieux*) has been included in vague terms such as “religious neutrality” at the workplace, leaving the door open for employers to restrict the religious freedom of their employees. The CNCDH (National Consultative Commission on Human Rights) along with the Observatory of *Laïcité* have both blasted the bill and reminded the government “that secularism (*laïcité*) is a constitutional principle which implies the neutrality of the state, public services and local authorities but which guarantees citizens freedom of conscience and freedom to express their convictions within the limits of respect for public order.”

Furthermore, the French judicial system so far has failed to apply existing laws against racist discourse. According to Vanessa Codaccioni, professor of Political Sciences at the University of Paris 8, “the 1972 law against racism is outdated and must be reviewed in order to include Islamophobic hate speech and attacks.” This position comes in light of a series of acquittals of various figures who deliberately targeted Muslim citizens with racist speech.

France has been living in a state of emergency for over a year. Passed on the night of the 13 November attacks, the regime of exception grants special powers to the executive branch. As of November 2016, over 4,000 raids have been carried out leading to only 6 investigations based on terror-related elements. By far, Muslims were the main targets of the state of emergency.

Confirming Vanessa Codaccioni’s declarations, the Loiret Prefect Chief of Staff Frederic Clowez admitted in an interview to the *L’Echo Républicain* daily, that they were indeed targeting Muslims whose “religious practice is very assiduous, who change behaviour or dress code”. To him, such raids were carried on a preemptive basis after a denunciation by neighbours or mere suspicion.

One highly symbolic measure taken in the aftermath of the November attacks, was the proposal to change the Constitution and include a permanent state of emergency and to strip individuals who are convicted of terrorism of their French citizenship if they hold dual citizenship. This measure was seen as a de facto establishing of two levels of citizenship: those holding two citizenships and therefore likely to lose

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23. Interview with Vanessa Codaccioni (December 5, 2016).

the French one; and those holding only French citizenship who will not be stripped of it. In other words, when faced with the same accusation, people holding only French citizenship would be allowed to retain it. Observers made the direct connection with French Muslim citizens who hold citizenships from the country of birth of their parents.

This time, President François Hollande and the rest of the government faced harsh criticism even from their own political party. Justice Minister Christiane Taubira openly expressed her opposition to such a measure declaring it “unwelcome and coming with paltry effectiveness” against terrorism.

On 30 March and following four months of controversy, President Francois Hollande decided to abandon the constitutional reform project after failing to secure support from both chambers of Parliament. But the effects of the project brought back the idea of ranking between citizens as it was practiced under the Vichy government of the 1940s that had collaborated with the Nazis. According to Amnesty International, “the (state of emergency ed.) measures were applied in a discriminatory manner. Some Muslims were targeted mainly on the basis of their religious practice, with no evidence pointing to their involvement in any criminal offence.”  

Human Rights Watch, on the other hand, went further and declared that “France has carried out abusive and discriminatory raids and house arrests against Muslims under its sweeping new state of emergency law. The measures have created economic hardship, stigmatised those targeted, and have traumatised children.”

Still according to the Human Rights Watch team sent to France for investigation “The vast majority of those placed under house arrest or whose homes were searched are Muslims and persons of North African descent. All the measures that the Human Rights Watch documented targeted Muslims, Muslim establishments, or halal restaurants.”

Such blatant targeting of individuals because of their real or assumed adherence to the Muslim religion convinced human rights lawyers such as Arié Alimi that state-sponsored racism is a reality but also that “there is a state doctrine that puts a continuum between Islam and terrorism”.  

If France’s war on terror were to be assessed according to the ratio between the number of repressive laws adopted and their results, failure is the only realistic conclusion. Since 1986, over thirty antiterror laws have been adopted; their only conse-

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27. Ibid.

quences have been the weakening of the rule of law and empowering terrorist groups that they can bring down “Western democracies” without sending an invading army.

Even within the country’s intelligence apparatus, criticism is the norm. The country’s domestic intelligence agency SGDSN (Secretary General for Defense and National Security) in a 2013 confidential report—which was leaked in January 2016, called for a proactive strategy that avoids singling out communities but instead brings representatives of the Muslim community to the table. Calls from those dealing with terrorism like the SGDSN, however, are far from being heard as shown by the closing of dozens of mosques and the handing of each terrorist attack.

On 28 July, David Lisnard, mayor of Cannes, issued a ban on the burkini in public beaches located in his town on the grounds that the swimsuit - mostly worn by Muslim women - “shows a religious affiliation in a conspicuous manner while France and religious places of worship (in reference to the Saint Etienne de Rouvray beheading of a priest in his church ed.) are under terrorist attacks, [and] are such that they create risks of trouble to public order (rioting, scuffles) which must be prevented.”

Fines of €38 were to be given to “any person not wearing decent clothes, respectful of good morals and laïcité (secular law), respectful of other people’s hygiene and safety in the maritime public domain.”

This sparked international controversy as the ban targeted dress codes in public beaches and thus public spaces. The danger of such a measure meant that a precedent was set for future banning of religious signs in public spaces as is being advocated by right and far right political figures such as former president Nicolas Sarkozy or national front leader Marine Le Pen.

Benedicte Jeannerod, the director of France’s Human Rights Watch, declared that “all these bans serve to do is create a dangerous and absurd confusion between how some Muslim women choose to dress and the despicable terrorist attacks that French people, of all religions, have suffered.”

At the international level the United Nations Human Rights Council demanded the immediate suspension of the ban and declared through its spokesperson Rupert Coalville that:

“It is frankly a stupid reaction to what we are having, facing, in terms of terrorist attacks. It does nothing to increase security, it does nothing to improve Security.”


public order, if anything, it stimulates friction, and therefore undermines public order. If anything, it is having a counterproductive effect.”

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<th>TABLE 1: IN TOTAL, 29 MAYORS PROHIBITED THE BURKINI ON THE SAME GROUNDS</th>
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<td>1 Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer (LR)</td>
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<td>2 Cassis (LR)</td>
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<td>3 La Ciotat (LR)</td>
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<td>4 Mandelieu-la-Napoule (LR)</td>
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<td>5 Cap d’Ail (LR), Menton (LR)</td>
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<td>6 Cannes (LR)</td>
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<td>7 Villeneuve-Loubet (LR)</td>
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<td>8 Nice (LR)</td>
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<td>9 Saint-Laurent-du-Var (divers droite)</td>
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<td>10 Beaulieu-sur-Mer (LR)</td>
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<td>11 Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat (DVD)</td>
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<td>12 Villefranche-sur-Mer (LR)</td>
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<td>13 Eze (DVD)</td>
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<td>14 Roquebrune-Cap-Martin (LR)</td>
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<td>15 Théoule-sur-Mer (DVD)</td>
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Human rights organisations including the French Human Rights League (LDH) turned to the administrative court of Nice to challenge the ban. According to Hervé Lavisse, attorney for the LDH:

“The Mayor (of Cannes ed.) has worn the uniform of a perfect recruiter for radical groups, how can we not be afraid that some of our fellow countrymen and women will feel excluded from the city by such exclusive and repressive attitudes? It is time for the region’s public office holders to calm their discriminatory ardor and to defend the spirit of the Republic”.

On 22 August, the Administrative Court of Nice sided with the mayors and justified the burkini ban by making a direct connection between wearing a burkini and being on the side of terrorist groups:

“As illustrated by the murder of a Catholic priest in his church in Saint Eti-enne du Rouvray on July 26, 2016, a few days before the August 5, 2016 municipal bylaw in dispute, the coexistence of religions, which is a constituent element

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of the principle of secularism (laïcité ed.), is opposed by Islamic religious fundamentalism which advocates a radical practice of religion, incompatible with the essential values of the French community, and the principle of gender equality. In this context the wearing of a garment on beaches to display a religious convictions in an ostentatious manner that could be interpreted as belonging to this religious fundamentalism is (…) to be felt by some as a mistrust or provocation exacerbating the tensions felt by the population following the succession of Islamist attacks suffered in France, including that of Nice on 14 July 2016 and of 26 July 2016 which directly targeted the Christian religion.”

Meanwhile, the whole country was engaged in a bitter hysteria targeting burkini-clad women. Several assaults were reported against women wearing it and even against women wearing a headscarf. In some cases, the police was even sent to fine them, demanded they undress or that they stay away from beaches.

In Corsica, a Muslim family was assaulted by a group of native Corsicans after a verbal dispute escalated following the presence of a burkini-clad woman. Others were assaulted by angry crowds as was the case in Nice, Villeneuve Loubet and Cannes. In his analysis of the situation, renowned French sociologist Said Bouamama expressed his condemnation of such behaviour, “the worst part is not police officers being sent to a beach to fine a headscarf-wearing woman but the crowd pointing to her and asking the police to come for her”.

By 26 August, the Council of the State invalidated the burkini ban in a decision that formed jurisprudence, hence demanding that all bans be lifted.

Nevertheless, Prime Minister Manuel Valls who declared he was in favour of the burkini ban, insisted that the debate, despite being ended by the country’s highest administrative court, “must continue”. Echoing such positions, only two mayors accepted to conform with the arbitration, prompting François Dumont, president of the French Human Rights League (LDH) to write to the Prime Minister in order to enforce the lift.

On 13 July, the Court of Justice of the European Union issued a press release declaring that the “Advocate General Sharpston considers that a company policy requiring an employee to remove her Islamic headscarf when in contact with clients constitutes unlawful direct discrimination”. The release relates to the dismissal of a French Muslim woman who was dismissed by her employer following her refusal to remove her headscarf while at work. The decision, which is unique when dealing with Islamophobic discrimination in France, still awaits the necessary backup to be enforced in the context where women wearing a headscarf have a 1% chance of securing a job.

35. Said Bouamama at the ALCIR Meeting Against Islamophobia (September 26, 2016), retrieved March 1st, 2017 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azLmKoyLrMw
Internet
Adding to the media role in promoting Islamophobia, the Internet has become one of the most effective places for doing so with almost total impunity. Several websites have managed to become the traditional relays of Islamophobes both from the left and the right.

For instance, *FDesouche, Riposte Laïque, Boulevard Voltaire, or Riposte Républicaine* are the specialised hotspots for Islamophobia with the theory of France being besieged by “rampant Islamization”. Pro-Israeli websites such as Europe-Israel are joining forces with the far right and contributing to feed the “Muslim threat” narrative and the “natural” convergence between Israelis and French nationalists in the face of a clash of civilisation with Muslims. This can also be explained by the fear of seeing Muslims promoting an anti-occupation agenda and influencing French foreign policy in order to support the right of Palestinians for self-determination.

In March 2001, right-wing weekly and profitable *Valeurs Actuelles* made a significant move to reach out to far right conspiracy website *FDesouche* and increase its legitimacy by purchasing advertising space. This move was spotted by French journalist Claude Asklolovitch, according to whom *Valeurs Actuelles* is trying to bridge the gap between younger social media users and older traditional readers of the magazine.

The far right cyberspace is bound to grow in size and in influence with the arrival of U.S. pro-Trump website *Breitbart* which had Steve Bannon at its head, offered to help the National Front for the upcoming election.

In reaction to the sustainability of cyber hate speech, the National Observatory Against Islamophobia noted the “strong progression” of online targeting of Muslims. Its president Abdellah Zekri declared that “since the 14 July attacks in Nice, there has been a more worrying rise in calls for murder against French Muslims and their representatives [...] These calls for hatred that flourish on the Web risk jeopardizing national cohesion which is what DAESH wishes as well as some politicians who have been making irresponsible declarations.”

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network
That the government is the number one contributor to Islamophobia in France comes as no surprise. The “Lepenisation” of the minds is a reality and is the direct result of rampant racism within French society inherited from the colonial era, but also from the weight and power of far right ideology. The far right is far from being a marginal group but represents a structured movement with institutional actors like the Front National, theorists, armed wings, media outlets and funders.

There are traditional mechanisms for the promotion of Islamophobia in France. Since the French Muslim population settled in the early 70s and their descendants became visible citizens, and given the discredited thesis that some races are superior
to others, identity, culture, values and later on terrorism have constantly been used to legitimise racist discourse targeting Muslims, whether they are new immigrants or have been established for several generations.

Laïcité or the French secular law is the archetype of laws that have been perverted for the purpose of excluding Muslims and passing regular laws of exception. Adopted in 1905 in order to separate religion from politics and to grant state neutrality, it was brought back as a pretext in the 1980s in order to clamp down on the visibility of Muslims with the argument that public space must be neutral and protected from religious visibility.

However, this went against the spirit and the letter of the law. What is being used as “laïcité” by the left and the right to legally challenge Muslims’ religious freedom, is actually the “new laïcité” as theorised by MP François Baroin from the mainstream political party Les Républicains in 2003. In his report “Pour une nouvelle laïcité” (For a new laïcité) to Prime Minister Jean Pierre Raffarin, Baroin considered that the target of this new laïcité was the rising visibility of Muslims after, according to Baroin, “the struggle against Catholicism was won”. Knowing that restricting people’s religious expression in public space was in clear violation of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and even the French Constitution, Baroin concluded in his report that, at some point “laïcité and human rights are incompatible”. 36

The Rise of the “Identitarian Left”

The continuous misuse of laïcité for ideological and political ends prompted the official Observatory of Laïcité to enter into a public confrontation with Prime Minister Valls following the #NousSommesUnis (We are united) clash with the head of the observatory, Jean Louis Bianco, for signing the call along with various Muslim organisations and activists.

During the night of the 13 November attacks, Samuel Greybowski - who had previously founded interfaith NGO COEXIST- launched the #NousSommesUnis (We are united) call on Twitter which went viral and rallied thousands of people. The call was then shortly transformed into a text calling for the unity of the French people in the face of terrorism. Signatories included representative organisations and individuals from the Catholic, Muslim, Protestant and Jewish faiths, who were later joined by organisations of various backgrounds.

As stated on the Noussommesunis.com website “A trap is being set up for us! We must refuse to succumb to it! Division, denunciation, stigmatization are at the heart of this sneaky trap. Whenever we hurry to designate the culprits of this crime, of which only the perpetrators are guilty, we fall into the trap of a programmed and orchestrated division.” 37


Despite its success within communities and much earned support by the public opinion, Prime Minister Manuel Valls denounced it on the grounds that Muslim activists, who he disagreed with, had been allowed to add their names to the list.

Valls was not alone to attack the “Nous Sommes Unis” initiative. He was joined by the traditional promoters of secular fundamentalism which range from the identitarian left (adherent of full assimilation, antierclicalism) to the far right and pro-Israeli lobbies such as the CRIF and American Jewish Committee. In a series of columns, all agreed on the exclusion of specific Muslim representatives based on the accusations of being part of the Muslim Brotherhood and being Muslim fundamentalists.

During a dinner organised by the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions (CRIF), a France-based Zionist lobbying group, Prime Minister Valls made headlines by declaring “The Observatory of Laïcité - which is under my responsibility - can not be anything that distorts the reality of this secularism. It must be clear about the calls that are signed: you can not sign calls, including condemning terrorism, with organizations that I consider to be participants in a (nauseating) climate, this is not possible.”

Commentators from the right and the left side of France’s political spectrum understood this as an attack against the Muslim activists whom had signed alongside the observatory’s head. Furthermore, Prime Minister Valls stood in support of Elizabeth Badinter who declared on 6 January that “One must not be afraid of being called an Islamophobe” prompting an immediate answer by the Observatory of Laïcité Rapporteur: “A three-year pedagogical work destroyed by an interview”.

Jean Louis Bianco brought the controversy to an end by first refusing to resign as requested by Manuel Valls and his entourage, and second by standing firm and reminding the public that “there are not two versions of laïcité, one prior and one after Islam”.

Given the little action taken by the government and the highly criticised official initiatives such as that of the state’s anti-racism body (DILCRA) marketed as #TousUnisContreLaHaine (All united against hatred), activists have turned to political autonomy and self-reliance.

Many concluded that attempts by the French state to deal with racism were not sincere enough but rather were initiated to hamper any effort by radicalised groups engaging in the activist and political arena and bringing about change by their own means.

Official responses to racism are discredited by the overwhelming majority of radicalised groups and are tagged as “moral” anti-racism, i.e. based on moral condemnation but without real enforcement of existing laws or intentions of bringing the culprits to justice.

For instance, a “decolonial camp” was setup during the summer of 2016 in order to allow Arab and African minorities to share common space, exchange ideas and experiences and learn about how the struggle against racism can be taken forward. The event, which was reserved for “racialised people only” was intended to be a platform for emancipation, self-determination and to empower those who are the daily targets of hate speech, discrimination, police brutality or structural exclusion.

National Identity

National identity debates on the back of French Muslims have had deep and violent effects at the local and national levels. The city of Nice, which is home to one of the biggest communities of former settlers from North Africa is also a national hub for what is commonly referred to as the “Identitarian Right”. Its mayor, Christian Estrosi, made headlines on multiple occasions with declarations such as “a third world war is being declared by an Islamic fifth column”. 39

Robert Menard, another mayor, this time in Béziers, burst into fame after leaving Reporters Without Borders and engaging with the far right and winning the Municipal elections of 2012.

Robert Menard had already sparked outrage in 2015 after declaring that he had established a list of all the Muslim pupils in his city - but was later acquitted. As a staunch supporter and promoter of extreme right wing ideas, his public appearances are synonymous with hostile positioning towards Muslims, immigrants and refugees.

In an already hostile environment, the mayor of Béziers launched his fearmongering campaign “Immigrants, they are coming” with an explicit message that Béziers, just as France as a whole, is being invaded by Blacks and Arabs.

Such refusal to welcome refugees is best expressed by France’s statistics in terms of treatment of those already on French soil and facing daily harassment by the police and minors being denied proper protection. According to film-making activists Radical Cinema, the French Red Cross rejects about 9 out of 10 minors on a purely arbitrary basis.

Overall, France has welcomed less migrants or refugees than the rest of Europe by far. For instance, according to figures made available by the country’s Office for the Protection of Refugees and Apatrideres (OFPRA), France has welcomed only 10,000 Syrians out of the 5 million that have fled the country.

Yet, despite such low figures and an internationally known unwelcoming stance, public discourse towards migrants and refugees is ever more violent. The National Front plays the traditional leading role in terms of rejecting non-white individuals but a new level was reached when its Vice President Florian Flippot refused to condemn hate speech targeting them on social media. When asked whether he supported such racist discourse, he replied that “making French people feel guilty, is a little easy. French elites have been doing so for the past 30 years by saying ‘You are racist because you refuse immigration’ [...] The French are tired of being made feel guilty.”

Such positioning is no longer restricted to the far right. The mainstream right-wing party adopted identical positions as was expressed by its President Nicolas Sarkozy who declared that only “5% of migrants are eligible to stay in France”, a figure contradicted by the Minister of Housing Emmanuelle Cosse who had previously declared that “80% of the migrants are eligible for asylum”.

Even within the left, Prime Minister Manuel Valls declared “France’s opposition” to any “permanent relocation mechanism” between European countries.

The racist discourse Muslims face on a daily basis has regular platforms in public and private media outlets as much as in politics. An example of profitable Islamophobia in the media and the biased treatment of Islamophobes by the latter, is that of conservative Eric Zemmour.

After making a name for himself for holding openly Islamophobic, misogynist and xenophobic positions on radio station RTL and through his books which regularly top France’s sales, he was convicted for “incitement of hatred towards Muslims” and fined €3,000 after giving an interview to Italian daily 


minorities. His regular employer RTL maintained him as a daily chronicler and he was welcomed on public television to promote his latest book, where he again targeted Muslims as an unwelcome minority.

The case of Eric Zemmour is far from being isolated. Several figures have kept their positions on public radio and television service while continuously feeding the general public with racist rhetoric. For instance, Alain Finkilekraut is a notorious self-proclaimed philosopher who has been feeding Islamophobia since the late eighties. The “clash of identities” within France remains his speciality. In a bestselling book _L‘identité malheureuse_ (The Sad Identity) published in 2011, his focus was on the inherent threat represented by Muslims to France, the impossibility for Muslims to integrate and the deep-rooted hatred of Muslims towards France’s values. On top of holding a weekly radio talk show on France Culture - a public radio station - he also managed to enter the Académie Française (French Academy), the pre-eminent French council for matters pertaining to the French language. The nominations of a notorious Islamophobe to some of the most prestigious institutions in the country did not spark any controversy within the French elites.

Civil Society and Political Initiatives Undertaken to Counter Islamophobia

The Coordination Against Racism and Islamophobia (CRI) has been one of the oldest organisations dealing with the specific issue of Islamophobia. Given the current climate of post terror attacks and normalised Islamophobia, a

A number of public meetings have been held in 2016 in order to denounce and hold the government responsible for not doing enough. The _Association de Lutte Contre Le Racisme et l’Islamophobie_ (ALCIR) organised their fall meeting in the aftermath of the burkini scandal and the participants, from sociologist Said Bouamama to the Teacher’s Collective for the Repeal of the 2004 Law (_Collectif des Enseignants pour l’Abrogation de la Loi de 2004_), have drawn the same picture of structural racism that can only be faced with further mobilisation from grass-roots organisations and a distancing from mainstream ones.

On the other hand, student organisations have been mobilised with a series of lectures being held despite state censorship – as at the University of Evry, for example, where a conference on police brutality and Islamophobia was canceled.

For instance, students at the Institute for Political Studies (Sciences PO) organised a hijab day[^45] in order to deconstruct the permanent demonisation of head-scarf-wearing women. Although criticised by the traditional promoters of Islamophobia, the initiative received rather positive welcome and raised questions on the

structural exclusion in France of Muslims wearing a headscarf. The initiative was launched in reaction to the Minister for Women’s Rights Laurence Rossignol who declared that veiled Muslim women were comparable to “American Negroes who were in favour of slavery”.

Farhad Khosrokhavar, Director of Studies at the EHESS (School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences) had previously declared “We have chosen to demonise the Muslim headscarf”. Students replied to Prime Minister Valls’s willingness to ban the headscarf in universities, with the hashtag #VraisProblemesUniversite (Real Problems in Universities) in order to denounce his focusing on headscarves at the expense of addressing the lack of means and equipment at universities.

The European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion (EMISCO) based in Strasbourg has been acting to bring the Islamophobia question before international institutions such as the OSCE HDIM meeting of 2016 but also to offer a platform for activists to face the French government in what can be described as rare opportunities to confront policy makers face to face. Along with a coalition of European NGOs including ENAR, FEMYSO and EFOM, EMISCO is engaged in current talks with David Friggieri, the European Commission’s coordinator against anti-Muslim hatred.

The Council for Justice Equality and Peace (COJEP) launched its “National Conference on Islamophobia” which aims to become a platform for activists and organisations alike and to further mobilise stakeholders at the grass-roots level.

The online counter-attack is probably the most aggressive and the most visible one so far. Several alternative information websites have been launched with the publicly announced objective of giving voice to the voiceless, deconstructing the myth of the domestic enemy and further normalising the presence of Muslims as full-fledged citizens.


In response to their constant demonisation by the media and the subsequent attacks, French mosques organised a national “Open Mosque Day” in order to invite people of other faiths and worldviews to visit, meet religious staff, answer questions and dispel any doubt on what happens inside mosques and on the nature of their mission. Abdembi El Hamraoui, imam of the Colomiers Mosque for 17 years, declared to the Provence daily “All those who want to know Islam better are welcome. Bringing people together overrides psychosis”. 52

Launched by journalist Nadia Henni Moulaï, alternative news website Melt- ingbook.com aims at being “a counter-voice” and a platform for “inspiring profiles, accomplishments for the youth and a counter-discourse to French mainstream me- dia”. 53 In a similar segment but rather focused on more political topics and by being engaged in promoting the “halal way of life beyond the meat consumption question”, 54 LeMuslimPost.com is already registering 1 million visitors per day and aims at becoming the number one online media for French Muslim-related questions.

Another website is becoming a central reference in terms of mosque-related news. According to its founder, Brahim Zardoua, Domes & Minarets was launched in order to deconstruct “their [Muslims’] frightening image in public opinion, because of disinformation and propaganda from fascists.” With 2017 approaching, the founder wants to “develop Domes & Minarets by making it a little more generalist to cover as widely as possible French Muslim-related news”. 55

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Tackling Islamophobia is bound to be a long and tenuous road. We hence recommend that the French state meets its obligation to protect human rights and civil liberties by:

- Lifting the state of emergency.
- Banning the use of white papers which have no legal ground but are still used to violate fundamental rights under the pretext of the war on terror.
- Implementing laïcité and a strict separation between the state and religious af- fairs. The French state must stop interfering in Muslim affairs but rather, be a facilitator for Muslims to build mosques that will be autonomous and fully con- trolled by the community.
- Launch a nationwide assessment on the effects of the 2004 headscarf ban on the girls who had to stop going to public school and on the girls who are obliged to take their headscarves off before entering school buildings.

53. Interview with Nadia Henni Moulaï (December 24, 2016).
54. Interview with Frederic Gheldof (December 24, 2016).
55. Interview with Brahim Zardoua (December 25, 2016).
• Repeal the 2004 ban on the Muslim headscarf.
• Repeal the 2010 full-face veil ban which was deemed unconstitutional as such but passed on security grounds.
• Repeal the Chatel Ministerial Circular banning veiled Muslim pupil mothers from attending school fieldtrips.
• Assess the effects of the state of emergency on the innocent people who have been unjustly targeted.
• Update the 1972 law on discrimination and include Islamophobia.
• Train state employees, especially magistrates, law enforcement, education and social services personnel on the realities of Islamophobia and on their duty to tackle it.
• Implement the training of public servants (especially those of the Ministry of Justice, law enforcement and the Ministry of Education) to the realities of Islamophobia and its effects on individuals as well as national cohesion.
• End payment of state subsidies to news outlets promoting Islamophobia.
• Empower victims of Islamophobia through state-supported class actions against discrimination or hate speech.
• Put pressure on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in order to effectively tackle hate speech targeting Muslims.
• Update schoolbooks in order to include the historic contribution of the Muslim community to France.
• Prosecute companies found guilty of discrimination.

Chronology

January
• 01/1/16: Vitrolles Mosque files lawsuit after arson attempt.
  - Man attacks military personnel stationed before the Valence Mosque.
• 06/1/16: Elizabeth Badinter states “One shouldn’t be afraid of being called an Islamophobe”.
• 07/1/16: Pig legs are thrown inside the mosque of Perpignan.
• 09/1/16: Mayor of Beaucaire is sued for demanding that shops close their doors after 11pm. The measure targeted Muslim-owned shops.
• 10/1/16: Satire show “Groland” issues a video mocking former rapper and Muslim convert Diam’s for wearing the hijab: “I f-ck you under my niqab”.
• 13/1/16: Senate holds hearing on the “Organization, establishment and funding of Islam in France and its places of worship”.
  - A boar head is thrown inside a mosque in Corsica.
  - Minister of Interior dissolves 3 Muslim organisations in Lagny sur Marne.
• 19/1/16: Minister of Interior Bernard Cazeneuve states “Anti-Muslim acts have tripled and reached 400 for the year 2015” - this only includes lawsuits and
declarations to the police, not administrative disputes such as discrimination.
- Three children are assaulted and racially insulted by the parent of a schoolmate
  who threatens to kick the door down while their parents are away.
- Racist graffiti on the Blois Mosque.

- 28/1/16: A court acquits the murderer of a Muslim man in 2015 after declaring
  him “irresponsible”.

February
- 01/2/16: The French Human Rights League publishes a renewed text calling for
  canceling the constitutional reform which includes the stripping of citizenship of
  binational citizens convicted of acts of terror and a permanent state of emergency.
- 02/2/16: The National Consultative Commission on Human Rights publishes
  its report on racism.
- 09/2/16: Minister of Interior Bernard Cazeneuve recognises the police’s wrong-
  doing while raiding the Aubervilliers Mosque.
  - A Muslim mother is assaulted in front her son’s school.

March
- Minister of Interior Bernard Cazeneuve declares that he is in favour of schools
  giving classes on religion in the region of Alsace-Lorraine.

May
- 01/5/16: The French Human Rights League holds a commemoration for Brahim
  Bouarram who was thrown into the Seine River by National Front militants and
  killed.

June
- 30/6/16: Elderly Muslim verbally and physically assaulted in the city of Rouen.

July
- 14/7/16: Truck attack in Nice.
- 26/7/16: A priest is murdered in the town of Saint Etienne du Rouvray.

August
- 16/8/16: IFOP Survey entitled “How Catholics Perceive Islam”.

October
- 3/9/16: The Observatory of Laïcité publishes its reminder of what is and what is
  not legal under the French secular law.
- 13/3/16: IFOP Survey on the place given to Islam in public debates and the
  presidential campaign.
November
- Gilles Kepel publishes the lengthy article “La Gauche et l’Islam” in which he accuses the left of being too friendly towards Islam.
- The head of one of France’s oldest anti-racist organisations (LICRA) expresses his opposition to using “Islamophobia” as a term and denies its existence as such; he claims “It is a sham”.

December
- 17/12/16: Chateau Thierry Mosque is targeted by arsonists.
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.