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, brain storming sessions, conferences and policy recommendations, SETA seeks to guide leaders in government, civil society, and business, and contributes to informed decision making mechanisms.
ABOUT EDITORS

Enes Bayraklı
Enes Bayraklı earned his BA, MA and PhD from the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna, and conducted research for his PhD thesis at the University of Nottingham in Britain between 2009 and 2010. He was a deputy director at the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in London in 2011-2013. Bayraklı also served as the founding director of the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers in Constanța and Bucharest, Romania in August-December 2012. He has been a faculty member at the Department of Political Science and International Relations and the head of the European and International Affairs MA Program at the Turkish-German University since 2013. Currently he is also the director of European Studies at SETA Foundation. His fields of research include Islamophobia in Europe, far-right movements in Europe, the transformation of Turkish foreign policy, foreign policy analysis, and German foreign policy. Email: bayrakli@tau.edu.tr

Farid Hafez
Farid Hafez PhD (Political Science, University of Vienna) is lecturer and researcher at the University of Salzburg, Department of Political Science and Sociology. He is also Senior Researcher at Georgetown University’s ‘The Bridge Initiative’. Currently, he also lectures at Istanbul Zaim University in Istanbul. In 2017, he was Fulbright visiting professor at University of California, Berkeley and in 2014, he was visiting scholar at Columbia University, New York. Since 2010, Hafez has been editor of the Islamophobia Studies Yearbook, and since 2015 co-editor of the annual European Islamophobia Report. He has received the Bruno Kreisky Award for the political book of the year, for his anthology Islamophobia in Austria (co-ed. with John Bunzl) and published more than 70 books and articles, including in high-ranking academic journals. Moreover, Hafez regularly publishes op-ed’s and is frequently interviewed by media outlets. Email: farid.hafez@sbg.ac.at

For more information about the EIR:
www.islamophobiaeurope.com
islamophobia@setav.org
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 inacceptable 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-

---


“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 reposting 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.

8. Ibid.
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-Gypsiesim.

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.”17 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.18

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 (Eiroskeptika Ricibas 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 apvienība) 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

---

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.” 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.”

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, which argued that “the love offer of Jesus Christ and Muhammad’s use of violence are as different as day and night.”

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).28

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

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

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

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

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

**Denying the Suffering**

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

---


The (Mis-)Use of Education and Academia

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

Online Islamophobia

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

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

Legalizing Islamophobia

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

with a legislative proposal for the ban of face veiling in educational institutions initiated by the ruling People’s Movement Party (PMP). The asserted aim was the prevention of violence and terrorism. The law was launched by 26 MPs from three parliamentary parties. Also, in Latvia, where – similar to Romania – there are nearly no Muslims, a draft law on the restriction of wearing a face veil was prepared by the Ministry of Justice in 2015 and is still under consideration. In Belgium, the parliament voted for limitations on ritual slaughter including the prohibition of Muslim halal slaughter. Also, a debate on a state takeover of the Grand Mosque of Belgium began. In a small village in Hungary, a mayor passed a law to ban the construction of mosques and minarets, the Muslim call for prayer, the chador, niqab, burqa, and burkini. The mayor argued that he wished to set a positive example for other Hungarian municipalities in order to guarantee the ‘centuries-old traditions’ of local communities in the face of mass migration to the country. 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

---

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=fied&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.”45 The fact that Islamophobia goes hand in hand with other forms of racism, such as anti-Semitism in this case, should be a symbolic reminder for those, who are aware of European history.46 Beyond this example of a right-wing extremist movement, the case of Hungary, where the ruling Fidesz party mobilizes against George Soros while portraying him as a conspirator alongside Muslims to change the European population,47 reveals again that racism will eventually target every minority.

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

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

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

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 \textit{waqf} properties. Also, many Muslim religious employees, which were formerly and legally paid by the Turkish government, had to leave their jobs because the Council of Ministers of Bulgaria unilaterally cancelled the treaty between Bulgaria and Turkey and did not

inform the representatives of the Office of the Grand Mufti, which faced a structural crisis after being informed three months later.

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

Steps Forward and Policy Recommendations

The picture presented here shows us that there is an urgent need to counter these developments. And there is room for hope. Critical assessment of the current situation regarding Muslims in Europe is growing within parts of civil society. Not only are there more and more institutions that are working to bring attention to the rise in hate crime towards Muslims such as the Spain-based Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los Medios 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” 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 \textit{EIR} support the following recommendations which were made by the OSCE OD\textsuperscript{I}HR 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 duly 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.

AUSTRIA

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

BELGIUM

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

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)
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)
THE STATE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE

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

**Leyla Yıldırım** is a PhD candidate at the Department of Sociology, Institute of Social Sciences at Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, Istanbul. She graduated from the Master’s program, “Islam in the Contemporary West” at Leiden University in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, she worked at the Islamic University of Applied Sciences Europe, as an education coordinator and program developer of BA and Master’s degrees in Islamic Spiritual Care and Islamic Theology. Currently she is a staff member of the research project “The Netherlands Human Rights Report” at Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University. Yıldırım’s research interests are Muslims in Europe, Islamophobia, race, racism and cultural secularism. Besides her native languages Turkish and Kurdish, she also speaks Dutch, English and reads German. Email: lelya_yildirim@hotmail.com

**Disclaimer:** Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the *European Islamophobia Report* are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

Executive Summary

The most significant development in 2017 in the Netherlands was the national elections held on March 15. The various parties’ election campaigns were dominated by populist rhetoric. The race was mainly between the extreme right-wing party of Geert Wilders (PVV) and the centre-right party of Mark Rutte (VVD). The left-wing parties were almost voiceless except for Groenlinks who managed to increase its votes. Islamophobic statements by Mark Rutte and other centre-right parties dominated the election campaigns. Many human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and the Netherlands Bar, warned that the election programs of many parties were in violation of the international treaties of human rights and the Dutch law.

In 2017, Islamophobic statements and actions were not only limited to politics, but were present in other areas such as the media, the judiciary, education, and the labor market. The MIND, the Internet complaint line, has published 918 complaints received in 2016. This is an increase of 41% compared to the year before.

Anti-discrimination agencies and projects such as Monitoring Muslim Discrimination lead by Ineke van der Valk also reported an increase in Islamophobia. An undercover study by the PEER in February 2017 shows that many of the temporary employment agencies are involved in racism, especially against Muslims.

Additionally, a study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights shows that Muslims have been discriminated against in finding work, but that only 12% of Muslims have reported the latest instance they faced discrimination. The most significant positive development of 2017 was the initiative taken by Dutch Muslims and indigenous Dutch people to fight against Islamophobia.
Samengevat

In dit rapport is Islamofobie in Nederland van het jaar 2017 onderzocht. De belangrijkste ontwikkeling in het jaar 2017 waren de nationale verkiezingen. Verkiezingscampagnes van verschillende partijen werden gedomineerd door Populistische campagnes. De concurrentie was voornamelijk tussen de extreemrechtse partij PVV en de centrumrechtse partij VVD. De linkse partijen waren vrijwel stemloos, behalve GroenLinks die erin slaagde zijn stemmen te verhogen. Veel mensenrechtenorganisaties zoals Amnesty International en de Nederlandse Orde van Advocaten hebben gewaarschuwd voor het verkiezingsprogramma van veel partijen die in strijd zijn met de internationale mensenrechtenverdragen en het Nederlands recht. In 2017 zijn de Islamofobische uitspraken en acties niet beperkt gebleven tot de politiek, maar ook op andere gebieden zoals in de Media, Internet en de arbeidsmarkt lieten ze zich sterk zien.

Antidiscriminatiebureaus en enkele projecten zoals Ineke van der Valk Monitoring van Moslimdiscriminatie meldden dat Islamofobie nog steeds in toename is. Uit een undercover onderzoek van PEER in februari 2017 blijkt dat veel van de uitzendbureaus betrokken zijn bij racisme vooral tegen moslims. Bovendien blijkt uit de studie van het Bureau van de Europese Unie voor de grondrechten dat moslims worden gediscrimineerd bij het vinden van werk terwijl slechts 12% van de moslims het incident van de discriminatie heeft gemeld.

Nederlandse moslims en inheemse Nederlanders zijn dit jaar meer bewust geworden van discriminatie jegens moslims en namen initiatieven om deze te bestrijden.
Introduction

Discrimination of immigrants with an Islamic background and hate speech against them, as well as the way Dutch society has responded to immigrants both socially and legally, has changed over time. The critiques have not only changed in terms of subject but have also become more strident over time. When in 1990, Hans Janmaat, a Dutch MP at the time, protested against migration with his statement ‘Full is Full.’ Dutch courts convicted him of committing an act of hate speech. He received fines and a conditional prison sentence for incitement to hate and discrimination against foreigners. However, recently Geert Wilders shouted similar inflammatory statements during one of his party meetings. When he asked his followers if they wanted fewer or more Moroccans in the country, the party members’ response was “Fewer, Fewer”, to which Wilders notoriously gave the assurance that when in power, his party would “arrange that.” Crucially, over time it is clear that such hate speech has become normalized. The larger public, however, was not as shocked at Wilder’s hate speech as with the case of Janmaat. The fact that Janmaat was actually persecuted for incitement of hate yet Wilder’s statement led to his being sentenced to a fine of 5,000 euro but to no prison time, clearly demonstrate that despite the harsher nature of the statements against Muslims since 1990, these statements have become ordinary for society as well as politicians.1

Significant Incidents and Developments

On January 24, 2017, a discussion took place in De Balie in Amsterdam with the title “Why do they actually hate us?” (“Waarom haten ze eigenlijk”). This discussion took place as an initiative of foundation De Stichting Werkelijkheid in Perspectief of former VVD leader Frits Bolkestein, legal philosopher Paul Cliteur (leading candidate of Forum for Democracy, a national conservative political party) and Emeritus Professor Meindert Fennema. The debate was held in order to introduce the release of a book under the same title and took the form of a debate with contributions from various, predominantly right-wing and extreme-right anti-Islam authors. Some of these contributors are known to make little or no distinction between Islam and Islamist extremism. After an introduction, the members started to speak about the ways the number of Muslims in the Netherlands could be reduced to one or two percent of the population, and they spoke openly about deportation as an option to reach that goal. Instead of reflecting on the potentially discriminatory nature of the question, which clearly echoed the pre-Holocaust policies of Germany under Hitler,2 panel members such as Wim van Rooy and Paul Cliteur philosophized about

Paul Cliteur suggested addressing de-Islamization step by step. He stated that, after all, it is not about the fact that Muslims cannot be deported, the point is that one wants to create a situation in which this is ‘normal’ and is possible. The fact that members of the panel, who were important intellectuals of the Netherlands, did not protest these dehumanizing utterances made the situation more worrying and shocking. Noteworthy were the reactions afterwards. Several newspapers reported on the meeting. There was strong criticism of the proposals by Van Rooy and De Wit (she is a well-known so-called “Islam critic” who during the debate was sitting among the audience and said that reducing Muslims to one or two percent could be a good solution). A few days later, the whole debate was discussed in the City Hall of the municipality of Amsterdam and a councillor of alderman pointed to the discriminatory nature of the statements. The leftist party GroenLinks considered filing a report to the police, but they did not. Deputy Prime Minister Lodewijk Asscher distanced himself on Twitter and called the statements “horrible” and “not normal.”

Another incident was the crisis between Turkey and the Netherlands which targeted Muslims with Turkish background. On March 11, the relationship between Turkey and the Netherlands suffered a huge downgrade and since then diplomatic relations have been on the back burner. The consequences of this crisis are still felt in all kinds of areas. People with a Turkish background are constantly approached and even interrogated at school, at work, in port clubs, and during social meetings. Joint activities are cancelled or postponed, retailers are avoided. Many politicians, like Rutte and Wilders, ask the Turkish community of the Netherlands to prove their loyalty to the Netherlands and double nationality is considered disreputable.

The attitude of Turkish-Dutch people on politics in the Netherlands is considered to be as follows: most Turkish-Dutch citizens are positive about Dutch society, but negative about Dutch politicians, in general, and Mark Rutte, in particular. DENK party voters and non-DENK voters look at Dutch politics differently. It is clear that the rise of the DENK party has had a considerable impact on the Turkish community. For example, two-thirds of the Turkish-Dutch think that Dutch politicians do not pay enough attention to the Turkish community, while more than half think that DENK will contribute to the integration of the Turkish-Dutch. What is not a surprise, according to the research agency, is that DENK voters are much more positive in this sense than non-DENK voters.

Another important report which was published before the elections of 2017 was that of the Verwey Jonker Institute, which was carried out on behalf of the Anne Frank Foundation in December 2017. For the year 2016, they reported 364 incidents of Mus-

Islam discrimination in the BVH, a slight decrease compared to 2015. The number of incidents of Muslim discrimination in 2015 was 466, a tripling of the number of incidents compared to 2014 (142 incidents). This was probably a result of the terrorist attacks committed in Europe in 2015 and the unrest surrounding the arrival of large groups of refugees that were predominantly from Islamic countries. Yet, as in 2016, several terrorist attacks were again committed for which the so-called DAESH terror group claimed responsibility, the aforementioned decrease was according to the reporters remarkable. At the same time, the number of incidents is still considerably higher than in 2014. The year 2015 may be called a ‘peak year.’ The researchers’ interpretation of these statistics is remarkable. They argued that the public may be getting used to the fact that attacks (without any support from local Muslims) regularly take place, and as a result it does not lead to increased social tensions. Another explanation given to this decrease was that Muslims who feel Islamophobia on a daily basis do not trust government agencies, or the police. Feeling that they are not taken seriously by the police, they largely avoid taking the necessary steps to register their cases to the authorities. This problem, activists concede, makes it more difficult to propose additional policies to combat Islamophobia.

The Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, Muslims – Selected Findings shows that especially in the Netherlands, Muslims feel increasingly discriminated. Thirteen percent of Muslims in Netherlands have been discriminated in the past five years because of their religious beliefs. This is higher in comparison with other European countries. As mentioned above, trust in the police is lowest among Dutch Muslims. But despite this, in comparison with other European countries, Dutch Muslims report discrimination more often. A quarter of the incidents are reported in the Netherlands. In no other European country do Muslims feel such a small connection to the country where they live. The average is 4.1 on a scale of five. Dutch Muslims, however, give their feeling of solidarity with the Netherlands a 3.4 on a scale of five. In a press release FRA Director Michael O’Flaherty states, “Our survey results make a mockery of the claim that Muslims aren’t integrated into our societies. On the contrary, we see a trust in democratic institutions that is higher than much of the general population. However, every incident of discrimination and hate crime hampers their inclusion and reduces their chances of finding employment. We risk alienating individuals and their communities, with potentially perilous consequences.”

4. Data from the incident registration system of the police, the Basic Enforcement Service (BVH).
5. This has been observed in many reports about ethnic profiling. For more information see: Amnesty International, “Gelijkheid onderdruk: de impact van etnischprofileren”, 2013; S. Cankaya, “De controle van marsmannetjes en ander schorriemorie, Het beslissingsproces tijdens pro-actief politie werk”, AcademiePolitie Amsterdam-Amstelland, 2012; and also a report which is written on behalf of the police to investigate the distrustfulness Muslims feel towards the police in terms of registering their cases: A. Ens, ”Discriminatiemeldenbij de politie?”, Den Haag: Nationale Politie, 2016.
Some key findings show that 76 percent of Muslim respondents feel strongly attached to the country where they live. Yet, 31 percent of those seeking employment have been discriminated against in the last five years. Regarding ethnic profiling by police, 42 percent of respondents who had been stopped by the police over the last year said this happened because of their migrant or ethnic minority background.

Another important report published before the elections is one by the SCP's (Social Cultural Planning Office) titled Kwesties voor het kiezen. In this, the SCP analyzes a number of social issues that are of interest to citizens, and that are expected to play a role in the campaign for the parliamentary elections of 2017 and the subsequent government formation. The report also pays a lot of attention to social contradictions in which Muslims and Islam play an important role.

One important outcome is the worry about the Turkish and Moroccan Dutch, who according to their survey have become more negative about their opportunities and life in the Netherlands. About 40% has “experienced discrimination more often.” The manner in which they have been discriminated, however, is not mentioned.

8. Ibid, p. 27.
Based on this research, the SCP does not assume that views on migrants have become more negative in recent years, but a large group of autochthonous Dutch people feel that the Netherlands will lose its identity. The report states that the great diversity (as in “backgrounds, religious convictions and norms and values”) contributes to this feeling. According to the SCP, the discussion about these issues is intensified because young people from migrant groups claim their place in society more emphatically than before.

Another point was the radicalization of Muslims. The Dutch in question (it is not entirely clear who these Dutch are) are concerned about groups that, according to the SCP, are “at a great distance” from Dutch society - “radicalized and extremist Muslims.” The most significant finding of this report is their advice to the government. The SCP posed the question of whether the government could have a role in reducing social unease and bringing citizens together. They came up with the following suggestion in relation to radicalization: “The government could also make a contribution by promoting the modernization of Islam and supporting liberal Muslims, as a counterweight to radical Islam, which has a strong attraction for young people.” This last point suggests that Dutch policymakers and advisers have considered the modification of the notion of non-interference in doctrines and religious organizations they embraced after 1983. New dynamics have challenged the stabilized secularization policy of the Dutch state that thought that it had made this process of secularization stable. The challenge of Muslims has made them, on occasion, desperate and they have broken their tradition of secularism. This report is a good example of how complicated it has been to deal with challenges. Although, on the other hand, the government has, of course, tried to do so for years. In this respect, the efforts to launch a program at universities to educate imams in the Netherlands, could be mentioned.

The bitter climate formed by politicians to gain more votes during their campaigns made Muslims in the Netherlands worry about their future in the country. This is reflected in reports and newspapers as “Plan B.” Many Muslims with Moroccan and Turkish background think of immigrating to the countries of their origin; this is particularly true of Moroccans due to Wilders’s focus on them. This return process has already started for Muslims with Turkish background. In 2015, about 2,500 or more immigrated to Turkey as opposed to Turks moving to the Netherlands, which was the dominant trend in the past.10

As mentioned above, on December 9, 2016, Geert Wilders was found guilty of defaming a group and inciting racial discrimination for leading a chant calling for

---

“fewer Moroccans” in the Netherlands. Wilders and his prosecutor appealed against this case. The prosecutor appealed against the decision of the court to not punish Wilders and Wilders appealed against his conviction. On his first pro forma hearing on October 24 his lawyer denied that Wilders’s statements about wanting fewer Moroccans in The Hague and the Netherlands led to actual discrimination against Moroccans. He argued that instead it should be seen as a call for the government to change its policy. During these first pro forma court hearings, Wilders repeated his habit of expressing his doubts about the neutrality of the judge. After another pro-forma court hearing on October 26, 2017, the substantive trial is set to start on May 17 2018, after the municipal elections in March.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Politics

The leading development in 2017 in the Netherlands was the Dutch elections. The parliamentary elections were held on March 15. Populism dominated the electoral campaigns of the different parties. The race mostly took place between the far-right party of Geert Wilders (PVV) and the centre-right party of Mark Rutte (VVD). The leftist parties were nearly voiceless.

The campaigns’ rhetoric was centred on the topics of Islam, immigration, and the economy. The main topics were the values and norms in the country. According to the survey of the research agency IPSOS on behalf of the Dutch broadcaster NOS, 86 percent of Dutch citizens “are concerned” about their values and norms and 10 percent were “very concerned.” This is a result of years-long discourse in which Islam and the culture of migrants have been presented as dangers to Dutch society. These worries of Dutch people are used by political parties in their campaigns.

Mark Rutte’s statement to the world during his campaigns was that the Netherlands would stop the racist domino effect of the far right. Instead Rutte and other centre-right parties gave ground with their speeches to racist and Islamophobic statements. The Christian parties focused on the conflicts between Islam and the Judeo-Christian tradition and Rutte’s party (VVD) targeted migrants and minorities with his open letter to newspapers calling them to act “normal” or to leave. The SGP (radical Christian party) published a manifesto titled Manifest Islam in Nederland (Declaration Islam in the Netherlands). Their declaration had roots in age-old biases from the Christian tradition towards Islam such as “The love offer of Jesus Christ and Muhammad’s use of violence is as different as night and day.”


12. Ibid.


12. Ibid.
party emphasized the danger of Islam and associated Islam with violence and emphasized that this violence, unfortunately, no longer stops at the gates of Vienna. Islamic violence is entering, according to them, many European cities. The Christian Democrats (CDA) called for the ban of the financing of mosques from abroad and was wary of “radical Islam” in their campaign.

The aforementioned facts demonstrated that not only far-right parties such as the PVV and the FvD used anti-Islam sentiments in their campaigns, but also other parties, like the liberals and moderate Christian parties. Due to their fear of losing votes and their desire to attract voters from the political right, especially from Geert Wilders’s Party for Freedom, they used nearly the same rhetoric as the far-right parties. This harsh climate is criticized by many institutions like Amnesty International and the Netherlands Bar (Nederlandse Orde van Advocaten, NOvA/ Dutch Association of Lawyers) which analyzed the campaign programs of political parties from a juridical perspective. Populism in the Netherlands is going too far, according to Amnesty International. “For example, when Geert Wilders talks about Moroccan scum. But also when the Dutch prime minister writes an open letter calling on migrants to act normal or go away,” stated Amnesty International. These institutions stressed that “stories about blame, hatred and fear globally haven’t been on this level since 1930.” Similarly, the Netherlands Bar announced its concerns about the content of the campaigns. According to their report, published in February, the alarming results of their research showed that an average of 40 percent of the electoral programs directly contradicted the rule of law. In particular, the last five surveys of the extreme right-wing Freedom Party (PVV) violated these principles. The other parties are the Liberal Party (VVD), the Christian Democratic Party (CDA), the Socialist Reform Party (SGP), and the Party for the Netherlands (VNL). In addition, compared to the electoral programs in 2012, the rate of taking security measures which contradict the rules of law was increased by 40 percent. The controversial topics which led the parties to violate the law to the highest degree were immigration, refugees, terrorism, and extremist Islamists.

On March 15, 2017, general elections took place. The People’s Party for Liberty and Democracy (VVD), led by Prime Minister Mark Rutte, gained the highest results although the party suffered a huge loss of votes. The party, which had previously been deputy in the House of Representatives with 150 seats, could now issue 33 deputies (21.3%). The party of Geert Wilders, the Freedom Party (PVV), won 20 seats (13.1%) and followed the VVD. This was a victory for Wilders since his party raised its number of seats from 15 to 20. Following the Liberty Party were the Christian Democratic Party (CDA) with 12.4% and the Democrats 66 (D66) with 12.2%, who managed to get 19 deputies in the parliament. The Green Left (GL) and the So-

The Socialist Party (SP) received in total 14 seats in the parliament (9.1%). It can be said that the Green Left Party, which won 4 seats benefited from the election. Tunahan Kuzu and Selcuk Ozturk, who were removed from the Labour Party (PvdA) because they did not cast a vote of confidence to the party’s integration policy, founded their own pro-diversity party, DENK, in 2015 and gained 3 deputies (2.1%) in this election.

The campaigns held before the elections soon turned into a race between Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Geert Wilders. Wilders managed to put Islam at the centre of the election campaigns. The liberals fervently wanted to attract voters from the political right, especially from Geert Wilders’s Party for Freedom (PVV), which according to the polls had the highest votes. The trend of attracting voters from Wilders was also pursued by the Christian Democrats and other Christian parties in the race. This harsh climate of election campaigns will continue in 2018 with the upcoming municipal elections.

Justice System

After the decision by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) on 14 March 2017 to consider the headscarf in the workplace illegal, the National Human Rights Institute of the Netherlands declared that the European Court of Justice’s ruling was not a license for employers to refuse or dismiss women with headscarves in the workplace.

On October 20, 2017, the National Human Rights Institute judged that the National Police discriminated against a police officer by not allowing her to wear a headscarf in combination with her uniform. The officer in question, Sarah Izat, was allowed to wear a headscarf while performing her administrative duties, but was not allowed to wear it in combination with her uniform. The police argued that the goal of wearing a uniform is to appear neutral and prevent expression of belief. They felt that wearing a headscarf with the uniform could harm the impartiality of the police and jeopardize the safety of the police officer. They were not able to convince the institute, however.

In this case, according to the institute, there is direct discrimination on the basis of religion; in other words, a person is treated in a different way than another in a comparable situation, on the basis of religion. This is violation of Article 1 of the General Equal Treatment Act (Algemene wet gelijkebehandeling AWGB). The institute’s ruling is not binding, but does carry weight politically.14

On July 10, 2017, the court of The Hague decided that a school in The Hague has to pay the mother of two pupils compensation because the children missed the school photos. The photos were to be taken on the same day as the celebration of the Islamic sacrificial festival. The judge assigned the woman 500 euro. The children

received the compensation because their school, according to the sub-district court judge, made a distinction between pupils and this is not permitted under the General Equal Treatment Act (AWGB).15

The director of the indoor children’s playground De Ballebak Nederland B.V. asked the National Human Rights Institute to assess whether he would be guilty of discrimination on grounds of religion if he forbade clients from praying at his playgrounds. He also wanted a verdict on whether he could put a sign with the following text: “In our playground we also have freedom of religion, but open confession by specific actions is forbidden by us. You will therefore be denied further access.” The institute is of the opinion that the applicant is free to decide for himself what purpose and for what kind of activities he offers his business premises. Equal treatment legislation does not mean that the applicant should be obliged to set up a separate room in which visitors can pray. The institute did, however, point out that visitors are not allowed to be refused access to their playground because of their religion. However, this is not the case here – on principle everyone is welcome. The institute judged that the applicant will not make a prohibited distinction on the grounds of religion if he forbids his visitors to pray at the children’s playground.16

Employment
The labour market is still the place where the most instances of discrimination continue to occur. Research by the Social Planning Office (SCP)17 shows that unemployment is still higher for immigrants in comparison to the indigenous Dutch. Non-Western migrants, and in particular their children born in the Netherlands, have, according to the researchers, become less positive in recent years about their chances and lives in the Netherlands. Especially young people of the second generation are very concerned about their chances in the labour market - and the changing social climate in the Netherlands.

According to an undercover research conducted by the youth action group Doetank PEER in February 2017, many temporary employment agencies are involved in racism. The members of the research group presented themselves as a ‘Dutch events company’ that was looking for only white temporary employees. The young action group fabricated the fictional company ‘Holland Danst.’ This events agency was supposedly looking for temporary workers. There were no requirements

17. SCP: Kwesties voor het kiezen, Den haag (February 13, 2017), retrieved January 20, 2018, from: https://www.scp.nl/Publicaties/Alle_publicaties/Publicaties_2017/Kwesties_voor_het_kiezen?_sp=e132676-06c7-4ca5-8c6d-ace712333d6.1517382442643.
except that the employees had to be white. “What baffled us the most was the obviousness of the request. Most employment agencies did not have any questions or comments. Some admitted that it was discriminatory and against the law, but then rushed to emphasize that they could nevertheless help us,” says initiator Lyle Muns. About 70% of the temporary employment agencies saw no problem in the racist request. “We did expect that a number of agencies would want to work with us, but that there would be so many, that it would be so easy and open shocked even us. Shameless!” says Muns. As to the reaction of the politicians, mention must be made of the party leader of the Groen Links in Amsterdam, Rutger Groot Wassink, who requested an emergency debate.

Furthermore, a survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) shows that among European countries, Muslims in the Netherlands feel increasingly discriminated, which is also felt on the labour market. The survey shows that one out of every three Muslim is the last five years felt that they had been discriminated against in finding work, but that only 12% of the Muslims reported the latest case of discrimination.

Yet, it has become routine to read in the papers that someone is refused a job due to her/his religious background. Just as previous research, this study showed that Muslim women who wear headscarves are the majority of victims. In December 2017, a Muslim girl who applied to work at the new McDonald’s branch in Oosterhout, near Nijmegen, was allowed to come to a meeting, was accepted, but on the condition that she takes off her headscarf when she starts work. The new McDonald’s claims it wants to radiate ‘neutrality.’ The burger franchise relies on the ruling by the European Court of Justice of March 2017.

**Education**

In the Netherlands, discrimination is often discussed in the guise of segregation. One third of the primary schools in the largest 38 municipalities do not reflect the social structure of the local region. The population of Dutch and immigrant students are not balanced in schools. In this sense, white flight is a developing phenomenon. Parents with Dutch origins occasionally conspicuously select schools with little or no immigrants for their children. This leads to segregation in schools. Sometimes this is not only due to the selection of the parents but primary schools structurally refuse pupils on the basis of their ethnic origin. In many cases this happens with non-transparent, ‘unfair’ admission procedures. Schools fear becoming ‘black’ and that their Cito score (i.e. the assessment to determine which type of secondary school

---


a child should go to) will be negatively influenced by the admission of many ethnic minority pupils, sometimes with language and learning disadvantages. As a result, they believe, their schools will end up in a downward spiral and will no longer be attractive to native Dutch parents.

In this sense, a research by the Amsterdam Municipal Research, Information and Statistics Authority of Amsterdam and its nearby area in previous years gives us a good picture of this segregation. They conclude that the segregation phenomenon at schools is at a high level. It is observed that there is still a serious division in the distribution of school types in secondary education in terms of the educational level of parents and the social roots of students. According to the institution, in secondary education, segregation is observed at a higher level than at primary education. One of the main reasons for this distinction is the advice given by the schools and teachers in primary education. While students with highly educated parents are frequently referred to good schools, low-educated and immigrant students are advised to go to lower-level vocational schools.

Another difficulty in education faced by Muslims students is in finding an internship and here, girls wearing headscarves are the major victims. One research carried out by KennisplatformIntegratie&Samenleving in the regions of Utrecht, Rotterdam and Amsterdam, on 120 MBO (Middle Vocational Education) students and education, revealed that 10% of students encountered discrimination in the process of searching for internship. About 33% of the respondents stated that they would not be able to declare that they are discriminated against. Researchers explained this as a two-sided drawback: on the one hand, students and supervisors avoid Dutch companies because of the risk of being rejected and, at the same time, they avoid responding to discriminatory signals. The students who are experiencing an internship problem later experience the same in the process of searching for work.

Another educational problem was the textbooks used in education. It is revealed that some secondary school textbooks, especially those related to humanities, contained prejudiced information on Turks, Muslims and Islam.

Due to the increasing demands of the Muslim population and educational freedom, many Islamic schools have been opened. The Dutch constitution, allows faith-based schools to be founded and they receive government funding. However, non-profit religious organizations are not eligible for funds, other than

---


for organizing non-religious socio-cultural activities. Religious schools qualify for funding under Article 23. The foundation of the first Islamic primary school was in 1988 and in the following years, new Islamic schools were opened. An apparent increase has been observed in the number of these schools. Their success has been growing in the last years and the government selected some of the Islamic schools for medals of excellence. But their establishment is not always easy. Sometimes they face protest from the neighbourhood and there are municipalities that put obstacles in their way by, for example, not making buildings available to them. Many politicians oppose their existence and see them as a hindrance to integration. In this sense, the Islamic primarily school Yunus Emre located in The Hague since 2014 wants to open a school in Zoetermeer. Their request has been refused several times by the municipality of Zoetermeer. But, in 2017, the minister of education obliged the municipality to offer a location to the school. The municipality refused and, despite research to the contrary by the school, the municipality claimed that according to their survey there will not be sufficient interest in Islamic primary schools in their town. This case shows that despite opportunities offered by the law, Muslims face difficulties in the realization of their demands. However, this does not discouraged Muslims parents, who increasingly select Islamic schools because of their educational quality.

Media
The media are focused on polemics and sensation and instead of seeing the whole picture; they focus on their vulgarizing and one-sided view. Most of the time, there is less or no space for counter-narratives by Muslims and Muslims who affirm the image created by politics and media are given space. Terms like “hate preacher,” “Jihad families” and “hate beard” are regularly used to frame Muslims. Since Muslims are usually portrayed in a negative way as violent and terrorists, mosque attacks often take place after terrorist attacks. In this sense, the media play the helping hand of populist politicians such as Wilders and target Muslims in an indirect way. One example of this was the news report on a Flemish school in Belgium where it was claimed that Muslim toddlers made radical statements. According to this report the toddlers quoted Koran verses during the break, called classmates ‘pigs’, and a girl refused to give a boy her hand. A child even expressed death threats. This was reported by the newspaper Volkskrant with the headline “Doodsbedreigingen en scheldpartijen door ‘napratende’ islamitische kleuters in Vlaanderen,” (Death Threats and Verbal

Abuse by ‘Parroting’ Islamic Pre-schoolers in Flanders). The focus is on parroting here, implying that the children had learned all this from their parents; the article questioned where the children could hear such words. The focus was on their parents who were unfortunately radicalized. Nearly at the same time, Pegida Nederland locked the gate of an Islamic primary school in Leiden in the Netherlands and left a note with a skull. On their first day of school, the students had to leave the building through the backyard door. Pegida’s attack was reported as an “action” by the media. The headline of one prominent newspaper read “Pegida Demands Action at Islamic Primary School in Leiden: ‘New fascism is Undesirable’” (Pegida eist actie bij islamitische basisschool in Leiden op: ‘Nieuw fascisme is ongewenst’) This trivialized the attack by describing it as a peaceful action.

The role of the media is very important in shaping the image of Muslims. This is shown by Verwey Joncker’s research “Anti-Semitism among Young People in the Netherlands - Causes and Trigger Factors,” carried out in 2015. In July 2017, this study was sent back to the House of Representatives. The report determined that young people with few contacts with Muslims base their judgment on Muslims mainly on the media and Internet reports. On average, these young people are less positive about Muslims in the Netherlands than young people who say that they base their judgment on Muslims primarily on their own experiences. Young people who have experiences with Muslims also state that media coverage about Muslims is more negative than their own experiences with Muslims. Most of the time the media reflects the opinion of mainstream politics. After the crisis between Turkey and the Netherlands, the media started to portray a negative picture of Turkish organizations. In a news report titled “Pro-Erdogan Turkish–Dutch Media Funded with Dutch Subsidies” they reported negatively about funds offered by the Dutch government. The timing of this news is remarkable since these funds dated from 2009.

Some news and reports of newspapers do not directly report about Muslims in an Islamophobic way but they emphasize some events or write articles in such a way that they contribute to Islamophobic discourse. In this sense, De Telegraaf often writes articles in which attempts are made to confirm stereotypes


about Muslims. In January, *De Telegraaf* came under attack because of two headlines about criminal asylum seekers. The Saturday newspaper opened with “Asylum Hopper Invasion” and continued on page four with “Chance-Free Asylum Plague Unhindered.” (Fig. 2) Some compared the word choice to the Nazi era, in which also ‘Jewish plagues’ were used. There was also a call to advertisers to boycott the newspaper. As a reaction, the editorial board of *De Telegraaf* wrote in an commentary that the debate in the Netherlands often deals more with the pitch used for the phenomenon than about the approach to the problems themselves.30

Another example was their article about the so-called ‘failed’ integration of Muslims. According to the report of Kantar Public published on behalf of *De Telegraaf* 65 percent of Dutch people think that the integration of Muslims has failed and will never succeed. *De Telegraaf* presented these views as facts and they focused on terrorist attacks believed to be perpetrated mostly by “home-grown terrorists” which explains, according to them, this huge pessimism of Dutch people towards Muslims.31 But contrary to their report, the report published by BertelsmannStiftung32 in August 2017 showed that Muslims are sufficiently integrated and that Islam is not a hindrance to integration.

**Physical and Verbal Attacks**

Written threats against mosques, which have been regular occurrences in the last years in the Netherlands, continued in 2017. The As-Soennah Mosque in The Hague received a letter in which an anonymous writer threatened mosques or schools with an attack with a truck. The perpetrator begins the letter with “Don’t forget that you’re vulnerable too in Europe.” “With every cowardly attack on our citizens and children, a counter-attack can follow on your innocent visitors of mosques or whatever. A truck that hits a mosque or school! Don’t forget that!” the letter states.

“So beware.” The envelope also included a toy truck.33 (Fig. 3)

The police arrested two suspects on March 19 in connection to a video on Facebook showing a young Muslim woman being attacked by two men in Amsterdam Noord. The suspects put the video of their crime on Facebook. The video shows the woman, wearing a hijab or headscarf, lying on the ground and trying to cover her head with her arms while two men viciously kick and beat her. The men’s faces can be seen on the video. They are in custody on suspicion of public violence.35

Fourteen members of anti-Islamic Pegida Nederland held an early Sunday morning protest action against the construction of a mosque, with at least one person accused of dousing the site with pig’s blood. A video that the organization posted on Twitter and Facebook shows a man disguised as a priest planting a wooden cross at the mosque site, and then using a toilet brush to splatter the blood on the cross and around the location.36

On August 21, 2017, the front and back doors of the Islamic primary school in Leiden was chained and locked. A note with the threatening text “Dutch people oppose Islamic education” was left, including an image of a skull. The action only became clear when the director read the tweets. With this protest action, the group wanted to show “that the new fascism (Islam) in the Netherlands is undesirable.” According to Pegida, “Islam causes terrible attacks in Europe.” By closing Islamic schools, the problem is tackled at the root, according to the group.37

Internet

In recent years, the Internet became one of the important circles of discriminatory and Islamophobic hate speech. In the Netherlands, discrimination against Muslims has been reported to the Internet complaint lines, such as MIND, as Muslims have of-

34. Ibid.
ten been the target of discriminatory expressions. The MIND complaint line has received 918 complaints in 2016. This is described by MIND as a record number of reports filed on the Internet, an increase of 41% compared to a year before. Since its establishment in 2013, the number of reports has increased steadily. The reasons they give for this increase is their growing name recognition and visibility; the cooperation with anti-discrimination facilities (ADVs); interest groups and other partners; and the phasing-out of the MDI. Since the establishment of the reporting centre in 2013, the number of reports has increased annually. (Fig. 4) Most of the reports (33 percent) concerned discrimination based on origin.

MIND categorizes reports based on eight grounds of discrimination: origin, religion, anti-Semitism, sexual preference, disability, personal discrimination, and labour market discrimination. One third of the reports is related to discrimination based on origin. MIND also received many reports about expressions of discrimination on the grounds of religion (21%). Almost all reports based on discrimination on religion were related to Islam (185). Only three reports were about Christianity and other religions.

Another important report published in March 2017 was The Third Monitor of Muslim Discrimination by Ineke van der Valk. In the second part of the report, an in-depth investigation into the image of Muslims and Islam on two weblogs is presented. Through quantitative and qualitative research, Internet communications on GeenStijl and PowNed were analyzed since their creation in 2003 and 2013 respectively up to the end of 2015. Van der Valk selected GeenStijl and PowNed because they are now well-established news media with large visitor numbers. In total, this research concerns 18,000 articles and 260,000 comments about Muslims/Islam. The most remarkable finding is that a relatively small number of contributors set the tone on this site. On PowNed the discourse on Muslims/Islam takes a more prominent place than on GeenStijl. The image of Muslims/Islam is negative across the board to a great extent on both sites. The subject is often approached from the perspective of Muslims as cultural or political threats, or they are framed as objects of hatred. Marking points in the process

39. Ibid, pp. 4-12.
of racialization of Muslims that takes place on both blogs often relate to clothing and appearance of both women and men. With this, they aim to isolate Muslims from the rest of society, while their recognisability is enlarged. Commonly used concepts stem directly from the discourse of Geert Wilders, who reaps a lot of sympathy and praise. 40

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

For years and likewise in 2017, PVV leader Geert Wilders is the most prominent figure in the Islamophobia network in the Netherlands. Other Dutch politicians, due to their concern about losing votes in the elections, instead of functioning as role models who emphasize norms and values related to democratic principles, further cultivated Wilders’s Islamophobic discourse. Besides Wilders’s political party, the Forum for Democracy (FvD) of Thierry Baudet became a serious political factor propagating nationalist, conservative and Eurosceptical views. Baudet often comes under scrutiny for his contacts with alt-right and other extreme right political parties or figures such as Marine Le Pen and Jared Taylor.

Baudet appears to attract a lot of highly educated young people. It seems that he is seen as a decent alternative to Wilders. According to a research, 41 ‘civilized’, ‘intellectual’ and ‘clear tone’ are motives that make PVV voters switch to Thierry Baudet. It gives Baudet the potential to be more attractive to a broader group of voters than Wilders, who produced the following associations in the same study: ‘yelling/bellowing/tone is too loud.’ Baudet as the more decent version of Wilders is a frequently heard argument from FvD voters.

Baudet stands for a stricter immigration policy; in his party program, he clearly states that immigration policy must be aimed towards those who are needed in the Netherlands and who (also on the basis of cultural background) can be admitted. He uses subtle references to racism which, as soon as they are better packaged, create fewer problems. 42 He adopts nationalistic views, standing for protecting Dutch values through introducing the “Dutch Values Protection Act.” In his party program he states that, due to the arrival of large (Muslim) immigrant groups to the Netherlands, core values of Dutch society have been put under pressure. The other parties, he claims, have ignored this problem for the past three decades, letting it get completely out of hand and allowing all groups in society to confront each other. In the party program, he has included his desire to ban

foreign funding of religious schools and institutions. Although not mentioned explicitly, he is referring to Islamic schools and institutions that have often been discussed in this context. Furthermore, the program also clearly states that there will be a ban on the wearing of niqabs, balaclavas and other face-covering clothing in public. It appears that in the future Baudet will play an increasingly prominent role in the Islamophobia network.

Another figure which has to be mentioned here is Pegida Nederland. In October 2015, Pegida Nederland was founded and its prominent leader is Edwin Wagensveld. Pegida organizes protests in the Netherlands several times a year, including in Utrecht, Apeldoorn, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam. They frequently hold demonstrations against the arrival of (Muslim) refugees to the Netherlands, against mosques and Islamic schools. Their demonstrations have increased since 2015.

Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

Governmental and civil society initiatives to counter islamophobia mentioned in the previous *European Islamophobia Report* are still running. Civil organizations that collect complaints are the Collective against Islamophobia based in Amsterdam; SPIOR; a platform of Islamic organizations and mosques in Rotterdam; Facebook initiative Meld Islamofobie!; the Muslim women’s organization Al Nisa; and the Turkish Forum. Other organizations that campaign against Islamophobia are Contact OrgaanMoslims en Overheid (Contact Body Muslims and Government) and EMCEMO. The weblog “RepubliekAllochtonie” is still an important source of information on Islamophobia in the Netherlands. Also the Human Rights Institute College voor het Rechten van de Mens collects complaints and reports about Muslim discrimination. MIND is an important governmental project which each year reports on online discrimination.

A significant civil initiative was taken in February 2017 by the Christen Unie-SGP Maasstad party in Rotterdam. They called on volunteers to form a human chain around the mosque while the noon prayer was taking place. (Fig. 5) “As a symbol that you can live your faith in freedom in Rotterdam and that we will raise the barricades if this freedom is pressured”, the initiators said. This was after the Quebec mosque attack when Dutch mosques were afraid of attacks and had decided to close their doors during common prayers.

In a similar spirit, citizens arranged extra security for the Blauwe Mosque in Amsterdam and the Essalam Mosque in Rotterdam during prayers. In Amsterdam, the initiative for extra security was taken by the Security Pact against Discrimination, an organization

---


consisting of Muslims, Jews, Christians and a number of organizations. The Security Pact argued, “Let’s prevent fear of the Other prevailing and continue to build mutual trust and invest in structural contact.” This reveals that Dutch citizens are aware of Muslim discrimination and are eager to take initiatives to combat Islamophobia.

In Amsterdam, on September 23, the Islamophobia symposium was held. The event was organized by the NWO-subsidized “Forces that bind and/or divide” research program of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Amsterdam and the Collective against Islamophobia and Discrimination (CTID). One of the central issues of the symposium was how to respond to the different forms of Islamophobia in relation to ideas about secular society, security, the position of women, and the intersection of Islamophobia with other hierarchies such as anti-black racism.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The year 2017 was a year of elections. The elections dominated political sphere in the Netherlands. Many institutes such as Amnesty International stressed their dissatisfaction about the Dutch elections. They were alarmed by the rise of populism. A remarkable point was that this did not only concern Geert Wilders but also the Dutch prime minister and his open letter calling on migrants to “act normal or go away.” The Netherlands Bar also warned of its concerns about the content of the campaigns. According to the results of their research, an average 40 percent of the electoral programs directly


ISLAMOPHOBIA IN NETHERLANDS

contradicted the rule of law. The populist demands of Geert Wilders were also taken up by other parties in fear of losing votes. Certain discriminating views became ordinary. Many surveys reported that Muslims increasingly felt discriminated and not at home. Politicians influence the public opinion on Muslims so in this sense their discriminating views must be punished and not treated as freedom of speech anymore.

At the same time, we also saw attempts from civil society and institutions to increase inclusiveness, such as the recent suggestion by the police organization of Amsterdam that women with headscarves should also be able to work in a police uniform. This was a positive attempt to attract new officers with an ethnic minority background, and thereby increase diversity in the Amsterdam corps. However, this led to a storm of criticism and the National Police Chief Erik Akkerboom decided not to allow it. He said that he completely supports diversity in the Dutch police, but there is currently no support for this measure. This is a two-sided issue: on the one hand, it shows development in inclusiveness and, on the other, it shows us that Dutch society and the government are still not ready to embrace visibly recognizable Muslims. More focus must be made on inclusiveness and acceptance of Muslims in Dutch society in campaigns.

There is still a need for effective sanctions for violations of anti-discrimination legislation. Islamophobic acts and speeches, in specific, must be added to this anti-discrimination legislation. Muslims themselves are not participating enough in decision-making processes. Furthermore, more focus must be put on the acceptance of Muslims instead of their integration by policymakers and on the improvement of the communication between the Muslim community and Dutch society.

Forty percent of Dutch-Turks and Dutch-Moroccans don’t feel at home in the Netherlands, according to a study by the social and cultural planning office SCP. They are particularly concerned about their employment prospects in the country and regularly experience discrimination. In this sense policymakers have to take this issue more seriously and combat their discrimination.

There is little attention paid to far-right hate speech by policymakers, and often violence against Muslim or other non-white communities that could also be construed as a form of terrorism is treated as trivial incidents. Even in intelligence reports focusing on threats of violence in Dutch society, the presumption exists that most terrorist attacks are committed by people of a Muslim background.

Although in comparison with other European countries Muslims in the Netherlands report discrimination more often, recent research shows that these numbers are the tip of the iceberg. This has several reasons, but one important reason is that Muslims often have no confidence in the institutions where they file reports. Their belief that little effort is made to combat discrimination, which is increasingly reported and monitored, must be tackled with concrete steps.

47. The expression “tip of the iceberg” is used in the research of Inekke van der Valk, *Derde Monitor Muslim Discriminatie*, University of Amsterdam, 2017.
Chronology

- **31.01.2017**: Director of Amnesty International Eduard Nazarski said that the Netherlands is climbing in the ranking of unjust countries—a fact that causes concern to the organization.48
- **03.02.2017**: A civil initiative was taken by the Christen Unie -SGP Maasstad party in Rotterdam. They called on volunteers to form a human chain around the mosque during the noon prayer. 49
- **06.02.2017**: Pegida leader Edwin Wagensveld was arrested on Sunday afternoon during a demonstration by the anti-Islam movement in Utrecht. According to the police, he was arrested for unlawful demonstration.50
- **06.03.2017**: About 300 Muslims and non-Muslims gathered in the Al Kabir Mosque in Amsterdam on Sunday afternoon to show support for the city’s Muslim community. The organizers wanted to establish a counterpoint to the “hateful stories” spreading about the Islamic community.51
- **20.03.2017**: A young Muslim woman was attacked by two men in Amsterdam Noord. Two suspects were arrested in connection with the video on Facebook which showcased the attack.52
- **07.04.2017**: The Ulu Mosque in the city of Heemskerk was set on fire by unidentified persons.53
- **26.06.2017**: The As-Soennah Mosque in The Hague received a letter in which an anonymous writer threatened mosques and schools with an attack with a truck. “Don’t forget that you’re vulnerable too in Europe,” the letter begins. The envelope also included a toy truck.54
- **18.07.2017**: The Selimiye Mosque, which is under construction in the Netherlands, was attacked by a group of Pegida members who left a letter with Islamophobic content.55

• **21.08.2017:** A member of Pegida Nederland chained and locked the front and back doors of the Islamic primary school ErRisèlèh on Stadhouderslaan in Leiden during the night.\(^{56}\)

• **02.09.2017:** In Venlo, banners were hung on the roof and the minaret of the Tevhid Mosque, under construction and managed by Diyanet, by the far-right ID Verzet which contained Islamophobic slogans.\(^{57}\)

• **04.09.2017:** In Amsterdam, a banner was hoisted on the building of the Ambassador Cornelius Haga High School (Cornelius was the first ambassador of the Netherlands in the Ottoman Empire), managed by the Amsterdam Islamic Education Association, with mocking and Islamophobic slogans.\(^{58}\)

• **13.11.2017:** In Enschede, the site of a mosque under construction by the local Turkish population was entered by Islamophobic and xenophobic Pegida members where they subsequently spilled pig blood and shared the incident on Twitter accounts.\(^{59}\)

• **20.11.2017:** The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights stated that police administration workers can wear a hijab with their uniform.\(^{60}\)

• **21.12.2017:** The national force confirmed that the Dutch police set aside a ruling from the equal opportunities committee which said a Muslim officer should be able to wear a headscarf while dealing with phone reports from the public.\(^{61}\)

• **29.12.2017:** Smeray (16) from Lent applied for a job at the new McDonald’s in Oosterhout, near Nijmegen. She was allowed to come to a meeting, was found fit, but was told she would have to remove her headscarf in order to start work. The new McDonald’s claims it wants to radiate ‘neutrality.’ The burger franchise relies on a ruling by the European Court of Justice in March 2017. The ruling says that employers may refuse employment to women with headscarves if there is a good reason.\(^{62}\)

---


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

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

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

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

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

About SETA
Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) is a non-profit research institute based in Turkey dedicated to innovative studies on national, regional and international issues. SETA is the leading think tank in Turkey and has offices in Ankara, Istanbul, Washington D.C. and Cairo. The objective of SETA is to produce up-to-date and accurate knowledge and analyses in the fields of politics, economy, and society, and inform policy makers and the public on changing political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. Through research reports, publications, brainstorming sessions, conferences and policy recommendations, SETA seeks to guide leaders in government, civil society, and business, and contributes to informed decision making mechanisms.