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THE STATE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ

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

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

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

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

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

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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”.5

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

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-

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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

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Executive Summary

In 2016 Parliamentary elections were held in Serbia. National Assembly structure is changed as several parties, among them pro-Russian nationalists, returned to parliament for the first time since 2012. The analyzes in the field of employment have not shown that discrimination exists in this regard, however Muslim community continues to be underrepresented in the local administration, judiciary or police in places where Muslims traditionally live in Serbia. This problem persists for more than two decades and it has been confirmed in the European Commission Report on Serbia for 2015 and also 2016. Media is arguably the most important in constructing and promoting Islamophobic positions and media reporting in Serbia is alarming as headlines are often inflammatory with harsh, almost pre-war rhetoric which this report illustrates in details. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia judgements in cases of Radovan Karadzic and Vojislav Seselj caused polarization in Serbian society and received huge media coverage. As in many other countries, the news of the terrorist attacks in Europe, especially the attack in Berlin, in Serbian media had a major place. American elections also received considerable attention in public debates which often resulted with fake news on how Donald Trump will support Serbia especially regarding Kosovo question. Other significant events include Srebrenica commemoration but also demolition of Muslim cemetery “Gazilar” in Novi Pazar when 29 gravestones were destroyed. Many European countries have numerous counter-Islamophobia initiatives. On the counter-Islamophobia level, Serbia is lacking a single initiative towards confronting Islamophobia (there are no projects by the state nor by NGO’s). The state need to address the issues of education and the teaching materials that are necessary to foster an awareness of diversity, the promotion of a non-violent culture of equality and non-discriminatory practice. Public awareness on Islamophobia should be raised and the very important role should be played by NGOs and media. An important signal came from the European Commision’s Progress Report on Serbia for 2016 which highlighted the decrease in religiously motivated incidents which continued in 2016. However, most critical points of Islamophobia have been analyzed as incidents were present while policy recommendations for key actors have been provided.
Izvršni Rezime

Introduction

Parliamentary elections were held in Serbia on 24 April, 2016. The Serbian Progressive Party coalition retained its majority, winning 131 of the 250 seats. In contrast to the 2014 elections, a record-breaking seven non-minority lists passed the 5% threshold (in 2014, only four non-ethnic lists surpassed the 5% threshold and all the parties were, at least declaratively, pro-EU). However, in 2016 the National Assembly structure has changed as several parties, among them pro-Russian nationalists, returned to parliament for the first time since 2012; namely the Serbian Radical Party led by nationalist politician Vojislav Seselj, who returned to politics this year after being acquitted by the UN war crimes tribunal in the Hague, and the coalition DSS/Dveri. The incumbent cabinet of the government of Serbia, the second one led by Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić, was elected on 11 August, 2016, by a majority vote in the National Assembly.

According to the 2011 census, Islam is the third most widespread religion in Serbia after Christian Orthodoxy and Catholicism with 228,658 Muslims in Serbia (3.1% of the total population). The largest concentration of Muslims in Serbia can be found in the municipalities of Novi Pazar, Tutin and Sjenica in the Sandžak region, and in the municipalities of Preševo and Bujanovac in the Preševo Valley. The general conclusion from the European Commission Report from 2016 is that the decrease in religiously motivated incidents has continued in 2016.

This report will cover different topics related to Islamophobia, from media reporting, which is arguably the most important in framing public policies and discourses and in constructing and promoting particular positions and therefore in spreading Islamophobia, to the judgments of the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia which were very important for Serbian society as one of them decided on the case of the killing of more than 8,000 Muslims in Srebrenica in 1995. Other significant incidents in 2016 in Serbia will also feature in the report.

Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Employment

Novi Pazar is the cultural centre of the Bosniaks in Serbia (83%) and the historical region of Sandzak. Bosniaks are generally defined as South Slavs and the majority are Muslim by religion. As of the 2011 census, the population of the municipal area of Novi Pazar was 125,000. Novi Pazar is one of the cities with the highest unemployment rate in Serbia. The situation in the Sandzak area in 2016 was mostly stable and municipal elections were peaceful. The Bosniak community continues to be underrepresented in the local administration and the police. The area remains among the most underdeveloped with a high unemployment rate according to the latest European Commission Report.

That the Bosniak community is underrepresented in the local administration was also stated in the European Islamophobia Report for 2015. In 2016, the Bosniak National Council issued a statement that formulated the same issue and called it an act of discrimination; it proposed that in places where Bosniaks traditionally live, the structure of the state organs with public authorities should be coordinated according to the national structure of the population.

The region of Presevo Valley – a region in southern Serbia composed of the municipalities of Bujanovac and Preševo - remains underdeveloped and the ethnic Albanian population, who tend to be adherents of Islam, continues to be underrepresented in the public administration.

Politics

The presidential elections in the United States have drawn the attention of the whole world and Serbia was not an exception. However, the presence of Donald Trump in the media was incredible. The image that was created in the media often exceeded science fiction. The media reported on all of Trump’s statements no matter how bizarre they were with no critical approach. Thus, his Islamophobic statements on banning Muslims from entering America and on the expulsion of Muslims were found on the pages of almost every newspaper. For example, “Trump: Islam un-

thinkably HATES the West”;14 “Trump: I would forbid the entry of Muslims in the United States, with one exception”;15 “TRUMP WARNS ON HATE: Muslims despise the West”;16 “Siptars in a panic: If Donald Trump wins, America will stand by Serbia!”,17 “ZEMAN ADORES HIM: He cheers for Trump because he doesn’t let Muslims in the U.S.”.18

The loudest Trump supporter in Serbia was Vojislav Seselj, a Serbian politician who spent 11 years in the United Nations Detention Unit of Scheveningen and on 31 March, 2016, was acquitted in a first-instance verdict on all counts by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) pending appeal. He is the leader of the right-wing Serbian Radical Party (SRS) which in the 2016 Serbian elections won 22 seats in parliament. Seselj and his supporters called everyone but especially the Serbian diaspora in the U.S. to vote for Trump (“Seselj called on Serbs in America: My brothers, with all your strength support Donald Trump!”)19 and organised protests against the official visit of U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden to Belgrade (because he supported the candidacy of Hillary Clinton) and rallies supporting Donald Trump in his race for president of America (“Radicals protest because of Biden’s visit to Belgrade”;20 “Protests of SRS because of Biden and support for Trump”).21

This political support wouldn’t be anything surprising in the political arena but then an open letter appeared which urged Donald Trump to reject Vojislav Seselj’s support. The letter was signed by former U.S. diplomats, academics and activists including professors from prestigious institutions such as Columbia University, Yale University, New York University, George Washington University. The letter stated:

“It is important to note that Bosniaks (Muslims) from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albanians from Kosovo were targeted and systematically killed during the Balkan Wars. For those among us who are survivors and are Muslim, Mr. Trump’s statements calling for a ban of Muslims from entering the United States, if applied when we fled our homes, would have surely ended in our deaths. More recently, he has not distanced himself from Vojislav Seselj, indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. During the Bosnian War, Seselj inspired terror in the hearts and minds of men, women and children during

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his militia’s violent invasions of villages carrying out a campaign of murder, rape and torture in Eastern Bosnia. Today, Seselj is a member of the Serbian parliament and likely to run for Serbia’s presidency in 2017. Apparently, Vojislav Seselj sees Donald Trump as an ally in his cause. Mr. Trump has done nothing to disavow Seselj’s endorsement.”

The spread of “Trumpmania” is witnessed by the fact that in the respected weekly magazine *Nedeljnik* there appeared an interview with presidential candidate Trump in which he apologised for the NATO bombing of Serbia. This interview was cited in a sensationalist context (“TRUMP OPENED UP HIS SOUL: I apologise to Serbs for the bombing, you are good people!”) in all Serbian media, not only tabloid but in more reputable newspapers and portals as well. The media frenzy went so far that even experts and academics started debates on the influence of this interview while Professor Eric Gordy from the prestigious University College London (UCL) emphasized that this interview is “another sign that the presidential candidate is a Russian player” and that “this rhetoric is in accordance with the Russian line in Serbia, but also with the extreme right in the United States, which sees the conflicts in Yugoslavia as a battle between Christianity and Islam. They believe that Bosnia and Kosovo are the first place where Islam took root in Europe.” The farce attracted a lot of attention across the world, but eventually experienced its downfall when the Trump campaign in a statement officially declared that “Mr. Trump never gave an interview to the Serbian weekly magazine *Nedeljnik*. The editorial board of *Nedeljnik* reacted promptly stating that the interview with Trump took place through an intermediary, and that although the possibility that Trump for some reason changed his mind and decided to deny the interview cannot be


excluded, the editorial board takes full responsibility if it turns out that their source deceived them and made up a fictional interview.27

Donald Trump’s victory in Serbia was welcomed in many circles. Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic said that officially Belgrade did not give support to any American candidate, but that he noticed a general enthusiasm in the country, and in the ranks of his own party after Trump’s victory. Serbian Radical Party leader Vojislav Seselj and his fellow party members wore T-shirts with the image of Donald Trump, while the radical leader said that his heart was “as big as Zlatibor” (a Serbian mountain). President of the right-nationalist movement Dveri and MP in the Serbian Parliament Bosko Obradovic even convened a press conference after news of Trump’s victory, during which he literally expressed his condolences to the Serbian government and the Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic because of, as he said, their misjudgments and support of Hillary Clinton.

While some politicians were fueled by the expectation of a change of U.S. policy towards Serbia and the Balkans, the Serbian tabloid fight could begin once again: “Trump can give us back Kosovo”; “Albanians are desperate because of Clinton’s defeat”; “Putin and Trump will return Kosovo to us”; “Kosovo Albanians wail and weep: They spit on Trump and Melania because of Serbia”28; “PANIC AND ANXIETY IN KOSOVO AND IN ALBANIA! They fear that Trump will return Kosovo to Serbia!”30

In North Mitrovica (Kosovo) in the busiest street as well as in the Serbian capital, Belgrade, billboards with the image of Donald Trump appeared which supported the newly elected president of the United States. The billboards in Kosovo showed Trump’s face with the message “Serbs supported! Serbs stood by him all the way”, while the other billboards which appeared in Kosovo featured a large photo of Trump next to photos of Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci and Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama with quotations of their statement “I expect the victory of Clinton. Albanians, vote for her” and “Trump as president is a threat to Albania and the Albanian-American relations”.31

Media

It has been stressed that Islamophobia is widely spread by the media. The tabloid press and nationalist web portals lead in this regard. The situation in the media is alarming. Just a few headlines will provide corroboration of this thesis: “Wahhabis recruits Serbs and threaten them that they will burn in hell if they do not convert to ISLAM”\(^\text{32}\); “Muslims make Germanistan of Germany”\(^\text{33}\); “Uncensored: How Shiptars systematically terrorize Serbs”\(^\text{34}\); “Shiptars are waiting for Clinton’s victory to start the ethnic cleansing of Serbs in Kosovo!”\(^\text{35}\)

In the 2015 *European Islamophobia Report* on Serbia, it was discussed in detail how the term ‘Šiptar’ is used in the Serbian language as a derogatory term for Albanians. Although the State Commissioner for Protection of Equality decided in two cases that the use of the term ‘Šiptar’ represents a violation of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination this practice did not change in media in 2016.\(^\text{36}\) In September 2016, the Independent Association of Journalists in Serbia condemned the usage of the term calling it hate speech.\(^\text{37}\)

Headlines are often inflammatory with harsh, almost pre-war rhetoric: “DISCLOSED! Shiptar pays yellow duck: Haki Abazi, director of the Rockefeller Foundation gives millions for CHAOS IN SERBIA!”\(^\text{38}\); “EXCLUSIVE Dunjalic escaped from Kosovo: I survived the hell, I thought Shiptars will kill me!”\(^\text{39}\); “ALARMING, Putin’s intelligence warned Serbia: Ustashas and Shiptars are preparing an attack on the north of Kosovo?”\(^\text{40}\); “They destroy everything which is Serbian: Shiptars overthrow a truck with Serbian products”\(^\text{41}\); “THREAT FROM KOSOVO: Shiptars dream of creating a military power reliant on NATO and the international community?”\(^\text{42}\)


\(^{36}\) Perovic, 2016, p. 456-457.


\(^{42}\) Informer, “PRETNJA SA KOSOVA: Шiptarimaštaju o stvaranjuvjeseslonjenina NATO i međunarodnordnuzajednicu!,” *Informer*, September 18, 2016.
The Bosniak National Council\textsuperscript{43} in a meeting held on 17 October, 2016, adopted a decision based on the examples of discrimination against Bosniaks in Serbia which proposed solutions to eliminate discrimination. In Part 10, dedicated to the media reporting on Muslims, the council stresses that

“Serbian media with national frequency often use offensive terms for Muslims/Bosniaks, equate them with crime, extremism and terrorism, and hate speech is extremely present. In addition, some Serbian media persistently and maliciously try to connect Muslims/Bosniaks with extremist criminal organisations which participate in the battlefields of the Middle East and North Africa.”\textsuperscript{44}

In relation to the foreign media, Serbian media mostly covers sensationalist texts. These news stories are usually directly imported without thorough research or a critical review of the topics covered. However, it must be emphasised that this “copy paste” method is sometimes beneficial as text are reprinted that point to the problem of Islamophobia in the world - even in the tabloid press: “Human Rights Watch Report: The world is ruled by Islamophobia”\textsuperscript{45}; “Islamophobia: Teenage Muslims beaten up in front of the New York mosque”\textsuperscript{46}; “Austria: The increase of xenophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism”.\textsuperscript{47} On the other hand, many newspapers and portals give space to obscure and bizarre news related to Islam: “Dutch right-wing politician will not be silenced: My mission is to stop the Islamic invasion”\textsuperscript{48}; “Hungarians are furious: Obama wants Muslims in Europe”\textsuperscript{49}; “They danced from happiness: Muslims rejoiced after attack in Brussels”\textsuperscript{50}; “Fico: No one will force us to haul Muslims in Slovakia”\textsuperscript{51}; “Jambon: A significant part of the Muslim community celebrated the attacks in Brussels”\textsuperscript{52}; “German’s right: Islam is not in accordance with the Constitution of Germany, prohibit the wearing of the burqa and minarets”\textsuperscript{53}; “Orban: Our Constitution prohibits Islamization”\textsuperscript{54}; “English imam disgusted the world ‘Islam allows you to have female slaves and to have sex with women’”.\textsuperscript{55}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item The Bosniak National Council is the highest representative body of Sandzak Bosniaks in Serbia. It was founded on 11 May, 1991, under the name “Muslim National Council of Sandzak”.
\item Bosnjackonacionalnovijece, Odluka o primerimadiskriminacijenadBosnjacima u Srbijaspredlogomres
\item Novi Pazar, October 17, 2016.
\item Blic, “ISLAMOFOBIJA Tinejdžerimuslimaniprećenisednjačkinjediskriminacije,” Blic, July 5, 2016.
\item Kurir, “HOLANDSKI DESNIČAR NE DA DA GA UCUTKAJU: Moja misija je da zaustavim islamsku invaziju,” Kurir, October 28, 2016.
\item Alo, “MAĐARI BESNI Obama želimuslimane u Evropi,” Alo, May 19, 2016.
\item Alo, “PLESALI OD SREĆE Muslimanise u Srbiji,” Alo, April 17, 2016.
\item Blic, “Zambon: Znacajadesultanskezajedniceproslaviljaonapade u Briselu,” Blic, April 16, 2016.
\item Blic, “Nemačkadesignica: Islam nije u skladusaUstavomNemačke, ZABRANITI NOŠENJE BURKI i MINARETE,” Blic, April 17, 2016.
\item “Orban: NašUstavzabranjujeislamizaciju,” Blic, April 26, 2016.
\end{enumerate}
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them”\textsuperscript{55}; “Prime Minister of Slovakia: We will not allow the eruption of Muslim ghettos on our territory”\textsuperscript{56}; “Sobotka: We do not want increased presence of Muslims”\textsuperscript{57}; “Miloš Zeman: I have nothing against refugees from Russia or Serbia, but Muslims to be deported from Europe”\textsuperscript{58}; “TERROR IN THE POOL Muslims spit on swimmers shouting ‘Allahu Akbar’”.\textsuperscript{59} The terrorist attacks that occurred during the year were covered by the media. Although the media often make sensational reports it should be noted that linking terrorism with religion does not occur, at least in mainstream Serbian media - a fact that is very positive. All terrorist attacks were reported but the attack in Berlin where 12 people were killed attracted the greatest attention. A detail that arguably affected this attention is that the terrorist is linked to a German citizen of Serbian origin, namely Boban Simeonović. Serbian media reported more on this terrorist attack (“Boban Simeonović is fanatic even for Islamists, he was the guru of the Berlin assassin”\textsuperscript{60}; “The murderer from Berlin lived with a Serb who recruited for ISIS!”\textsuperscript{61}; “Who is behind the terrorist: Serb recruited executioner from Berlin”\textsuperscript{62}; “Father of Serbian jihadist in shock: He can’t believe his son is a terrorist!”\textsuperscript{63}; “Shocking secret document: Serb in charge of recruitment and training of terrorists!”\textsuperscript{64}. Even in this case, however, there appears a clear distinction between terrorism and religion even in the tabloid media.

**International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia**

**Radovan Karadzic**

On 24 March, 2016, Radovan Karadzic was found guilty of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, and sentenced to 40 years imprisonment. He was found guilty of genocide for the Srebrenica massacre, which aimed to eliminate the Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica by killing the men and boys of Srebrenica and forcibly removing the women, young children and some elderly men and systematically exterminating the Bosnian Muslim community. He was also convicted of persecution, extermination, deportation, forcible transfer (ethnic cleansing) and murder in


\textsuperscript{56}Blic, “Premijer Slovačke: Nedeļmo ameno zbiri da nana otorijeniknumuslimanskageta,” Blic, February 14, 2016.


\textsuperscript{58}Informer, “MILOŠ ZEMAN: NemamništaprotivizbeglicaizRusijeiliSrbije, alimuslimani da se deportuižEvrope!,” Informer, October 2, 2016.


\textsuperscript{60}Informer, “Boban Simeonović je FANATIK i za same islamiste, BIO JE GURU UBICE IZ BERLINA!,” Informer, December 24, 2016.

\textsuperscript{61}Blic, “UbicaizBerlina ŽIVEO KOD SRBINA koji je regrotovaaza ISIS!,” Blic, December 21, 2016.


\textsuperscript{64}Alo, “ŠOKANTANTAJNI DOKUMENT Srbinzglovanzavbrovanje i obukuterorista?,” Alo, December 24, 2016.
connection with his campaign to drive Bosnian Muslims and Croats out of villages claimed by Bosnian Serb forces.65

Virtually all the world’s media reported on Karadzic’s verdict, from CNN writing that “The Butcher of Bosnia” was sentenced to 40 years in prison,66 the BBC calling his trial “as one of the most important war crimes trials since World War Two”,67 the New York Times describing the trial “as the most important in the 23-year history of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia”,68 while the Daily Mail highlighted that “Karadzic is the highest ranking person to face the UN Tribunal at the Hague and being sentenced”.69 Many of the influential international figures like U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon commented by hailing the verdicts as a “historic result for the people of the former Yugoslavia and for international criminal justice” and by expressing support for the victims who suffered under Karadzic’s leadership.70

Most of the mainstream media in Serbia reported the news in a sensationalist manner: “The Hague has no mercy for Serbs: Karadzic sentenced to 40 years in prison”;71 “The Hague rapes Serbs again! Radovan sentenced to 40 years on the 17th anniversary of the NATO aggression!”72; “Karadzic’s verdict is a revenge of the West!”73; “Reaction after Karadzic’s verdict: Biljana Plavsic: If it is genocide, then women and children are killed too, and I’ve seen them saved”.74

The Serbian Radical Party organised a protest against Karadzic’s verdict while their leader sent out the message that “Karadzic is innocent but sentenced only because he is a Serb. This is a judgement against the entire Serbian people, Serbian history and

nation.”

One of the Serbian daily newspapers in their weekend edition gave a poster of Radovan Karadzic as a free gift to its readers. In the following days, a very dangerous, but already known, thesis was promoted in many Serbian newspapers and web portals. In this context there is a statement by Karadzic after the verdict, which left him in shock, whereby he allegedly said “Is it possible that after Paris and Brussels, Europe still don’t see what we fought against?”

This certainly indicates and renews the thesis which was already pointed out in last year's report during the trial before the ICTY of Ratko Mladic, in whose defence Milorad Dodik, president of Republika of Srpska, testified. In brief, Dodik said that what are seeing around the globe - the blood and suffering of innocent Western men and the establishment of Daesh/ISIL based on Sharia law – had its beginnings in the political movement of the Bosnian Muslims. Just as the Serbs had to defend themselves, the whole world today must do the same; they should not accuse anyone of any crimes when dealing with such evil. Testifying in defence of Ratko Mladic, Dodik said that Alija Izetbegovic and his Party of Democratic Action, “in a sense were the forerunners of the current ideology of radical Islam that we see in the world.”

**Vojislav Seselj**

On 31 March, 2016, the Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) delivered its first instance judgment acquitting Vojislav Šešelj of criminal responsibility on all counts of the indictment, with the dissenting opinion of Judge Lattanzi expressing criticism of the judgement in harsh tones. Judge Lattanzi emphasized that the ICTY had set aside all the rules of international humanitarian law in order to acquit Vojislav Šešelj and concluded “On reading the majority's judgement, I felt I was thrown back in time to a period in human history, centuries ago, when it was said – and it was the Romans who used to say this, to justify their bloody conquests and the murders of their political opponents in civil wars: ‘silent enim leges inter arma’ (In time of war, laws fall silent).”

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Vojislav Seselj, a Serbian politician (from 2016, he is an MP in the Serbian Parliament) and the founder and president of the far-right Serbian Radical Party (SRS), was charged with crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or the customs of war by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The crimes in the indictment included, among others, that Seselj, both individually and as part of a “joint criminal enterprise”, engaged in “the permanent forcible removal […] of a majority of the Croat, Muslim and other non-Serb populations from approximately one-third of the territory of the Republic of Croatia (“Croa

The verdict provoked different reactions in the domestic and international publics, and in academic and political circles. While Seselj, his political party and his supporters celebrated, some others were furious with the outcome of the trial. Some of the local NGOs protested stating that “Seselj’s judgment is a reward for a crime” while others stated that “Seselj was chief propagandist of the 1990s war.” Some local media have promoted the thesis that the release of Seselj is a trap set up by the West to overthrow Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic (“The ICTY gave a strong impetus to the chief of SRS, while stabbing the knife right in the heart of Prime Minister Vucic!”). Mayor of Srebrenica Camil Durakovic said that “SRS sympathisers celebrated Seselj’s judgement in Srebrenica by circulating in cars decorated with flags of the SRS, with shouts that they will slaughter again”. While Russian Deputy Prime Minister Rogozin “congratulated his friend Seselj on his victory”, Croatian President Grabar-Kitarovic called Seselj “one of the greatest criminals in our region and … [that] this judgement is a huge blow of international criminal law”. He sent letters to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the UN Security Council regarding the judgment of Vojislav Seselj, in which she expressed that she was disappointed and worried.

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84. Informer, “ZAPAD SRUŠIO VUČIĆA!PosleoslobađajućepresudeŠešelju u Srbijišudefiniranjeiustanijeisto!,” Informer, April 1, 2016.
acquittal was described by *The Economist* as “a victory for advocates of ethnic cleansing” while in the words of the UCL Professor Eric Gordy, a sociologist and expert on war crimes in the Balkans, the Seselj verdict is “a great victory for bloated, violent lunatics everywhere”. Prominent International Law Professor Marko Milanovic from the University of Nottingham wrote

“The main issue is not with the acquittal, which may or may not be the appropriate result, but with how that result was reached. The entire judgment is a reductionist dismissal of the case presented by the prosecution...I also have no doubt that with its many flaws the judgment will be reversed on appeal. But what good exactly will that accomplish? Its principal damage – that of reinforcing diverging ethnic realities in the Balkans – will already have been done.”

Srebrenica Commemoration

Every year on the eve of the commemoration of the murder of thousands of Muslims in Srebrenica, media, politicians and academics in Serbia send political temperatures rising. This year was no exception: from politicians who deny the existence of the crime to scientists who for more than twenty years deny the events at Srebrenica. The prime example can be summarised in a single column published in the most prominent Serbian daily *Politika*: “The Srebrenica tragedy and the political myth which is formed, as Edward Herman noted long ago, was and will be one of the twentieth century’s biggest inexhaustible resources for the unarmed but not less fierce fight, which will be ruthlessly exploited.” This text continues, “Bosnian Muslims will not easily give up the undeserved moral capital that bestowed on them the status of the nation-victim with this ‘crime of the crimes’, and even less so will they give up the political valuables which that capital is likely to be converted into.”

Dr Dejan Ilic questions the arguments presented by the author and highlights the fact that Professor Herman, whose arguments are used in the text, has been severely criticised. But the real problem is that these texts are then used by

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high-ranking political officials. Dr Ilic analyses how Marko Djuric, from the ruling party, has used sections of this text in his own political statements.93

Civil society organisations94 held a press conference on the eve of the 21st anniversary of Srebrenica.95 It was stated that “bearing in mind the atmosphere of the last years when marking the 20th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica, we believe that it is of great importance that the highest representative body in Serbia takes a clear stance regarding this event. We remind that commemorative actions last year were prohibited by the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia, with the explanation that the state institutions are unable to ensure the safety”,96 The Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) submitted an open letter to the National Assembly calling the MPs to dedicate a commemorative session to Srebrenica’s victims, adopt a declaration condemning the Srebrenica genocide, and to join the commemoration organised by NGOs.97 After the submission of the letter, the YIHR stated

“…with regret and deep embarrassment we observe the attitudes of the highest representatives of institutions, politicians and some media related to the upcoming anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide when more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims were killed. In Serbia, there is a continuation of policy of insult, disqualification and threats to those who call the Srebrenica genocide by its real name. Thus, Serbian Progressive Party MP Vladimir Djukanovic expressed ‘deepest possible disgust’ towards the YIHR because of the letter that the initiative sent to all MPs, and expressed regret that the members of the Initiative ‘were not arrested’. Almost identical vocabulary and arguments were used by the representatives of the opposition parties - the Serbian Radical Party, Dveri, Zavetnici, which describes the unity of nationalist politics.”98

However, this year’s anniversary commemoration was held. The event was secured by the police and there were no incidents.99

94. Inicijativa mladih i ljudskih prava, Fond za humanitarno pravo, žene u crnom, Civil Right Defenders, Centar za evropsku ljudska prava i Kuća ljudskih prava.
Bill on Amendments to the Criminal Code (Denial of Genocide)

On 15 November, 2016, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia opened the debate on the Bill on Amendments to the Criminal Code, which prohibits public approval and denial of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. As the Srebrenica Massacre is still the subject of debate, including those who deny the existence of any crime in Srebrenica, this proposal has caused a huge hysteria not only in the media but also in Parliament and academia.100

Headlines in the media include: “CAUTION: If you deny the Srebrenica genocide, you might go to jail!”101; “Appeal against the prosecution of citizens for denial of ‘genocide’ in Srebrenica”102; “Be careful what you say about Srebrenica, because you might end up in jail!”103; “GOVERNMENT LOSES COMPASS: Denial of genocide in Srebrenica would be a criminal offense in Serbia”.104 Parliamentary debate turned into a discussion of whether there was a genocide or not in Srebrenica (Liberal Democratic Party leader claimed that Srebrenica is a genocide while Serbian Radical Party leader claimed the opposite),105 while professors wrote columns about how the adoption of this article “will declare Serbian people genocidal” and that it represents a “a masochistic act that introduces power to proven Islamists ”.106 The highlight of this completely unnecessary hysteria culminated with certain websites giving instructions on how to fight against this article of law.

“If you do not want to allow the adoption of amendments to Article 387 of the Criminal Code, which would make the denial of “genocide” in Srebrenica punishable, make use of your civic and democratic right to contact the National Assembly of Serbia. Go to the web site of the Assembly, which is located here: http://www.parlament.gov.rs Then fill in the fields provided for your name, email and comment. Finally, click on the blue button “SEND” and your comment will be handed over to members of the Parliament of Serbia. If they ignore your attitude, remember this and punish them in the next election.”107

Returning to the essence of the proposal will demonstrate how pointless this whole charade was since the proposed article doesn’t even mention Srebrenica and anyone with a legal background or with knowledge of the war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia wars would notice this at first glance. The bill provides that a new Paragraph 5 should be added to Article 387 of the applicable Criminal Code, which will read as follows

“Anyone who publicly approves, denies the existence or significantly reduces the weight of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed against a group of persons or a member of a group determined on the basis of race, colour, religion, origin, state, national or ethnic affiliation, in a way that can lead to violence or incitement of hatred against such a group of persons or member of that group, if those offenses have been established by a final judgment of a court in Serbia or the International Criminal Court, shall be punished by imprisonment for six months to five years.”

The International Criminal Court and the Serbian courts have never provided verdicts regarding the Srebrenica genocide. The judgements of the International Court of Justice and the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia have established that genocide was committed in Srebrenica, but the courts included in the proposed article have made no such ruling.

Other Significant Incidents

The Case of Muamer Zukorlic

Muamer Zukorlic was chief mufti of the Islamic Community in Serbia until 2016, when he decided to campaign with the Bosniak Democratic Union of Sandzak in the Serbian elections; in 2016, he became an MP. Zukorlic also ran for president of Serbia in 2012. He is a businessman, the founder and first rector of the International University of Novi Pazar, and the first dean of the Faculty of Islamic Studies.

The scandal escalated when Zukorlic told N1 TV that there is no legal permission for his construction sites in downtown Novi Pazar, and when the TV host commented that “there can’t be illegal construction”, Zukorlic without hesi-
itation responded “You see that there can”. The media started reporting with headlines like “Who can stop Zukorlić?”; “We build illegally because we can: Zukorlić confirmed that he builds without permits in the center of Novi Pazar”. The media reported that the building inspection in Novi Pazar for two months unsuccessfully tried to shut down construction and demolish the illegal building activity, but that the local police together with the Ministry of Interior were silent the entire time and allowed the violation of the law. However, this wasn’t even the start of the scandal. Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic said on the subject of the illegal assets of the former Mufti Muamer Zukorlić that he does not want any violence or conflict, but a peaceful conversation to resolve the situation. The prime minister went on to say

“We do not want to have a conflict between the Orthodox Christians and Muslims? I don’t. This does not mean that every Muslim can do something against the law, but give us a way to see how we can apply the law and to try to find a way, and not to start a war and conflicts.”

He further stated that he “does not want to send 1,000 gendarmes to fight against Muslims” and does not want bloodshed in Serbia. The prime minister concluded, “Do you think that the mufti will just let someone crash his buildings without 5,000 people present? He won’t and he already said so and now I ask you to advise me how to bring that down.” The Protector of Citizens of the Republic of Serbia (Ombudsman) issued a statement which included the following:

“A declaration that he will not stop the illegal construction in the center of Novi Pazar, which is being built under the auspices of an MP of the ruling coalition (Zukorlić) and that he will not ‘break heads’ with Muslims, Aleksandar Vucic abuses the function of the Prime Minister and turned off the last light of the rule of law and created religious intolerance in Serbia. Aleksandar Vucic has no right to suspend the laws of the Republic of Serbia by his own assessment. His statements that the law will not be applied in the most outrageous case of illegal construction in Novi Pazar destroy the rule of law, legal security, property rights and equality before the law. His evaluation that the demolition of the illegal objects would mean ‘a...
war with Muslims’ and ‘breaking heads’ is the grossest manipulation as illegal construction is not characteristic of Muslims but an expression of lawlessness, which, clearly, exists among members of all faiths and nations. During a recent visit to Novi Pazar, municipal authorities, as well as a large number of citizens, of which a large number of the Muslim religion, asked the Ombudsman to influence the competent national authorities to work under the law which must be the same for all.”

Zukorlic welcomed the prime minister’s statements saying that he is “real statesman” while “Ombudsman incites citizens”. Ombudsman Jankovic received fierce criticism from the government, police and the prime minister’s Serbian Progressive Party. The Vice President of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party Milenko Jovanov said in a statement broadcasted from the ruling party that the Ombudsman Jankovic is “a liar, fraud and thief”; State Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Jana Ljubicic said that the Ombudsman Saša Janković started a presidential campaign and called him hypocritical; while Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic and Minister of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs Aleksandar Vulin also criticised the Ombudsman. The Bosniak National Council expressed “protest over the fact that Aleksandar Vucic, publicly placed above the law a member of his governing coalition, the so-called ‘Mufti Zukorlic’”, which eliminated the principle of equality before the law.

Desecration of Muslim Cemetery in Novi Pazar

It is customary that on the Ramadan Feast (Eid al-Fitr), after praying in the morning, Bosnian Muslims visit the graves of their deceased relatives. In Novi Pazar, the Muslim cemetery Gazilar was attacked during the night of the most sacred holiday, when 29 gravestones were destroyed, as stated by the spokesperson of Novi Pazar Prosecutor Jovan Milanovic. It was stated by the prosecutor’s office that appropri-
ate criminal charges will be brought against the perpetrators, and that the Prosecut-
orial Office has video footage from the security cameras.\footnote{Telegraf, “Na najsvetijimuslimanskipraznikstušeno 29 nadgrobnihploča u NovomPazaru,” Telegraf, July 5, 2016.}

Novi Pazar Mayor Nihat Biševac strongly condemned the desecration of the
monuments in the cemetery, pointing out that this act of vandalism was committed
in the evening after the end of Ramadan and beginning of the three-day holiday
of Eid. The Bosniak National Council strongly condemned the act of vandalism,\footnote{Bosniak National Council, “BNV NAJOŠTRIJE OSUĐUJE SKRNAVLJENJE MEZARJA NA
NOVOPAZARSKOM GROBLJU “GAZILAR,” bnv.org, (July 5, 2016), retrieved October 24, 216, from http://
} while the Serbian Orthodox Church also condemned the acts and appealed to the
investigative authorities to find the perpetrators.\footnote{Informer, “CRKVA OSUDILA VANDALIZAM NA GROBLJU U NOVOM PAZARU: KomšijamasrećanBajram,
policija da nađepočinioce!,” Informer, July 6, 2016.} In this case, the police reacted
} work on the reconstruction of the grave-
stones began the same day with the support of Novi Pazar Municipality.\footnote{Informer, “NOVI PAZAR: Počelaobnovanadgrobnihspomenika,” Informer, July 5, 2016.}

**Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

The latest European Commission 2016 Progress Report on Serbia observed that
freedom of thought, conscience and religion is guaranteed by the constitution and
generally respected but more importantly that the decrease in religiously motivated
incidents has continued. Another positive development noted in the report was that
the problem with school textbooks (especially for Albanian and Bosniak students
who are predominantly Muslims) improved and that agreements on printing text-
books in minority languages were reached with representatives of eight national mi-
norities (Bosniak, Albanian, Bulgarian, etc). However, the procedure for approving
textbooks in minority languages should be facilitated and the teaching of Serbian as
a second language needs to be better developed. Two more points from the report
deserve to be highlighted as these regions are predominantly inhabited by Muslims.
Municipal elections in Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja were held in a calm at-
mosphere. The government’s coordinating body worked efficiently and increased
funding for infrastructure development. For the first time, an ethnic Albanian was
appointed police chief in Bujanovac. The political dialogue between the central
authorities and local ethnic Albanian leaders on a comprehensive programme of
integration and economic recovery has still not resumed. The region remains un-
derdeveloped and the ethnic Albanian population continues to be underrepresented
in public administration. The situation in the Sandzak area was mostly stable and
municipal elections peaceful. Court interpreters for the Bosnian language were ap-

\footnote{Telegraf, “Na najsvetijimuslimanskipraznikstušeno 29 nadgrobnihploča u NovomPazaru,” Telegraf, July 5, 2016.}

\footnote{Bosniak National Council, “BNV NAJOŠTRIJE OSUĐUJE SKRNAVLJENJE MEZARJA NA
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policija da nađepočinioce!,” Informer, July 6, 2016.}

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\footnote{Informer, “NOVI PAZAR: Počelaobnovanadgrobnihspomenika,” Informer, July 5, 2016.}

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pointed. The Bosniak community continues to be underrepresented in the local administration and the police. The area remains among the most underdeveloped with a high unemployment rate. In conclusion, positive signals exist which is encouraging, but there is also room for improvement.

A positive sign discussed in last year’s European Islamophobia Report on Serbia was the fact that Serbia was one of the countries in Europe with no far right political party in parliament – this was the case for the first time since the breakup of former Yugoslavia. This, however, changed after the 2016 elections when two far right nationalist parties won seats in Parliament. Additional effort from the ruling coalition and other progressive parties, therefore, is needed in order to keep Islamophobic speech out of Parliament.

The state needs to address the issues of education and that of the teaching materials that are necessary to foster an awareness of diversity, the promotion of a non-violent culture of equality, and non-discriminatory practice. On the other hand, educational programmes and seminars on Islam and on how one should deal with Islamophobia should be organised for local authorities, public officials and politicians.

Public awareness of Islamophobia should be raised and a very important role should be played by NGOs and media. Last year’s recommendations also stressed the need for a comprehensive programme or project by NGOs to deal with these issues. Unfortunately, this has not changed in 2016. In this regard, there are no NGOs in Serbia that work on human rights protection; it would be very beneficial if NGOs could play a direct role in challenging and combating Islamophobia. This recommendation might be further strengthened with the inclusion of academics, Muslim communities and activists who would then work together to raise awareness on Islamophobia. Therefore, NGOs need to take a strong and proactive role in pointing out negative perceptions, prejudices and discriminations targeting Muslims.

As can be observed by the topics covered in this report, the media are arguably the weakest link in the Islamophobia network. There is an urgent need for very strong efforts on raising awareness among journalists (print media, TV, Internet) on Islamophobia. Tabloid reports exist in most countries but in Serbia there is a serious need to prevent the spread of hate speech in the media. This can be achieved by preparing and organising training sessions and seminars for journalists and editors.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN SERBIA

Chronology

March
• On 24 March 2016, ICTY found Radovan Karadzic guilty of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity (including the murder of 8,000 Muslims in Srebrenica).
• Karadzic’s verdict was followed by a media frenzy which lasted for months.

March-April
• On 31 March 2016, Vojislav Seselj was acquitted in a first instance verdict on all counts by the ICTY pending appeal.
• The media frenzy regarding Seselj’s acquittal, similarly to Karadzic’s case, lasted for months.

July
• On 5 July 2016, the Muslim cemetery Gazilar in Novi Pazar was desecrated and 29 gravestones were destroyed. This act of vandalism was committed in the evening after the end of Ramadan and the beginning of the three-day holiday of Eid.

• On 11 July 2016, the Srebrenica Commemoration was organised by Serbian NGOs and unlike previous years, this year’s event passed without incident as police secured the commemoration grounds. However, there was still a harsh reaction from political elites regarding a letter by an NGO (YIHR) submitted to the National Assembly.

September
• On 13 September 2016, the Independent Association of Journalists in Serbia condemned the usage of the term “Shiptar” classifying the usage as hate speech.

November
• On 15 November 2016, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia opened the debate on the Bill on Amendments to the Criminal Code, which prohibits public approval and denial of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. As the Srebrenica Massacre is still the subject of debate, including those who deny any existence of a crime in Srebrenica, this proposal has caused a huge hysteria not only in the media but also in Parliament and academia.

• The scandal involving the illegal construction sites of former Mufti Zukorlic escalated in November when the latter confirmed that his constructions do not have legal permits. The highest state representatives of Serbia were involved in the media scandal.
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, brainstorming sessions, conferences and policy recommendations, SETA seeks to guide leaders in government, civil society, and business, and contributes to informed decision making mechanisms.