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The denial of the very existence of Islamophobia/anti-Muslim racism/anti-Muslim hate crimes in Europe by many demonstrates the need for an appropriate effort and political will to tackle this normalized racism and its manifestations that are deeply entrenched in European societies, institutions, and states.

This denial is not only the case for extremist groups on the political fringe of the society, but rather far-right discourses have moved to the center of political power. Consequently, it is not only right-wing extremist groups that rely on the means of Islamophobic propaganda and discourse - social democrats, liberals, leftists or conservatives are not immune to this form of racism.

As a survey published by the FRA reveals 76% of Muslim respondents feel strongly attached to the country they live in, while 31% of those seeking work have been discriminated against in the last five years. At the same time, only 12% of Muslims say they have reported cases of discrimination. Hence, we can say with certainty that the extent of discrimination Muslims face in Europe is much greater than the numbers revealed in any report on Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime in Europe.

In other words, one can claim that all the available data and statistics about Islamophobia in Europe show only the tip of the iceberg. Therefore, revealing the comprehensiveness of structural anti-Muslim racism lies at the heart of the European Islamophobia Report project, which on a yearly basis analyzes the trends and developments in Europe from Russia to Portugal, and Malta to Norway.

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.
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FOREWORD

SETA is pleased to present the third edition of the annual *European Islamophobia Report* (EIR) succeeding the reports of 2015 and 2016. This year, 40 prominent scholars and civil society actors from various European countries who specialize in different fields such as racism, gender, and discrimination studies, present 33 country reports. In addition to highlighting the developments of Islamophobia in key fields such as employment, education and politics, they provide precious country-specific policy recommendations to counter this phenomenon and a detailed chronology of events. Since every year it applies the same methodological framework on a large number of European countries, the *European Islamophobia Report* (EIR) provides a unique collection of European-wide analyses in regard to anti-Muslim racism in Europe to policy makers, social scientists, and ordinary readers.

Monitoring Islamophobia in Europe became an urgent need in the last few years, since the phenomenon has sensibly increased, following economic recession and the rise of far-right politics. Today, Islamophobia constitutes a serious challenge for European democracies for at least four reasons:

- First of all, Islamophobia is severely impacting the life of millions of European Muslims facing racism at university, in the workplace, the public sphere, etc. In addition to representing a threat to their physical life, this racism undermines their place in society and their sense of belonging in European nation states.
Secondly, the rise of Islamophobia both reflects and strengthens the normalization of far-right discourse in the political spectrum across Europe. Within a few months, neofascist parties entered the German Bundestag, accessed strategic ministries in Austria, and registered historical results in the French, Dutch and Italian elections.

Thirdly, Islamophobia poses a problem of internal security as it intensifies tensions between communities, legitimizes hate crimes against individuals, and undermines the European Union ideals of peace and coexistence.

Finally, Islamophobia represents an obstacle for European international relations, since it mars the EU image of tolerance worldwide and increases tension between EU member states and certain strategic partners, including Muslim countries.

Yet, even if Islamophobia objectively constitutes a threat for European democracies, many European intellectuals and politicians, both left- and right-wing, are still refuting the existence and the validity of the concept. Their worries about terrorist attacks and immigration are preventing them from acknowledging the daily racism that Muslims face in Europe. However, by denying Islamophobia, there is a risk – intended or not – to ignore the unacceptable reality experienced by millions of European citizens.

Based on this observation, as SETA, we decided to annually publish the European Islamophobia Report (EIR) in order to provide serious – yet accessible – analyses on a phenomenon that remains widely ignored and misunderstood. We hope this will be a vital contribution in the fight against Islamophobia in Europe.

Burhanettin Duran
General Coordinator of SETA
THE STATE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ

This is the third issue of the annual European Islamophobia Report (EIR) consisting of an overall evaluation of Islamophobia in Europe in the year 2017, as well as 33 country reports which include almost all EU member states and additional countries such as Russia and Norway. This year’s EIR represents the work of 40 prominent scholars and civil society activists from various European countries.

In a presentation of the Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey’s selected findings on Muslims, the director of the European Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), Michael O’Flaherty, stressed that their survey clearly contradicts the claim that Muslims are not integrated into European societies. On the contrary, the survey found that the trust of Muslims in the democratic institutions of Europe is higher than much of the general population. Furthermore, O’Flaherty pointed out that “every incident of discrimination and hate crime, however, hinders their [Muslims’] inclusion and reduces their chances of finding work. We risk that we alienate individuals and their community from us, with all possible consequences.”1

As the report based on a survey of 10,527 people who identified themselves as Muslims published by the FRA reveals 76% of Muslim respondents feel strongly attached to the country they live in, while 31% of those seeking work have been discriminated against in the last five years. At the same time, only 12% of Muslims say they have reported cases of discrimination. Hence, we can say with certainty that the extent of discrimination Muslims face in Europe is much greater than the numbers revealed in any report on Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime in Europe. In other words, one can claim that all the available data and statistics about Islamophobia in Europe show only the tip of the iceberg. Therefore, revealing the comprehensiveness of structural anti-Muslim racism lies at the heart of the European Islamophobia Report project, which on a yearly basis analyzes the trends and developments in almost all states in Europe from Russia to Portugal, and Malta to Norway.

However, NGOs and projects like the EIR cannot provide a European-wide daily monitoring mechanism given the colossal size of the problem and the funds required. Therefore, we think it is the duty of the nation states to put in place monitoring mechanisms and publish yearly data on anti-Muslim hate crimes in their respective countries. Yet, it is clear that we are far from that goal since there is no official documentation of anti-Muslim hate crime in the overwhelming majority of European nation states. Recently, Germany made an important step by including Islamophobia as a subcategory of “hate crimes” in the official police statistics of “politically motivated criminal acts.” We welcome this decision and urge other European nation states to follow suit, since Islamophobia is not only a fundamental threat to the coexistence of different religions and cultures but also a threat to the democratic foundations of Europe. Furthermore, tackling Islamophobia has also become an acute problem given the rise of racist, especially Islamophobic, anti-Semitic and anti-Roma far-right parties and the adaptation of their discourse by mainstream parties in many European nation states.

The first statistics, which were revealed for 2017 by the German State reveal around 71 attacks on mosques and 908 crimes against German Muslims (ranging from verbal to physical attacks and murder attempts). Germany also registered 1,413 attacks on refugees and 93 attacks on aid workers in Germany in the first 273 days of 2017. However, although the German state registered 71 attacks on mosques, the DITIB, which is an NGO, listed 101 attacks on mosques in Germany all throughout 2017. Therefore, bearing in mind also what the FRA revealed about the reluctance of Muslims to report incidents, one can claim that the estimated number of unknown cases might be more than eight times higher. There are various reasons for these phenomena; some of these include:
• Victims may not be aware of the reporting mechanisms.
• The victims’ possible social isolation or proximity to the perpetrator.
• The victims’ lack of trust in the authorities, due to fears that their claim will not be taken seriously.
• The victims’ fear of being victimized again by police officers.

In this regard, the OSCE ODIHR points out to the fact that “governments have a central role to play in ensuring access to justice; from the initial assessment of victims’ needs by police officers, to support mechanisms for victims through governmental or nongovernmental institutions.”

The denial of the very existence of Islamophobia/anti-Muslim racism/anti-Muslim hate crime in Europe by many demonstrates the need for an appropriate effort and political will to tackle this normalized racism and its manifestations that are deeply entrenched in European societies, institutions, and states. Intelligence services, such as the German Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, have realized the important role Islamophobia plays for right-wing extremist parties. Still, it is not only the case for extremist groups on the political fringe of the society, but rather far-right discourses have moved to the center of political power. Consequently, it is not only right-wing extremist groups that rely on the means of Islamophobic propaganda and discourse - social democrats, liberals, leftists or conservatives are no longer immune to this form of racism.

The recognition of Islamophobia is of utmost importance in Europe. Therefore, we welcome the Swedish government’s decision to launch a National Plan to Combat Racism, which also acknowledges Islamophobia as a problem that needs to be addressed. However, despite this positive step the Equality Ombudsman in Sweden followed the EU Court of Justice in ruling that company policies banning the Islamic headscarf are not discriminatory.

That is also why initiatives such as the report *The Missing Muslims: Unlocking British Muslim Potential for the Benefit of All* by Conservative MP Dominic Grieve, in which the government was urged to adopt a definition of anti-Muslim prejudice along the lines of that adopted in 2016 for anti-Semitism, are so important. Successfully combating Islamophobia requires outspoken and brave initiatives and persons (politicians and activists) who challenge this widespread normalized form of racism.

With the help of the new president of the USA, who defends his “Muslim Ban” by referring to invented terrorist attacks such as the one in Sweden, the imagined figure of the all-time lurking Muslim enemy is kept alive. When Trump tweet-

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ed “You look at what’s happening last night in Sweden. Sweden, who would believe this? Sweden. They took in large numbers. They’re having problems like they never thought possible,” Swedish officials and reporters were bewildered since there were no major incidents that night. The climate of the age of fake news, which has always been central to the spread of conspiracy theories, is now exaggerated and expanded by leading politicians in the world, while the structural dimension of Islamophobia still exists at the heart of European societies and institutions. This situation requires a need for a clear stance by governing politicians, elites and intellectuals since they are bound by their constitutions and laws, and international and national human rights standards.

In this manner, British Prime Minister Theresa May criticized Trump for re-posting material from the far-right Britain First, while the U.S. president answered her with the advice that it would be better if she dealt with the “destructive radical Islamic Terrorism that is taking place within the United Kingdom” rather than focusing on him. It is quite clear that Europe needs more courageous leaders such as Alexander Van der Bellen, the president of the Austrian Republic, who defended the rights of women to wear a headscarf in a country where the far right has become the leading political power.

Combatting Islamophobia on the European and the Supranational Levels

Combatting Islamophobia on national and regional levels is important but not enough. Therefore, there is a need for a concerted effort to combat Islamophobia first on the European level and second on the supranational level. In this regard both the coordination among different NGOs and the involvement of institutions such as the EU, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the UN are essential. In 2017, there were some initial positive steps on the EU level, however, given the size of the problem there is still a long way to go.

As an NGO coalition statement following the 4th Roundtable on anti-Muslim hatred, which was organized by the European Commission (EC) and chaired by the EU coordinator on combatting anti-Muslim hatred, David Friggieri, made clear, a “stronger and more concrete commitment and actions” are needed to combat

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Islamophobia. These civil society organizations argue that “there are still some misconceptions by the European institutions with regards to the issue of Islamophobia. With the generalised suspicion against Muslims, it is of utmost importance for EU policy makers not to fall into the trap of treating Muslims as potential problems but rather as human beings whose fundamental rights can be violated. Combating Islamophobia is not about preventing radicalism or terrorism […] it is about politically addressing structural forms of discrimination and racism affecting Muslims or those perceived as such.”

Although the statements of high-ranking politicians such as Frans Timmerman, vice-president of the European Commission, in which he recognized the problem of Islamophobia are positive steps, the European Coalition against Islamophobia still sees a large potential for improvement regarding the fight against Islamophobia on the EU level. According to the European Coalition against Islamophobia, the EU and national legislations provide legal remedies for racist crime and discrimination, yet Muslims still suffer from violence, prejudice and exclusion in Europe. In this context, the FRA recommends better implementation of the relevant EU and national legislation to combat widespread harassment and hate crime against Muslims.

On March 14, 2017, the European Court of Justice (EJC) for the first time made two judgments to rule on non-discrimination at work on religious grounds. The EJC ruled that employers would be able to prohibit the wearing of religious garments by their employees. This was despite the content of Article 9, which secures the freedom of thought, conscience and religion of the European Convention on Human Rights. The EJC ruled that banning visible signs of political, philosophical or religious beliefs is “appropriate” to ensure a “policy of neutrality” if systematically applied as a company policy. Obviously, also observant Jews and other religious minorities will be affected by this as much as Muslim women and men. But the verdict has evolved in the context of the complaints of two Muslim women, one from France and one from Belgium. It will be Muslim women who will suffer from this regulation disproportionately. Amnesty International protested against this decision as potentially propelling increased discrimination on the basis of religious identity, especially against Muslim women. Also, many faith communities and vocal Muslim organizations in Brussels and beyond have objected to what they perceive a step towards further institutionalization of Islamophobia.

8. Ibid.


bia. While this verdict made clear that visible signs of political, philosophical or religious beliefs can be banned in private companies, it left many questions open regarding the decisions to be taken in the future.

As Bülent Senay, personal representative of the OSCE Chair-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, argued during the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2017, on a supranational level, institutions still lack means to fight Islamophobia. Amongst other important recommendations, he called the OSCE states to commit to recording hate crimes against Muslims as a separate disaggregated category. The OSCE ODIHR is also considering the preparation of a guide on hate crimes against Muslims and on the security needs of Muslim communities in the OSCE region. A similar guide has been prepared and published for Jewish communities.12 We think this would be a positive step to combatting Islamophobia in the OSCE region and, therefore, welcome the preparation of such a guide.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance of the Council of Europe publishes an annual report on the ECRI’s activities, in which Islamophobia is also analyzed under a separate heading. In the last report, which covered the year 2016, the ECRI points to the fact that “Muslims continue to experience discrimination in various areas of social life, including education, employment and housing.”13 The ECRI concludes that the “negative experiences of Muslims in Europe can fuel feelings of isolation within a larger community and hinder inclusive societies.”14 However, we think that the Council of Europe, which consists of 47 states, can play a wider role in the combat against Islamophobia in Europe.

The European Coalition against Islamophobia, which consists of 13 NGOs,15 has published its suggestion for an action plan for 2018-2019 to fight Islamophobia in the European Union. This plan puts the recognition of Islamophobia at its center and among other important recommendations calls the European Parliament to adopt a resolution on combatting Islamophobia as it did on combatting anti-Semitism and anti-Gypsism.16

14. Ibid.
15. The members of this coalition are the following: European Forum of Muslim Women; Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations; Karamah EU; European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion; European Network against Racism; and the Collective against Islamophobia in France.
A resolution adopted by the UN Human Rights Council on March 23, 2016 (Resolution 31/16) expressed “concern over violent attacks motivated by anti-religious bias, targeting individuals belonging to religious minorities, as well as religious places, and recommended that states prevent, investigate and punish such acts.” Although this is more a general resolution on freedom of religion it is still relevant to EU states which are witnessing an unprecedented rise of anti-Muslim hate crimes in the last decade. More concretely, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance reported that “the fear of terrorism and racist and xenophobic speech often translate into increases in hate crimes targeting Muslims, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.” Like many others, the special rapporteur reiterated the importance of collecting disaggregated data on hate crimes targeting Muslims and others.

The Rise of the Far Right in Europe

Beyond the supranational level, there are observable trends in different European nation states. Firstly, the far-right political camp has moved from the periphery to the center and become integral to the political landscape in Europe. While most far-right parties are still in opposition, some have gained major influence by becoming governing parties such as in the cases of Austria, Bulgaria, and Finland. While others may still be in opposition, their Islamophobic discourse, which is so central to most of them, has become mainstream since their issues have been co-opted by former centrist political parties. In Sweden, for instance, the once marginal anti-Muslim Sweden Democrats became the third or second largest party in opinion polls, pushing most other parties to adjust their policies accordingly. Secondly, we also observe a stronger cooperation of various Islamophobic parties in Europe. For instance, the Czech Freedom and Direct Democracy Party (SPD) organized a meeting of representatives of its partners from the European Parliament in December 2017 in Prague. Politicians such as Geert Wilders (Dutch Freedom Party) and Marine Le Pen (Front National) were amongst some of the participants.

From Sweden to Greece, from Poland to the Netherlands, the rise of far-right parties is a vital threat to democratic order in Europe. What is more dangerous is the mainstreaming and normalization of the far-right policies within mainstream politics. Austria is a wake-up call and the prime example of this horror story which might repeat itself in many European countries if European societies do not seriously tackle this disturbing trend.

18. Ibid.
The Right Wing in Opposition

As mentioned above in the majority of EU countries far-right parties are still in opposition. However, when in opposition, right-wing political parties are even more explicit about their racist utopia and hence speak out in a harsher and more direct way against Muslims. By doing so, they are playing a crucial role in the normalization of anti-Muslim discourse in Europe.

There are many examples of this blatant anti-Muslim racism, some of which will be presented here. In this context, the Northern League’s candidate for president of the Lombardy region of Italy warned that there is a “risk that the white race disappears and is replaced by migrants.” In Slovenia, right-wing populist and extremist parties are not strong enough to win elections, however they are very active on social media and in the organization of public events and protests. For instance, Nova 24TV in Slovenia broadcasted the following Islamophobic opinion: “Obviously, we do not have enough terrorists, rapists and other criminals in Europe. It seems that leading politicians want to bring even more. Only this can explain their desire for the ever-increasing inclusion of migrants and Muslims in European countries.”

In Latvia, numerous pre-election programs of various parties for the 2017 municipal elections demonstrated unambiguous Islamophobic positions. In Riga, the Action Party of Eurosceptics (Eiroskeptiķu Rīcības partija) published the following slogan in their program, “We are not against Muslims, we are against the Islamization of Latvia and Europe.” The National Alliance (Nacionālā apvienīb) was even more radical in its program in which it stated that it was “in support of not letting into Liepāja illegal immigrants called ‘refugees’ – potential criminals, terrorists and idlers! There will be no mosques here!”

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, anti-Muslim bigotry and negative trends towards Muslims were evident mainly in the educational, political and media sectors. The main generators of Islamophobic discourse and anti-Muslim bigotry are the Bosnian Serb political, media and academic policymakers.

For the first time since 1989 a right-wing extremist party managed to enter parliament in Slovakia. The opposition party ‘We Are a Family – Boris Kolar’ submitted


a bill to amend the laws to enable a ban on building mosques. Eleven members voted for the proposal, 48 against it, while more than a half of the MPs, 77 in total, abstained from the vote.

In Southern Cyprus, a newly established party, the far-right ELAM (Ethniko Laiko Metopo), which is a sister party to Greece’s Golden Dawn, has significantly contributed to spreading Islamophobia in the southern part of the island. Although ELAM is a very small party and only managed to enter parliament in 2016 with 3.71% (allowing them 2 MPs), their views are widespread; the archbishop of southern Cyprus often expresses his agreement with ELAM’S positions.

The successful Swiss right-wing party SVP tried to introduce a full-face veil ban in Sweden. Another parliamentary initiative by National Councillor Yannick Buttet (CVP) demanded a “mandatory labelling of imported halal meat at all stages of sales as well as an increase in the price of imported halal meat.”23 Although the National Council accepted the initiative, the Council of States rejected it.

In Switzerland, the parliamentary motion by Lorenzo Quadri from the regional right-wing party Lega, which was adopted in the National Council, instructed the Federal Council to draw up a bill, which, following the rules that apply in Austria, provides a guarantee for the following: “(1) The prohibition of Islamic places of worship and imams who accept funds from abroad; (2) The obligation for Islamic centers to disclose the origin and use of their finances; (3) The duty to conduct sermons in the language of residence.”24

Meanwhile in the UK, UKIP’s election manifesto promised a public ban on “face coverings” and proscribed sharia courts in the UK. In the Netherlands, radical parties such as the Dutch SGP (a radical Christian party) published a manifesto,25 which argued that “the love offer of Jesus Christ and Muhammad’s use of violence are as different as day and night.”26

Beyond political parties, on the more extreme non-parliamentarian level or the grassroots level, far-right groups, such as the Identitarian movement or ones that function underground, pose a threat to Muslims in Europe, especially in their most violent form. Nationalist groups such as, among others, the Finnish branch of the Nordic Resistance Movement and the “Finland First” movement were active in spreading their ideology of hate.


26. Ibid., p. 2.
The Right Wing in Power

Currently, there are a few governments in Europe, which include right-wing parties that have focused heavily on using Islamophobia as a means of gaining public support and political power. After the general elections in Norway, the Progress Party, which is often regarded as a right-wing populist party and which had an openly Islamophobic election campaign, governs together with the conservatives in a coalition. Consequently, for the first time in Norwegian history, there are government representatives who do not shy away from using Islamophobic discourse. The Progress Party’s minister for immigration and integration, Sylvi Listhaug, suggested a prohibition against hijabs at elementary schools, which was not supported by the coalition partner. The party also proposed to ban the circumcision of baby boys, which also found no support in parliament. A third proposal, a national ban of the face veil in schools and institutions of higher education, won broad parliamentary support and is currently being circulated for consultation.

In the Czech Republic, a new party called ANO won the elections. Its leader supported the notorious Islamophobic politician, Czech President Miloš Zeman. The leader of the right-wing populist party Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), which campaigns continuously for a legal ban of Islam, became vice-chair of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. Although there is a tiny Muslim community in the country, the 2017 national elections were the first in the history of the Czech Republic, during which attitudes towards Muslims were a central issue.

In Bulgaria, a hostile language towards Muslims is winning ground. Especially, during election campaigns, anti-Muslim rhetoric was at its peak. Many extreme right-wing political parties such as ATAKA, NFSB (National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria), and IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) are part of the current government and form a coalition with the leading party.

In Serbia, there are ministers such as Aleksandar Vulin, minister of defense, and Nebojša Stefanovic, minister of the interior, who attract attention by stirring ethnic and religious hostilities. Today, we can witness a revival of political parties and forces from the 1990s in the political arena. Currently, the strongest parties are those that were the most important players in the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. A rise in nationalism and hate speech targeting Muslims can be seen in the public sphere. Crimes committed against Muslims are glorified.

Co-option of Islamophobia by Centrist Parties

We observe a general trend within centrist political parties to co-opt the Islamophobic discourse of right-wing political parties. The former president of Romania, Traian Basescu, proclaimed in the midst of a debate on a mosque in Bucharest that this was
“a risk to national security,” and argued that “part of the Islamization of Europe is building mosques everywhere.” 27 During a local council election in Bucharest in June 2016, several leading Bucharest mayoral candidates argued for a referendum on the mosque, amongst them the current mayor Gabriela Firea of the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat – PSD). 28

In Poland, there is no nominal right-wing political party, but a conservative party in power, which nevertheless allows an unambiguous negative image of Islam to be spread in state institutions. State-funded media outlets seem to carefully select their guests, who spread a stereotypical portrayal of Muslims as “violent,” “terrorists,” “Jihadists,” “sexists,” “rapists,” “uncivilized,” “double-faced,” and in general “a threat” to European and Christian values. While a research commissioned by the Commissioner of Human Rights on the attitudes among Polish secondary school students was published in 2017, showing that the majority of the 396 respondents reveal strong anti-refugee, Islamophobic and homophobic prejudice, 29 the Ministry of Education shut down anti-discrimination programs in Polish schools and instead promoted programs supporting patriotism and a national and cultural Polish identity. 30

In Spain, former president of Madrid and of the senate, and former minister of culture, Esperanza Aguirre, tweeted that January 2 was a glorious day for Spanish women who otherwise would not enjoy any freedom under the rule of Islam. 31 In Slovakia, former president Robert Fico argued that he will “not allow the creation of an integrated Muslim community in Slovakia.” 32

In Hungary, the ruling conservative Fidesz competed in Islamophobic rhetoric with the far right. It finally managed to make anti-Muslim narratives become un-
contested and thus realized a support of an overwhelming portion of the population. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán became famous for the alleged conspiracy of George Soros to Islamize Europe with the help of “hordes of migrants raping Europe.”

During the national presidential elections in France in 2017, Islamophobia was omnipresent not only in the campaign of the Front National but also in an array of other candidates’ campaigns. Also during the national elections in the Netherlands in 2017, there was a race between the right-wing populist party of Geert Wilders (PVV) and the center-right party of Mark Rutte (VVD). Some intellectuals, before the elections, discussed whether the number of Muslims could be reduced by deportation. Prominent Law Professor Paul Cliteur was present during the debate and discussed how this could be made possible legally.

In Denmark, the leader of the Social Democrats, Mette Frederiksen, argued that there is no need for Muslim private schools and that they would be strengthening the isolation of Muslims. Frederiksen argued that “a school with a foundation in Islam is not part of the majority culture in Denmark.” Bias against Muslims within the oppositional social democratic party intensified. This is also true for the conservatives in Austria. There, the then-leader of the conservatives and now chancellor, Sebastian Kurz, argued that there should not be any private Muslim kindergartens in the country.

Denying the Suffering

In many European countries, the very existence of Islamophobia itself is denied. In countries like Austria and Norway, leading journalists of editorial boards shift the focus from Islamophobia as a problem to Islamophobia as a “combat term,” arguing that the term itself is used by Islamists to delegitimize any debate on Islam and Muslims. Hence, there is a reluctance to use the term “Islamophobia” in the public sphere. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is a denial of the anti-Muslim genocide. Nationalist movements and even parts of the Croatian political establishment argue that the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to be territorially divided in order to secure peace and security. Convictions such as in the case of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague fueled Islamophobia within these separatist and nationalist movements. Republika Srpska, continued its separatist policy in 2017 and was supported by visits from abroad, especially members of the right-wing Austrian FPÖ, which now forms a government with the conservative ÖVP.

The (Mis-)Use of Education and Academia

An unsubstantiated report on an alleged Muslim Brotherhood conspiracy to establish an Islamic State in Sweden was published by a Swedish state agency. The Administrative Court of Appeal later dismissed the report as of “highly limited” value. The author is a senior fellow at the Brussels-based think tank European Foundation for Democracy, which plays a central role in disseminating this conspiracy theory, which helps in defaming Muslim civil society actors. Also in Austria, a report was published on an alleged Muslim Brotherhood conspiracy by another senior policy advisor of the same think tank in cooperation with a state agency. The report had no serious impact, since it was presented a few days before the elections and did not receive major coverage due to other political scandals. The current chancellor of Austria Sebastian Kurz has been central in sponsoring ‘studies’ on Muslims in Austria (one on Muslim kindergartens, the other on mosques), which would serve his increasingly Islamophobic agenda. Also, Islamophobia is a threat, when good initiatives are legitimized for the wrong ends. Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama defended the need for religious instruction in public schools with the prevention of the radicalization of young Muslims.

Online Islamophobia

Islamophobic groups are especially active on the Internet. Often, the Internet is where right-wing groups emerge before materializing in “real life.” Therefore, better regulations are needed in this sphere to combat the spread of Islamophobic content which is the main source in the radicalization of far-right terrorist groups or lone wolves.

Groups such as the explicitly Islamophobic Identitarian Movement that represents the postmodern face of the New Right, is active in countries like Slovenia, Hungary. Malta witnessed the emergence of its first far-right party, the Ghaqda Patrijotti Maltin (Maltese Patriots). While doing poorly in elections, their media campaign and social media advertisements presented many Islamophobic statements. In countries with a negligible Muslim population like Latvia, Islamophobic attitudes are still mostly voiced on the Internet. In Italy, a significant research on intolerance based on an analysis of Twitter realized by Voxdiritti in 2016 ranked Muslims as the fourth most targeted group (6% of all tweets).35

Legalizing Islamophobia

Early in 2017, the Austrian government, made up of social democrats and conservatives, passed a law that outlawed the veiling of the face. Romania followed

with a legislative proposal for the ban of face veiling in educational institutions initiated by the ruling People’s Movement Party (PMP). The asserted aim was the prevention of violence and terrorism. The law was launched by 26 MPs from three parliamentary parties. Also, in Latvia, where – similar to Romania – there are nearly no Muslims, a draft law on the restriction of wearing a face veil was prepared by the Ministry of Justice in 2015 and is still under consideration. In Belgium, the parliament voted for limitations on ritual slaughter including the prohibition of Muslim halal slaughter. Also, a debate on a state takeover of the Grand Mosque of Belgium began. In a small village in Hungary, a mayor passed a law to ban the construction of mosques and minarets, the Muslim call for prayer, the chador, niqab, burqa, and burkini. The mayor argued that he wished to set a positive example for other Hungarian municipalities in order to guarantee the ‘centuries-old traditions’ of local communities in the face of mass migration to the country.\footnote{HVG, “Toroczkai odacsap a bevándorlóknak: megtiltják a mecsetépítést Ásotthalmon”, retrieved February 5, 2017, from http://hvg.hu/itthon/20161124_toroczkai_asotthalom_muszlim_tiltas.} After massive protests in the entire country, the mayor had to withdraw the legislation for contradicting a number of basic rights guaranteed by the Hungarian Constitution.\footnote{HVG, “Elmeszelte Toroczkai rendeletét az Alkotmánybíróság”, retrieved January 9, 2018, from http://hvg.hu/itthon/20170412_alkotmanybirosag_toroczkai_asotthalom.} In November 2017, however, the local council voted in favor of the same legislation that was amended after merely removing any words referring to Islam from the text. Also, the Dutch Christian-Democrats (CDA) included a ban on the financing of mosques from abroad and were wary of “radical Islam” in their campaign program.

In Finland, a citizens’ initiative\footnote{“Initiative submitted by at least 50,000 Finnish citizens eligible to vote and containing the proposal that an act be enacted” as defined in “MOT Eduskuntasanasto,” a multilingual parliamentary glossary, prepared jointly by parliament and the Government Terminology Service of the Prime Minister’s Office, retrieved January 31, 2018, from https://mot.kielikone.fi/mot/eduskuntasanasto/netmot?U=1-fIELDS&height=147.} was launched to amend a law in favor of a “Burka Ban.” Among the initiators was Terhi Kiemunki,\footnote{Cf. “Islamophobia in Finland: National Report 2016” in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, European Islamophobia Report 2016, Istanbul, SETA, 2017.} a former member of the Finns Party, who was convicted of incitement to hatred due to texts on her blog defaming Muslims.\footnote{For a detailed description of Terhi Kiemunki’s court case, see Ibid.} A spokesperson of the initiative was Jukka Ketonen, current chairman of the Finnish Defense League (FDL), who proclaims to be fighting against “Islamic extremism”\footnote{Homepage of the Finnish Defense League, retrieved January 31, 2018, from http://www.fdl.fi/about/} and is known for other smaller initiatives such as demonstrations against “Islamization” before a school. In Denmark, a ban on full-face veils, a so-called “mask ban” (popularly referred to as the “niqab ban”) was proposed by the Danish
The initiative was not only supported by the right wing, but also the Social Democrats and the Danish Social Liberal Party, arguing that they would, thus, empower Muslim women. There is also a law prohibiting male circumcision under way in Denmark.

Terrorist Attacks against Muslims

In Europe, the largest number of attacks which could conclusively be affiliated to terrorist organizations were carried out by racists, nationalists and separatist extremis
tists (99), followed by left-wing extremist attacks (27). Nevertheless, Jihadist terrorist attacks (13) and the general Muslim population in Europe associated with it are largely seen as the greatest threat to European societies. Irresponsible politicians and media play their part in supporting this trend.

There are worrying signs of far-right terrorist groups and lone wolf far-right terrorists increasing their activities and targeting Muslims in Europe. Attacks against mosques and Muslim institutions have become a daily routine. For instance, according to the DITIB in Germany there were 101 attacks on mosques throughout 2017. However, the attacks against Muslims, persons who are perceived as Muslims, and persons who are vocal in their support for Muslim or refugee rights are becoming more and more frequent and violent. In Germany, the government registered around 908 hate crimes in 2017 against German Muslims, ranging from verbal to physical attacks and murder attempts. As a result of these Islamophobic attacks in Europe, there are already victims of Islamophobic terrorist attacks who have either been killed or severely injured. Below we have summarized the most important attacks in 2017.

On the night of April 15, 2017, the 22-year-old Egyptian student Shaden Mohamed al-Gohary was killed in a hit-and-run incident in Cottbus, Germany. The most shocking part is that while she lay injured on the street, people started insulting her in racist ways, believing she was a refugee. The attackers eventually came back on foot and said things like “Well, they gotta check the street first, since they don’t have streets at home. They should fuck off to their damn country.”

In Germany, the conservative mayor of Altena, Andreas Hollstein, known for his welcoming stance towards refugees was stabbed in the neck and seriously injured in a knife attack at a kebab restaurant.


In Sweden, three members of the national socialist Nordic Resistance Movement were sentenced to up to eight-and-a-half years in prison. The trio was found guilty of bombings of two refugee housings and a libertarian socialist trade union office in Gothenburg, which severely wounded one person. They were trained in urban guerrilla warfare by a Russian radical nationalist and anti-Muslim paramilitary organization. The perpetrators were influenced by Islamophobic and anti-Semitic discourse, which was clear in a recorded video prayer to All-Father Odin in which they vowed to “re-take our land” and “take the fight against you who have defiled our country.” “Oh Jew, oh Muslim / We Norsemen have awakened / You should fear us / We are coming after you / The rage of the Norsemen thunder / Be assured / Oh, Jew and Muslim / The Norsemen are coming after you.”45 The fact that Islamophobia goes hand in hand with other forms of racism, such as anti-Semitism in this case, should be a symbolic reminder for those, who are aware of European history.46 Beyond this example of a right-wing extremist movement, the case of Hungary, where the ruling Fidesz party mobilizes against George Soros while portraying him as a conspirator alongside Muslims to change the European population,47 reveals again that racism will eventually target every minority.

On September 27, 2017, four members of the banned neo-Nazi group National Action in the UK were arrested on suspicion of preparing and instigating acts of terrorism. According to the UK’s Defense Ministry some of them were soldiers serving in the British army.48

In Germany, two supporters of a neo-Nazi terrorist group were arrested on January 14 after 155 kg of explosives were discovered in their home.49 On April 27, a German soldier posing as a Syrian refugee was arrested for allegedly planning a “false flag” shooting attack against politicians that would be blamed on asylum seekers.50

On October 17, 2017, 10 far-right militants were arrested by French anti-terrorist police in France. According to the TV station M6, they were suspected of

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In Russia, between 2012 and 2016, five imams were killed in the Stavropol region. The cases remain unresolved to this today. All the assassinated imams were involved in civic activism and they openly resisted the prohibition of the hijab in the Stavropol region.

On June 19, 2017, a man drove his van deliberately into a crowd of Muslim worshippers leaving the north London Finsbury Park Mosque. As a result of this attack, one person was killed and eleven were injured.

In Poland, a Pakistani Muslim man was severely beaten by a group of men in Ozorków on January 3, 2017. On April 8, 2017, three Pakistani Muslim men were severely beaten in Swidwin Polan.

**Threatening the Religious Infrastructure**

More than two decades after the Agreements of 1992 between the Islamic communities and the Spanish state, basic rights such as access to religious education or the possibility of burying the Muslim dead in an Islamic cemetery have not been put into practice in most of the Spanish regions; small steps, however, are being taken in this sense. In Malta, there were debates about the legitimacy of teaching Islam to Muslim pupils.

In Slovakia, there has been a parliamentary debate on a draft law that toughened the registration of churches and religious communities and a draft has been submitted by members of the government of the Slovak National Party (SNS). This trend of discrimination against Muslims, who are a small minority in Slovakia and thus directly affected by these amendments, has been noticed by the U.S. Department of State, which in its report on religious freedom in the world noted the disparity in the approach to religious rights in the country. Today, it is impossible for the Muslim community to become an officially registered religious community in Slovakia.

In Greece, three mosques located inside non-governmental organizations belonging to members of the Muslim Turkish minority were closed by the Greek police - one of them had existed for 12 years. Officially, the closures were due to the lack of the necessary permissions to function a house of prayer inside the premises.

In Bulgaria, an indifference from the part of governments to the religious needs of Muslims can be observed. There is a lack of funding by the state be it in the area of religious education, Muslims’ attempts to develop a cultural-religious center, or the blocking of Muslims’ attempts to regain property ownership of \textit{waqf} properties. Also, many Muslim religious employees, which were formerly and legally paid by the Turkish government, had to leave their jobs because the Council of Ministers of Bulgaria unilaterally cancelled the treaty between Bulgaria and Turkey and did not
inform the representatives of the Office of the Grand Mufti, which faced a structural crisis after being informed three months later.

On a European level, the European Citizens’ Initiative against Extremism (Stop Extremism) was founded and recognized on June 7, 2017 by the European Commission. Among its initiators are Seyran Ates and Efgani Dönmez, who are known for their notorious Islamophobic positions. Supporters include well-known Islamophobes such as Abdel-Hakim Ourghi, Ralph Ghadban, Saida Keller-Messahli, and Necla Kelek. The initiative, which came under criticism when leaks by the weekly *Falter* revealed that more than 20,000 Euros, the budget specified by the EU Commission, could potentially be used to restrict Muslims’ religious activities. Stop Extremism calls for “the introduction of a joint, EU-wide watch list to which individuals and organizations with an extremist background could be added” as well as for the introduction of an “Extremism-free” certification for organizations and businesses.\(^5^2\) Initiatives like this seem to target specifically Muslims, not extremists, and to restrain their scope of activities, which ultimately reflects already existing restrictions as discussed above.

**Steps Forward and Policy Recommendations**

The picture presented here shows us that there is an urgent need to counter these developments. And there is room for hope. Critical assessment of the current situation regarding Muslims in Europe is growing within parts of civil society. Not only are there more and more institutions that are working to bring attention to the rise in hate crime towards Muslims such as the Spain-based Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los Medios\(^5^3\) but there are also favorable developments such as in the Norwegian justice system which has developed positive steps regarding monitoring and convicting cases involving hate speech or discrimination against Muslims. Also, the German Federal Police has made a first important institutional step to combatting Islamophobia by documenting it: for the first time, Islamophobia has been included as a category of hate crime.

There are more and more politicians, who dare to openly speak out against the threat of Islamophobia. President of the Slovak Republic Andrej Kiska stood up for Muslims in his New Year’s speech. Also, Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen took a stance of solidarity with Muslim women wearing the hijab. Finnish Prime Minister Juha Sipilä called people not to respond to “hate with hate”\(^5^4\) in the aftermath of the stabbings by a Muslim citizen, which led to increased harassment, violent physical attacks as well as acts of vandalism against Muslim properties.

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\(^{52}\) Stop Extremism, “Six Actions That We Demand to Secure a Safer Europe”, retrieved March 24, 2018, from https://www.en.stopextremism.eu/about.

\(^{53}\) Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los medios, http://www.observatorioislamofobia.org/.

dalism towards Muslims. These examples of political courage give hope that there still exist reasonable politicians, who look beyond their ephemeral political careers, keeping the good of the whole of society in mind. With an increase of alternative right-wing media and social media bubbles as well as a general swing to the right, hate speech is becoming more and more normalised. In an especially extreme incident in the Czech Republic, children in a primary school in the city of Teplice were threatened with death in gas chambers; the class was comprised predominantly of children of Arab or Romani origin. Such incidents call for an unambiguous reaction on behalf of politicians and opinion leaders.

The authors of every respective national report have suggested specific recommendations regarding the country they have covered. This will support all those forces within European societies, who work towards a more equal society and fight every form of racism. The editors of the EIR support the following recommendations which were made by the OSCE ODIHR office, the FRA, the ENAR, the European Coalition against Islamophobia, and other NGOs:

- In the face of the increased and generalized suspicion and marginalization of Muslims in the post-terrorist attacks and migration contexts and the deep impact the former have had on Muslims’ lives, including newly arrived migrants, the recognition of the specific form of racism targeting Muslims (or those perceived as such) is crucial.
- The misconceptions and demonization surrounding the fight against Islamophobia and visible Muslims, in general, need to be challenged; data, facts and concrete solutions need to be visible in order to improve the recognition of Islamophobia and influence policy changes.
- This should lead to informed anti-racism/anti-discrimination policies and support the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation on the national and European levels. EU institutions need to recognize and address Islamophobia politically as a form of racism that can lead to human rights violations.
- While the issue of Islamophobia has gained more visibility in recent years at the EU level, there is a clear need for stronger actions that will materialize recognition into concrete political actions.
- Considering their competence on the issue of anti-racism and non-discrimination, EU institutions have the possibility to support progress and change in this area. The appointment of the European Commission’s coordinator on combatting anti-Muslim hatred following the European Commission’s 2015 colloquium on anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hatred has created a momentum for the EU to act.

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• The legal and political recognition of Islamophobia is of utmost importance. Therefore, a European-level conference on Islamophobia should be organized with the support of at least one EU Member State or the European Parliament.

• In this context, the European Parliament should adopt a resolution on combating Islamophobia with concrete policy recommendations and ways forward - as it did to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Gypsysism.

• The adoption of EU standards for National Action Plans against Racism that take into account specific forms of racism, and include specific measures on Islamophobia with objectives and targets is necessary.

• EU member states should adopt national action plans against racism addressing Islamophobia as a specific form of racism.

• The European Commission should develop a roadmap detailing main policy instruments, issues and examples of good practice by Member States. This would function as a standard document that would be the basis for concrete operational objectives and action plans for the EU coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred.

• The European Commission’s coordinator on anti-Muslim hatred should develop a clear action plan for combatting Islamophobia.

• A high-level roundtable should be organized with the European Commission’s coordinator on anti-Muslim hatred and NGOs on the issue of Islamophobia.

• Europe needs courageous leaders and activists who can confront the Islamophobic discourses and narratives in the age of rising far-right parties.

• A Guidance handbook should be developed on the collection methodology of hate crime data for EU Member States in order to ensure that Islamophobia is dully recorded according to the victims’ and witnesses’ perceptions and lived experiences; other bias indicators should be included in the data collection as well.

• The recording of anti-Muslim/Islamophobic crimes as a separate category of hate crime by the police is essential to uncover the real extent of this problem and to develop counter-strategies to combat it.

• Muslim women’s access to employment should be improved since they are the most discriminated group among Muslims. Gender equality departments and the corresponding committees of EU institutions should give specific attention to situations of discrimination affecting Muslim women by documenting the issue and pushing for specific programs and measures to combat it.

• While protecting free speech, developing good guidelines to tackle online hate speech and considering primary legislation to deal with social media offences and online hate speech are also vital since the Internet plays an important role in the spread of Islamophobic discourses and also in the radicalization of far-right terrorists.
• Discrimination in the workplace should be tackled to address the low level of economic activity among Muslims through targeted interventions at the stages of recruitment, job retention, and promotion.

• Preserving the Human Rights Act and the protection of minority rights including religious slaughter, circumcision and the wearing of religious attire or symbols are imperative for a multicultural Europe.

• Counter-terrorism policies should work with Muslim communities, not against them, in the so-called “de-radicalization” programs. These programs should also incorporate the fight against far-right and far-left terrorist groups and should not only target Muslims.
ISLAMOPHOBIA IN NUMBERS

- The overwhelming majority of European states do not record Islamophobic incidents as a separate category of hate crime. The recording of anti-Muslim/Islamophobic crimes by the police as a separate category of hate crime is essential to uncover the real extent of this problem and to develop counter-strategies to combat it.

- In the EU, only 12% of Muslims who have been discriminated against report their cases to the authorities. (Source: FRA) The non-exhaustive list that follows hints at the extent of underreporting of anti-Muslim hate crimes in Europe by states and NGOs, which has serious implications regarding the awareness of Muslims and the bureaucracy to tackle these issues.

DENMARK
In 2016, 56 Islamophobic incidents were reported. 20% of all hate crime committed in 2016 targeted Muslims, while the group make up 5% of the general population, making Muslims the most targeted minority.
(Source: National Police)

BELGIUM
In the month following the terror attacks in Brussels, 36 Islamophobic incidents were recorded. (Source: CCIB).

AUSTRIA
256 Islamophobic incidents were documented.
(Source: EIR Report, Antidiscrimination Office Styria, ZARA, and Initiative for a Discrimination-Free Education [IDB]).
THE STATE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE

GERMANY

• 100 attacks occurred on mosques.
  (Source: DITIB and German State)

• 908 attacks took place targeting German Muslims.

• 60% of all Muslim teaching staff felt discriminated.
  (Source: Karim Fereidooni)

• There were 1,906 criminal attacks on refugees
  (5.2 attacks per day).

• There were 286 attacks against refugee shelters
  (0.8 attacks per day).

• 132 criminal acts and physical attacks against
  (refugee) aid workers occurred (0.4 attacks per day).
  (Source: German state)

FRANCE

• 121 Islamophobic incidents were reported.
  (Source: Observatory of Islamophobia)

• 19 Muslim places of worship were closed by the government;
  749 individuals were placed under house arrest;
  over 4,500 police raids were conducted;
  and the list of individuals under government surveillance
  has reached 25,000.

• 17,393 individuals were enrolled in the Terrorism
  Prevention Database (FSPRT).

MALTA

• 7% of Muslims have experienced physical violence.

• 25% of Muslims have experienced harassment.
NORWAY
- In 2017, 14% of Muslims experienced harassment.

NETHERLANDS
- 364 incidents of discrimination against Muslims occurred in 2016.
  (Source: Verwey Jonker Institute and Anne Frank Foundation)

POLAND
- In 2017, Muslims were the most targeted group representing 20% of all hate crime cases.
  (Source: National Prosecutor’s Office)
- Between January and October 2017, there were 664 hate crime proceedings regarding attacks against Muslims.
  (Source: Ministry of Interior)
- 193 (29%) of those proceedings resulted in an indictment.
  (Source: Ministry of Interior)
The terrorist attack in Manchester in May resulted in a fivefold increase in Islamophobic hate crime in the Greater Manchester region. (Source: Greater Manchester Police)

Hate crime cases targeting Muslims in Greater London for the entire year of 2017 increased to 1,204 from 1,678 in the previous year, which is equal to a 40% rise. (Source: Scotland Yard)

Between March and July 2017, the number of attacks on mosques climbed to 110 from 47 in the previous year. (Source: Tell MAMA UK)

In 2016, 1,223 cases of Islamophobic attacks were reported to Tell MAMA. Twenty percent of these incidents involve physical attacks; 56% of the victims were women, while two-thirds of the perpetrators were men.

In 2016, 439 hate crimes with Islamophobic motives were recorded. (Source: Swedish Crime Survey-NTU)

In 2017, 546 attacks took place against Muslims. (Source: Plataforma Ciudadana contra la Islamofobia)
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Executive Summary

This report notes an increase of the Islamophobic rhetoric in Albania in 2017. As noted in previous reports, Islamophobia in Albania is primarily linked to identity politics that reflect attempts to shape the collective identity of the nation by rejecting Islam and embracing Europe, where Europe and Islam are seen as mutually exclusive entities.

The Eid prayer in the main square of the capital in 2017 was followed by intense Islamophobic rhetoric. In December, a mob attacked the Turkish flag next to a power plant administered by a Turkish company. The Turkish flag was equated to the Ottoman flag, and as media commentators pointed out, while the event was presented as motivated by nationalism, it had a clear anti-Muslim dimension.

Mainstream media promotes hate speech and calls for violence against Muslims, calls that pass without reactions or retractions, contributing to the normalization of Islamophobia in the public sphere. Instances of hate speech including calls for the assassination of Turkish President Erdogan during an upcoming visit when he is scheduled to inaugurate the new mosque in the capital. Normalized anti-Muslim bigotry is seen as one of the main reasons that despite low reported numbers of discrimination in employment, Muslims – especially Muslim women – do not report discriminatory treatment, or have internalized notions of Islamophobia that prevents them from even applying for employment.

Political tensions in Albania in 2017 were injected with the rhetoric of ‘clash of civilizations’ that sought to demonize political opponents by comparing them to ‘Ottomans,’ in a recycled discourse that conflates the Ottoman Empire, Islam, and the contemporary Republic of Turkey. Right-wing politicians from other European nations have contributed to this rhetoric in Albania.

This report notes the persistent bias in school textbooks towards Islam, while pointing out that a government proposal of adding the instruction on religion to the public school curriculum is presented to the public as driven by the fear of Islamic extremism.

Despite no terrorist attack having been reported in Albania, the fear of terrorism is used to justify controversial judicial policies, including the temporary closing of a mosque, and what can amount to extra-judicial arrests, lacking transparency in terms of the legal proceedings followed by the authorities.
Përmbledhje Ekzekutive

Ky raport vëren rritjen e retorikës islamofobe në Shqipëri në 2017. Sic është vënë në raporte të mëpërparshme, Islamofobia në Shqipëri është në mënyrë primare e lidhur me politikat identitare që reflektojnë përjetje për të formësuar identitetin kolektiv të kombit duke refuzuar Islamin e duke përqafuar Europën, ku Europa dhe Islami shihen si entitete që përjashtojnë njëra tjetrën.

Falja e Kurban Bajramit në sheshin kryesor të kryeqytetit në 2017 u pasua nga retorikë intensive islamofobe. Në Dhjetor një turmë sulmoi flamurin turk pranë një hidrocentrali të administruar nga një kompani turke. Flamuri turk u krahasua me flamurin Osman dhe sic u vu në dukje nga komentues mediatike, teksa sulmi u paraqit si i nxitur prej ndjenjash nacionaliste, ai kishte një dimension të qartë anti-Musliman.

Mediat kanë promovuar gjuhën e urrejtjes, thirrjet për dhunë kundra muslimanëve, thirrje që kalojnë pa reagime e pa u térhequr mbrapsh, duke kontribuar kështu në normalizimin e Islamofobisë në sferën publike. Kjo përfshin thirrje për vrasjen e Presidentit turk, Erdogan, gjatë një vizitë të ardhshme ku pritet të inagurojë hapjen e xhamisë së re në kryeqytet. Normalizimi i paragjykimeve anti-muslimane është ndër shkaktet e diskriminimit në punësim për shkak të Islamofobisë, muslimanët – vecanërisht femrat muslimane – nuk raportojnë trajtimet diskriminuuese, apo kanë përbyeshësuar nocione të Islamofobisë e si rjedhojë nuk aplikojnë për punësim.

Tensioneve politike në Shqipëri në 2017 ju shtua retorika e “përplasjes së qytet-rimeve,” që kishte për qëllim sulmin negativ të oponentit politik duke i krahasuar me “osmanë,” duke ricikluar ligjërimin që bashkëvendos Perandorinë Osmane, Islamin, dhe Republikën e Turqise së sotme. Politikanë të djathtë nga vende europiane, gjithashtu, i kontribuan kësaj retorike.

Ky raport vëren vazhdimësinë e anësisë negative ndaj Islamin në tekstet shkollore, teksa vëren se një propozim qeveritar për përfshirjen e lëndës fetare në kurikulumin shkollor i prezantohet publikut si i nxitur prej frikës ndaj ekstremizmit islamik. Pavarësisht se nuk ka patur sulme terroriste të raportuar në Shqipëri, frika ndaj terrorizmit përdoret për justifikuar veprime juridike kontraversiale, përfshin mbëlljen e përkohshme të xhamisë qendrore të Tiranës, apo dhe arrestime me ligjshmëri të dyshimit, në mungesë të plotë të transparencës në lidhje me procedurat ligjore të ndjekura nga autoritetet.
Introduction

This year’s celebration of the *Eid al-Adha* in the main square of the capital was followed by threats and incriminations that while they recycled established clichés of Islamophobia, were unique in their intensity. The organizers put screens in the square so that participants in the back rows would be able to see the speakers in the front, where the statue of Albania’s national hero stands. The statue of an Albanian prince, who fought against Ottoman armies in the 15th century, was loaded with the symbolism of the war of a Christian, European prince, against the Islamic, Oriental invaders. The screens were interpreted as an attack against national symbols, a Muslim conspiracy against the hero, and were depicted as *burqas* attempting to cover the hero. The mass of Muslim participants in the prayer was depicted as standing against the symbols, values and historical ideology of the nation. They were depicted as jihadists that need to be exterminated. The entire incident was the outcome of an image that went viral online focusing on massive screens used for public events, taken from a vintage point resembling a covering of the statue. Other images shown later, some of them made public by Muslim representatives, showed that there was ample distance between the two screens, and therefore there had been no covering of the statue. To no avail, organizers of the Eid prayer ensured the public that the way the large screens had been positioned was dictated by technical considerations rather than some ideological drive against the statue.¹

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Politics

On May 4, 2017, the Head of Commission on Foreign Relations in the Hungarian Parliament Zsolt Nemeth participated in a protest organized by the Albanian opposition. Speaking to the protesters, Nemeth compared the political efforts against the current government of Albania, accused of corruption and links to organized crime, to the war of Albania’s national hero against the Ottomans. His support, as a representative of an EU country, was compared to the support of John Hunyadi, a Hungarian warrior who in the 15th century came to assist Albanian troops fighting the Ottomans.² It followed the official endorsement of the opposition by Italian Senator, former Minister of Defence, and former Undersecretary of the European Parliament Mario Mauro, known for his promotion of Islamophobia. Albanian media outlets pointed at the negative religious

connotations of the support for the opposition from a politician known for the promotion of Islamophobia.3

The political crisis, in which these European politicians landed their support to the opposition, was solved after the parties agreed to hold elections. The elections, however, were to be held on the very same day as the Eid prayers, charging an officially recognized holiday with the tensions of political conflict. A mufti, Imam Muhammad Sytari, called it provocation, “an unacceptable [decision against] the sanctity of the day,” demanding the government changes the election date.4 The imam of the largest mosque in the capital Ahmed Kalaja interpreted it as aimed at provoking a Muslim boycott of the elections.5

On September 6, 2017, the head of a small political party that supports the ruling centre-left government, Spartak Ngjela, demanded publicly the arrest of the mufti of the capital city Ylli Gurra calling him “a typical, Ottoman barbarian.” He accused the mufti of having violated the Albanian Penal Code, declaring, “[I will] accomplish my duty to my nation, by denouncing him in a written form addressed to the Office of the General Prosecutor. I call upon all Albanians to denounce this barbarian ugliness in Albania…”6 Despite the fact that Mr. Ngjela had accused the mufti of statements he had never uttered, Mr. Ngjela never apologized, but retracted his accusations stating that it had been “a misunderstanding.”7

Following the controversial Eid festivities and the alleged “covering of the [statue] of Skanderbeg” in the main square of the capital, Mufti Ylli Gurra reported receiving death threats. He felt obliged to ensure “the Catholic and Orthodox [Christian] brothers” that there had been no intention of covering the statue, ensuring the larger public that Albanian Muslims do not reject the national hero.8

Despite the attempts of Muslim representatives to clarify their stand, various public figures reacted to the perceived threat against the national hero. A well-known civil society activist, who has also held various public positions, Artan Lame, called for solidarity in defence of the national hero declaring “Je suis Scanderbeg,” echoing the


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“Je suis Charlie” solidarity campaign following the terrorist attacks in Paris against the magazine Charlie Hebdo. He declared his readiness to turn himself from a “common citizen into a hero,” failing to clarify what such transformation would entail.9

Justice System

On September 16, 2017, the closing for security reasons of the Ethem Beu Mosque in the centre of the capital was announced on various sites on social media. The mosque was closed for two days, and congregants were asked to perform their religious duties in other mosques in the city.10 The reason, according to these accounts, was the proximity of the mosque to the hotel where high military officials of NATO countries were staying during a two-day conference. The imam of the mosque Elton Karaj told the media that the order had been communicated by the state police, and the presence of the NATO military officials was presented as the reason for the closing.11 No other public institution, or religious edifice of another religion in the area was closed due to the NATO event. The following day, the spokesperson of the Albanian Muslim Community (AMC), Mr. Agron Hoxha, condemned the decision and declared that the AMC had not been notified of this decision. He demanded that the state police be held responsible for the closing.12 The mufti of the capital Mr. Ylli Gurra also condemned the police’s decision.13 Despite these condemnations from Muslim representatives, who declared that the action of the state police echoes the closing of the mosques during the communist regime in 1967, no measures have been taken to hold responsible those who ordered the closing of the mosque.

On September 9, 2017, after almost a year of pre-trial imprisonment, four Muslim men, one of them an imam, were confined to house arrest. The four citizens, Ergys Fasllia, Medat Hasani, Bekim Protopapa and Xhevahir Fishti were first arrested prior to a soccer game between the national teams of Albania and Israel, suspected of planning an attack against the Israeli national team. All four have denied the accusation. The court asked for the four Muslim men to be confined to house arrest due to the surpassing of the pre-trial imprisonment period envisioned by the law. They have not been charged, and their lawyers have not been presented the evidence against them.14 The arrests were based on information coming from Israeli secret services,

but the evidence has never been made public. Following the alleged information by the Israeli security forces, many more Muslims known to frequent mosques, were arrested and later set free, and no evidence to incriminate them was ever presented. The government has not clarified whether they are still considered a threat to security which begs the questions: If they are considered threats, why are they being sent home? If not, why are they under house arrest? Even the reasons they have not been charged have not been made public.

**Employment**

The yearly report for 2017 by the Commissioner for Defence against Discrimination has not been published yet. The reported cases of discrimination in employment due to Islamophobia in 2016 are quite low, especially when juxtaposed with the general trend of increased Islamophobia. The report claims that the reported cases of discrimination due to homophobia are less than what occurs in reality, but it does not draw similar conclusions regarding Islamophobia. Religious discrimination in employment, however, has appeared in popular TV shows like *E Diela Shqiptare*. According to a psychologist working for a local NGO offering counselling to victims of discrimination, there are many cases especially linked to women wearing the hijab. She added that employers are mindful of the anti-discrimination law and would not mention the hijab as the reason for terminating the employment of someone who recently started wearing the hijab, or for not offering employment to a Muslim woman already wearing the hijab. The counsellor wanted to remain anonymous.

**Education**

The Prime Minister of Albania Mr. Edi Rama explained the need for religious instruction in public schools based on the need to prevent the radicalization of young Muslims. Prior to the implementation of the proposal, the Minister of Education Ms. Lindita Nikolla declared at the time that the theological views of various religions would not be included in the curriculum. In February 2017, the project was piloted for the first time. Despite the clarifications by the Minister of Education,
the government’s proposal faced strong opposition. Arguing for a strict form of secularism, a university professor, Artan Trebicka, argued that this proposal is similar to the educational system in countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia, or as a return to medieval Europe. Others followed this rationale in arguing that religious education constitutes a similarity with distant countries in the Middle East.

A well-known promoter of hate speech, bigotry and Islamophobia, Kastriot Myftaraj declared that this government proposal constitutes “a victory for ISIS,” given that the drive behind this proposal, according to him, is “Islamic terrorism.” He added, “This initiative has one cause, one religion, Islam, the holy book of one religion, the Quran, and the Prophet of one religion, Muhammad.” These kinds of reactions caused concerns among parents of the students from the Dora D’Istria School, where the project was first piloted. The school administration organized a meeting with parents to ensure them there would be no threat of religious indoctrination.

Knowledge about religion in high school is included as part of history textbooks. In his recent study on history textbooks in the last two decades, Professor Enis Sulstarova has problematized the way Islam is represented in school textbooks. In his conclusions he notes that the positive contributions of Islam are limited to its contribution to the European Renaissance, while it is presented as the drive behind the Arab and later Ottoman invasions of Europe, presenting Islam as a driver of war and invasion.

According to this study, Islam is represented in the historical context of Albania in terms of Otherness and is ascribed a divisive historical role. The author concludes, “The influence of Islam is identified either implicitly or explicitly with those Albanians who in the conflict between Albanians and Turks, sided with the Turks.” In the representation of Islam following independence from the Ottoman Empire, Islam barely receives any attention in these textbooks, and it is commonly discussed in a negative light, being reduced to norms deemed incompatible with modernity and Western civilization, and therefore which have to be abandoned.

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24. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 204.
27. Ibid., 205.
28. Ibid., 206.
Media
The media remains the main repository of Islamophobic rhetoric in the country.²⁹ The director of the pro-government newspaper, Mr. Mero Baze, writing after the “covering” of the statue of the national hero during the Eid prayer, spoke of the “aggression of Islamic militants” who aim — according to him — to test the determination of society. He called for new security measures in order to confront “Political Islam,” even though he failed to identify a platform, groups or an instance that would indicate the existence of such a threat.³¹ He claimed that the aim of “Political Islam” is to replace Albanian national “myths” and turn Islam into the main marker of national identity.³²

The columnist of the newspaper Panorama, and university professor, Mr. Agron Gjekmarkaj, in an article published on September 2, 2017 considered the ‘covering’ of the statue to constitute an “almost terrorist act” against the national hero, and a “threat to the constitutional order.” He called the ‘covering’ a burqa thrown upon the national hero. He asked “The AMC and especially its leadership” for a public apology. He added, “Today they have insulted Albania. Today they have compromised the European aspiration, uncovering through this detail something frightening that saddens us in regard to our collective future.”³³

²⁹. Gazeta Shqiptare, September 1, 2017
³². Ibid.
³⁴. Insajderi, September 2, 2017
Reacting to the same event, Kastriot Myftaraj called for the “extermination of the jihadists like insects, wherever they are.” He considered every Muslim a jihadist, given that they were present praying in the square during the ‘covering’ of the statue. His article was filled with insults against Muslims and Islam, and he called for the cleansing of the country from the Muslims using genocidal methods.

On January 16, 2018, during a televised debate, Mr. Myftaraj called for the assassination of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President of Turkey, during an upcoming visit when he is scheduled to inaugurate the new mosque in the capital, Tirana. No charges have been pressed against him.35

On September 7, 2017, a well-known columnist, Mustafa Nano,36 wrote an article titled “Muslims Are Not the Majority in Albania, But Even If They Were…” arguing that Muslims are not a majority, since many of them engage in acts condemned by Islam. He went on to describe those who follow the commands of their faith as those who consider Prophet Muhammad as their hero, rather than the national hero of Albania, arguing for an exclusive form of identity. He described the rest of the Muslims as those who, following the teaching of their religion, are antagonistic to people of other faiths and beat their wives, while the most devoted are the ones who commit acts of terrorism, killing themselves while shouting “Allahu Akbar.” He called for the religious registration of the population where respondents have to be schooled on the meaning of “religious identity,” following the criteria set forth by him. Such a registration, he concluded, would finally determine that Albania is not a Muslim-majority country.37

On October 3, 2017, Ira Londo wrote that the Balkans are under a jihadist threat. One of the examples she brought forth in support of her argument was the building of a new mosque in the centre of Albania’s capital, Tirana. Drawing a direct parallel between the jihadist threat and mosques, she problematized the work of TİKA, the Turkish development aid agency, working on the renovation of edifices of Islamic heritage in the Balkans.38

Following the temporary closing of the Ethem Beu Mosque, Gani Mehmetaj called for the permanent closing of the mosque, calling it a “barrack of jihadists.” Despite the fact that there has never been a report linking this mosque to any jihadist activity, the author insisted in his article published in Gazeta 55, that this mosque with its central location constituted a threat to state institutions and to national secu-
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rity. Given its historical significance and the fact that Western tourists randomly visit the mosque, the author stated, “It is even more dangerous when in its space enter tourists and believers. Who would be able to stop some Arab or Asian from shouting the mortal call ‘Allahu Akbar’ while exploding and murdering visitors and locals?”

Physical and Verbal Attacks
The journalist Mentor Kikia called the wearing of the burkini “animalistic.” Present in a public beach where he had witnessed members of a family wearing burkinis, he declared he had witnessed the “slavery” of these women, calling the practice “a harsh form of violence,” appealing to the organizations for the protection of women’s rights to react against these forms of “slavery” and this “violent ritual.” He remained convinced that these women do not wear the burkini by choice.

Responding to his appeal, a writer and feminist activist, Diana Çuli, wrote that these dressing practices are anti-constitutional, “sadistic,” an expression of “physical and psychological violence” with no bases “in philosophy, culture, or religion,” depicting this kind of clothing contradictory to the war on terror, since under the clothing these women can conceal weapons or other dangerous material.

No physical attacks were reported.

Internet
The majority of Albanian newspapers have online pages, and as reported in the past, despite their stated policy of editing the comments, comment sections of mainstream newspapers remain some of the most active spaces for the promotion of Islamophobia.

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network
There are no formal organizations known for their focus on the promotion of Islamophobia. The list of columnists mentioned in the Media section were selected from a range of well-known promoters of Islamophobia.

Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia
A public intellectual, Mr. Fatos Lubonja, who on numerous occasions has spoken against campaigns that represent Muslims as second-class citizens, following the Eid prayer and the alleged hysteria of ‘covering’ the statue, raised the question whether it was indeed mandatory for everyone to honour this particular hero, supporting the

idea that every community should follow the truth according to its own worldview. Criticizing those who drove the debate for following a medieval mentality, he called for the preservation of the values of society through the contribution of everyone, regardless of the views and beliefs they follow.43 In a TV interview on September 5, 2017, on News 24 TV, he called against the ideological marginalization of communities, and for the importance of promoting multicultural values.

Addressing the debate, another well-known public intellectual, Mr. Ardian Vehbiu, considered the reactions “false,” “blown out of proportion,” and “bordering on panic.” He argued that those behind this debate were using the controversy to promote their own cultural identity.44 On September 5, 2017, he wrote that he considered the debate an expression of “idolatry symptoms as infantile sickness of our collective mentality.” He argued that such debates threaten civic co-existence in the country.45

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The Islamophobic rhetoric of politicians and media pundits contributes to the normalization of anti-Muslim bigotry, which results in both policy and media discourse that denies Muslims equal rights, contributing to a sense of marginalization, while portraying them as a threat to collective security and national identity. There is a clear link between extra-judicial arrests, the arbitrary closing of the central mosque of the capital without any reactions from society, and constantly marking Muslims in the media as a threat, who need to be “exterminated,” as one media commentator argued. As noted in the report, there is a clear link between Islamophobia in Albania and anti-Turkish bigotry, the clearest case perhaps being the debate on the inauguration of the new mosque in the capital, which was accompanied by calls for the assassination of Turkish President Erdogan. Following this report, we make the following recommendations:

• The government of Albania should undertake an investigation on the temporary closing of the central mosque of the capital; ensure the Muslim community of the determination of the government to (a) protect their right to free exercise of religion, (b) protect places of worship, and (c) ensure the accessibility to places of worship.

• The government of Albania should review the arrests of Muslim citizens on charges of terrorism when such charges are not substantiated and ensure the Muslim community of the full protection of the law.


• The Ministry of Education should review school textbooks and address biased representations of Islam.
• The government should monitor and investigate calls for violence against Muslims, and act according to the provisions of the law.

Chronology

• **04.05.2017:** Head of Commission on Foreign Relations in the Hungarian Parliament Zsolt Nemeth and Italian politician, Mario Mauro, known for the promotion of Islamophobia, expressed support for the opposition.

• **01.09.2017:** Eid al-Adha prayer (Bajram) takes place in the centre of the capital followed by accusations of Muslims ‘covering’ the statue of the national hero, resulting in various attacks and abuses, hate speech and calls for violence against Muslims in general, and death threats against the mufti of the capital.

• **09.09.2017:** After almost a year of imprisonment, four Muslim men, one of them an imam, were confined to house arrest.

• **16.09.2017:** State Police ordered the temporary closing of the capital’s central mosque.
This is the third issue of the annual *European Islamophobia Report (EIR)* consisting of an overall evaluation of Islamophobia in Europe in the year 2017, as well as 33 country reports which include almost all EU member states and additional countries such as Russia and Norway. This year’s *EIR* represents the work of 40 prominent scholars and civil society activists from various European countries.

The denial of the very existence of Islamophobia/anti-Muslim racism/anti-Muslim hate crime in Europe by many demonstrates the need for an appropriate effort and political will to tackle this normalized racism and its manifestations that are deeply entrenched in European societies, institutions, and states. This denial is not only the case for extremist groups on the political fringe of the society, but rather far-right discourses have moved to the center of political power. Consequently, it is not only right-wing extremist groups that rely on the means of Islamophobic propaganda and discourse - social democrats, liberals, leftists or conservatives are not immune to this form of racism.

As a survey published by the FRA reveals 76% of Muslim respondents feel strongly attached to the country they live in, while 31% of those seeking work have been discriminated against in the last five years. At the same time, only 12% of Muslims say they have reported cases of discrimination. Hence, we can say with certainty that the extent of discrimination Muslims face in Europe is much greater than the numbers revealed in any report on Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime in Europe.

In other words, one can claim that all the available data and statistics about Islamophobia in Europe show only the tip of the iceberg. Therefore, revealing the comprehensiveness of structural anti-Muslim racism lies at the heart of the *European Islamophobia Report* project, which on a yearly basis analyzes the trends and developments in Europe from Russia to Portugal, and Malta to Norway.

**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.