
EUROPEAN
ISLAMOPHOBIA
REPORT
2016



ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

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**SETA | FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL RESEARCH**

Nenehatun Caddesi No: 66 GOP Çankaya 06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE

Phone:+90 312.551 21 00 | Fax :+90 312.551 21 90

www.setav.org | info@setav.org | @setavakfi

SETA | İstanbul

Defterdar Mh. Savaklar Cd. Ayvansaray Kavşağı No: 41-43

Eyüp İstanbul TÜRKİYE

Phone: +90 212 315 11 00 | Fax: +90 212 315 11 11

SETA | Washington D.C.

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 1106

Washington, D.C., 20036 USA

Phone: 202-223-9885 | Fax: 202-223-6099

www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org | @setadc

SETA | Cairo

21 Fahmi Street Bab al Luq Abdeen Flat No 19 Cairo EGYPT

Phone: 00202 279 56866 | 00202 279 56985 | @setakahire

ABOUT EDITORS

Enes Bayraklı

Mr. Bayraklı earned his BA, MA and PhD from the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna, and conducted research for his PhD thesis at the University of Nottingham in Britain between 2009 and 2010. He took office as a deputy director at Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in London in 2011-2013. Mr. Bayraklı also served as the founding director of Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers in Constanta and Bucharest during the period of August-December 2012. Mr. Bayraklı has been a faculty member in the Department of Political Science at the Turkish-German University since 2013. His fields of research include the Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy, Cultural Diplomacy, Foreign Policy Analysis, German Politics and Foreign Policy. bayrakli@tau.edu.tr

Farid Hafez

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

For more information about the EIR:

www.islamophobiaeurope.com

islamophobia@setav.org

THE STATE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ

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

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

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

The Rise of Islamophobia

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

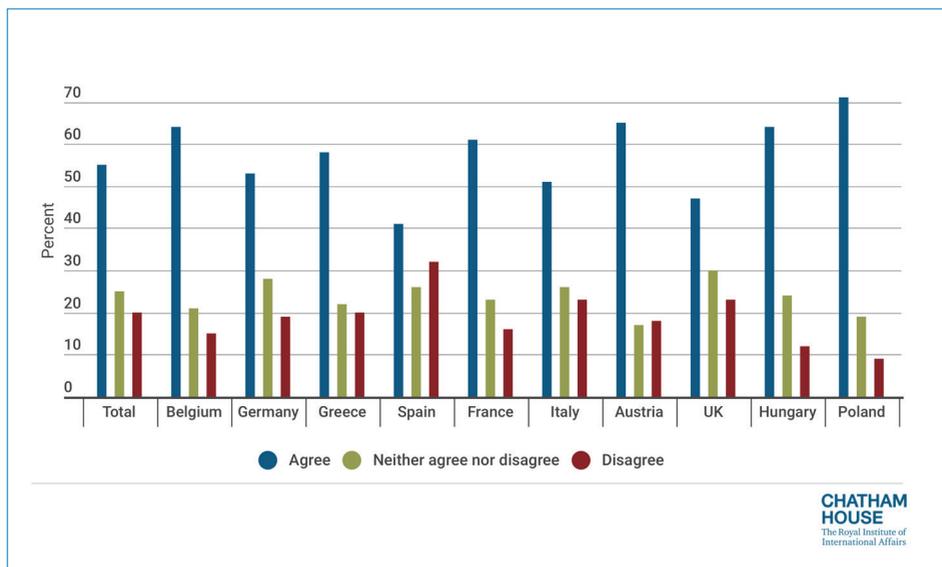


Figure 1: Public opposition to any further migration from predominantly Muslim states in Europe.²

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Recognition of Islamophobia

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

“When talking about Islamophobia, we mean anti-Muslim racism. As Anti-Semitism Studies has shown, the etymological components of a word do not necessarily point to its complete meaning, nor how it is used. Such is also the case with Islamophobia Studies. Islamophobia has become a well-known term used in academia as much as in the public sphere. Criticism of Muslims or of the Islamic religion is not necessarily Islamophobic. Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilising and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat – real or invented – and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/rights/definition of a constructed ‘we’. Islamophobia operates by constructing a static ‘Muslim’ identity, which is attributed in negative terms and generalised for all Muslims. At the same time, Islamophobic images are fluid and vary in different contexts, because Islamophobia tells us more about the Islamophobe than it tells us about the Muslims/Islam”.⁵

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

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

Policy Recommendations for European Countries

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
SWITZERLAND
NATIONAL REPORT 2016

NAJATE ZOUGGARI

The Author

Najate Zouggari is a sociologist at the University of Lausanne, Institute of Social Sciences. Her current research interests are sociology of work and culture, gender studies, race studies and critical theory. She earned an MA in Philosophy (Paris I, Sorbonne), Political Sciences (Paris VII, Jussieu) and Aesthetics & Comparative Literature (Paris VII, Denis-Diderot). In 2016, she was the recipient of a Doc.Mobility Scholarship by the Swiss National Fund and has been a visiting scholar at New York University (Media, Culture and Communication). She is currently a visiting scholar at the Department of European Ethnology, Humboldt University of Berlin. Her most recent publications deal with ethnography and qualitative methods, craft practices, materialities and photography. Previously, she worked as a journalist in London and Paris, focusing on the issues of racism, sexism and Islamophobia in Europe.

E-mail: najate.zouggari@unil.ch

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Executive Summary

This study has collected and analysed data on the phenomenon of Islamophobia with the aim of informing the public and giving stakeholders tools to address discrimination and deconstruct prejudice. The report shows that the situation of Islamophobia has not only worsened due to the geopolitical context but also due to a policy of exclusion against migrants reinforced by a specific and exclusive conception of the nation. The creation of a scapegoat makes it possible to strengthen the identity of the national community, at the expense of the respect of human rights and rationality. During the research period (January 2016-December 2016), a wide range of sources (media, data, academia) were examined. If the number of federal votes against foreigners also corresponds to a form of Islamophobia, the specificities of Islamophobia itself must be observed. This form of cultural racism often focuses on women's clothes. The issue of the veil in school has become a recurring theme - in the name of a secularism in many ways fantasized by its promoters. The emblematic case of the two teenagers who refused to shake hands with their teacher reveals tensions and an inability to build a constructive dialogue. In contrast to this hysterical treatment of a news item and to the production of stereotypes, however, a space for exchange and mutual understanding exists in Switzerland. It is this mission that education can ensure, notably through the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society of the University of Fribourg which opened its doors in 2016. In this report, I sought to identify the main incidents of the past year in order to provide comprehensive and useful insights for discussion and prevention. In particular, I examined the extent to which these incidents took place in the workplace and school and how Islamophobia affected the political debate. It is also revealing that physical violence lies upon verbal violences, discourses and ideologies favoring an essentialist representation of Islam and Muslims, to the detriment of debate based on rationality and inter-knowledge. This affects not only the minorities but the entire population, creating a deleterious climate that does not favor the common good.

Zusammenfassung

Im vorliegenden Bericht wurden islamophobe Vorfälle gesammelt und analysiert, um diese einer breiten Öffentlichkeit zugänglich zu machen und InteressensvertreterInnen Mittel zur Bekämpfung von Diskriminierung und Vorurteilen anzubieten. Es hat sich gezeigt, dass sich die Situation von MuslimInnen nicht nur aufgrund von geopolitischen Ereignissen verschlechtert hat, sondern auch aufgrund politischer Ausgrenzung von MigrantInnen; verstärkt durch die enggefaste und exkludierenden Konzeption von ‚Nation‘. Die Erschaffung eines Sündenbockes ermöglicht die Stärkung nationaler Identitäten gestärkt auf Kosten der Menschenrechte und Vernunft. Während des Forschungszeitraums (Jänner 2016 - Dezember 2016) wurde eine Vielzahl von Daten untersucht. Wenn die Zahl der eidgenössischen Abstimmungen gegen Ausländer eine Art von Islamophobie ist, müssen Besonderheiten der Islamophobie selbst beobachtet werden. Kleidungs Vorschriften für Frauen stehen oft im Fokus von Kulturrassismus. Das Thema der Haarbedeckung in der Schule ist zu einem immer wiederkehrenden Thema geworden. UnterstützerInnen des Verbots beriefen sich auf den Säkularismus. Der symbolische Fall zweier Jugendlicher, die das Händeschütteln mit Lehrerinnen verweigerten zeigte nicht nur eine aufgeladene Diskussion, sondern auch die Unfähigkeit, konstruktiven Dialog zu führen. Im Gegensatz zu dieser medial verbreiteten Hysterie und Wiedergabe von Stereotypen im Falle der Jugendlichen besteht in der Schweiz Raum für Austausch und gegenseitiges Verständnis. Es ist die Aufgabe der Bildung und der Bildungseinrichtungen diese (Werte) sicherzustellen. Ein gelungenes Beispiel hierfür wäre das Schweizerische Zentrum für Islam und Gesellschaft (SZIG) der Universität Freiburg, welche im Jahr 2016 ihre Tore öffnete. Im vorliegenden Bericht gehe ich auf die Hauptvorfälle des vergangenen Jahres ein, um umfassende und nützliche Daten für Diskussionen und Präventionsarbeit zur Verfügung zu stellen. Ich habe insbesondere untersucht, wie oft solche Vorfälle am Arbeitsplatz oder in der Schule stattgefunden haben und inwiefern die Diskussion über Islamophobie in politische Debatte eingeflossen ist. Es zeigte sich auch, dass körperliche Gewalt auf verbale Gewalt, Diskurse und Ideologien basiert. Diese unterstützen entgegen einer rationalen Debatte eine essentialistische Repräsentation des Islam und der Muslime. Dies betrifft nicht nur die Minderheiten, sondern erzeugt in der gesamten Bevölkerung ein schädliches Klima, das dem Wohl aller schadet.

Résumé

Cette étude a recueilli et analysé des données sur le phénomène de l'islamophobie en Suisse dans le but d'informer le public et de fournir aux différentes parties des outils pour traiter la discrimination et déconstruire les préjugés. Le rapport montre que la situation de l'islamophobie n'a pas seulement empiré en raison du contexte géopolitique mais aussi du fait d'une politique d'exclusion contre les migrants, elle-même renforcée par une conception spécifique et exclusive de la nation. La création d'un bouc-émissaire permet assurément de renforcer l'identité de la communauté nationale au détriment du respect des droits de l'homme et de l'exercice de la raison. Au cours de la période de recherche (janvier 2016-décembre 2016), on a examiné un large éventail de sources (issues des médias, des recherches universitaires et de différents rapports). Si le nombre de votations contre les étrangers correspond aussi à une forme d'islamophobie, il faut encore observer les spécificités propres à l'islamophobie elle-même. Cette forme de racisme culturel vise en priorité la tenue vestimentaire des femmes. La question du voile à l'école est devenue un thème récurrent au nom d'une laïcité à bien des égards fantasmée. En outre, le cas emblématique des deux adolescents qui ont refusé de serrer la main à leur enseignante et la mise en scène spectaculaire de ce fait divers dans le champ médiatique est révélateur de tensions et d'une incapacité à promouvoir un dialogue constructif. A rebours de la production de stéréotypes, cependant, un espace d'échange et de compréhension mutuelle existe en Suisse. C'est cette mission que l'éducation peut précisément assumer, notamment par le biais du Centre Suisse, Islam et Société de l'Université de Fribourg qui a ouvert ses portes en 2016. Dans ce rapport, nous avons cherché à recenser les principaux incidents de l'année passée en vue d'offrir un éclairage global et utile à des fins de discussion et de prévention. Nous avons plus particulièrement examiné dans quelle mesure ces incidents s'inscrivaient dans le milieu du travail et de l'école, avant de nous intéresser plus largement au contexte politique. Il est aussi révélateur de noter que les violences physiques prennent appui sur une violence verbale et des discours dont l'idéologie favorise, au détriment d'un débat fondé sur la rationalité et l'entre-connaissance, une représentation essentialiste de l'Islam et des Musulman.e.s. Celle-ci affecte l'ensemble de la population et crée un climat délétère qui ne favorise en rien le bien commun.

Introduction

In 2016, the geopolitical context of previous years as well as the terrorist attacks launched by DAESH contributed to reinforce Islamophobia in Europe. Despite the obvious fact that such acts of terror and their consequences are either killing Muslims or impacting their daily lives, Islamophobic discourses and racism against migrants have increased in Europe. In Switzerland, the Islamophobic discourses are carried out in the form of a threat against the “imagined political community”,¹ a threat embodied by teenagers who refused to shake their teacher’s hand or schoolgirls not attending swimming lessons. Such anecdotes attracted significant media attention, both local and international. Politicians and columnists use them as pieces of evidence of a so-called “clash of civilizations”. It is mostly the far right Central Democratic Union (UDC) which is acting as the spokesperson for Islamophobia and racism against migrants in Switzerland.

It needs to be reminded that the UDC achieved its best result in the federal elections of 18 October, 2015 with 29.4% of the vote. This party has long been conducting a campaign against Islam and Muslims.² As stated in its programme, “the UDC is committed to the Christian and Western culture that underpins our identity and our cohesion. It is not without reason that the flag of our country carries a cross and that our national anthem has the form of a hymn”.³ The prominent figures of this party, active throughout various conservative movements or associations (such as the Association for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland at the Egerkinden Committee) have participated to the construction of a “Muslim problem”. The Federal People’s Initiative of the Egerkinden Committee Against the Construction of New Minarets, approved by 57.5% of the votes in November 2009, was one of the first signs of the assimilation of this Islamophobic discourse by important segments of the population. The committee is also an actor of the federal initiative against the concealment of the face in public spaces, inspired by the “anti-burqa initiative” adopted in Ticino in 2013. These legislative measures contribute to the exclusion and designation of Muslims as scapegoats. Another initiative of the UDC, in Valais, was to ban the wearing of the veil at school. In 2016, the same party tried to prohibit the creation of the Swiss Centre for Islam & Society (University of Fribourg).

The UDC also performs what may be conceptualised as a *necro-Islamophobia*. Indeed, members of the UDC launched a petition against the establishment of a Muslim square in the cemetery of the Bois-de-Vaux in 2015.⁴ The petitioners

1. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London/New York: Verso, 1983).

2. Dario Lopreno, “Les musulmans en Suisse entre islamophobie et xénophobie,” *La Brèche*, No. 4 (December 2015).

3. See here: <https://www.udc.ch/positions/themes/religions/> (retrieved February 5, 2017).

4. RTS, “Pétition de l’UDC contre un carré musulman dans un cimetière lausannois,” *rts.ch*, (April 11, 2015), retrieved February 5, 2017, from <https://www.rts.ch/info/regions/vaud/6693648-petition-de-l-udc-contre-un-carre-musulman-dans-un-cimetiere-lausannois.html>.

worried about what they called “the arrival of a large number of deceased Muslims” from other communes to Lausanne, or a post-mortem invasion that allows us to understand Islamophobia through the theoretical framework of necropolitics.⁵ The major events and topics which dominated the Swiss political debate, however, remain related to the questions of global terrorism, migration and the assimilation of Muslim minorities.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

In December 2016, the day after the terrorist attack in Berlin, a gunman wounded three people attending prayers at the Islamic Centre of Zurich.⁶ It is not the first time an Islamic centre has been attacked in Switzerland. In 2004, a Frenchman stabbed the imam of a Lausanne mosque.⁷ The Islamic Central Council of Switzerland⁸ said the 2016 shooting was “an alarm signal”. Subsequently, the association Islamic Youth Switzerland organised a march and underlined the fact that “terrorism and Islamophobia were two faces of the same coin”.⁹

Islamophobia manifests itself through discourses and discriminatory practices, mostly directed against women wearing the hijab. If Switzerland has not adopted such laws as are present in France,¹⁰ the wearing of hijab and niqab in public spaces are often turned into identity fetishes serving as foils for contrast with a conception of feminism excluding the very principle of free choice. This so-called feminism aims to unveil Muslim women for their benefit but it neglects structural inequalities affecting the daily lives of Muslim and non-Muslim women, such as the gender wage gap - which is above the EU average in Switzerland.¹¹ Focusing attention on Islam and Muslims is, a usual, a fast and convenient way to distract citizens from more sensitive social questions.

5. Achille Mbembé, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Winter 2003).

6. Daniel Gonzalez, “Une attaque dans un centre islamique à Zurich fait trois blessés,” *Le Nouvelliste*, (December 19, 2016), retrieved February 5, 2017, from <http://www.lenouveliste.ch/articles/suisse/une-attaque-contre-un-centre-islamique-a-zurich-fait-trois-blesses-614720>.

7. See RTS, “L’imam du Centre islamique de Lausanne a été poignardé pendant la prière aujourd’hui,” *rts.ch*, (October 8, 2004), retrieved February 5, 2017, from <http://www.rts.ch/play/tv/19h30/video/limam-du-centre-islamique-de-lausanne-a-ete-poignarde-pendant-la-priere-aujourd'hui?id=119274>.

8. Islamischer Zentralrat Schweiz, “Offene Fragennach Anschlag auf Zürcher Moschee,” *izrs.ch*, (December 20, 2016), retrieved February 5, 2017, from <http://www.izrs.ch/der-islamische-zentralrat-verurteilt-den-anschlag-auf-eine-zuercher-moschee-scharf.html>.

9. 24heures, “Manif contre le terrorisme et l’islamophobie,” *24heures.com*, (December 24, 2016) retrieved February 5, 2017, from <http://www.24heures.ch/suisse/manif-terrorisme-islamophobie/story/19666878>.

10. The Funambulist, “State Misogyny: France’s Colonial Unveiling History Against Muslim Women,” *thefunambulist.net*, (not dated), retrieved February 5, 2017, from <https://thefunambulist.net/history/state-misogyny-frances-colonial-unveiling-history-against-muslim-women>.

11. Malcolm Curtis, “Rising Swiss gender pay gap above EU average,” *The Local*, (March 5, 2016), retrieved February 5, 2017, from <http://www.thelocal.ch/20150305/swiss-pay-gap-for-women>.

In a report Swiss trade unionist, Dario Lopreno,¹² has shown how the Islamic veil became a fetish for Islamophobes. He noticed that in recent years there have been campaigns to collect signatures and votes on the following initiatives: Against the Construction of Minarets (accepted in November 2009 by 57.5% of voters); For the Dismissal of Foreigners (accepted in November 2010 by 52.4% of voters); Against Mass Immigration (accepted by 50.3% of voters); and the campaign to collect signatures for the initiative For the Effective Dismissal of Foreigners (156,000 signatures while 100,000 are needed) in 2016. As outlined by Lopreno, the first initiative attacked Muslims directly, while the other three attacked them indirectly as part of their campaigns. For example, the “foreign criminal” easily had a name and appearance suggesting a Muslim Balkan person, or “mass immigration” was staged by a graph indicating “Soon a million Muslims” with the same woman in black burqa that was featured in the poster of the initiative against the minarets, appearing here in overprint. There was also a vote in Ticino, in September 2013, of the initiative Banning the Concealment of the Face in Public Places Open to the Public, commonly called the “anti-burqa initiative” even by its promoters, which was largely inspired by French legislation.

The irony here is that factually the only women wearing a burqa in Ticino are wealthy tourists, unlikely to be affected by the legislative effects of Islamophobia and protected by the interests of the luxury industry. Other Muslims, namely refugees, are less fortunate.

Other more specific incidents and developments in 2016 include the public debate about the burkini (August 2016) and the adoption of an initiative against the wearing of hijab in schools in Valais (March 2016). According to Martine Brunschwig Graf,¹³ president of the Federal Commission against Racism, “the burkini allows women to go to the beach, so to free themselves, not the other way around”. She observed that such a debate was actually a pretext for stigmatising Muslims. In Valais, the initiative collected 4,385 signatures and aims to produce a legislative text against the wearing of headscarves in public schools in the coming years.

Employment and Education

The rise of Islamophobia has been challenged by the process of interreligious dialogue and education. In this respect, a significant example is provided by the creation of the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society.¹⁴ The Swiss Centre for Islam and Society (CSIS) was officially inaugurated in June 2016 in Fribourg. All speakers emphasised

12.Ibid.

13.<http://www.24heures.ch/suisse/politique/La-burqa-est-un-pretexte-pour-s-en-prendre-a-lislam/story/25438900>

14.See here: <http://www.unifr.ch/szig/fr> (retrieved February 5, 2017).

its crucial role in dialogue and tolerance. “The University of Fribourg is proud to host this centre of competence at the national level,” said its president Astrid Epiney. “The University must contribute to cultivating openness and tolerance,” she stressed. “Only a society in which we can live together respecting differences allows for each person a life in dignity”.¹⁵

Unfortunately, it may not be the kind of society some politicians dream of. Indeed, the far right party UDC interfered and tried to slow down the process. They rejected a “state formation for imams” (which is basically not the aim of the centre) and mentioned the sufferings of “Eastern Christians”, a category of people whose misfortunes are usually instrumentalised by the European far right when they are running short of arguments to justify their lack of humanism or their outright Islamophobia. In contrast with the academic endeavour to promote dialogue and mutual understanding, it has been noted by Dario Lopreno that “the very tough and political Islamophobia of the authorities and the governmental parties of Switzerland is not a racist policy but is an assimilationist policy. The aim is to try to obtain from all foreigners, each one taken as an individual in the liberal sense of the term (...) that all these people correspond to the very selective requirements of naturalization (LN, Article 14). But this is just to get a work permit, a residence permit or establishment. These persons must thus be a part of the ‘Swiss community’ puzzle, they must be accustomed to ‘the Swiss way of life and customs’, conforming to the ‘Swiss legal order’ (...). This system is de facto also aimed at Swiss people with a culture, religion or customs considered as non-insertable (...). In case of non-compliance, the consequences are the withdrawal or non-renewal of permits for foreigners, the withdrawal of citizenship for 8 years for naturalised persons, the withdrawal of the permit for 5 years for foreigners married to Swiss citizens. In addition, this system makes it possible to put even more pressure on asylum seekers (in process or unsuccessful), provisionally admitted (...). It is a very selective lottery for those very rare who, lucky winners of the race for assimilation, do obtain a residence permit.”¹⁶

A significant number of news items were turned into so-called pieces of evidence of the non-compliance of Muslims to the Swiss community. “*Les faits divers, ce sont aussi des faits qui font diversion*” (News items can create diversion) as the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu¹⁷ used to say. In April 2016, two Muslim boys in Northern Switzerland refused to shake hands with female teachers. What could have been

15. swissinfo.ch, “Centre suisse islam et société officiellement inauguré à Fribourg,” *swissinfo.ch*, (June 13, 2016), retrieved February 5, 2017, from <http://www.swissinfo.ch/fre/centre-suisse-islam-et-société-officiellement-inauguré-à-fribourg/42224320>.

16. Dario Lopreno, “Les musulmans en Suisse entre xénophobie et islamophobie (III): communauté et intégration,” *La Brèche*, (July 17, 2015), retrieved February 5, 2017, from <https://cerclelabreche.wordpress.com/2015/07/17/les-musulmans-en-suisse-entre-xenophobie-et-islamophobie-iii-communauté-et-intégration/>.

17. Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision* (Paris: Seuil, 1996).

discussed in a rational way in the very space of the classroom became a polemic widely disseminated in the media, mixing the prejudices against migrants with other ingredients such as idle theological talk by so-called experts, confused perceptions of agency and a disgusting appetite for sensationalism. This unimaginative mixture was supposed to solve the tricky problem (to shake or not to shake hands) posed by two boys respectively aged 14 and 15 - a serious threat to the Swiss community and the eternal values of Freedom and Sex Equality !

Even Justice Minister Simonetta Sommaruga intervened. She insisted on Swiss television that “shaking hands is part of our culture”.¹⁸ The head of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education, Christoph Eymann, also made his contribution to the heroic defence of Swiss culture by saying “We cannot tolerate that women in the public service are treated differently from men”. Here is the classic argument of feminism used as a culturalist argument to bring down Arab (and by extension, Muslim) men, as if the gesture of two teenagers in a Swiss village could sum up a religion and produce the contrast that helps to define, negatively, a community, a collective “we” into which some cannot fit.

By contrast with this compliance of the mainstream media and politics to the Huntingtonian paradigm, the opening of a Museum of the Civilisations of Islam¹⁹ in May 2016 in La Chaux-de-Fonds (Neuchâtel) shows that the dichotomy between so-called “West” and “Islam” is merely a product of ignorance; civilisations are not fixed essences but they interact through exchange, cross-fertilisation and sharing, as Edward Said observed. This museum is neither funded by states or Swiss institutions. The director of the museum, Nadia Karmous, has collected sponsorship and funds for 16 years, mainly from women from Switzerland or the Gulf states. The museum seeks to dispel erroneous notions about Islam, clarify misunderstandings and promote cultural curiosity.

Unfortunately, Islamophobia still has an impact on employees’ lives. In January, thirty men were arrested at Geneva Airport. These luggage handlers had no criminal records but they were French Muslims, which was adequate ground for being suspected. As was underlined in the previous report: “Such incidents of discrimination against Muslims became rampant after the January 2015 attacks in Paris due to the heightened security concerns in Switzerland”.²⁰ Other companies, such as Swissport and Dndata also took measures against Muslim employees. A trade unionist observed that the luggage handlers had precarious contracts and their arrest was not in accordance with the Swiss Constitution.

18.The Local, “Muslim boys refuse to shake hands with female teachers,” *thelocal.ch*, (April 5, 2016), retrieved February 5, 2017, from <http://www.thelocal.ch/20160405/muslim-boys-refuse-to-shake-hands-with-female-teachers>.

19.<http://mucivi.ch/>

20.Saira Bano Orakzai (2016): Islamophobia in Switzerland: National Report 2015, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, European Islamophobia Report 2015, Istanbul, SETA, 2016

Politics

In November 2014, National Councilor Walter Wobman (UDC Solothurn), already a member of the Initiative Committee for the Prohibition of New Minarets, filed a parliamentary initiative (National Council). Wobman intervenes very regularly against Muslims. In particular, in 2012, he rejected the dialogue established by the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP) with the Muslim population and put forward the parliamentary question under the title "Towards an Islamization of Administration?" He also suggested to no longer grant asylum to Iraqi and Syrian Muslims, in order to avoid «dangerous terrorists infiltrating» Switzerland.

This is a just an example of the most pernicious form of cynicism that confuses terrorists with those who are turned into refugees by terrorism. In July 2016, more than two thirds of the 1,300 refugees stopped at the Swiss Italian border were sent back to Italy by Swiss officials.²¹ This strict policy does not prevent UDC members from giving in to a populist rhetoric in which "the migrant" embodies what Giorgio Agamben²² calls "homo sacer". Extrapolating from ancient Roman law, "homo sacer" defines someone outside the law, a depoliticised naked life which is excluded from the normal limits of the state. Though at the same time, this very figure testifies to the politicised norm. As a matter of fact, in September 2016, the Swiss authorities noticed that 40% of the migrants who claim asylum in Switzerland "disappeared" from reception centres.²³ According to the Federal Migration Office spokeswoman, Chloe Kohlprath, "many migrants took advantage of the system by saying they wished to claim asylum in Switzerland and then disappeared before their request could be formally registered".²⁴ How does "homo sacer" dare not be registered! Indeed, this is a scandal for the administration and reinforces the usual (racist) discourse within which the migrant "only takes advantage of the system".

After the 2009 elections, journalist Rachad Armanios was right to comment that "the unexpected extent of this success of the hard-line and Christian right-wing is commensurate with the punch received by the defenders of a Switzerland based on respect for minorities. Being the first Western country to include such religious discrimination in its Constitution, it undermines the rule of law, based on equity of treatment."²⁵ He also pointed out the fact that "the whole world, stunned, observed

21. Swissinfo, "Como reports more migrants turned away by Switzerland," *swissinfo.ch*, (July 15, 2016), retrieved February 5, 2017, from http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/crossing-borders_como-reports-more-migrants-turned-away-by-switzerland/42302178.

22. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

23. 20 Minutes, "Ces requérants qui disparaissent dans la nature," *20min.ch*, (September 4, 2016), retrieved February 5, 2017, from <http://www.20min.ch/ro/news/suisse/story/Ces-requerants-qui-disparaissent-dans-la-nature-25031461>.

24. The Local, "'Disappearing' migrants on the rise in Switzerland," *thelocal.ch*, (September 5, 2016), retrieved February 5, 2017, from <http://www.thelocal.ch/20160905/disappearing-migrants-on-the-rise-in-switzerland>

25. Rachad Armanios, « La Suisse, laboratoire de l'islamophobie », *Le Courrier* (30 novembre 2009). http://www.lecourrier.ch/la_suisse_laboratoire_de_l_islamophobie.

the cradle of humanitarian law turn into a laboratory of Islamophobia. But it is not yesterday that xenophobia has poisoned minds. The minaret ballot is part of a long list of exclusionary votes, including the tightening of the right of aliens and asylum, or the denial of facilitated naturalisation”.

Physical and Verbal Attacks

The discrimination rate against Muslims has increased in Switzerland. This also was the main finding in the report of the Federal Commission against Racism (CFR) for the year 2015.²⁶ The number of hostile acts towards Muslims had increased by 11% (53 incidents) compared to previous years. The year 2015 seems to have been a turning point as the report shows that “the year 2015 was marked by an upsurge of hostile demonstrations against Muslims. Migratory movements, the crisis in Syria and, above all, terrorist acts carried out on behalf of the Islamic State group are often the cause of more or less explicit rejection reactions”. The document indicated 239 cases of racial discrimination from the 18 member centres of the Network of Counseling Centres for Victims of Racism throughout Switzerland. The study also revealed a rise of antisemitic acts (+ 3%) which ranked fourth, just behind Islamophobic and racist acts against the population from the Balkan area.

Media and Internet

In 2014, Anaïd Lindemann and Jörg Stolz published a comprehensive article about the “use of Islam in the definition of foreign otherness in Switzerland”.²⁷ They have analysed Swiss newspapers between 1970 and 2014 in order to investigate how the category of the “Muslim foreigner” is socially constructed in journalistic discourses. They noticed an Islamization of media discourses on immigration: “foreigners affiliated to a religious tradition are necessarily Muslim, since other religions are not represented when foreigners are discussed in Swiss newspapers.” The researchers also observed an overrepresentation of Muslim migrants in Swiss media: “We can assert that Swiss newspapers represent religious affiliations of the migrant population in a way that is not in numerical accord with the sociological reality”.

Lindemann and Stöltz underline the fact that “journalists often unintentionally contribute to negative images of Islamic immigration by displaying more negative claims than positive alternative views regarding Muslim foreigners.” But they also want their study to raise awareness among journalists and “serve as a warning and recommendation to the Swiss media concerning their handling of immigrant issues, and more specifically Muslims, to prevent the formation of negative stereotypes and stigmas”.

26. Federal Department against Racisms (EKR), “Incidents racistes recensés par les centres de conseil,” *ekr.admin.ch*, (Juni 2016), retrieved February 5, 2017, from http://www.ekr.admin.ch/pdf/rassismusbericht_2015_web_f.pdf.

27. Anaïd Lindemann/ Jörg Stolz, “Use of Islam in the Definition of Foreign Otherness in Switzerland: A Comparative Analysis of Media Discourses Between 1970-2004,” *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, No. 1 (Spring 2014), pp.44-58.

On the Internet, several blogs promote Islamophobia. In Switzerland, the most frequented is the site of the association Switzerland Vigilance Islam.²⁸ This site aims to resist the pressures of «Islamically correct» and is promoting a neo-conservatism à la Suisse. By claiming to fight in favour of secularism and “Western values”, the authors of the site actually show Islamophobia. They perpetuate the myth that all mosques are radical and participate in the usual debates about Muslim women’s choice of clothing. Subsequently, their writers are experts in burqas, niqabs, hijabs, burqinis and other textile fears. Interestingly, the only Muslims authorised to express their opinions on this website are those who either doubt their faith or frankly criticise Islam. The action of this association is both ideological (intervention in the public debate, invitation of Islamophobic authors) and political (collection of signatures, willingness to weigh in on the democratic debate). In 2016, they participated in the collection of signatures in Valais, sent letters to the elected representatives of Fribourg and invited well-known French Islamophobes to speak in Switzerland. This blog is unfortunately becoming mainstream as Swiss journalists interviewed Mireille Vallette, the founder of the website, in popular Swiss newspapers such as *La Tribune de Genève*, *Le Temps*, etc. According to her and the title of her book : « *Islamophobia is self-defense.* » As usual, this is an incitement of racial hatred against Muslims masked by the demand for freedom of expression.

It is interesting to notice that here Islamophobia takes the form of a “cultural racism”.²⁹ It has been defined by Ramòn Grosfoguel and Eric Mielants as “a form of racism that does not even mention the word ‘race’. It is focused on the cultural inferiority of a group of people. Usually it is framed in terms of the inferior habits, beliefs, behaviours, or values of a group of people (...) In the new cultural racist discourse, religion has a dominant role. The contemporary tropes about ‘uncivilised’, ‘barbarian’, ‘savage’, ‘primitive’, ‘underdeveloped’, ‘authoritarian’, and ‘terrorist’ inferior people are today concentrated in the ‘other’s’ religious practices and beliefs. By focusing on the ‘other’s’ religion, the Europeans, Euro-Americans and Euro-Israelis manage to escape being accused of racism.”³⁰

To escape being accused of racism is a matter of absolute necessity, that is precisely why an entire page of the website in question is dedicated to explaining why Islamophobia has allegedly nothing to do with racism.

28.<http://www.vigilanceislam.com/>

29.Ramòn Grosfoguel, Eric Mielants, « The Long-durée EntanglementbetweenIslamophobia and Racism in the Modern/Colonial Capitalist/Patriarchal World-System », *Human Architecture : Journal of the Sociology of Self Knowledge*. <http://www.okcir.com/Articles%20V%201/GrossfoguelMielants-FM.pdf>

30.Op. cit.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

In conclusion, the fact that Islamophobia in Switzerland takes the form of a political discourse that holds negative views not only about Muslims but also about migrants must be emphasised. The figure of the foreigner is particularly important to grasp the specificity of Islamophobia in Switzerland. This figure of the foreigner makes it possible to define the boundaries of a divided community whose coherence is constructed in opposition to what it excludes. The year 2016 was marked in Europe by terrorist attacks claimed by the sect of DAESH and by an influx of people victims of the wars and the exactions of this same DAESH. The trauma produced by these events also deeply affects European citizens of Muslim faith.

In Switzerland, there is a willingness for interreligious dialogue, mutual knowledge and recognition that would reflect cultural diversity. In contrast to the hateful stereotypes that undermine the ability of people to live together in peace, we can identify a few lines of recommendation:

- Strengthening interreligious dialogues and institutionalising these meetings, within the framework of the Swiss Center for Islam and Society;
- Including in these discussions members of the civil society and not reserving the meetings for members of the academic community;
- Ensuring equality in relations between men and women, even when they do not exclusively involve Muslims (for example, fight for equal pay instead of stigmatising and targeting Muslims). Moreover, are all the Swiss employers who create this wage discrimination between men and women Muslims who do not fully understanding the principle of gender equality?
- Making sure not to repeat in the French-speaking part of Switzerland the aggressively secularist speeches and legislation applied in France;
- Maintaining the existence and the exercise of a critical discourse in schools, high schools and universities which truly honour the Swiss tradition of thought based upon the respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law.

Chronology

January

- The UDC collects 9,700 signatures against the Swiss Center for Islam and Society.
- Thirty male baggage handlers are arrested at the Geneva International Airport. These employees are Muslims from France suspected because of their religion and despite the fact they have no criminal record.

February

- The UDC initiates a legislative text against the veil in public schools.

March

- The Grand Conseil declares the UDC constitutional initiative against the Swiss Center for Islam and Society null and void. The text was declared contrary to the Federal Constitution, according to two experts in constitutional law, Pascal Mahon from the University of Neuchâtel and Benjamin Schindler from the University of St. Gallen. According to them, it is discriminatory, based on a denominational difference, and directed against the people of a single religion.

May

- Inauguration of the Museum of the Civilisations of Islam, Chaux-de-Fond (Neuchâtel). The Museum was established mainly by Swiss companies and financed entirely by private donations. The 750-square-metre, two-storey building has a public library with some 20,000 books, a conference room, rooms for artists' workshops, round table discussions and exhibition spaces.

June

- Official opening of the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society in Fribourg in the presence of representatives of the federal, cantonal and city authorities of Fribourg. Many faculty members, members of Christian churches and Muslim communities, as well as curious members of the public, made the trip to support this academic and societal approach to «inter-knowledge».

July

- A woman wearing a burkini and her three children were denied access to a swimming pond in Carouge (Genève). The French debate about the burkini and how Muslims should swim contaminated Switzerland with multiple articles in national newspapers.

December

- Shootings at the Islamic Centre in Zurich. Three people were seriously injured.

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.

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