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 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.
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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.”

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,”4 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.5 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.6

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”7 are needed to combat

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.
bobia. 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. 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.” The ECRI concludes that the “negative experiences of Muslims in Europe can fuel feelings of isolation within a larger community and hinder inclusive societies.” 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, 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-Gypsyism.

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.”19 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.”20

In Latvia, numerous pre-election programs of various parties for the 2017 municipal elections demonstrated unambiguous Islamophobic positions. In Riga, the Action Party of Euroseptics (Eiroskeptiķu Rīcības partija) published the following slogan in their program, “We are not against Muslims, we are against the Islamization of Latvia and Europe.”21 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!”22

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

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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.” 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). 

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, 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.

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. In Slovakia, former president Robert Fico argued that he will “not allow the creation of an integrated Muslim community in Slovakia.”

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. 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. 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 was launched to amend a law in favor of a “Burka Ban.” Among the initiators was Terhi Kiemunki, a former member of the Finns Party, who was convicted of incitement to hatred due to texts on her blog defaming Muslims. A spokesperson of the initiative was Jukka Ketonen, current chairman of the Finnish Defense League (FDL), who proclaims to be fighting against “Islamic extremism” 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

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38. “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?UI=fi&field&height=147.
40. For a detailed description of Terhi Kiemunki’s court case, see Ibid.
People’s Party following the verdict by the European Court of Human Rights. This 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 extremists (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 “retake 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.” 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. 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, 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.

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. 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.

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...
planning attacks on French politicians and on Muslim places of worship.\textsuperscript{51}

In Russia, between 2012 and 2016, five imams were killed in the Stavropol region. The cases remain unresolved to this day. 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 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. 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.52 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 Medios53 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”54 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 van-

dalism towards Muslims.\textsuperscript{55} 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.

• 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-Gypsism.

• 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]).
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).

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)

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)
UNITED KINGDOM

- 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.

SWEDEN

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

SPAIN

- In 2017, **546 attacks** took place against Muslims.
  (Source: Plataforma Ciudadana contra la Islamofobia)
The Author

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Executive Summary

During 2017, Islamophobia in Belgium has continued to grow at a steady rate. The most notable difference between the state of Islamophobia in the country and that documented in the European Islamophobia Report in previous years can be located in the lack of marked peaks or sizeable clusters in violent attacks against Muslims, Islamic sites or those presumed to be Muslim. However, this does not indicate an absence of Islamophobia rather it indicates a continuation of low level violent Islamophobic attacks, a growth in Islamophobic hate speech and most notably numerous state-level Islamophobic policies, legislative measures and proposals throughout 2017.

As in previous years, Islamophobia in Belgium has continued to have a distinctively gendered nature, with Belgian Muslim women bearing the brunt of Islamophobia in the nation. The most pertinent example of this gendered Islamophobia includes the European Court of Justice preliminary judgements regarding the permissibility of dismissing women who wear the headscarf from employment issued in March 2017 - incidentally this decision was based, in part, on a case that had emerged from the Belgian context.

Beyond the continued gendered Islamophobia seen in Belgium during 2017, the year was interspersed with significant state-led policies, bills and legislative measures which sought to regulate the practice of Islam in Belgium, namely the limitations on ritual slaughter (including halal slaughter) voted on in May 2017 and July 2017, and the proposed state takeover of the Grand Mosque of Belgium.

The bases of Islamophobic narratives remain much the same as in previous years: Islam is framed as constituting demographic, cultural and violent threat and thus it is alleged that Islam and Muslims must be regulated by the state, law and, in some cases, even the lay public. However, as we see from rulings such as that of the European Court of Justice, Belgian Islamophobia has the potential to influence and be influenced by the broader European Islamophobia, and this therefore has the potential to shape the ways in which the phenomenon may be effectively tackled.
Synthèse

La Belgique a vu une croissance stable de l’Islamophobie pendant l’année 2017. La différence la plus remarquable entre l’état de l’Islamophobie dans le pays et ce qui est détaillée dans le Rapport Européen de l’Islamophobie dans les années précédentes peut-être localisé dans la manque des montées exceptionnels, ou les groupements des attaques violents envers les Musulmans non-négligeable, les endroits Islamiques ou ceux qui sont présums d’être Musulmans. Néanmoins, cette différence ne signale pas une absence d’Islamophobia, plutôt 2017 a vu une continuation faible des attaques Islamophobiques et violents, une croissance des discours de haine et notablement des projets politiques et des projets de loi, détaillé en plus dans cette partie du rapport.

Comme des années précédentes, l’Islamophobie en Belgique a continué d’avoir une façon génrée distincte, des Musulmanes sont les premières touchées par l’Islamophobie dans la nation. L’exemple le plus pertinent de cette Islamophobie génrée inclut les jugements préliminaires de la Cour de la Justice de l’Union Européenne concernant la possibilité de licencier des femmes qui portent le foulard issu en mars 2017 (d’ailleurs cette décision suit un cas qui sort de la contexte Belge).

Au-delà de la continuation génrée de l’Islamophobie en Belgique vu en 2017, l’année était marquée par des projets de loi et des mesures législatives qui a voulu contrôler le pratique d’Islam en Belgique, (y compris l’abattage halal) qui était voté en mai 2017 et juillet 2017 et le projet de reprendre contrôle de la Grande Mosquée de Belgique mené par l’état.

Les fondations des discours Islamophobiques restent similaires comme vue dans les années précédentes. L’Islam est construit comme une menace démographique, culturelle et comme porteur de menace violente, et par conséquence c’est présumé que l’Islam et les Musulmans doit être réglés par l’état, la loi, et dans quelques instances par le grand public. Cependant, des décisions juridiques comme celle de la Cour Européenne de la Justice révèle que l’Islamophobie en Belgique peut influencer (potentiellement) et être influencé par l’Islamophobie en Europe plus généralement, et comme résultat ces faits peuvent façonner les manières de combattre effectivement le phénomène.
Samengevat

Tijdens 2017 is Islamofobie in Belgie gelijdelijk gegroeid. Het grootste verschil tussen Islamofobie in het land en het gedocumenteerde Islamofobie in de “European Islamophobia Report” in de afgelopen jaren is voornamelijk vanwege het gebrek aan pieken of clusters in gewelddadige aanvallen jegens moslims of Islamitische gebouwen. Dit wijst echter niet op een gebrek aan Islamofobie in het land. Gedurende het jaar 2017 is er sprake van een continuïteit van licht gewelddadige Islamofobische aanvallen, een groei in Islamofobische haatdraginge tal, verschillend politiek beleid dat uiterst Islamofobisch is, alsmede wetgevingen en moties, wat uitgebreider verteld wordt in deze sectie van het rapport.

Net als in de vorige jaren is Islamofobie in Belgie nog steeds van een uiterst seksegerichte natuur. Belgische moslim vrouwen lijden het meest aan het wijdverspreide Islamofobie in het land. Het belangrijkste voorbeeld van de seksegerichte Islamofobie is het oordeel van de Europese Hof van Justitie in maart 2017 in verband met het toestaan van het weigeren van werknemers die hoofddoeken dragen op de arbeidsmarkt (dit oordeel was gebaseerd op een rechtszaak in Belgie).

Naast het seksegerichte Islamofobie in Belgie gedurende het jaar 2017 was er sprake van een variatie van politiek beleid, voornamelijk wetgeving en ingediende moties, die gericht waren op het reguleren van Islam in de praktijk. Een voorbeeld hiervan was de voorgestelde restricties op het religieus slachten (inclusief het halal slachten) waar in mei 2017 en juli 2017 op werd gestemd en het voorgestelde overname van de Grote Moskee door de Belgische staat.

De basis van Islamofobische uitingen blijven hetzelfde als in de vorige jaren. Islam wordt gezien en geframed als een demografische, culturele en gewelddadige gevaar waardoor Islam en moslims gereguleerd moeten worden door de staat en rechtsgeving. Overigens zien we dat oordelen zoals dat van het Europese Hof voor Justitie invloed heeft op de Belgische maatschappij en Islamofobie in Belgie, waarvan teveneens het omgekeerde ook een werkelijkheid is.
Introduction

Islamophobia in Belgium has continued to increase at a steady pace throughout 2017. Most significantly, 2017 saw a continuation of low level violent Islamophobic attacks, a growth in Islamophobic hate speech and actions, and, most notably, increased spotlight on numerous state-level Islamophobic policies, legislative measures and proposals.

In a country where Muslims constitute only six per cent of the wider population and Islam is afforded official national recognition and support, Belgium has continued to devote intense and arguably disproportionate media, political and legal attention to this seemingly small part of society.

This section of the European Islamophobia Report details general instances of Islamophobia and pays special attention to the political and legal forms of Islamophobia that have been apparent over the course of 2017 in Belgium. The report includes an overview of the European Court of Justice preliminary judgements on the permissibility of dismissing women who wear the headscarf in employment, the ban on ritual slaughter in Wallonia and Flanders, and the discussions regarding the state takeover of the Grand Mosque of Brussels.

The report discusses some of the counter-Islamophobia initiatives taking place in Belgium, and the increased need for collaborative work and the sharing of best practices in the wider struggle against Islamophobia in Belgium and Europe. The report concludes with a series of recommendations in this regard before presenting a chronological overview of some of the most pertinent instances of Islamophobia in Belgium during 2017.

Significant Incidents and Developments

Over the course of the year the most significant incidents and developments in the field of Islamophobia in the country pertain to political and legal discourses, debates and decisions. These include the European Court of Justice preliminary judgements regarding the legitimacy of dismissing Muslim women who wear the hijab from their employment, which in itself demonstrates a continuation of gendered Islamophobia in Belgium and also signals the potential for further Islamophobia against Muslim women in the Belgian workforce. Additionally, 2017 saw a unanimous vote to ban halal and kosher slaughter in Wallonia and Flanders, signalling the direct targeting of Islamic practices in the nation. These two principal incidents are against a backdrop of steadily growing Islamophobia throughout the nation. These events are detailed further in the next section of the report.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Politics
When compared with previous years, Muslim political figures have faced fewer reported direct attacks both on a personal level and in terms of their political standing. In place of the numerous direct verbal and physical attacks seen in previous years, 2017 has witnessed an increase in its generalised Islamophobic discourse in the Belgian political sphere. This Islamophobic political discourse has led to a wide variety of political actions, both enacted and envisaged. Such political actions include the controversies surrounding the permissibility of the headscarf in the workplace; the prohibition of ritual slaughter; debate concerning state involvement in the leadership of the nation’s largest mosque; political officials calling for the legal prohibition of faith symbols in Belgian public spaces; far-right desire to organise an ‘Islam Safari’ in the capital; left-wing political representatives alleging that the capital’s mosques are in the hands of Salafists; and calls for the ‘cleansing’ of Belgian public spaces of refugees. Furthermore, Islamophobic narratives articulated at the political level send a clear signal regarding the ‘Otherness’ of Belgian Muslims and the alleged need to regulate these populations.

Two pertinent examples that emerged from the political sphere in 2017 include the proposed ban on ritual slaughter and also the proposed state takeover of the Grand Mosque of Belgium. In May 2017, the francophone Walloon Parliamentary Environment Committee unanimously voted in favour of prohibiting ritual slaughter in Wallonia. If left unchallenged, the ban will mean that both Islamic halal slaughter and Jewish kosher slaughter will no longer be permitted in the largest Belgian region as of September 2019. Flanders also quickly followed suit with a bill along similar lines filed to cover the Belgian Flemish region in July 2017. Previous years have seen calls for a limitation on halal slaughter proposed, particularly around the time of Eid al-Adha, on the grounds of animal rights and protection.

This type of Islamophobic narrative is not unique to francophone Belgium, rather it is seen across European Islamophobia (and paradoxically proponents are often meat eaters themselves). The narrative is built upon Orientalist stereotypes of Muslim barbarity and violence, which then feeds into contemporary Islamophobic constructions of Muslims in Belgium (and beyond) as violent and is subsequently evoked to legitimise their targeting.

4. The Islamic festival of Eid al-Adha follows the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and involves ritual slaughter in recognition and homage to Prophet Abraham, and has been marked by controversy in Belgium in previous years, see Amina Easat-Daas, ed. Islamophobia in Belgium 2015: National Report European Islamophobia Report 2015 (Istanbul: SETA).
The proposed measures sparked strong condemnation from the European Jewish Congress, whose president Moshe Kantor stated, “It attacks the very core of our culture and religious practice and our status as equal citizens with equal rights in a democratic society. It gives succour to anti-Semites and to those intolerant of other communities and faiths.” I would argue that the measures represent an opportunity for Jewish and Muslim religious communities to come together and form an effective coalition in countering anti-religious and discriminatory narratives, practices and legal measures and to send out a clear message that ritual slaughter bans do not protect animals (especially as the meat industry continues to grow), instead these prohibitions target minority faith groups and must not be tolerated. Collaborative Muslim-Jewish legal strategies were coordinated and jointly launched between November 2017 and January 2018 and are likely to continue well beyond the scope of this report. Furthermore, the combined lawsuit draws on existing precedents within the legal arena, namely comments by the European Court of Human Rights that has stated that ritual slaughter is “an essential aspect of the practice of the Jewish faith” and therefore potentially indicating that given precedents the lawsuit may be ruled in favour of religious minorities in Belgium rather than seeing legal projects succumbing to the growing tide of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

Furthermore, during late 2017, increasing political discourse and media coverage emerged in Belgium suggesting that the Belgian state would take over the country’s largest Islamic site of worship, the Grand Mosque of Belgium. In 1969, the then head of the Belgian state King Baudouin signed a 99-year rent-free lease of the mosque to Saudi Arabia, meaning that the mosque is now run by the Saudi-based World Muslim League who allegedly espouse more conservative interpretations of Islam. Against a backdrop of the so-called Islamic terror attacks that took place in France and Belgium during 2015 and 2016, it is suggested that the mosque is a ‘hotbed for extremism’ and therefore the Belgian state seeks to replace the leadership of the Grand Mosque of Belgium with those who are in favour of an interpretation of Islam that is more European in nature. As Farid Hafez, editor of the European Islamophobia Report, clearly elucidates there is no established link between terror attacks and conservative interpretations of Islam. Also, and perhaps more pertinent, Hafez also raises the question, “If the Belgian state intervenes here, then where will the limit be set?”

5. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
Justice System
Arguably, the most influential and significant judicial decision related to Islamophobia in Belgium during 2017 is apparent in the European Court of Justice’s decision regarding the permissibility of dismissing Muslim women who wear the headscarf from their employment. The case taken to the European Court of Justice, in part, stems from a Belgian appeal and therefore the ruling potentially carries greater significance to the Belgian nation. However, given its overlap with the field of employment, I have opted to cover the supranational level case in the next subsection of the report, namely Employment.

Notwithstanding, the European Court of Justice case does not represent an isolated example of Muslim-related cases being taken to the Belgian courts. For example, in Belgium during June 2017, the Brabant-Walloon correctional court heard the case of a visibly Muslim woman who, while pregnant, was attacked in the streets of Ottignies in September 2015.10 The defendant pleaded psychological impairment and expressed regret. However, this case and many others like it, demonstrate the intersectional discrimination faced by Muslim women in Belgium. Also, as detailed in the report’s Internet section, the Belgian judicial system has been influential in sentencing online Islamophobia.

Employment
On 14th March 2017 the European Court of Justice (La Cour de Justice de l’Union Européenne, ECJ) delivered its preliminary judgements regarding the permissibility of dismissing employees on the grounds of the Islamic headscarf, with specific focus on the extent to which the examples presented before the court constituted direct or indirect discrimination, or indeed any discrimination at all.

The preliminary judgements issued by the ECJ are based on two specific cases heard together in March 2017: the case of Samira Achbita in Belgium and Asma Bougnaoui in France. Achbita had previously been employed as a receptionist at G4S. Three years into her employment, Achbita adopted the headscarf in the workplace and was told that due to an ‘unwritten rule’ regarding ‘neutralité’, employees could not manifest faith, political or philosophical symbols in the workplace. Achbita refused to remove her headscarf and was subsequently dismissed by G4S. The case was initially heard in Antwerp’s lower and higher labour courts and was rejected before being referred to the Belgian Court of Cassation, which then referred the case to the ECJ.

As a design engineer for Micropole in France, Bougnaoui was required to visit clients on location. Following complaints regarding her headscarf from a client, Bougnaoui was requested to remove her headscarf on visits to clients’ sites. As Bougnaoui refused to comply, she was dismissed from her post at Micropole. Her case was initially heard in the Parisian Labour Tribunal before being referred to the ECJ by the French Court of Cassation.

The Achbita and Bougnaoui cases were the first cases related to faith and discrimination heard by the European Court of Justice; however, in the past, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has heard cases based on religious symbols. In these two cases, General Advocate Sharpston suggested that the Belgian example (Achbita) constituted indirect discrimination rather than direct discrimination. Sharpston concluded the contrary in the French Bougnaoui case: her dismissal was seen to constitute direct discrimination. The preliminary judgements on these two cases sparked condemnation and split opinion across the European (and Belgian) counter-Islamophobia and counter-discrimination scene and among academics.

Most notably, Brems underlines the paradoxical nature of the judgement stating that no reference was made to the European climate of Islamophobia and hostility towards Muslim women on the continent. However, much of the media picked up on the gendered Islamophobic nature of the ECJ’s judgements. Most importantly, the message that the ECJ decision would send to future employers of visibly Muslim women was questioned.

In a statement issued on 15th March 2017 Carlos Crespo, president of the Belgian organisation Movement Against Racism, Antisemitism and Xenophobia (Mouvement contre le Racisme, l’Antisémitisme et la Xénophobie – MRAX), stated, “The decision will result in the facilitation of the already significant ostracization of European citizens who are Muslim and who want to participate in the labour market without necessarily having to denounce (or remove) their headscarf.”

Whilst at the supranational legal level experts may become fixated on technical legal notions such as that concerning interpretation or ‘margins of appreciation’ as previously applied by the ECHR to account for context-specific elements, the media and the general public tend to take away the base level message from the legal cases and I would argue that in this instance it is one that potentially legitimises a gendered form of Islamophobia in the workplace in Belgium and in wider Europe. Furthermore, in Belgium it is likely that the ECJ judgement coupled with growing gendered Islamophobia and the invocation of ‘neutrality’/laïcité we may anticipate more employment-based headscarf affairs emerging in coming years.

Education

With regards to discrimination of Muslims and their rights to access education, comparatively fewer major scandals emerged over the course of 2017. For example, 2015 saw the Belgian ‘long skirt affair’ surface which was ultimately reduced to nothing.

12. Ibid.
whilst August 2016 saw the toing and froing regarding the right of Muslim women to sit access course exams.\footnote{16} In their annual report published in June 2017, the Belgian Counter Islamophobia Collective (CCIB) describe the small victories made in terms of the rights of Muslim women to education in Belgium. Nonetheless, they state that these are only first steps.\footnote{17} Bans such as the prohibition of ‘ostentatious faith symbols’ (or more typically headscarves) in the francophone region of Verviers\footnote{18} will continue to be in place until 2019.

The Belgian League of Human Rights published their analysis of the legal validity and permissibility of headscarves bans in the field of education, employment and social/cultural development in Belgium in August 2017. The report adopts a legal analytical framework to assess the limitations imposed on Muslim women’s appearance in Belgium. Via the consideration of rights to religious freedom and non-discrimination, the report asserts that more often than not the bans are not valid. The paper also problematizes the arguments often evoked in support of controlling Muslim women’s dress in the country, including the notion of state neutrality (sometimes referred to as laïcité in Belgian debates) by raising the question regarding the need for neutrality of acts or appearances. The report concludes that based on the legal analysis presented “[t]he prohibition of the headscarf has not been revealed to be compatible with the respect of fundamental rights, except in very limited and specific situations”.\footnote{19}

This type of structured legal analysis by experts regarding the paradoxes and irrationality of headscarf bans in the country should be welcomed as this type of legal-based analysis has the potential to offer effective counter tools that may support those, including women in the Belgian education system, who chose to take their discrimination cases to the courts.

**Media**

As with previous years, in Belgium the media has been, in part, complicit with the reproduction of Islamophobic tropes. This is say that rather than being the source of Islamophobia in Belgium, the Belgian media rearticulates and exacerbates Islamophobic narratives that stem from both the national context and also those coming from global sources.

Specific examples of Islamophobia in Belgian media in 2017 can be seen, among others, in *Le Soir* publications that have repeatedly exaggerated Islamophobic headlines in 2017. Examples of this include the following headlines: “*L’Islam en Belgique divise Musulmans et politiques*”\footnote{20} (Islam in Belgium Divides Muslims and Politicians – see Fig-
ure 1); “Plus de 2.000 Musulmans radicalisés en Belgique”\textsuperscript{21} (More than 2000 Radicalised Muslims in Belgium – see Figure 2); “50% de Belges sont pour une politiques très restrictives envers les Musulmans”\textsuperscript{22} (50% of Belgians Favour Very Restrictive Policies Towards Muslims); and “Entre 11 et 18% de Musulmans en Belgique d’ici 2050”\textsuperscript{23} (Between 11 and 18% Muslim Population in Belgium by 2050 – see Figure 3). While these headlines are provocative and therefore may prompt increased circulation, the publication is contributing to the Islamophobic idea of alleged Muslim violence via the radicalisation headline, the Islamophobic trope of a demographic threat via the statistical projection headline, while the trope of opposition to normative Belgian values is invoked by the political division headline. Such headlines lead to the formation of narratives related to the need to control Muslim populations apparent in the headline denoting that half of Belgians favour the strict control of Muslims within their respective countries.

During 2017, CCIB increasingly challenged examples of Islamophobia in the Belgian media, examples of which are detailed in the Chronology section of this report. The action recalls the work of the British counter-Islamophobic organisation MEND.

(Muslim Engagement and Development) that regularly challenges Islamophobic media and also encourages their followers to do the same. On occasion, in the UK, this has led to official retractions of Islamophobic news.24 Furthermore, the approach also indicates the need for increased collaborative work and the sharing of best practices among European counter-Islamophobia organisations in Belgium and beyond.

Physical and Verbal Attacks

When juxtaposed with previous years’ analyses in the respective European Islamophobia Reports, Belgium witnessed comparatively fewer clusters of reported Islamophobic verbal and physical attacks. In previous years, the highest peaks in Islamophobic attacks (often on visibly Muslim women) could be seen in the days and weeks following terrorist attacks perpetrated by alleged Muslims.25 For example, in the one-month period following the terror attacks in Brussels, the CCIB recorded 36 reported Islamophobic incidents, which translates to over one recorded incident per day.26

Previous editions of the Belgian component of the European Islamophobia Report have asserted that ‘Islamist’ terror attacks tend to lead to a backlash for Belgian Muslims in which they experience peaks in Islamophobia.27 The realities of these claims have been borne out during 2017, whereby Belgium and its immediate geographical neighbours did not experience ‘Islamist terror attacks’ and, as a result, clusters of Islamophobia did not appear to have emerged in the same way as in previous years.

Instead, and as speculated in previous reports, the rate of Islamophobic incidences in Belgium saw a steady incline in 2017. Examples of attacks include attacks on individuals and sites, and are discussed in the Chronology section of this report, including the stabbing of a worshipper at a mosque in Liège and the attempted arson of a mosque in Herstal.

Internet

As with the media, the Internet serves as a medium for the reproduction and articulation of Islamophobic tropes, rather than being at the source of these narratives. The anonymity afforded to Islamophobes online potentially serves to exacerbate and intensify the nature of Islamophobia asserted on the Internet. These virtual spaces, and especially social media, become echo-chambers for those who hold such views, and in turn potentially legitimise such narratives amongst certain individuals. This legitimisation may subsequently lead to individuals being compelled to act on their Islamophobic beliefs in the real world. This emphasises the very real need to counter Islamophobia online.

Rather than being limited to specific perpetrators, online spaces for Islamophobia are utilised by a plethora of individuals and groups, including far-right groups, such as Vlaams Belang. For example, the Parti Populaire Verviers published a cartoon on its social media page in November which portrayed Tintin, the famous Belgian comic book protagonist, with text superimposed on the speech bubble to read “tu es certain qu’on est à Verviers???” (are you sure we are in Verviers??), while the background image includes seemingly non-ethnic Belgians who may be presumed to be Muslims (see Figure 4). This imagery feeds into Islamophobic narratives of an alleged Muslim demographic takeover of the nation.

The report published in 2017 by the International Network against Cyber Hate (INACH) highlighted specific instances of online Islamophobia, including detailing the case of the Flemish Defence League Facebook page. The page had over 6500 followers and now, in part due to pressure from UNIA, the page has been removed. The page included images of Belgian Muslims with commentaries from users stating that those featured in the images should be shot or gassed. The administrator of the page was sentenced to ten months imprisonment on the grounds of inciting racial hatred on 4th July 2017;²⁸ the clear intersection of racial and Islamophobic hate speech, and problems of strict categorisation of an event as either racist or Islamophobic may restrict depth of comprehension of such events. Notwithstanding, pages like these surface and are removed and subsequently

²⁸ Maren Hamelmann, Camille Lhopitault, and Andreas Schadauen, “Reports on Antisemitic, Antiziganistic, Homophobic and Anti-Muslim Hate Speech,”(Amsterdam, Holland: International Network Against Hate Speech (INACH)).
replaced frequently in the Belgian online Islamophobia platform and thus precise quantification remains problematic.

In their annual report published in June 2017, UNIA note that in terms of the discrimination cases received by the organisation, Internet-based discrimination (including online Islamophobia) is at the fore. In their annual report, the organisation highlights that not only are reported incidents of Islamophobia increasing in Belgium, Internet-based discrimination has increased almost five fold since UNIA’s first reporting in 2005. These findings are echoed by the European Commission that reported in 2017 that Islamophobia (along with xenophobia) constituted the most commonly cited source of online hate speech. However, given the expansive nature of the Internet, such quantifications represent only reported instances of Islamophobia and, therefore, only the tip of the iceberg.

Notwithstanding this bleak and deteriorating situation, the Internet can also serve as a potential platform for the spread of effective counter-narratives to Islamophobia. In this regard, it is reassuring to see that the majority of Belgian counter-discrimination and counter-Islamophobia groups have a strong online presence which can be utilised to promote their work and key messages.

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

In 2017, the nature of central actors in the Belgian Islamophobia network is not dissimilar to that observed in previous years; namely the far-right, the Internet and the media continue to be at the centre of reproduction, and arguably normalisation of Islamophobic tropes in the nation.

However, rather than being limited to sole actors, 2017 has seen the extent to which political and legal discourses have dominated the nature of the most prevalent Islamophobic narratives in Belgium. Key examples of these types of tropes have been detailed above and in the Chronology section of the report, but they include the European Court of Justice judgements on the permissibility of dismissing employees on the grounds of the headscarf in March 2017, the ban on ritual (including halal slaughter) in Wallonia unanimously voted in May 2017, and also the proposed state takeover of the Grand Mosque of Belgium discussed in late 2017.

These decisions, whilst perhaps not as remarkable on first sight as the clusters of violent Islamophobic attacks seen in previous years, are in fact equally sinister since they are frequently transmitted via the Internet and media and subsequently inform public opinion and hostility towards Muslim. The perception of a state-sanctioned model of Islamophobia has the potential to translate into real attacks against Muslims across the country.

Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

At the political level, various political and official figures spoke out against intolerance in 2017. For example, in his address to the nation on 21st July 2017 as part of the National Festival celebrations, Belgian King Philippe issued a message to promote intercultural and intercommunity support, and tolerance. Similarly, Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel addressed the United Nations in September 2017 and used the opportunity to speak out against online hatred.

Given its diverse nature, Belgium is home to numerous effective counter-racism groups and organisations that seek to counter Islamophobia in the country, such as UNIA, the European Network against Racism, and MRAX, among many others. The CCIB continues to be a key figure in the counter-Islamophobia network in Belgium. During 2017, CCIB continued many of the projects detailed in previous editions in the *European Islamophobia Report* such as the ‘Open School for Women’ project or the ‘Open Jobs Testing’ initiatives. In their annual report published in 2017, the organisation also details a new pedagogical initiative entitled ICE – *Islamophobie, Citoyenneté, Education* (Islamophobia, Citizenship, and Education). The 2017 project sought to train one hundred individuals in francophone Wallonia using a practical, education-based toolkit to counter-Islamophobia via dispelling prejudices regarding Muslims in the country.31

Perhaps most remarkably, CCIB cites collaboration with twenty-two different international, European, national and local organisations committed in the fight against Islamophobia in various ways.32 I would argue, that in this regard CCIB constitutes an example of best practice as it seeks to share its messages and tools with others in the field. The increasingly fluid and non-geographically bound nature of Islamophobia indicates that it is precisely this type of collaborative work that is required in the struggle against it.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

In conclusion, Islamophobia in Belgium in 2017 was marked by a steady and continued growth in media and Internet-based Islamophobia, Islamophobic hate speech and violent Islamophobic attacks. This is contrary to the significant clusters of Islamophobic acts and coverage in Belgium in the previous two years, namely 2015 and 2016.33 Instead, 2017 was marked by significant political and legal instances of Islamophobia. These political and legal discourses typically concerned Muslims women’s headscarves in Belgian employment, *halal* meat slaughter and the running of mosques in the country. Thus, as with previous years, there is a continued

31. CCIB, “Rapport D’activités 2016.”
32. Ibid.
gendered manifestation of Islamophobia in Belgium, but also a growing scrutiny on more generalised Islamic sites and practices. The nature of state-level Islamophobia witnessed in Belgium in 2017 is as concerning as the clusters of violent attacks witnessed in previous years since it sends out clear messages concerning the legitimacy and acceptability of Islamophobic discrimination in the country. In the report, I also hypothesise that these narratives and politico-legal actions could signal further general increases in Islamophobia more generally across Belgium in coming months and years.

Furthermore, the report demonstrates the increasingly Europeanisation/globalisation of Islamophobic tropes and actions. Therefore, with regards to policy recommendations, given the non-geographically bound nature of Islamophobic discourses it has become increasingly apparent that there is a growing need for cross counter-Islamophobia groups to work together in an effort to share best practices. The report also observes that, in part, CCIB (among other European actors) is already working in this collaborative way. This *modus operandi* needs to be celebrated and promoted and also financially supported (where required) to facilitate this much needed objective in the long-term.

On a more direct and short-term level in Belgium the following actions are necessary:

- Increased and continued monitoring, documenting and supporting Muslim women who face Islamophobia in education and/or employment in Belgium, particularly given the European Court of Justice’s judgement passed in March 2017.
- Robust legal strategies for countering gendered Islamophobia in these fields, and beyond, must be developed and supported through collaborative working between those facing Islamophobia, civil society initiatives and experts/academics.
- Collaborative work must be developed and maintained between the Belgian Jewish and Belgian Muslim community to counter the ban on ritual slaughter prior to its 2019 implementation.
- Strategies related to combatting state-sanctioned limitations on the practice of faith in Belgium, such as a strengthened and united response to the proposed state takeover of the Grand Mosque of Belgium, must emerge.

**Chronology**

- **15.01.2017**: The CCIB challenges press Islamophobia in a publication which had previously appeared in the Belgian publication *L’Avenir*.
- **21.01.2017**: UNIA begins to present their initial statistics detailing various types of discrimination that had taken place in Belgium in the previous year. Figures reveal an overall twenty percent increase in discrimination, hate speech and hate
crime cases (including Islamophobia) referred to the organisation in cases concerning employment. 34

- **23.01.2017**: A Muslim man worshipping at El Hijra Mosque in the francophone town of Ougrée, Liège is stabbed in the abdomen by a local resident. The attack leaves the mosque and its congregation vulnerable and in fear of reprisals. 35

- **19.02.2017**: Attempted arson of Al Ihsan Islamic Cultural Centre in Herstal in the Greater Liège region. (Fig. 5)

- **14.03.2017**: The ECJ issues its preliminary judgements regarding the legitimacy of dismissing Muslim women employees on the grounds of their headscarf and provokes condemnation across Belgium and the continent.

- **22.03.2017**: Brussels alderman of the Parti Socialiste (Socialist Party) publicly comments that mosques in the city of Brussels are ‘in the hands of Salafists.’ His Islamophobic comments provoked condemnation among his colleagues in the Socialist Party and the CCIB. 36 Incidentally, Mayeur was forced to resign from his role due to an unrelated controversy related to taking funds for participation in meetings related to a charity intended to help the homeless. 37

- **03.04.2017**: Flemish Belgian Rachida Lamrabet is dismissed from her post as a lawyer at UNIA on the grounds of her comments regarding the *burqa*. 38 Her support for the right of Muslim women to wear the face veil was deemed controversial since the use of face coverings has been banned in Belgium since 1st June 2011. 39

- **19.04.2017**: After an advert is placed by an individual seeking a roommate in Brussels, a young Muslim male responds to the advert and is met with messages stating ‘no Arabs’. 40 The event highlights the intersection between racial and religious prejudice in Belgium, and also the presumed acceptability of these racist tendencies. (Fig. 6)


21.04.2017: A report emerges stating that Belgian Muslims of Turkish origin are leaving the country at unprecedented rates. In 2015, 1351 Belgians of Turkish heritage left Belgium - this is twice as high compared to rates witnessed fifteen years prior. CCIB are quick to point out that these statistics are likely to be linked to growing rates of Islamophobia in Belgium.

08.05.2017: A vote to ban ritual slaughter as of September 2019 in Wallonia is passed with unanimous support by the Wallonia environmental committee.

18.05.2017: A member of the police force from the francophone Belgian region of Couvin-Viroinval is found wearing an Islamophobic crusader symbol of his official uniform, highlighting the historical nature of Islamophobic imagery and narratives. The Belgian police force were quick to issue their condemnation of the behaviour of the police officer in question.

10.06.2017: News coverage of Muslims and non-Muslims sharing their iftar (breaking of the fast at sunset). This example is not dissimilar to other cases in Europe and represents an effective means of inter-community relationship-building and countering Islamophobic prejudices.

13.06.2017: The case of a woman who wore the headscarf and suffered an attack in September 2015 whilst pregnant is heard by the francophone Brabant-Wallon correctional court.

10.07.2017: Belgian Muslims hold the March against Terrorism and issue statements condemning hatred in the name of and against Islam. (Fig. 8)

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44. Sudinfo.be, “Une Femme Voilée Enceinte Agressée Dans Une Rue D’ottignies.”
45. AUVO, “Ramadan: Dialogue Autout D’un Repas”.
13.07.2017: UNIA speaks out on the potentially discriminatory nature of the burkini ban.46
18.07.2017: CCIB publishes its annual report for the preceding year, detailing significant Islamophobic incidents that took place in Belgium during 2016.47 In particular, the report details the position of Muslim women and access to education in the country.
01.08.2017: The Belgian League of Human Rights publishes its analysis of the headscarf bans which have impacted adult Muslim women in the country.48
14.09.2017: Theo Francken of the Nieuw Vlaamse Alliantie (New Flemish Alliance) makes remarks on Twitter about ‘cleaning’ the Brussels Parc Maximilien of refugees.49 The racist remarks provoke condemnation and also nurture an atmosphere of hatred towards all that is ‘Other’, including Muslims, in Belgium.
16.09.2017: Christen, Democratisch in Vlaamse (Christian Democratic and Flemish) party leader Wouter Beke expresses his condemnation of Theo Francken’s nationalist comments two days earlier.50
21.09.2017: The No Hate Speech Movement publishes statistics on social media regarding the overestimation of the Muslim population size in Belgium. The data indicates that among Francophone Belgians the national Muslim population is estimated on average to be 29%, whereas in reality the population is closer to 6%.51
21.09.2017: The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) publishes its report which reveals the negative experiences of European Muslims in terms of seeking employment and also highlights that contrary to Islamophobic popular opinion European Muslims are in fact well-integrated members of European society.52

47. CCIB, “Rapport D’activités 2016.”
types of messages counter Islamophobic narratives which assert that Muslims are living ghettoised and isolated lives in Europe.

- **22.09.2017:** The Centre Public d’Aide Sociale (Public Social Assistance Centre, CPAS) of Louvain puts in place measures to allow for its employees and representatives to wear the headscarf at the CPAS without restriction. This measure represents a refreshing alternative to the earlier preliminary judgements issued by the ECJ in March 2017.

- **23.09.2017:** Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel addresses the United Nations and speaks out against hate speech and hate crimes.

- **03.10.2017:** The CCIB attends the European Union Commission event on combatting ‘anti-Muslim hatred’.

- **04.10.2017:** Belgian Newspaper L’Echo publishes a comment piece which is Islamophobic in nature as it accuses Islam of being a ‘conquering faith’. In response, CCIB takes to its social media platforms to criticise the newspaper for publishing the Islamophobic opinion piece.

- **03.11.2017:** Brussels alderman Philippe Close prohibits the planned ‘Safari de l’Islam’ (Islam Safari) organised by the Flemish and Dutch political far-right, whereby far-right politicians Filip Dewinter and Geert Wilders intended to tour the mosques and Islamic sites of the city. Whilst banning the so-called ‘safari’, Close also used the opportunity to condemn incitement of Islamophobia in Brussels. The message shared by Close goes towards countering the narrative which frames Brussels as a city taken over by Muslims, particularly in regions such as Molenbeek.

- **13.11.2017:** The University of Liège shares work by its scholars related to immigration in Belgium. Given the largely ethnic minority composition of the Belgian Muslim population, are most likely to face Islamophobia in Belgium, the report’s findings are influential in countering narratives of ‘Othering’ which contribute to the legitimisation of Islamophobia in the country. The report’s authors also explicitly indicate the exacerbation of experiencing racial discrimination if an individual is perceived to be Muslim.

- **30.11.2017:** News reports detailing the possible takeover of the Belgian Grand Mosque in Brussels by the state circulate.

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57. Ibid.
• **30.11.2017:** Reports of combined Muslim and Jewish planned legal action against proposed ritual slaughter bans emerge.59

• **01.12.2017:** News coverage emerges across Belgium related to the Pew Centre report on the projected growth of Muslim populations in Europe by 2050. News coverage details estimated statistics of the Belgian Muslim community thirty-two years from now and postulates that this will increase to between eleven and eighteen per cent.60 (see figure below) This type of media coverage relies on sensationalist Islamophobia for its own gains and adds to the narrative of a Muslim demographic takeover, which in turn legitimises Islamophobic normative discourses, practices and even attacks on Islam and Muslims in the country.

• **01.12.2017:** The proposed construction of a mosque in Retinne, Fléron provokes Islamophobic protests and hate speech. This case is reminiscent of examples documented in previous editions of the *European Islamophobia Report*61 and highlights the ongoing targeting of not only Muslims but also religious sites frequented by Muslims.

• **06.12.2017:** Reports emerge stating that one-fifth of Belgians of either Turkish or Moroccan ethnic heritage suffers discrimination in their search for employment.62 This report highlights the intersectional discrimination faced by Belgian Muslims and also corroborates statements made by CCIB regarding the increasing rates of Belgian Muslims of Turkish background who are choosing to return to Turkey.


60. Ponciau, “Entre 11-18% Des Musulmans En Belgique D’ici 2050.”


• **07.12.2017**: As is often seen in Belgium and other neighbouring Western European countries, stories begin to circulate in popular culture and especially on social media stating that Belgian Muslims wish to ‘ban Christmas’ in the country. In this vein and in response to these false claims, Belgian media outlet RTL Info runs a story declaring that ‘Muslims have never wanted to change the Christmas holidays to winter holidays.’ 63 Stories such as this, published by seemingly external sources, contribute to challenging Islamophobic narratives in Belgium.

• **18.12.2017**: Hendrik Bogaert of the Flemish political party *Christen, Democratisch in Vlaamse* (Christian, Democratic and Flemish) calls for a general prohibition of ‘visible faith symbols’ throughout Belgian public spaces. 64 These calls are reminiscent of French *laïque* bans on visible Muslim dress, and therefore demonstrate the fluidity of Islamophobic tropes across Europe.

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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 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.