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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In this manner, British Prime Minister Theresa May criticized Trump for 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. It is quite clear that Europe needs more courageous leaders such as Alexander Van der Bellen, the president of the Austrian Republic, who defended the rights of women to wear a headscarf in a country where the far right has become the leading political power.

Combatting Islamophobia on the European and the Supranational Levels

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

As an NGO coalition statement following the 4th Roundtable on anti-Muslim hatred, which was organized by the European Commission (EC) and chaired by the EU coordinator on combatting anti-Muslim hatred, David Friggieri, made clear, a “stronger and more concrete commitment and actions”7 are needed to combat

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

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

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

8. Ibid.
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-Gypsism.

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

The Rise of the Far Right in Europe

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

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

18. Ibid.
The Right Wing in Opposition

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

There are many examples of this blatant anti-Muslim racism, some of which will be presented here. In this context, the Northern League’s candidate for president of the Lombardy region of Italy warned that there is a “risk that the white race disappears and is replaced by migrants.”19 In Slovenia, right-wing populist and extremist parties are not strong enough to win elections, however they are very active on social media and in the organization of public events and protests. For instance, Nova 24TV in Slovenia broadcasted the following Islamophobic opinion: “Obviously, we do not have enough terrorists, rapists and other criminals in Europe. It seems that leading politicians want to bring even more. Only this can explain their desire for the ever-increasing inclusion of migrants and Muslims in European countries.”20

In Latvia, numerous pre-election programs of various parties for the 2017 municipal elections demonstrated unambiguous Islamophobic positions. In Riga, the Action Party of Euroseptics (Eiroskeptiķu Rīcības partija) published the following slogan in their program, “We are not against Muslims, we are against the Islamization of Latvia and Europe.”21 The National Alliance (Nacionālā apvienīb) was even more radical in its program in which it stated that it was “in support of not letting into Liepāja illegal immigrants called ‘refugees’ – potential criminals, terrorists and idlers! There will be no mosques here!”22

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In Hungary, the ruling conservative Fidesz competed in Islamophobic rhetoric with the far right. It finally managed to make anti-Muslim narratives become un-


contested and thus realized a support of an overwhelming portion of the population. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán became famous for the alleged conspiracy of George Soros to Islamize Europe with the help of “hordes of migrants raping Europe.”

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

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

Denying the Suffering

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

The (Mis-)Use of Education and Academia

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

Online Islamophobia

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

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

Legalizing Islamophobia

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

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

After massive protests in the entire country, the mayor had to withdraw the legislation for contradicting a number of basic rights guaranteed by the Hungarian Constitution. In November 2017, however, the local council voted in favor of the same legislation that was amended after merely removing any words referring to Islam from the text. Also, the Dutch Christian-Democrats (CDA) included a ban on the financing of mosques from abroad and were wary of “radical Islam” in their campaign program.

In Finland, a citizens’ initiative was launched to amend a law in favor of a “Burka Ban.” Among the initiators was Terhi Kiemunki, a former member of the Finns Party, who was convicted of incitement to hatred due to texts on her blog defaming Muslims. A spokesperson of the initiative was Jukka Ketonen, current chairman of the Finnish Defense League (FDL), who proclaims to be fighting against “Islamic extremism” and is known for other smaller initiatives such as demonstrations against “Islamization” before a school. In Denmark, a ban on full-face veils, a so-called “mask ban” (popularly referred to as the “niqab ban”) was proposed by the Danish

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.42 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.43 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.44

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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.\(^{51}\)

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

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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.52 Initiatives like this seem to target specifically Muslims, not extremists, and to restrain their scope of activities, which ultimately reflects already existing restrictions as discussed above.

**Steps Forward and Policy Recommendations**

The picture presented here shows us that there is an urgent need to counter these developments. And there is room for hope. Critical assessment of the current situation regarding Muslims in Europe is growing within parts of civil society. Not only are there more and more institutions that are working to bring attention to the rise in hate crime towards Muslims such as the Spain-based Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los Medios53 but there are also favorable developments such as in the Norwegian justice system which has developed positive steps regarding monitoring and convicting cases involving hate speech or discrimination against Muslims. Also, the German Federal Police has made a first important institutional step to combatting Islamophobia by documenting it: for the first time, Islamophobia has been included as a category of hate crime.

There are more and more politicians, who dare to openly speak out against the threat of Islamophobia. President of the Slovak Republic Andrej Kiska stood up for Muslims in his New Year’s speech. Also, Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen took a stance of solidarity with Muslim women wearing the hijab. Finnish Prime Minister Juha Sipilä called people not to respond to “hate with hate”54 in the aftermath of the stabbings by a Muslim citizen, which led to increased harassment, violent physical attacks as well as acts of vandalism against Muslim properties van-

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dalism towards Muslims.55 These examples of political courage give hope that there still exist reasonable politicians, who look beyond their ephemeral political careers, keeping the good of the whole of society in mind. With an increase of alternative right-wing media and social media bubbles as well as a general swing to the right, hate speech is becoming more and more normalised. In an especially extreme incident in the Czech Republic, children in a primary school in the city of Teplice were threatened with death in gas chambers; the class was comprised predominantly of children of Arab or Romani origin. Such incidents call for an unambiguous reaction on behalf of politicians and opinion leaders.

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

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

• The legal and political recognition of Islamophobia is of utmost importance. Therefore, a European-level conference on Islamophobia should be organized with the support of at least one EU Member State or the European Parliament.
• In this context, the European Parliament should adopt a resolution on combating Islamophobia with concrete policy recommendations and ways forward - as it did to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Gypsism.
• The adoption of EU standards for National Action Plans against Racism that take into account specific forms of racism, and include specific measures on Islamophobia with objectives and targets is necessary.
• EU member states should adopt national action plans against racism addressing Islamophobia as a specific form of racism.
• The European Commission should develop a roadmap detailing main policy instruments, issues and examples of good practice by Member States. This would function as a standard document that would be the basis for concrete operational objectives and action plans for the EU coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred.
• The European Commission’s coordinator on anti-Muslim hatred should develop a clear action plan for combating 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.

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

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

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

GERMANY

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

- **908 attacks** took place targeting German Muslims.

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

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

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

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

FRANCE

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

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

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

MALTA

- **7%** of Muslims have experienced physical violence.

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

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

**POLAND**
- In 2017, Muslims were the most targeted group representing **20%** of all hate crime cases.
  (Source: National Prosecutor’s Office)
- Between January and October 2017, there were **664** hate crime proceedings regarding attacks against Muslims.
  (Source: Ministry of Interior)
- **193** (29%) of those proceedings resulted in an indictment.
  (Source: Ministry of Interior)
THE 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

Samuel Alexey Sorokin is a PhD researcher in the Department of History and Civilization at the European University Institute of Florence. He earned his BA in History and Philosophy at the University of Bonn and his MA in Global History at the University of Heidelberg. He has studied at the University of Cologne, the University of Valencia, and the Russian State University of Moscow. His fields of research include nationalism, ideology, and political identity construction. His dissertation project treats the transformative impact of Russian Islam on the Russian national identity discourse since 1992. Email: samuel.a.sorokin@eui.eu

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Executive Summary

While government agencies have yet to present precise anti-Muslim hate crime statistics for 2017, the last report from September 2017, put forward by the Commission on Monitoring of Conflict Situations in Inter-Ethnic Relations of the Council of the President, confirms the general trend of the past three years, which points to the continuous decrease of Islamophobic attitudes in Russian society. According to this report, Islamophobia decreased by 10% in 2016, compared to 2015. Furthermore, Russia allegedly showed the “the smallest number of Islamophobic incidents of the ten most important European countries,” including Great Britain, Hungary, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Ukraine.1

In its recent poll on xenophobia, published in July 2017, the Levada Center supports the claim of decreased animosity towards people of particular confessions. Twenty-three percent of respondents have a very positive or positive attitude towards people of other confessions (4% very positive, 19% positive), while 17% have a critical or very bad attitude towards people of other confessions (14% critical, 3% very bad). Fifty-eight percent affirmed to be neutral towards people of other confessions.2

Alexander Verkhovski, director of the analytical center Sova, indicates that there are not sufficient qualitative surveys that allow a thorough analysis of public attitude towards Islam and Muslims.3 Only a small number of civil rights organizations specifically monitor cases of Islamophobia. The fact that some institutes providing existing statistics have a proximity to governmental structures, calls for a cautious and critical usage of their data. Some cases of violence or discrimination are assessed as xenophobic, migrantophobic, or fall under the section of hooliganism, hence preventing a thorough understanding of Islamophobia in Russia.

It should not be overlooked that the Russian government engages in a more conscious religious politics, and has enforced agencies as well as passed new regulations aimed at tackling Islamophobia. A number of committees and councils stand at the junction of dialogue between the state and Islamic institutions, as well as of inter-religious exchange.

Nonetheless, the Russian Orthodox Church continues to be not only a partner, but equally a competitor that perceives demands of Muslims for equal treatment of religions based on the secular nature of the Russian constitution, as a threat to its privileged position, which it justifies by historical and cultural specifics.

The Muslim community itself remains in a state of fragmentation. On the one hand, are the structures of the so-called “traditional Islam.” All-Russian Muslim Spiritual boards are the privileged associates and mediators between the government and the Muslim population. They return the favor of government support, with loyalty and moderate statements in instances of Islamophobia. On the other hand, there exists a multifaceted array of diverse Islamic communities that are excluded from governmental protection, as they do not fall under the definition of “traditional Islam.” Their theological positions cover all the range of Islamic exegesis: from Sufi split-offs over ethno-religious Islam, to Salafi and Wahabi stances. They do not have widely audible advocates and thus often become the primary victims of the law enforcements’ partially opaque measures against extremism and terrorism.
Краткое описание

Хотя подробные данные об исламофобии в 2017 году еще не представлены государственными органами, последний отчет сентября 2017 года, представленный комиссией по мониторингу и разрешению конфликтных ситуаций в сфере межнациональных отношений Совета при Президенте РФ по межнациональным отношениям, подтверждает общий тренд последних трех дней, который указывает на спад исламофобских настроений в российском обществе. Согласно отчету, уровень исламофобии снизился в 2016 году на 10% по сравнению с предыдущим годом. Более того, утверждается что в России «самый низкий уровень исламофобии среди десяти наиболее значимых европейских стран», включая Великобританию, Венгрию, Германию, Италию, Польшу и Украину.

В последнем опросе о ксенофобии, опубликованном в июле 2017, Левада-центр подкрепляет утверждение о понизившейся враждебности против людей других конфессий. 23% опрошенных проявляют очень положительное или положительное отношение к людям отличной конфессии (4% очень положительное, 19% положительное), в то время как 17% настороженно или очень плохо относятся к людям других конфессий (14% настороженно, 3% очень плохо). 58% респондентов отметили, что относятся к людям других конфессий равнодушно.

Александр Верховский, директор аналитического центра Сова, указывает на отсутствие достаточно качественных исследований, которые бы позволили провести глубокий анализ общественного мнения по отношению к исламу и мусульманам. Лишь небольшое число общественных организаций и институтов специализируются на мониторинге случаев исламофобии. Некоторые институты, предоставляющие статистические данные, имеют определенную близость к государственными структурами, что, следовательно, требует более осторожного и критического подхода в использовании подобных данных. Некоторые случаи насилия и дискриминации оцениваются как проявление ксенофобии и мигрантофобии, или подпадают под категорию хулиганства, что препятствует комплексному пониманию исламофобии в России.

Нельзя отрицать тот факт, что российское правительство задействовано в более осознанной религиозной политике – предоставило новые полномочия уже существующим ведомствам, а также привело в исполнение новые нормативно-правовые акты с целью борьбы против исламофобии. Ряд комитетов и советов являются узловым пунктом диалога между государством и исламскими институтами, а также в области межрелигиозного обмена.

Тем не менее, Русская Православная Церковь продолжает быть не только партнёром, но и конкурентом, который воспринимает требования мусульман соблюдать равенство религий согласно светскому характеру российской Конституции как угрозу её привилегированной позиции, которую РПЦ обосно-
выводит исторической и культурной спецификой. Сама мусульманская община продолжает находиться в состоянии раздробленности. С одной стороны, существуют структуры так называемого «традиционного Ислама». Всероссийские духовные управления мусульман являются привилегированными партнерами и посредниками между государством и мусульманским населением. В ответ на государственную поддержку они проявляют лояльность и выступают с умеренными заявлениями в отношении исламофобских проявлений.

С другой стороны, существует многообразие исламских движений, которые не располагают защитой со стороны государства и не приравниваются к «традиционному» Исламу. Их теологические воззрения включают весь диапазон исламской экзегезы - от различных ответвлений суфизма и этнократического толкования ислама до салафизма и ваххабизма. Из-за отсутствия структур, которые широко отстаивают их интересы в обществе, они часто становятся главными потерпевшими из-за нетранспарентности проводимых силовыми структурами контрэкстремистских и контртеррористических мер.
Introduction

In 2017, the Muslim community was particularly engaged in debating its freedom of religious expression in public spaces, after a school prohibited its students from wearing the hijab. The federal government mostly restrained itself from participating in the debate, and delegated the issue to the regional governments.

Lawsuits and legal claims over mosques (or buildings formally functioning as mosques), are common. Often, regional administrations succumb to the pressure of the local Russian Orthodox Church, which tries to prevent the expansion of mosques or other Islamic institutions.

On the local and regional level, cases of possible Islamophobia are not sufficiently circumvented. In some cases, it can be assumed that regional governments are not only inapt or unwilling to comply with their obligation, but that elements of the state security may be in complicity with the harassment, intimidation and assassination of Muslim activists. Likewise, the anti-terrorist and anti-extremist operations in the North Caucasus often come along with collective stigmatization of Islamic communities as extremist and unsupported accusations of terrorism.

The Yarov Bill, as well as a number of other amendments to existing legislation, equipped the federal service for media supervision with a new authority to counter extremism. While it allowed the blocking of numerous Internet sites propagating nationalism and religious intolerance, the laws equally resulted in the persecution of Islamic organizations and structures which civil activists and human right organizations claim have wrongly be labeled “extremist.”

Ostensibly as a consequence of more rigid interpretation of the penal code, mass media have noticeably ceased to exploit Islamophobic and xenophobic fear, as in previous years. The case of Ilias Nikitin, who was wrongly suspected of being affiliated to the terrorist bombing in a Saint Petersburg metro station, was, however, a showcase for mass Islamophobic hysteria, triggered and maintained in the course of several days by the media.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Politics

Mosque Controversies

A constant apple of discord between administrative authorities and the Muslim communities is the construction of mosques as well as other institutions connected to Muslim life. Often the local Russian Orthodox Church as well as nationalist forces publicly criticize or deploy their political leverage to prevent the regional administration from issuing planning permissions.
Such was the case with the commercial complex Muslim City, planned by the Spiritual Board of the Muslims in Bashkortostan. In September 2017, the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Bashkortostan filed a complaint against the municipality of Ufa for its alleged inaction to find a solution for completing the project construction, which was halted in 2016. (Fig. 1)

On August 3, 2017, the Muslim community of Kaliningrad wrote a letter of complaint to the president and the governor of Kaliningrad, demanding mediation in the conflict with the city administration, which had demolished the local mosque in 2014. In December 2017, the Kaliningrad community was granted the usage of a former museum building for the duration of one year - a short-term solution which did not change the precarious situation of the Muslims of Kaliningrad.

In Stavropol, the Muslim community has been denied the right to reclaim the historical mosque, which was closed during Soviet times, and which, since 1987, has been used as an art gallery. The municipality states that the building’s sacral character was changed in Soviet times, and thus the Muslim community has no right to restore the building to its previous religious function. In February 2017, Albir Krganov, head of the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Russia and mufti of Moscow, drew a connection between the issue of the historical mosque of Stavropol and the prominent and contested return of the St. Isaac’s Cathedral in St. Petersburg to the Russian Orthodox Church’s administration. He stated that just as he supports the legal ownership of the cathedral by the Russian Orthodox Church, the Stavropol mosque should equally be returned to its legal owners.

Debates over Hijabs in Public Schools

The legislation is not clear on the implications of the secular nature of education in Russia. Whether it means that religious symbols are generally not allowed in schools, or whether the law is to be understood solely in the sense that religious education does not fall under the field of activity of public schools, is an issue of debate.\(^\text{10}\) While the question of wearing the hijab and other religious symbols in public space has not been an issue as polarizing as in many countries of the EU, an incident in December 2016 triggered an emotional debate that continues to date. After the social media circulated pictures of students wearing hijabs and posing with weapons within the school building of the village of Belozer’e in the Republic of Mordovia, the school director categorically prohibited the wearing of the religious garment.\(^\text{11}\) (Fig. 2) In 2015, the village already attained a disputable fame for supposedly being a cluster of Wahhabism, with a disproportional high amount of people joining DAESH and other terrorist organizations in Syria.\(^\text{12}\) The school administration justified its decision as a “preventative measure” against extremism in the eve of the FIFA World Championship in 2018.

The Russian minister of education and science, Olga Vasilevna, publicly supported the decision in January 2017, thereby sparking a public debate. While Vasilevna underlined that she expressed her personal opinion, she wrongly referred to the Constitutional Court which she claims supported the prohibition of the hijab in 2013 and 2015. In truth, the public display of religious symbols is not clearly regulated. The right to wear ethnoculturally specific symbols is, however, protected by law. Thus, the discussion evolves around the evaluation of diverging court cases, the delimitation line of a headscarf and a hijab, as well as the question of the extent to which a religious symbol is distinct from an ethnocultural identity. Several decisions of the Federal High Court of Justice have left these questions open. While in 2003 the court ruled in favor of the hijab, it supported the decision of the Stavropol Region to prohibit the wearing of religious

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attributes by school students in 2013 and 2015.\textsuperscript{14} In the course of the heated public and strongly mediatized debate, the head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, spoke out against Vasilevna for having trespassed her competence and obtruding her personal opinion upon millions.\textsuperscript{15} On March 31, 2017, the Chechen parliament responded to the ongoing debate by approving the wearing of the hijab in schools of the republic.\textsuperscript{16} (Fig. 3)

Since Russian media affiliated to the state often decry Islamophobia in Europe and portray it as a negative example, against the background of which the interreligious relations in Russia appear all in all harmonious,\textsuperscript{18} the rising controversy around the hijab thwarted this narrative. Leading political figures as well as grand muftis of the national Muslim spiritual boards remained strikingly inconspicuous. In 2013, President Putin rejected the hijab as not belonging to the tradition of Russian Muslims.\textsuperscript{19} Yet, in 2017, the press-secretary of the president, Dmitri Peskov, made it clear that the Kremlin did not intend to intervene in the polemics and said that there can be no standard position on the issue. Apart from this, he repeated the obvious dilemma that while acknowledging the multi-ethnic and pluri-religious nature of Russia, it is equally a secular state.\textsuperscript{20} The head of the Commission on Migration Policy and Human Rights in the sphere of multiethnic relations, Bobrov, reaffirmed that the issue of religious symbols in educational establishments falls under the jurisdiction of the federal districts.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{14} Anastasija Mihajlova, “Verhovnyj sud Rossii priznal zakonnym zapret na noszenie hidzhabov v shkole”, RBK (Feb. 11, 2015), from https://www.rbc.ru/society/11/02/2015/54db1b9b9a79474d5bb8d028.
\textsuperscript{17} Source: Golos Islama, Feb. 1, 2017
\textsuperscript{19} “Putin pro hidzhaby i islamizaciju (Prijamaja linija 2013)”, YouTube (Apr. 25, 2013), from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-QKEPMq0mY.
Justice System

Yarov Law Controversy
In July 2016, the contentious Yarov Bill entered into force. The bill intends to strengthen Russian anti-terrorist efforts. It enlarges the competence of the security service, establishes new requirements for Internet providers, and facilitates the monitoring of religious organizations. The bill allows the confiscation and prohibition of religious literature deemed promotional of terrorism. According to the new law, missionary activism and public performance of religious rituals is only granted to members of registered religious organizations. Missionary activists operating outside of registered religious structures run the risk of being persecuted.22 According to Forum 18 News Agency, by August 2017, over 193 individuals and religious communities were brought to court under the new anti-missionary law.23

The Russian Muslim community is divided over the new law. Some spiritual leaders, like the grand mufti of the Saratov Oblast, Mukkadan Bibrasov, were critical of the fact that the law was ratified without integrating the expertise of religious scholars.24 The grand mufti of Tatarstan, Kamil Samigulin, decried the law as violating the rights of the Muslim community.25 The majority of North Caucasian muftiates, by contrast, have supported the new law. The grand mufti of Dagestan, Akhmad Hadzhi Abdullaev, expressed his hope that the new law improves the regulation of religious practice, and protects traditional Islam from radicalism as well as the misleading and arbitrary interpretations of self-proclaimed religious leaders.26

A petition against the Yarov Bill gathered more than 100,000 subscribers within a month. It was forwarded to a governmental commission, but rejected on January 2017.27 On October 2017, in a common effort, representatives of the Muslim spiritual board, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Evangelical Christian congregation and the Hare Krishna movement, drew a proposal for amendments to the law and forwarded it to representatives of the Public

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Chamber of the Russian Federation and the Council of the President of the Russian Federation.  

**Hizb ut-Tahrir**

In June, August and December 2017, fourteen members of the Hizb ut-Tahrir (prohibited in Russia since 2003) were sentenced to between 11 and 18 years in prison. The radical Islamist party repudiates secular governments, strives for the abolishment of non-Muslim political entities and declares the establishment of a Caliphate as its primary goal. It is prohibited in several countries of the EU, such as Germany, while operating freely in countries like Great Britain or Sweden. Despite its members adhering to a radical fundamentalist Islam, and the ideology of Hizb ut-Tahrir being essentially anti-constitutional in terms of denying the legitimacy of secular statehood, some human right groups question the legitimacy of branding the organization as terrorist. Hizb ut-Tahrir requires of its members to refrain from political participation, invocation of violence or active propaganda as a means to achieve the envisioned Caliphate. Experts from the civil rights society Memorial, the analytical center Sova, and the Committee for Civic Assistance have criticized the lack of distinction between extremism and terrorism within the Russian judiciary system, and condemn the application of the anti-terrorist criminal code, which results in higher sentences for the individuals. 


32. While it has not been proven to have participated in terrorism, Hizb ut-Tahrir has been actively supporting violent resistance against President Bashar-al Assad in Syria, and as recently as September 2017, warned Syrian Islamist factions from engaging in any kind of truce, collaboration or peace treaty with any of the secular forces on the ground. cf. http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.info/en/index.php/leaflet/syria/14067.html.


34. Source: Itar-Tass
**Tabligh Jamaat**

In December 2017, the Russian Security Service arrested 69 members of the Tabligh Jamaat movement (prohibited in Russia since 2009).\(^{35}\) (Fig. 5) The radical Islamic organization with an emphasis on missionary work is often suspected of indirect links to terrorist organizations. In 2003, the FBI stated that Al Qaida was using Tabligh Jamaat for recruitment.\(^{36}\) The group has been linked to two of the terrorists of the July 7 London bombings in 2005.\(^{37}\) However, the analytical center Sova\(^{38}\) and the organization Human Rights Without Frontiers\(^{39}\) consider the persecution of Tabligh Jamaat members under the current anti-extremist legislation as unlawful, because its members have not engaged in a call for violence or unconstitutional behavior.

![Figure 5: Members of Tabligh Jamaat arrested in Moscow, Nov. 14, 2017.\(^{40}\)](image)

**Nurculuk Movement**

Another group of individuals brought to trial under the anti-extremist legislation, were found in possession of the texts of the Turkish theologian Said Nursi. In 2002 and 2003, the Nursi movement was accused of espionage for Pan-Turkic nationalist groups.\(^{41}\) In 2008, the Federal High Court of Justice declared the Nursi movement an extremist organization, and prohibited its activity in Russia.\(^{42}\) In March 2017, five individuals possessing literature of Said Nursi, received suspended sentences from

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\(^{40}\) Source: video of the Federal Security Service


Human rights groups criticized the fact that the Russian courts deduced membership in the prohibited organization based on the confiscated literature.

On August 31, 2017, the European Court on Human Rights received a lawsuit filed by eight organizations termed terrorist or extremist by a Russian court decision, among which was Tabligh Jamaat.

**Debate on “Extremist Literature”**

That the possession of literature labeled extremist is sufficient for an individual to be tried in court under the anti-extremism law is sparking outrage within certain parts of the Muslim community. In 2013, a court in Novorossiysk outlawed a religious text by proclaiming it extremist, which led to a common effort by coalitions of the Muslim media, political leaders and religious authorities to address the federal government. As a consequence, the decision of the court was retracted. In 2015, Ildar Nurimanov, the chief of staff of the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Russia, warned the Duma in the annual session on the rights of Muslims in Russia, that the “festivity of prohibitions” against sacred texts of Islam ran the risk of sparking tension in the Russian Muslim community. 

Judging theological literature should not be conducted by governmental officers, as this contradicts the separation of state and religion.

Given that judicial officers are no experts in theological subtleties, spiritual boards have repeatedly demanded the inclusion of their proper exegeses of religious literature. Since a well-known case in 2015, when Ramzan Kadyrov threatened a prosecutor of the South Sakhalin court for having prohibited an Islamic book, whereupon the court repealed its previous verdict, there have been numerous examples of courts withdrawing their previous decisions under the vehement opposition of an increasingly politically pro-active Muslim community. Nonetheless, by 2017, the Federal List of Extremist Materials has exceeded 4,000 entries, and the issue of religious literature remains an area of conflict between governmental agencies and parts of the Muslim community.

**Persecution of “Non-Traditional” Islam in the North Caucasus**

Security agencies in some North Caucasian republics, a region which is witnessing a growing Islamism, take rigorous actions against Salafi structures, while other...
republics engage in a dialogue between Sufi and Salafi groups. Between May and December 2017, Salafi communities (or communities sometimes wrongly labeled as such) have witnessed a rise in persecution by security forces in Dagestan. Several Salafi mosques have been closed and individuals detained after prayer. Especially after terrorist attacks, ordinary Muslims complain about collective stigmatization, as well as the arbitrariness of police control and profiling - simply wearing religious garments or donning a beard attracts police attention.

The Law against the Offense of Feelings of Believers and Its Consequences

Since its implementation in 2013, the law against the offense of feelings of believers has diminished hate crimes against religions and arguably contributed to the decline of blunt Islamophobia in the media. The first verdict was in 2014 against a person who posted torrents of hatred aimed against Muslims on the social network Vkontakte. However, the law has been criticized by jurists and political activists as impeding the rights of freedom of conscience, freedom of thought and the freedom of speech, guaranteed in the Russian constitution. The overzealous application of the law, according to Russian deputy Oleg Smolin, who brought a modification proposal to the State Duma, jeopardizes with the rights of atheist, anti-clerical, and anti-religious positions. In the Tomsk region, a music festival of tribal and neo-pagan music was prohibited as it was said to contradict the traditions of the local Muslim population. As the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) points out, the definition of “propaganda of exclusivity, superiority or inferiority of a person on the basis of their religious affiliation or attitude towards religion” as extremism allows for the suppression of any open critical discourse on religion.

On the one hand, the law is intended to defend religious communities, but it equally provides religious communities with the judicial tool to interfere with secular cultural life, as evidenced in the reported cases of prohibitions of concerts, exhibitions, theater plays, and movie premiers. More importantly, it prevents public discourse on

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issues of religion in general, and consequently allows the concealment of critical issues relevant to religious communities. A survey aimed at evaluating the impact of the law on the work of editorial departments on federal TV stations, radio stations, Internet portals and print media, showed that new directives recommended the reduction, or entirely prohibited the usage of words “God,” “Allah,” or “atheist.”54 From the outset, many media ventures stopped broaching the issue of religion, except on occasions of Russian Orthodox or Muslim holidays. In the end, a law meant to protect religious beliefs, became an obstacle to the proper understanding and portraying of religious life, as well as divergent attitudes towards religion in society. A hostile atmosphere hindering open debates on religion, in turn, prevents the thorough understanding of the magnitude of persisting prejudices, including Islamophobia.

Employment

While Paragraph 3 of the Russian labor legislation prohibits the limitation of labor rights on the basis of gender, race, religion, nationality, origin or membership in social groups, in practice it is very difficult to prove discrimination in court. The law in place demands verifiability that an employer has violated labor rights on grounds of discrimination.55 Self-evidently, no employer explains a wage cut or a notice of termination of a working contract based on personal prejudices of any kind. Given the difficulty of proving discrimination in court, there are no reliable statistics on discrimination provably motivated by Islamophobia. Complicating the issue of statistically evaluating discrimination, is the challenge of accurately classifying and distinguishing discrimination caused by xenophobic, migrantophobic, or Islamophobic bias.

The program *Ne Molči* (Don’t Be Silent), broadcasted by Alif.tv, a nationwide Muslim TV station which started transmitting in June 2016,56 broaches issues of discrimination of Muslim citizens on the basis of origin or religion. It portrays individual cases of xenophobia, migrantophobia and Islamophobia in public places such as airports,57 by police officers,58 or in the labor market.59 (Fig. 6)


Education
Frequently, Muslim students in schools of higher education reported internal directives that prohibited religious dress codes or the right to perform obligatory prayers. In a publication of the online portal *Moslenta*, the dean for foreign students of the First Moscow State Medical University explains that the university falls under the jurisdiction of the law on education, which he claims prohibits the performance of religious rites in public. According to Marat Ashimov, the lawyer representing the hijab-wearing students in the aforementioned case of the school in Belozer’e, the administration of the Republic of Mordovia systematically discriminates against Muslims who publicly wear religious attributes. He spoke of an internal document within the Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute which instructs teachers to deny admission to exams to students wearing headscarves. However, no proof supporting the claim was provided.

Media
Apart from the media witch hunt of Ilias Nikitin, there have been no blatant expressions of Islamophobia on the part of public media outlets. To the contrary, Muslim life in Russia has received noticeably greater media coverage than in previous years. National TV regularly transmits events of inter-religious dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the national Muslim spiritual boards, as well as the wishes of the president and the leaders of traditional religious congregations on Muslim holidays. However, this outward manifestation of multi-religiosity with the purpose of strengthening social cohesion does not include broaching critical issues truly important to the Russian Muslim communities, such as debates over the construction of mosques, cases of discrimination in the public sphere, the labor market, as well as allegations of arbitrariness by security forces against Muslims. Hence, media outlets that disseminate cases of discrimination of Muslims remain mostly Muslim-owned media with high diffusion rates, such websites as islamnews.ru, islamonline.ru, info-islam, Alif-tv, etc.

60. Source: Alif.tv
The Case of Ilias Nikitin

The case of Ilias Nikitin stands as an exemplary instance of social mass hysteria, triggered by a terrorist attack and culminating in Islamophobic resentments. A few hours after a terrorist attack on a Saint Petersburg metro station on April 3, 2017, a media agency published the picture of a security camera that showed a bearded man in a taqiyya (head cap) entering the metro. Mass media quickly disseminated the picture identifying the man as the primary suspect. Yet, even after Ilias Nikitin saw himself in the media and immediately presented himself to the closest police station to forestall any future allegations, the media (most actively lifenews.ru) continued to diffuse the false story, live broadcasting every step of the “suicide bomber in a cap.”

(Fig. 7) When Nikitin boarded a plane from Saint Petersburg to Moscow, agitated passengers forced the crew to escort him off the plane. Furthermore, Nikitin lost his job in his hometown, Nizhnevartovsk, apparently under the pressure of the municipal commission of enquiry. A positive aspect in this case has been the resonance of civic society decrying the blatant injustice disseminated by the media. A petition demanding the reparation of Nikitin’s damaged reputation, and apologizing in the name of the citizens, was signed by over 6,411 people. The absurd story was intensely covered by other media, and may be an indicator of a changing sensitivity to the danger posed by Islamophobia.

Anti-Islam Critique and Islamophobia in Liberal Media

On March 26, 2017, an investigative video report on the corruption of Vice-President Dmitry Medvedev, released by opposition politician and blogger Alexey Navalny,
triggered the largest mass protest since the Bolotnaya protests in 2011.70 Strikingly, despite a small number of participants in the Republics of Tatarstan and Dagestan, the national popular Muslim media, on the whole, ignored the protests, concluding that the movement does not represent the interests of Muslims. This made apparent that even Muslim opposition leaders and civil activists have difficulties associating themselves with a protest movement whose leader continuously resorts to migrant-ophbic, Islamophobic and Caucasophobic stereotypes to mobilize public support.71

Navalny repeatedly rejected Northern Caucasus as part of the Russian Federation, and called it instead a territory in turmoil, controlled by a lawless fusion of criminal bands, whose citizens should be denied the right of free mobility within the Russian Federation. In 2011, he participated in a rally of Russian nationalists under the slogan “Enough feeding the Caucasus.”72 After the terrorist attacks in Paris 2015, he posted the article “Where Is the Orgy of Tolerance Taking Place?” where he decries the unchecked migration of “young Muslim men,” draws a connection between the rising Muslim population and the threat of Islamism, and opposes the rising numbers of mosque constructions in Russia.73 In November 2017, as a reaction to the launching of a toy product (Barbie doll), inspired by the first hijab-wearing U.S. Olympian Ibtihaj Muhammad, Navalny tweeted, “[It is a] promotion of humiliation. Girls are taught since childhood that they are not fully equal and should wear a headscarf.”74 (Fig. 8)

74. Alexey Navalny, Twitter (Nov. 15, 2017), from https://twitter.com/navalny/status/930736680461590528 .
75. Source: Twitter
Some Russian liberals stand out for their opinion that Islam is an ultraconservative social threat in an already increasingly illiberal society. This fundamental skepticism towards the admission of religiosity into politics prevented the integration of the political agenda of moderate Muslim opposition groups during the Bolotnaya Square protests in 2011.

Yulija Latynina, for instance, a prominent and reputable liberal journalist, imper turbably warns society of the monotheistic nature of Islam, which she claims makes it per definition an intolerant and totalitarian religion. She decries the government’s blind eye to the gradual Islamization of parts of Russia (particularly referring to the republics in North Caucasus) and the consequences she estimates to come with it.

To draw a demarcation line between critique of Islam, the analysis of political processes within the Muslim community, and the dispersion of Islamophobic prejudices, is difficult. The presumption that Muslims naturally oppose processes of liberalization and democratization in Russia, are, however, positions frequently expressed by analysts77 hence reinforcing a stereotype of the incapability of political Islam and modernist-reformist political movements.

**Physical and Verbal Attacks**

**Unsolved Assassinations of Imams in the Stavropol Region**

To date, five assassinations of imams that took place in the Stavropol region between 2012 and 2016, have remained unresolved. In 2016, Imam Ravil Kaybaliev was killed, continuing the tragic list of murders in the region. Kaybaliev was a fervent critic of the Yarov Bill, and the prohibition of the hijab by the Stavropol administration. While some media highlighted his engagement in civil society, other media outlets focused on the imam’s alleged closeness to the local Salafi community. The ineffectual investigations by the commissions of inquiry nourish the allegation of government-critical Muslim media, such as Kavkazkiuzel.com, that the federal government is not interested in solving the cases. Some family members of

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the victims recalled prior harassment by the security forces. The anti-government media agency Onkavkaz.com interprets the local administration's alleged inaction as a coordinated cover-up policy of the Stavropol administration. The investigative news portal argues that the local administration prevents the investigations of the “death squads,” which Onkavkaz incriminates in the recent assassinations, and which it links to the regional security services. There is no proof of these allegations.

**Internet**

In 2017, the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media blocked a number of internet sites propagating nationalism and religious intolerance. Among them were Pravi Vzgliad, Russki Sektor, and Pravi Sektor. The Federal Service equally blocked the widely popular website Sputnik i Pogrom, which had an average of 1.4 million monthly visitors (June 2017). The radical right is undergoing a profound crisis, and as a result of internal conflicts and increased fragmentations, it is no longer as publicly perceivable as in previous years. The decrease of nationalist and Islamophobic rhetoric in the public discourse and the hindered access to social media to articulate nationalist and Islamophobic standpoints will arguably have positive consequences in the long run.

**Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network**

There are no nameable figures that put Islamophobia in the center of their political or publishing activity, as is the case in some countries of the EU, or within the Alt-Right movement of the United States. Some prominent figures, such as nationalist Aleksandr Potkin or the Russian Orthodox priest Daniil Sisoeov have concentrated on Islamophobic writings. However, while Sisoev reaches a limited audience of radical Christians, Potkin, as many other nationalist leaders, has recently concentrated his attention on the Ukraine crisis, which has divided the Russian nationalist movement. The legislative restriction, on the one hand, and new topics perceived as more pressing than the “threat of Islam,” have resulted in Islamophobia persisting, but have not allowed room for prominent public figures, willing or capable of mobilizing large popular support, to systematically exploit the topic.

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Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The general tendency points to an amelioration of the situation of Russian Muslims, and the growing acceptance of Islam as being an integral pillar of Russian society, history and identity. Recent sociological surveys and research studies affirm a decline in xenophobia and Islamophobia in the past years. Strict law enforcement has equally, arguably to the expense of freedom of expression, reduced the margin of tolerance for critique against “traditional” religions, including Islam. Openly racist, xenophobic or Islamophobic Internet sites have been blocked, and the media has become more cautious in reproducing xenophobic and Islamophobic stereotypes. At the same time, Islamic communities that are not considered “traditional,” are stigmatized as extremist, and their members thrown under the bus of the justice system. Strong xenophobic and migrantophobic dispositions prevail in society, although they have apparently diminished in number. However, the relatively small number of NGOs continuously monitoring Islamophobic incidents, the difficulty to prove discrimination on the basis of Islamophobia in court, and a lack of interest by the national media to investigate such cases, may result in hostility towards Islam being more common on the ground than it is perceivable or retraceable.

• Recommendations for media: The media’s increasingly cautious approach towards Islam is the first step in the right direction of confining Islamophobic stereotypes from entering the public sphere. However, it is not sufficient to contain the dispersion of such images, in the attempt to fulfill governmental requirements of duplicating a narrative of Russian multi-ethnicity and pluri-religiosity. Mass me-

Figure 9: President Vladimir Putin greeting Grand Mufti Gaynudtdin and Grand Mufti Tazhuddin, heads of Russia’s two main spiritual boards of Muslims, together with other spiritual leaders of Russia’s traditional religions, on the holiday of National Unity, 2017.

88. Source: DUM RF
dia should not be engaged in concealing xenophobia and Islamophobia, but in actively broaching the issue and sensitizing the population. One of Russia’s biggest media holdings belongs to Alisher Usmanov, yet, despite being Muslim, he avoids positioning himself clearly on topics troubling Muslim society, or using his media empire in raising awareness of the topics relevant to Russia’s Muslim community. With some exceptions, there is an apparent lack of perceivable Muslim experts of diverse political stances in mass media, who can represent the Muslim community instead of letting non-Muslims speak on their behalf. A pleasant process in this regard is the growing Muslim media landscape. From the newly established national Alif.tv station, over to the large media holding ‘Islam’ by Ayna Gamzatova, to digital news agencies (e.g. islam-today.ru, islamreview.ru, islamrf.ru, as-salam.ru, islamonline.ru, and others), these media agencies are proof of a growingly politicized Muslim community that is eager to make itself heard.

• Recommendations for Muslim advocacy: The multitude of Muslim spiritual boards mirror the ethnocultural specifics of the many forms of Islam in Russia, and are equally a reflection of the complex federative nature of the state. While this diversity is most desirable, there are equally several All-Russian Muslim spiritual boards that claim to speak on the behalf of the entire Muslim population. The main umbrella organizations, namely, the Russian Council of Mufties/Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Russian Federation, the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Russia, and, as of 2017, the Russian Association of Islamic Accord, assemble various regional spiritual boards around each other, with constantly changing coalitions. This status quo of permanent rivalry is unhelpful for the establishment of a strong advocate of Muslim rights in public and vis-à-vis the government. It is recommended that these spiritual boards speak with one voice, or delegate the right to do so, on behalf of Russian Muslims on issues that concern the entire Russian ummah.

• Recommendations for issues of discrimination: It is recommended to add amendments to the paragraph on discrimination, with the purpose of facilitating the pressing of criminal charges in court. Furthermore, it is important to delimitate xenophobia, migrantophobia and Islamophobia from one another. It is not always clear whether the difficulty of drawing a demarcation between different hate crime categories is motivated by consciously wanting to obscure Islamophobia, or by the definitional and judicial difficulties in the nature of the matter.

• Recommendations for anti-extremist legislation: The problematic definition of what is extremist gives the organs of law enforcement a flexible legal tool to sanction people or organizations for adhering to “non-traditional” religions. The process by which print and audiovisual material are put on the federal list of banned materials remains intransparent and reflects, for the most part, arbitrary court decisions that take into account the recommendation of “experts” and prosecutors without pro-
found religious education. To make persecution of extremist literature more sanctified and comprehensive to the Muslim population, it is recommended to create a nexus between secular legislative structures and religious authorities who by virtue of their theological expertise could reduce the danger of misjudgment.

**Chronology**

- **24.01.2017**: Russian minister of education publicly supports the decision of a school administration to prohibit the hijab at public schools, thereby unleashing a public debate.
- **02.02.2017**: Albir Krganov supports the claim of the Russian Orthodox Church on St. Isaac's Cathedral in St. Petersburg, and draws a connection between the issue and the demand to return the historical mosque of Stavropol to the Muslim community.
- **31.03.2017**: Chechen parliament approves the wearing of hijabs at schools.
- **03.04.2017**: Ilias Nikitin is falsely portrayed by the media as the principal suspect after a terrorist bombing in St. Petersburg. The media witch hunt lasts days, stirring Islamophobic prejudices.
- **03.08.2017**: The Muslim community of Kaliningrad writes a letter of complaint to President Putin and the governor of Kaliningrad, demanding mediation in the conflict with the municipality over the construction of a mosque. In December, the community is given a provisional building at their disposal for the duration of a year.
- **31.08.2017**: The European Court for Human Rights receives a lawsuit by eight religious organizations who have been labeled extremist by Russian court decisions.
- **13.09.2017**: Complaint of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Bashkortostan against the municipality of Ufa for retaining and not resolving the discordance regarding the Muslim-City complex.
- **15.11.2017**: Anti-corruption activist and opposition leader Alexey Navalny tweets against a hijab-wearing Barbie doll, denouncing the hijab as a symbol of female oppression.
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 the 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.