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

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.⁴

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. 6 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.

The Author

Zsolt Sereghy is a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Political Science, Vienna University, Austria. His current research focuses on the nexus between Europe’s Muslim communities, migration, and political and media securitisation. He holds a Magister degree in Oriental Studies from Vienna University and a M.Litt. degree in Middle Eastern and Central Asian Security Studies from the University of St Andrews, Scotland. His research interests include the securitisation of Islam and Muslim migrant communities in Europe, as well as Middle East politics in general and Lebanese politics, educational policies and pop culture in particular. Sereghy has published a number of articles, most recently ‘Vienna Must Not Become Istanbul – The Securitization of Islam and Muslims in Austria’ (in Suleiman, Yasir (ed.), Muslims in the UK and Europe, Centre for Islamic Studies of the University of Cambridge, May 2014). Currently, he is a researcher at a Beirut-based Human Rights NGO. E-mail: zsolt.sereghy@gmail.com

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Executive Summary

Until recently, there has been no considerable public or political interest in Islam per se or in Muslims in the country or elsewhere in the world. For the larger part of the 20th century, the image of Islam in Hungary had been largely formed by Orientalist essentialisations and imported stereotypes based on world affairs; however due to the lack of the country’s colonial experience and following waves of Western-European style Muslim immigration, Islam stayed fundamentally more distant, exotic and less known. Today, Hungary is a country with a very small but well-integrated Islamic community and historically rather positive public attitudes towards Islam. However, as a result of global events and increasing exposure to Western European debates surrounding the religion and its followers, Hungary has been experiencing a slow but gradual shift towards adopting Islamophobic perceptions and discourses in the past decade. This slow process found new wind in its sails this year, as global events hit closer to home and Europe’s unfolding so-called refugee crisis made the Hungarian public a direct witness of what it had hitherto been only a distant observer. Starting with the ‘refugee crisis’ of the summer of 2015, the debate on Islam became one of the most prominent and omnipresent topics in Hungarian media and politics. Competing with the far right, the ruling conservative Fidesz managed to portray Islam and Muslims as an existential threat to both the country and Western culture. Framed by a flagrant anti-Islamic rhetoric omnipresent by now in right-wing political and media circles, anti-Muslim narratives remain uncontested in the country’s current political atmosphere and enjoy the unconditional support of an overwhelming portion of the population. Through the lack of popular knowledge about Islam and without any effective counter-narrative or defence strategy, this no-stakes situation has led to an openly anti-Islam rhetoric dominating the mainstreams of politics and the media and to an increasing number of physical attacks with a possibly Islamophobic motive. This report investigates discursive events in connection with anti-Muslim attitudes that occurred in Hungary in the past year and puts them into their domestic and transnational contexts. The report is based on a survey of relevant discourses taking place in Hungarian media outlets and the country’s political arena as well as on a number of expert interviews from the fields of journalism and NGOs conducted in December 2016 in Budapest.
Összefoglaló

Introduction

Islam in Hungary today has a very low number of followers and no historically indigenous community comparable to those of, for example, Romania or Poland.1 During the most recent official census of 2011,2 5,579 - or 0.056% - of the country’s legal residents indicated their affiliation to, almost exclusively, Sunni Islam.3 Of these, 4,097 (73.4%) declared themselves Hungarian, while 2,369 (42.5%) as Arab by ethnicity.4 However, various estimates put the number of the country’s Islamic community between 25,0005 and 50,000.6 Even so, with a share of well under 1% (0.1 or 0.3% respectively) of the overall population, Islam can be considered a marginal and invisible religion in the country; Budapest, a city of more than two million, has only one mosque and merely a handful of prayer rooms. The last minaret was built almost 500 years ago by the occupying Ottoman Turks.7 Currently, there are two officially recognised Islamic religious organisations, both Sunni, working in Hungary: the Hungarian Islamic Community (MIK - Magyar Iszlám Közösség) and the Church of Muslims of Hungary (MME – Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza).8 Among these, the latter largely represents foreign-born Muslims, while the former is mainly dominated by Hungarian-born converts and is better represented in the media. Both organisations are too small in number to adhere themselves to a singular branch or madhhab (school of Islamic jurisprudence); the MIK declares itself to be open to both Sunni and Shia Islam and all of their madhāhib.9 A formerly third organisation - but still the largest -, the Islamic Church (IE – Iszlám Egyház) had its status as an officially recognised church revoked in 2012.

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2. The Hungarian government does not collect official data on religious affiliation; however, the 2011 national census included an optional question on religious affiliation.
4. Hungary’s Central Statistics Office allows the declaration of more than one ethnicity, thus the sum of residents declaring Hungarian and Arab ethnicity is higher than those declaring their affiliation to Islam. Also, there is no distinction made between the passport countries of residents with Arab ethnicity. See: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, “A népességnevezetiségi, anyanyelv, családi, baráttaközösségbenhasználatnyelvészkulturális-összefüggés,” ksh.hu, (April 17, 2013), retrieved December 28, 2015, from http://www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/tablak_teruleti_00.
8. According to Hungarian legal practice, all religious organisations, Christian or not, seeking recognition by the state are referred to with the term ‘church’ (egyház) originating from Christian ecclesiastic practice.
the community is represented by the Islamic Council of Hungary (MIT –Magyarországi Islám Tanács), an umbrella organisation jointly created by the MIK and the MME in 2011 and recognised as one of the country’s 32 churches by parliament in 2012.  

During the course of its history, Hungary has had frequent, mostly not very peaceful, encounters with the Muslim world. Traces of Hungary’s Ottoman occupation (1541-1699) are still present in the country’s collective memory, e.g. even 400 years later, Hungarian children can recite nursery rhymes about a stork wounded by a Turkish child and healed by a Hungarian one. The Ottoman era, however, is not interpreted through a religious lens as a Christian-Muslim conflict, but rather through an ethnic one as a foreign occupation. Hence, the Ottomans are not regarded any differently than the Catholic Austrians, or the atheist Soviets, who also occupied the country for longer periods of time. Since the Ottomans were more interested in collecting taxes from the Christian population than converting it to Islam, they are remembered mostly as occupiers in political terms. The 17th-century poet and military strategist, Miklós Zrínyi, for example, saw the Ottomans as an obstacle to Hungarian sovereignty, rather than a lethal threat to the Catholic faith.  

In 1916, the recognition of Islam as one of Hungary’s official denominations is the second example of legislation of this kind in Europe after the Austrian part of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire did the same in 1912. Both acts were the direct result of the incorporation of Muslim-majority Bosnia into the Empire in 1908 but remain in effect until today. Despite the memory of the Ottoman occupation, Hungarian Orientalist scholars have managed to contribute to the emergence of highly romanticised and essentialised, yet fundamentally positive images of the Orient and thus, of Islam.  

During the four decades of communist rule, Hungary built strong political and economic relations with several ‘brotherly socialist’ countries of the Arab region. This was in accordance with the policies of the larger Soviet bloc. Thousands of Muslim students from secular Arab republics, such as Algeria, Syria, Palestine and Iraq, pursued their engineering or medical studies at Hungarian universities. Many of these students married Hungarians and permanently settled in the country. Thus, Hungary has had a fundamentally different experience with the integration of its Muslims than Western Europe due to their small number, their usually high educational level and for the most part their successful integration. It is important to note however that even if the upkeep of religious practices does play a significant role in the personal lives of foreign-born Hungarian Muslims, the external identification of these immigrant groups by the host society is more likely to be based on their ethnic

11. Pall/Sayfo, Why an anti-Islam campaign has taken root in Hungary, a country with few Muslims.
origin, not religious affiliation. Thus, good relations with one’s ‘Iraqi GP’ or ‘Syrian grocer’ won’t necessarily be translated into or seen as representative of the perceptions of Islam and Muslims in general. This, as well as the low number of Muslims, also means that the average Hungarian is likely to have little or no direct contact with Muslims on a daily basis.

Although Islamophobia was not dominant in the Hungary of the ‘90s and 2000s, it was nevertheless present in public discourse. Thus, American-style ‘Born Again Christians’, mainly members of the Hungarian branch of the Pentecostals, the Faith Church (with about 60.000 members), saw in Islam the manifestation of the Antichrist.12

Often styled as a case study of ‘Islamophobia without Muslims’,13 Hungary has been increasingly showing cases of intolerance, negative attitudes, essentialisation and fear towards Islam. Also, not surprisingly, Hungary has not been exempt from the Europe-wide phenomenon of overestimating Islam’s demographic strength within the population. The latest Ipsos MORI poll of late 2016 found that the Hungarian public has also greatly overestimated the portion of the country’s Muslims putting their number at 6% against what in reality is well below 0.1%14 and predicted their increase to 14% by 2020. According to experts, this portion is not likely to increase above the current number of 0.1%.15

According to a PEW Research Center study of spring 2016, Hungarians are the most fearful of refugees in the EU: 76% of the Hungarian respondents in the study think refugees increase the risk of terror attacks; 82% fear that refugees pose a burden to the economy; 69% say the large number of refugees leaving Iraq and Syria is a major threat to their country; 76% think that Muslims are unwilling to integrate and wish to lead a life distinct from the country’s customs and way of life; while 72% has an unfavourable view of Muslims in general – the latter result being the highest in Europe. It is also remarkable that while elsewhere in Europe people on the ideological Right express more concerns about refugees, more negative attitudes toward minorities and less enthusiasm for a diverse society, this view is more strongly held by Hungarians on the ideological Left (76% as opposed to 69% on the Right).16

Significant Incidents and Developments

As we know, the year 2015 was an unusually turbulent year for both the country and its Muslim communities with the unfolding of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ and the resulting debates about resettlement quotas within the EU which dominated domestic discourses and brought about rapid changes in attitudes. Narratives of the Right in general and the government in particular were characterised by the effort to use Islam as one of the main arguments in the country’s stand-off with Brussels on handling the ‘refugee crisis’, the government’s refusal to accept the proposed EU-wide refugee resettlement quota system and to drive away domestic attention from the country’s deep-running economic, societal, and political problems. Both towards domestic and foreign audiences Orbán and his allies developed an often repeated mantra referring to Islam in contrast to Christian/European culture and the PM often styled himself as the sole defender of Christian Europe. By selecting a tiny domestic community and a voiceless mass of newcomers as their ‘scapegoat’, which had no opportunity to offer a counter-narrative and to defend themselves, the government’s strategy was set up for success. In general terms, the year 2016 was largely about strengthening and building upon the fundaments of this narrative. As a result, anti-Muslim and anti-migrant narratives enjoy an overwhelming consensus among the Hungarian population, despite the fact that the construction of a razor-wire fence along the country’s southern borders has been successful in keeping refugees from entering the country and in rerouting the so-called Balkan route of migration to Croatia and Slovenia. The image of uncontrollable hordes of mainly Muslim immigrants that seek to Islamize Christian Europe and are being let into the EU by the decadent and weak liberal democracies of the West remains uncontested. Combined with narratives criticising the EU and Western democracies, the weakness of the country’s left-wing opposition and the lack or discrediting of counter-narratives both from in- and outside, this narrative is used as a highly successful tool to demonize migrants and Islam as existential threats for Hungary and Europe. Global events of the year, such as the attacks in France and Germany or the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States were used as further justification for government policies and rhetoric targeting migrants and Muslims and blurring Islam with terrorism and the notion of an eminent threat.

Also telling is the government’s usage of linguistic tools. Since the beginning of the ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015, the conservative media and the government have been exclusively referring to refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants as ‘illegális bevándorlók’ (illegal immigrants) or ‘migránsok’ (migrants) thereby playing down the root causes and humanitarian nature of the crisis.

Hungarian political discourses of this year were largely dominated by the referendum on whether to accept mandatory EU quotas for relocating migrants. In
September 2015, the European Union agreed to relocate an additional 120,000 migrants across its member states. Hungary opposed accepting 1,294 refugees, the number that would have been its share of the mandatory quota. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán argued that the quota system would “redraw Hungary’s and Europe’s ethnic, cultural and religious identities, which no EU organ has the right to do.” The prime minister’s initiative gained parliamentary approval from governing Fidesz and KDNP (Christian Democratic) lawmakers, as well as MPs of the oppositional extreme-right Jobbik, while the majority of left-wing opposition boycotted the plenary session. Although the referendum’s proposed question “Do you want the European Union to be able to mandate the obligatory resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens into Hungary even without the approval of the National Assembly?” has been legally challenged by a number of parties, the country’s Supreme Court gave the green light to the initiative. In June, the Constitutional Court rejected all existing four appeals against the referendum allowing President János Áder to set 2 October, 2016, as the date for the referendum. Deputy Prime Minister and KDNP leader Zsolt Semjén described the costs of the failed referendum as ‘good investment’ that will prevent Hungary from witnessing the Islamization of its population.

The announcement of the referendum signalled the start of an intensive campaign calling for the rejection of the quota system. The government’s ‘information campaign’, costing €34 million, featured large billboards with controversial messages, such as “Did you know? More than 300 people were killed in terrorist attacks in Europe since the start of the migrant crisis”; “Did you know? The Paris terrorist attacks were carried out by immigrants”; “Did you know? 1.5 million illegal immigrants arrived to Europe in 2015”; “Did you know? Almost one million immigrants want to come to Europe from Libya alone?” ;or “Did you know? Since the start of the immigration crisis, sexual harassment of women has increased in Europe?” After seven months of heated debates and campaign, an overwhelming majority of voters (98%) rejected the EU’s migrant quotas; turnout, however, was too low to make the referendum valid. Regardless of the low turnout (44%) making the referendum invalid, the government declared the results as ‘politically valid’ and regarded them as a political mandate to “defend the country against the compulsory quota”.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Education

There have been no major changes since 2015 in the field of education. Hungary’s rich Islamic history and ties to Muslim-majority regions are still ignored and omitted from general history curricula; the overwhelming majority of history textbooks tend to be Eurocentric and are inadequate in terms of providing students with a balanced knowledge of Islam and Islamic societies. Even if reference is made to, for example the rise of Islam, the Ottoman Empire, or de-/colonisation, the portrayal of non-European regions remains marginal, schematic and lacking critical analysis. Also, as István Tóth, vice president of MIK remarks, contrary to other churches, the Islamic community is still not allowed to review the content on Islam in curricula.

Since the beginning of the ‘refugee crisis’, conservative and government-affiliated media outlets have been frequently featuring Hungarian Orientalist scholars styled as ‘security policy analysts’ and ‘Middle East experts’. More often than not, their analyses quote from Islam’s foundational texts, interpreting them as calls to use violence in order to conquer the land of unbelievers. Contemporary Muslims’ interpretations or a deeper sociological analysis of the migrants’ realities is rarely the subject of such ‘expert opinions’.

Most of these Middle East experts are graduates of the Pázmány Peter Catholic University’s Arabic faculty, headed by an advisor to PM Orbán, Miklós Maróth, an academic well known for his Christian-Conservative views and philological approaches, which claim that all Muslims disregard the European legal system, following only Sharia law instead. He also has suggested that the EU should not only bar Muslim migrants from entering Europe, but has even argued that European Muslims already living in European countries should be stripped of their citizenship, and that Muslim refugees and migrants ‘should be wrapped in pork skin’ if they do not accept European norms.

Another set of scholars are employed by the Migration Research Institute, established in 2015, by organisations close to the ruling government. The institute’s aim is to publish reports on the security risks posed by Muslims in Europe, and to provide ‘academic’ justification for the government’s anti-migrant policies.
Despite increasingly hostile popular sentiments, the vast majority of Hungary’s Islamic and Middle East Studies community managed to provide better, sociologically-founded analyses on the issues related to Islam, radicalism and migration. Scholars such as Zoltán Szombathy, professor of Islamic history at ELTE University; Zsolt Rostoványi, rector of Corvinus University; or Erzsébet N. Rózsa, a senior researcher at the Hungarian Institute of Foreign Affairs seek to highlight the sociopolitical reasons behind contemporary Muslim migration movements.26 Also, some representatives of the Catholic Church, such as Péter Mustó, a Jesuit priest, or Csaba Bőjte, a Franciscan monk, promote Pope Francis’s peaceful approach highlighting a humanitarian responsibility towards refugees and advising against linking violence to any religion.27

Politics
The seven months of this heightened intensity campaign surrounding the EU’s refugee resettlement quotas dominated a large spectrum of domestic discourse both in the political arena and in the media. Outside events, such as the Brussels bombings in March, the Istanbul bombings in June, the summer attacks in Germany and France, the election of Donald Trump as president of the U.S., the ongoing wars in Syria and Iraq, as well as the Christmas attack in Berlin were framed as further justifications for the government’s stance against immigration, the standoff with Brussels, the rejection of quotas and the aggressive ‘No’ campaign for the October referendum in government and conservative media outlets. These outside events and the way they were framed by overwhelming segments of the political arena and the media managed to further radicalise public opinion on Islam and immigration, establish uncontested Islam-terrorism, immigration-crime-existential threat nexuses building on the unprecedented public shock caused by the influx of refugees in the summer of 2015.

Within the framework of the quota referendum campaign, beside the aforementioned large-scale billboards, the government organised a series of public forums in order to mobilise rural voters. Attended by government ministers, state secretaries, Fidesz MPs, pro-government journalists, such as Zsolt Bayer and government security advisers, notably György Nógrádi and Georg Spöttle, these forums became infamous for hard-toned speeches and anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim statements.28 In June, in a speech given at a Christian Democratic youth summer camp, Speaker of the National Assembly László Kővér warned his audience of the ongoing ‘cultural disintegration of Europe’, the “threat of ‘unintegrable’ migrants integrating indigenous Eu-

26. Pall/Sayfo, Why an anti-Islam campaign has taken root in Hungary, a country with few Muslims.
European populations” before closing his speech by asking ‘Shall we be enslaved or free, Muslims or Christians?’ evoking a sentimental 1848 revolutionary poem.

In the run-up to the quota referendum, the Hungarian government distributed an official leaflet that claimed that major European cities, such as London, Brussels, Marseille, Berlin, Stockholm and Malmö had become “no-go” areas due to high levels of immigration, that high levels of immigration have produced a spike in terrorism and violent assault, and that authorities are unable to impose order in 900 such areas in Western Europe. (Figure 1) While not explicitly Islamophobic, the leaflet, as well as an interview given by Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó to the BBC echoes a warning by a Fox News commentator last year that there were “no-go zones” across Europe “where Muslim density is very intense”.

The overall tone of the referendum campaign was condemned from numerous sides both domestic and international; Amnesty International, for example, said Orbán’s campaign rhetoric ‘replaced the rule of law with the rule of fear’, while the Brussels-based European edition of Politico described the event as ‘Orbán’s Potemkin referendum’ arguing that the country ‘actually needs migrants, even if it doesn’t want them”, citing the private sector to be suffering from skilled labour shortages.

In November, László Toroczkai, the infamous mayor of Ásotthalom, a village of less than 4,000 souls lying on the southern borders, issued an order banning the construction of mosques or minarets, the Muslim call for prayer, the wearing of the chador, the niqab, the burqa and the burkini, as well as LGBT ‘propaganda’ and Gay Pride marches in the village. Toroczkai argued that he wished to set a positive example to other Hungarian municipalities in order to guarantee the ‘centuries-old traditions’ of local communities in the face of mass migration to the country.

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Interestingly, there was no government reaction to this order that has been criticised for being anti-constitutional both by domestic and international commentators.

Outside of the ruling Fidesz orbit, the country’s notoriously anti-Semitic and anti-Roma Jobbik has seen slow transformation. The party whose leader, Gábor Vona, once referred to Islam as the ‘only light of civilisation in the darkness of Globalism’, is still maintaining strong international ties with Muslim countries, such as Turkey and Iran, and thus refrains from making openly anti-Islamic statements. This is, however, not the case with its core constituency, the wider Hungarian far right, a constituency that Fidesz also seeks to address. The grass roots of the movement sometimes even call for the massacre of the refugees on both Facebook and Twitter. With this, Jobbik’s support base is moving closer to the discourse exemplified by the far Right in Western Europe.

Justice System

Islam is one of the country’s state-recognised religions since 1916. According to the president of the Church of Muslims in Hungary, Zoltan Sulok, Islam, being one of the country’s long-recognised religions, faces no legal obstacles: Muslims are guaranteed freedom of religion and there are no Hungarian laws contradicting Islamic practices. On the other hand however, there have been a number of smaller scale transgressions against Muslims (such as verbal abuse, pulling off headscarves), which however remained largely unreported.

Also, the police and the notoriously underfinanced and under-prioritised Immigration Authority have no programmes to train personnel in intercultural interaction or sensitivity about cultural/religious background. Accordingly, dealing with Muslim women or with inmates, for example, during Ramadan remains problematic and there were minor incidents based on mocking religion or mishandling copies of the Quran. However, the majority of such incidents are likely to remain unreported. Also, since the beginning of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ and the government’s increasing Islamophobic reactions, both Muslim communities and NGOs sense a deterioration of formerly good and cooperative relations with state authorities.

In an open letter, the president of the Hungarian Islamic Community asks PM Orbán for the physical protection of their mosques and families from hate crimes.

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34. Pall/Sayfo, Why an anti-Islam campaign has taken root in Hungary, a country with few Muslims.
36. Interview with Omar Sayfo on December 2, 2016.
37. Interview conducted with Júlia Iván, senior legal officer at the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, a human rights organisation working on the legal protection of refugees (Budapest, November 12, 2015).
38. Ibid.; and interview conducted with István Tóth, vice president of the Islamic Church of Hungary (MIK). 2015.
Zoltán Bolek mentioned the increasing amount of hate speech, threats and physical assaults targeting the community as reasons to ‘be afraid’. In its reply, the government reassured the president that Hungary is there to protect all of its citizens.  

Media

Similarly to the country’s political landscape, Hungarian media is also characterised by a stark Left-Right divide where political and ideological allegiances are more or less the norm. Hungary’s media environment, a privately owned sector that has suffered from increased state regulation since the Fidesz government’s coming to power, continues to be under government pressure to influence coverage. The sudden shutdown of Népszabadság, the country’s largest traditional left-wing daily newspaper in October 2016, was the hitherto most serious blow against a media outlet providing a counter-narrative to the government’s anti-Islam and anti-migrant rhetoric. The narrative that’s been given rise since the intensification of the ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015 allowed for the securitisation of Islam and Muslim immigration to a level that is largely incontestable in today’s political and media environment. In this environment, all balanced opinions are either ignored by popular media, or sidelined by nationalist clamor.

Self-declared ‘experts’ are frequent guests who provide simplistic and often highly populist and Islamophobic answers about current events and Islam itself. Many of these increasingly popular ‘independent’ commentators, who in reality express right-wing or pro-government ideas, such as György Nógrádi and Georg Spöttle, contribute to the spreading of essentialised anti-Islamic stereotypes and calculated fearmongering. They are almost omnipresent guests both in the media (including, conservative television and radio channels, print and online media outlets) as well as at Fidesz campaign events and local party forums.

Internet

While there is no sign of organised anti-Islamic networks of media outlets or public figures, the ‘refugee crisis’ and the quota referendum campaign has increased the vehemence of right-wing, xenophobic Internet portals and popular so called ‘like hunting’ or ‘like bait’ news sites publishing fake news on Muslim refugees. Sites such as kurucinfo.hu, meteon.hu, legfrissebb.info, faith- and Church-affiliated vigyazo.hu or explicitly anti-migrant sites such as napimigrans.hu (lit. ‘daily migrant’) flood social media with content often bordering on hate speech.

It is important to note that the language of the current anti-Islam discourse largely uses the tropes traditionally applied in anti-Gypsy (e.g. non-European ori-
gin, linking to crime, impossible integration, etc.), as well as those applied to Jews (e.g. self-perceived superiority, anti-Christian/European conspiracies, etc.). However, while by now, anti-Gypsy and anti-Jewish utterances are more or less considered to be taboo in mainstream discourses, anti-Muslim and anti-refugee rhetoric – both in a seemingly elevated, intellectual way, as well as in highly derogatory, racist and vulgar style – became acceptable throughout the larger parts of mainstream media. As a result, anti-Islam and indeed anti-Muslim viewpoints are ‘no longer subject to condemnation–sometimes they are all but duties’.42

**Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

Given the absence of a sizable Muslim population, verbal Muslim-bashing has proven to be a conduit through which Hungarian society’s frustrations can be channelled in politically and socially safe ways.43 Without any effective counter-narrative or defence strategy, this no-stakes situation has led to an uncontested monopoly of an openly anti-Islam rhetoric dominating the mainstreams of politics and the media and enjoying the unconditional support of an overwhelming portion of the population. However, Islamophobia in this small, ethnically highly homogenous and in cultural-linguistic terms isolated Central European country lacking any recent direct experience of peaceful interaction with Islam or Muslim populations should be viewed through a domestic political lens. With high unemployment rates, widespread poverty and corruption, bleak economic prospects and an increasingly weakening middle class, large parts of Hungarian society are hard to be considered as winners of the country’s transition from communism to democracy. By tapping into the population’s irrational fear of what is an unknown religion and culture, the Fidesz government has been using Islamophobia as a political tool to drive away attention from the country’s mismanagement and deep-rooted socioeconomic problems.

**To counter this, the following recommendations are formulated:**

- The political elite needs to stop framing Islam and Muslim refugees as an existential threat to the future of the country and Europe and using Islamophobic narratives as its primary political tool.
- There is an urgent need to fight the uncontested Islamophobic narratives of the political Right. Studying the root causes accounting for the almost universal acceptance of these anti-Muslim narratives by the overwhelming portion of the population is essential in developing strategies on numerous levels – the political, media-related, educational, academic, or cultural – to combat these narratives and to replace them.


43. Pall/Sayfo, *Why an anti-Islam campaign has taken root in Hungary, a country with few Muslims.*
There is a genuine need to address the very existence of Islamophobia, define it as a form of racism and criminalise Islamophobic utterances as is the case with anti-Semitic utterances.

Islam needs to be explained and made familiar both by its community and by qualified, non-partisan, politically neutral commentators. Also, Islamophobic utterances need to be countered in meaningful, professional ways both by the community and engaged NGOs or lobby groups.

The Muslim community and NGOs cooperating with Muslims in the country should both strive for increased interreligious and intercultural exchanges and dialogues between Muslim and non-Muslim Hungarians on the grass-roots level in order to enable more personal and institutional contact.

Chronology

24 February – PM Viktor Orbán announces that the Hungarian government will hold a referendum on whether to accept the European Union’s proposed mandatory quotas for relocating migrants. The announcement marks the beginning of a large-scale government billboard campaign often described as racist, xenophobic, and using violent language.

08 July – In a speech given at a Christian Democratic youth summer camp, Speaker of the Parliament László Kövér warned his audience of the ongoing ‘cultural disintegration of Europe’, the “threat of ‘unintegrable’ migrants integrating indigenous European populations” before closing his speech by asking ‘Shall we be enslaved or free, Muslims or Christians?’ evoking an 1848 revolutionary poem.

20 August – A tweet of Fidesz MEP György Schöpflin suggests installing pig heads on Hungary’s border fence to scare off refugees. His tweet has been widely shared in British and Hungarian media.

6 September – An under-secretariat within the Ministry of Human Resources is created in order to fight the persecution of Christians. The move is widely criticised because of the stark contradiction with how the Hungarian government tackled the ‘refugee crisis’ in the summer of 2015.

21 September – Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó talks to the BBC about a controversial government leaflet which claims migrants have created “no-go zones” in the UK and elsewhere in Europe.

24 September – In an open letter, the president of the Hungarian Islamic Community asks PM Orbán for the physical protection of their mosques and families from hate crimes.

2 October – In the referendum announced in February, an overwhelming majority of voters rejects the EU’s migrant quotas, although the 44% turnout was too low to make the poll valid.
• **11 October** – Hungary’s largest broadsheet newspaper *Népszabadság*, a vehement opposition voice to the government and the quota referendum, shuts down suddenly, with journalists and the opposition alleging government pressure.

• **24 November** - The right-wing mayor of Ásotthalom, a village on the southern borders, bans mosques, minarets, the muezzin’s call for prayer, burkas, niqabs and burqinis in the village.
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.