By gathering 39 local scholars, experts, and civil society activists specialized in racism and human rights, the fourth edition of the European Islamophobia Report addresses a still timely and politically important issue. All 34 country reports included in this book follow a unique structure that is convenient, first, for comparing country reports and, second, for selected readings on a particular topic such as politics, employment, or education with regards to Islamophobia across Europe. The present report investigates in detail the underlying dynamics that directly or indirectly support the rise of anti-Muslim racism in Europe. This extends from Islamophobic statements spread in national media to laws and policies that restrain the fundamental rights of European Muslim citizens. As a result, the European Islamophobia Report 2018 discusses the impact of anti-Muslim discourse on human rights, multiculturalism, and the state of law in Europe.

This fourth edition of our report highlights how European societies are challenged by the rise of violent far-right groups that do not only preach hatred of Muslims but also participate in the organization of bloody terror attacks. The rise of far-right terrorist groups such as AFO (Action of Operational Forces) in France or the network Hannibal in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland confirms EUROPOL’s alarming surveys on the growing danger of right-wing terrorism.

This year, SETA worked in cooperation with the Leopold Weiss Institute, an Austrian NGO based in Vienna dedicated to the research of Muslims in Europe. In addition, the European Union has funded the European Islamophobia Report 2018 through the program “Civil Society Dialogue Between EU and Turkey (CSD-V)”.

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 at the Turkish-German University since 2013. Currently he is also the coordinator of SETA Brussels office and 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.

Farid Hafez
Farid Hafez, PhD (Political Science, University of Vienna), is currently lecturer and researcher at the University of Salzburg, Department of Political Science and Sociology and senior researcher at Georgetown University’s “The Bridge Initiative” at the School of Foreign Service. He defended his habilitation thesis on “Islam-Politics in the Second Republic of Austria” at the University of Salzburg. In 2017, he was a Fulbright visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley and in 2014, he was a visiting scholar at Columbia University, New York. Since 2010 he has been the editor of Islamophobia Studies Yearbook, and since 2016 the co-editor of European Islamophobia Report. Hafez has received the Bruno Kreisky Award for the “Political Book of the Year” for his anthology Islamophobia in Austria (co-edited with John Bunzl). He has more than 80 publications in leading journals such as Politics and Religion, Patterns of Prejudice, and German Politics and Society. His latest publications are Islamophobia in Muslim Majority Societies (Routledge, co-edited with Enes Bayraklı) and Feindbild Islam. Über die Salonfähigkeit von Rassismus (Böhlau).

For more information about the EIR:
www.islamophobiaeurope.com
islamophobia@setav.org
The Author

Nejra Kadić Meškić is a project manager at the NGO Center for Cultural Dialogue and an associate at the Islamic Community in Croatia. She finished the School for Economics and Business of the University of Sarajevo. She has seven years of experience as a program and campaign leader in the field of human rights, culture of dialogue, and youth and gender equality including the political and implementation level. She is familiar with the issues of human rights in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as she has worked in the NGO sector in both countries. In 2013, Kadić Meškić received an award by the BIH Parliament for her contribution towards the achievement of gender equality. She has experience in project management, event management, as well as in public relations and marketing. She is the author and co-author of strategic documents related to the improvement in the implementation of human rights. Kadić Meškić is also a trainer on teamwork and leadership in educational programs for youth. Email: nejra.kadic.sa@gmail.com

Disclaimer: Statements of fact and opinion in the national reports of the European Islamophobia Report are those of the respective authors. They are not the expression of the editors or the funding institutions and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union and Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Directorate for EU Affairs.

Executive Summary

The so-called migrant crisis divided the European political scene and provided certain public figures with material for developing anti-Islam and anti-Muslim rhetoric to incite Islamophobia and win political points that would give them power. There is now fear of a similar scenario in Croatia. Croatian nationalism is not anti-Islamic, but includes Muslims in its construction of identity. It used to call Muslims the “flowers of the Croatian people.” Unlike in other countries, in Croatia it is not easy to present Muslims as a foreign, enemy body. That is why this sentiment is not as prevalent here as it is elsewhere, but it’s important to continuously work on ensuring that the current European and world trend in politics does not overpower the inclusive Croatian tradition.

It is interesting to note that at some point, the so-called refugee crisis was replaced with the term ‘migrant crisis’ in the Croatian public space and media; the terms are not synonyms but antonyms, and different in terms of eliciting empathy and understanding. The use of proper and correct terminology in the media and public space in Croatia is still lacking.

People are reluctant to speak up when they feel discriminated on the basis of religion, because of vulnerability when expressing religious belief in public and respecting religious customs. This is the reason we don’t have true insight into the frequency of this type of discrimination in Croatia.

In the political sphere, the arrival and short-term accommodation of refugees was spoken of in terms of a humanitarian crisis. However, later emphasis shifted to framing it as a security issue, underlining the differences intended to make citizens wary or even afraid of refugees.

According to the European Court of Human Rights, political speech has the highest level of protection, but this protection is not absolute and does not include the right to hate speech. Social networks and the Internet are still spaces that contain the most hate speech. Spreading fabricated news that encourages hatred and fear appears to be the election strategy for the upcoming 2019 elections, the elections for the European Parliament, and the presidential elections in the Republic of Croatia.

In the world, conflicts that include violence of any kind are often linked to Islam, i.e. Islam is portrayed as a religion based on an intolerance towards everything that is not Islamic. However, in Croatia, we can still note the absence of any negative impact from the rise of Islamophobia in Europe.
Sažetak

Migrantska kriza podijelila je političku pozornicu Europe i određenim političkim figuramadala materijala da razvijaju antiislamsku i antimuslimansku retoriku kako bi na taj način potakli islamofobiju i time stjecali određene političke bodove i osvajali vlast. Sad postoji bojazan da bi se takvo nešto moglo dogoditi i u Hrvatskoj. Hrvatski nacionalizam nije protumuslimanski. On je, naime, muslimane svojevremeno zvao “cvijećem hrvatskog naroda”. Za razliku od nekih drugih zemalja, u Hrvatskoj nije lako predstaviti muslimanke i muslimane kao neko strano, neprijateljsko tijelo. Zato taj sentiment u Hrvatskoj ne cvjeta kao u nekim drugim sredinama, ali treba kontinuirano raditi da ta neka vrsta europske i svjetske političke mode ne nadjača tu inkluzivnu hrvatsku tradiciju.

Zanimljivo je da je u jednom trenutku takozvana ‘izbjeglička kriza’ u javnom prostoru i medijima u Hrvatskoj zamijenjena pojmom ‘migrantska kriza’, što nisu sinonimi već upravo suprotno, sadržajno se jako razlikuju u izazivanju empatije i razumijevanja. Uporaba korektnog i ispravnog govora u medijima i javnom prostoru hrvatskog društva i dalje izostaje.

Pojedinci, kada smatraju da su diskriminirani temeljem vjere, nerado o tome progovaraju, zbog ranjivosti kojoj su izloženi prilikom javnog očitovanja religijskih uvjerenja i poštivanja vjerskih običaja, a to je razlog zašto izostaje pravi uvid u kvalitet ove diskriminacije u Hrvatskoj.

O dolasku i kratkoročnom zbrinjavanju izbjeglica u Hrvatskoj u političkom spektru se u početku uglavnom govorilo kao o humanitarnoj krizi, no naglasak s vremenom preteže ka sigurnosnom problemu i sve se češće naglašavaju razlike zbog kojih bi građani trebali biti oprezni, pa i u strahu od izbjeglica.

Prema Europskom sudu za ljudska prava politički govor uživa najveći stupanj zaštite, ali nije apsolutno zaštićen, niti je sloboda političkog izražavanja opravdana za govor mržnje. Društvene mreže i prostor na internetu prostori su koji još uvijek najviše trpe govor mržnje. Širenje lažnih vijesti kojima se potiče na mržnju i kojima se sije strah gotovo je postalo predizborna strategija za nadolazeće izbore u 2019., izbore za Europski parlament i predsjedničke izbore u RH.

U svijetu, sukobi koji uz sebe vežu i nasilje svake vrste neizostavno se povezuju s islamom, odnosno islam se prikazuje kao religija u čijoj osnovi je netrpeljivost prema svemu što nije islamsko. Međutim, u Hrvatskoj i dalje možemo svjedočiti izostanku negativnog utjecaja rasta islamofobije u Europi.
Country Profile

Country: Croatia

Type of Regime: Democratic Republic

Form of Government: Parliamentary System

Ruling Parties: HDZ – Croatian Democratic Union

Opposition Parties: SDP - Social Democratic Party

Last Elections: 2014 Presidential Election (Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović won 50.74% of the vote against 49.26% that went to Ivo Josipović in the second round); 2016 Legislative Election (HDZ, HDS, HSLS: 61 seats; SDP, HNS, HSS, HSU: 54 seats; MOST: 13 seats; ŽIVI ZID, PH, AM: 8 seats; IDS, PGS, RI: 3 seats; STRANKA RADA I SOLDARNOSTI, REFORMISTI, NOVI VAL, HSS-SR, BUZ: 2 seats; HDSSB, HKS: 1 seat; NL-ŽELJKO GLASNOVIĆ: 1 seat; National Minorities: 8 seats)

Total Population: 4,284,889 (in 2011)

Official Religion: No official religion

Statistics on Islamophobia: N/A

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: N/A

Major Religions (% of Population): Christianity (86.28% Catholics and 4.44% Orthodox), No religion (3.81%), Islam (1.47%), Others (less than 1%)

Muslim Population (% of Population): 62,977 (1.47%) in 2011

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Islamic Community in Croatia (Islamska zajednica u Hrvatskoj)

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS); Human Rights House Zagreb; Are You Serious; International Organization for Migration (IOM); The International Red Cross; Save the Children; Center for Missing and Abused Children; Centre for Peace Studies (CMS; CPS); Croatian Legal Center; Center for Cultural Dialogue (CCD).

Far Right Parties: N/A

Far Right Movements: N/A

Far Right Terrorist Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

− Hijab Ban: No
− Halal Slaughter Ban: No
− Minaret Ban: No
− Circumcision Ban: No
− Burka Ban: No
− Prayer Ban: No
Introduction

During 2018, the Islamic Community in Croatia proved to be an integrative factor of Croatian society. Their activities included open dialogue with representatives of different religions, and they used every opportunity in the country and abroad to promote the well-organized and good relations between the Republic of Croatia and the Islamic Community as a minority religious community in the Republic of Croatia. In 2018, the construction of the Islamic Cultural Center in Sisak continued, and a mosque was opened in Bogovolja, Karlovac County. It is the fourth mosque in the Republic of Croatia, after the ones in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Gunja. The Islamic Community in Croatia published the first halal cookbook, a book of recipes that meet halal standards of food preparation and the use of food products. The community has managed to be successful in preventing radical behaviors since there are no members from the Republic of Croatia on battlefields around the world.

Hate speech in general, and towards Islam in particular, is present on social networks as well as other online content. The tragedy the migrants are experiencing contributes to the strengthening of Islamophobia and anti-Islamism. Although these phenomena are more present in Europe than in Croatia, it can still be claimed that they are experiencing a rise in Croatia as well. Politicians and other public figures are often responsible for this due to cherry-picking negative behavior and attributing extreme behavior to migrants and followers of Islam. This year, fabricated news and photographs were used to achieve this as well. People who use hate speech often call on their freedom of expression, which is wrong.

On the other hand, some media such as Internet portal Index.hr and political analysts such as Višeslav Raos and Žarko Puhovski warn that such behavior and attitudes of politicians are merely political populism, and that these statements by Croatian politicians and professors are xenophobic. One positive initiative was aimed at eliminating religious prejudice as an incentive to hate and gathered representatives of four religious communities for a debate; the representatives came from the Islamic, Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish communities. An important message from the debate came from the Bishop of Dubrovnik and President of the Council of Croatian Bishops’ Conference for Life and Family Mate Uzinić who stated, “Christianity will not be endangered by the migrants whom we will treat as Christians should. Christianity will be endangered by us Christians who will not behave as Christians.”¹

At the same time, an independent American institute, the Pew Research Center, known for its research on religious demography, conducted a survey between 2015 and 2017 in 34 countries among 56,000 adults over 18 years of age. According to the

published data, Croatia is the most tolerant country in Central and Eastern Europe. As much as 57% of respondents in Croatia said they would accept a Muslim as a family member. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, this percentage is 42%, in Serbia 43%, in Hungary only 21%, and in Italy 43%.² (Fig. 1)

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks
On Savudrijska Street in Borongaj, in 2018, an ugly sight appeared. An unknown perpetrator placed lumps of lard on death notices of two Muslims. The Islamic Community in Croatia issued a statement condemning this individual act.⁴ (Fig. 2)

---

³ Ibid.
ISLAMOPHOBIA IN CROATIA

Discussion of Islamophobia Incidents and Discursive Events

On Savudrijska Street in Borongaj, in 2018, an ugly sight appeared. An unknown perpetrator placed lumps of lard on death notices of two Muslims. The Islamic Community in Croatia issued a statement condemning this individual act.

![Figure 2: Lumps of lard placed on death notices of two Muslims in Zagreb (Savudrijska Street).](image)

According to the Ombudswoman’s Report, there were 17 complaints of discrimination on the basis of religion that were processed under the Anti-Discrimination Law in 2017 by the Ombudswoman, two by the Ombudswoman for Children, one by the Ombudswoman for Gender Equality. Seventeen percent of prosecutors claim that complaints include multiple discriminations (on several grounds); one fifth of the complaints include discrimination on the basis of religion or political and other beliefs. The Ombudswoman received complaints of discrimination based on religion (6.1%), social status (5.4%), and education (5.4%). When it comes to discrimination based on ethnicity, it is the most frequent for Serbs, Roma, and asylum seekers.

The NGO Center for Peace Studies brought criminal charges against unidentified perpetrators (law enforcement officers) suspected of illegal actions that occurred at the border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in November 2019. The charges were brought on International Migrants Day, after Border Violence Monitoring published videos showing Croatian law enforcement overstepping their authority and in an organized and violent way turning away refugees attempting to enter Croatia.8

Three complaints made to the Islamic Community come from women in hijabs, and concern verbal provocations and the message “Go home!” The implication of the message is that they should return to their own country, somewhere other than Croatia. These incidents occurred on the street, and it is interesting to note that the provocations came from other women.


A Gallup poll from August 2017 placed Croatia among countries whose citizens are the least friendly towards migrants and refugees. Forty percent of respondents in Croatia do not want Syrians in their country, and 39% believe that the country could accept some of them.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you afraid of migrants?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, they pose a great danger.</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, they are people who need help.</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not afraid, but they shouldn’t cross the border illegally.</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Questionnaire on the fear toward migrants made by news portal Index.hr.10

Political figures such as Ivan Pernar, a member of the Croatian Parliament representing the political party Živi zid, charges asylum seekers perceived as Muslims of having accommodation and financial assistance while Croats are leaving the country due to poverty or are homeless and depend on public transportation for warmth. Mate Mijić, a Croatian communicologist, also tries to entice public hatred of migrants and Muslims by writing columns that judge migrants for taking state money that he believes should be given to veterans.

**Employment**

The number of complaints made to the Ombudswoman, according to the report for 2017, was the highest, for the first time, for violations of labor and public servant relations (11.8%), while labor and employment - in line with previous trends - remained the most frequent areas for complaints concerning discrimination.

The Ombudsperson also emphasized the complaints regarding active employment policies, and the lack of an adequate integration policy that would make it easier for workers from third countries, asylum seekers, or seekers of international protection to find employment in Croatia.

The Ombudswoman received inquiries from citizens of Islamic faith about the right not to work on Ramadan and Eid. Namely, the Law on Holidays, Memorial Days and Non-Working Days in the Republic of Croatia stipulates that followers of Islam are entitled to having the days of Ramadan and Eid as non-working days. However, since each of these Islamic holidays lasts for several days, the linguistic structures used in the law are imprecise and leave room for interpretation of whether

---


the right relates to only one day for each of the two holidays; in other words, the duration of the holidays are under question.11

**Education**

During 2018, the Islamic Community in Croatia published a book entitled *Razumjeti Islam* (Understanding Islam) by Aziz Hasanović Effendi, PhD, mufti and president of the Mesihat of the Islamic Community in Croatia. The book includes the most important themes, discussed on the basis of the source of this faith, offering readers basic information about Islam.

Ivana Šojat, one of Croatia’s most famous writers, is the author of a book *Ezanzumjeti Islam (Understanding Islam)* by Aziz Hasanović Effendi, PhD, mufti and president of the Mesihat of the Islamic Community in Croatia. The book includes the most important themes, discussed on the basis of the source of this faith, offering readers basic information about Islam.

Ivana Šojat, one of Croatia’s most famous writers, is the author of a book *Ezanzumjeti Islam (Understanding Islam)* by Aziz Hasanović Effendi, PhD, mufti and president of the Mesihat of the Islamic Community in Croatia. The book includes the most important themes, discussed on the basis of the source of this faith, offering readers basic information about Islam.

According to the Ombudsman’s report, there is still no comprehensive policy for integrating foreigners, especially those seeking international protection, and inclusion in society is already made difficult for them in the very beginning by the lack of Croatian language courses.12

**Politics**

Intolerance of various groups remained a prominent feature of the public space in 2018 as well. The apparent apathy and social stagnation is caused by the lack of dialogue and quality, constructive debates, and the lack of adequate and timely public condemnation of unacceptable content.

The President of the Republic of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović in an interview with the Vienna daily *Kleine Zeitung* stated, “Croatian Muslims live in great fear. They fear for their position. They are worried that they will become outcasts in society because of individuals who come to us for fabricated reasons to agitate for radical ideas.” The title of the interview was “Europe Was Too Laid-Back and Too Naive.” The president explained her claim that Croatian Muslims live in fear by referencing a recent conversation with the “Croatian Mufti.” In her words, he was “completely exhausted from the effort to include migrants into the Croatian Muslim community, which is integrated into Croatian society.”13

She also stated that she visited Afghanistan several times, and that not everyone who comes to Europe has a democratic frame of mind, substantiating this claim by

12. Ibid.
describing the oppression of women in Afghanistan. This statement contributes to Islamophobia by reinforcing the prejudice of oppression and disrespect for women in Islam.

The Islamic Community in Croatia reacted to the president’s claim and stated that Muslims in Croatia fear no one but God, and the President of the Mesihat Mufti AzizEffendi Hasanović stated that people can be divided only into two groups, good and bad people, and not into Muslims and others, and that he is certain the president agrees with him on the issue.14

The president denied giving the above statement, claiming that it was taken out of context, a key part of the sentence was left out, and she never claimed that Muslims in Croatia live in fear.15

Politically, Islam is often subject to non-constructive debates, verbal conflicts, and polemics in the media between different agents - most often politicians. One of the three former members of the BIH Presidency, Dragan Čović, had the support of the Croatian government for his new candidacy in the 2018 presidential elections in BIH. However, he lost the election race to another Croat, Željko Komšić, which caused additional tensions between Croatia and BIH. Croatian leaders in both Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina all agree that Komšić was elected by the Bosniak electorate and that he is not a legitimate Croatian representative in the BIH Presidency. Political clashes triggered by these elections resulted in different statements that placed Islam in a negative context. One such statement was from Čović himself who said, “In BIH, if you say ‘civil state,’ this means unitarism in some form and in theory, which basically means an Islamic state.”16

Thus, the general elections in BIH in 2018 were the subject of a debate during a session of the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs. The Croatian MP in the European Parliament labeled the Islamic community in BIH and Turkey the main culprits for the victory of Željko Komšić in the elections.17 The Islamic Community in BIH reacted to this by stating that Croatian extremists were campaigning against Muslims.18 MP Zovko’s statement elicited a response from the member of the BIH Presidency Željko Komšić who stated, “This is nothing but lies and nonsense,

15. Ibid.
unbecoming of a member of the European Parliament. Also, this statement has all the trappings of chauvinism and Islamophobia.”

Hate speech regarding the relationship of Bosniaks and Croats was a mainstay in the statements of Croatian intellectuals and academics, who are given substantial attention by the media, without any censorship or limitations.

One such example is the philosopher, political analyst, and professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb and Mostar Nino Raspudić, who writes for the Zagreb daily Večernji list and Banja Luka’s Nezavisni list. He stated that Bosniaks voted for Komšić out of pure hatred towards Croats.

The run-up to the general elections in 2018 was also characterized by media displays of intolerance between these two peoples, where Islam is mentioned in negative contexts, as something detrimental to Croats. The then-member of the BIH Presidency Čović claimed that the demographic domination of Bosniaks poses a threat of turning BIH into an Islamic state, which prompted a response from Izetbegović, also a member of the BIH Presidency at the time, who refuted the existence of an Islamic state in BIH and affirmed the existence of the Croatian radical right.

Relations became more tense after the Croatian Parliament adopted a declaration on the position of Croats in BIH and the European path of BIH. From the Croatian perspective, the adopted declaration warns of Croats being marginalized in BIH and calls for amendments on the Constitution of BIH and the electoral law in BIH. The declaration was mostly criticized by the left wing political party SDP which stated that it was proposed because Željko Komšić was elected as a Croat member of the BIH Presidency. From the perspective of BIH and the Bosniaks living in Croatia, the adopted declaration is an instance of interfering in the internal affairs of BIH. The declaration elicited responses from representatives of the Bosniak national minority in the Republic of Croatia, and added to their displeasure with the Albanian representative who also represents Bosniaks in the Croatian Parliament, Erminom Lekaj Prljaskaj, who expressed a favorable view of the declaration.

The extreme right are not the only ones talking about the alleged danger to Croatia and Europe posed by migrants. Ivan Pernar, a member of the Croatian Parliament from the party Živi zid, judging by his Facebook profile which he uses as his main communication tool, seems obsessed with the idea of migrants as barbarians from the East intent on conquering Europe. Pernar, among others, engaged in po-

lemics to explain Islam; accused feminist organizations of remaining silent in the face of the UN’s decision that wearing a burqa is a human right; warned about the media being corrupt; led readers to believe that migrants are sexually assaulting women across Europe; shared foreign media news about violence and offenses committed by migrants; and criticized the Croatian government for providing financial assistance to asylum seekers when there are homeless Croats.

**Media**

In their report *Human Rights in Croatia: Overview of 2017*, the Human Rights House Zagreb stated that the underrepresentation of minority religious communities in the program content of the Croatian national TV and radio station HRT leads to their media ghettoization. Minority religious communities are represented in only two shows aired in low-ratings slots and are not represented in other programs, such as the news. This means that the HRT is in direct violation of their duty to encourage pluralism.23

There is a notable lack of knowledge or understanding of certain minority religious communities, and topics that concern them are afforded very little space in the media.24 Citizens should be more familiar with Islam, while the media should accept more social responsibility and share accurate and verified information about Islam and Muslims.

At the same time, informative texts must relay correct information about religion and religious communities to avoid fostering prejudice. Lack of correct reporting contributes to fostering intolerance towards certain religious groups.25 Since the migrants’ tragedy is used to reinforce Islamophobia and anti-Islamism, the media has an extremely important role in correct and professional reporting on migrants.

The reporting style used by the media portrays refugees mostly as migrants, as if it is their profession or the only noteworthy thing about them, depriving them of their humanity and dignity. Joint efforts are necessary to change this prevalent narrative, replace “crisis” with “opportunities” and portray “rivers of people” as individuals with their own stories, hopes, and talents.

Religious ceremonies held on the occasion of the two holidays in Islam, Ramadan and Eid, were broadcast live on the HRT TV station. The message of Mufti Hasanović on the occasion of these holidays was published and printed in traditional media such as TV and newspapers, and non-traditional media such as Internet portals.

---


“Ekumena” and “Duhovni izazovi” are TV shows that promoted interreligious dialogue, and portray Islam as a religion of peace and dialogue. Their segments and guest appearances by representatives of the Islamic Community promoted Islam in a positive way, along with the coexistence of Muslims and Christians in the Republic of Croatia.

“Otvoreno,” broadcast by HRT, is among the TV shows with the highest ratings, whose format entails appearances of relevant speakers on a certain topic. Islam was often discussed on this show, both in positive and negative contexts.

**Justice System**


In April 2018, the Ombudswoman published a report for 2017, containing an analysis and evaluation of the protection of rights and freedoms, some examples of violations of rights of individuals or social groups, and 231 recommendations aimed at preventing violations of citizens’ rights.

There was an isolated incident in 2015 concerning a young Franciscan monk who published online content that was extremely negative towards Islam, and that prompted the Ombudswoman to demand that the public prosecutor take steps to address this, and requested the Croatian Bishops’ Conference to issue a statement. This instance of inappropriate speech was prosecuted in 2018 on the grounds of Article 25, Paragraph 1 of the Anti-Discrimination Law, resulting in a final verdict citing violation of dignity (harassment) based on religious differences.26

Individuals accused of discrimination are most frequently prosecuted for harassment, and ordered to pay a fine. There are instances of harassment aimed at Muslims of Bosniak origin, who were called derogatory terms (balije) and associated with “Islamists.” The injured parties were often victims of verbal harassment accompanied by physical violence, which indicates a high level of intolerance aimed at certain groups of citizens.27

The Republic of Croatia ratified the Marrakesh Compact28 that caused an uproar among the Croatian public and politicians. Upon signing, there were some doubts and misconceptions about its intent, significance, and implications.29

The last National Program for Protecting and Promoting Human Rights was

---

26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
valid for the period 2013-2016, and the new National Program has not been adopted yet.

Banning clothing items that include clothing traditionally worn by Muslims is not codified in Croatian law. Women can cover their face and body however they want; there is no headscarf ban. Women can wear the headscarf in public places, and they also have official citizens’ documents and IDs with photos with the headscarf. So far, there is no registered case of violation of this right.

**Internet**

The public space contains discriminatory and hate speech; this is especially true for the Internet. Evidently, the presumption of anonymity emboldens individuals to direct threats and entirely inappropriate speech at people with opinions different to theirs.

“Catholics Beware, This Is Being Kept from You: Stores Flooded with Food Sacrificed to Idols!” was the title of an article published at the end of the year on an Internet portal. The article espouses the idea that halal food and beverages are inappropriate for Catholics and that eating food sacrificed for the Muslim holiday Eid is dangerous. The Center for Halal Quality Certification, which operates as a part of the Islamic Community in Croatia, was also referenced in the article, in a negative context.  

Figure 5: An article on Internet news portal www.dnevno.hr about halal food being food that was sacrificed to idols and warning of the danger that it represents to Catholics.

One of the Facebook pages that spreads Islamophobia is the “Ministry of Truth,” which is constantly warning the Croatian people about the danger posed by migrants and shares news published by foreign media where migrants are portrayed as violent and prone to crime. For instance, the page claims that the guilty verdict of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of the Austrian accused of blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad and their directive stating that any criticism of the Prophet constitutes Islamophobia actually affirmed Sharia law in the EU and circumvented the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The same Facebook user also raised the question of the article of the Marrakesh Compact concerning the reunification of migrants’ families. Ironically, he raised the question of how Croatia would recognize the marriage of a Muslim from Afghanistan, for instance, if he is married to a girl under 16 years of age, implying that by doing so Croatia would legalize pedophilia. (Fig. 6)

![Facebook post](https://www.facebook.com/minist.istine)

Figure 6: The post of Facebook profile user “Ministry of Truth” ironically questioning whether migrants and their marriage traditions legalize pedophilia in the Republic of Croatia.

The Facebook page “Pokret Naroda ‘Vrijeme je’ organized a Facebook event called “Mass protest against the forced Islamization of Croatia” inviting Croatian citizens to gather and protest at one of the squares in Zagreb. It remains to be seen what will come of this, since this occurred at the end of 2018.

Index.hr, the leading leftist Internet tabloid in the Republic of Croatia, published the observation of political analysts Višeslav Raos and Žarko Puhovski who warned about the media spin and use of migrants to draw attention away from real problems in the Republic of Croatia that have been unaddressed for years, such as the failure to prosecute war crimes in Vukovar. They also warn that the hysteria over migrants is disproportionate to the true extent of the problem, and that there is a problem with migrants, although the situation is far from any kind of “Islamic invasion” that the right-wing pundits and populists write about. Some journalists such as Ana Benačić from the Internet news portal Faktograf spoke about politicians using lies about migrants to raise political points. (Fig. 9)

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN CROATIA

Fabricated news is spread about mass rapes that according to Internet portals such as *Večernji list* and politicians’ social networks profiles such as the Facebook profile of Ivan Pernar are perpetrated exclusively by migrants. Columnists of right-wing mainstream newspaper *Večernji list* compare migrants to venomous snakes, call them criminals, and claim that “funds are taken from veterans and given to migrants.”

Migrants are portrayed as soldiers conquering Europe and being useless for Croatian society on the official Facebook profile of a parish in Mrkpolje called “Mrkopaljska župska kronika.” This profile is edited by parish priest Ante Zovko. A parishioner, referring to migrants, comments the following, “Throw a bomb at them, make them go away.” (Fig. 10)

---

Figure 9: Ana Benačić, journalist of Internet news portal Faktograf.hr, on Croatian national TV and radio station talking about Ivan Pernar, a member of the Croatian Parliament, using the so-called migrant crisis for political populism. Ivan Pernar ironically thanked her for the free publicity.35

Boris Havel, professor at the Faculty of Political Science and external associate of the Faculty of Philosophy, Scandinavian Studies Section, is somewhat of a social media star. He regularly comments on current events; as can be surmised by one of his tweets refugees bother him, especially Muslims: “Croatia was taken over by a clique of untouchable Brussels servants. Their main project is mass settlement of Middle East Muslims in Croatia.” The faculty’s administration discussed Professor Havel’s statements and concluded that there is no need for initiating proceedings on this matter by the Political Science Ethics Committee.40 (Fig. 11)


One of the fabricated news that spread across Croatian Internet portals alleged that the Greek police confiscated 52 tons of firearms and ammunition in cargo containers that entered Greece as furniture containers and were intended for Europe-bound migrants. This news was accompanied by photographs that were later determined to date from 2015 and depict the confiscation of smuggled firearms.  

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Central figures that portrayed Islam in a negative context, spreading hatred towards this religion, can be divided into two groups. It is interesting to note that they include members of the academic community in the Republic of Croatia, mostly political analysts, philosophers, communicologists, and professors at Croatian universities such as Boris Havel, Ive Lučić, Mate Mijić, and Ivica Šole however inappropriate given the public nature of their professions. They write columns for Večernji list, a news portal of a conservative daily owned by Styria and Globus, a national weekly published by the Hansa Media. One of the individuals who attempted to revolutionize the exercise of rights and better treatment of teachers and professors is the English language teacher Bernarda Jug, who propagates and reinforces Croatian nationalism that includes only Christianity.


On the other hand, there are right-wing politicians such as EU MP Željana Zovko (HDZ) who comments on national matters of a neighboring country while implicating Muslims and their religious institutions, which certainly does nothing to prevent hatred of Muslims. There are also politicians such as Ivan Pernar (Živi zid) who use this issue for garnering media attention and scoring political points.

**Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives**

The Ombudswoman, under the high patronage of the Chairman of the Croatian Parliament, organized an international conference entitled *Protection of Human Rights and Strengthening Democracy in Europe: Fighting Terrorism - Free Speech - Living Together.*44 The Ombudswoman Lora Vidović also organized a roundtable on the topic “Hate Speech in Croatia - Where to Go from Here?”45

During 2017, civil society organizations (CSO) warned about the difficult communication with executive bodies, in particular through participation in working groups of ministries or government offices, as well as the lack of understanding of their work.46 The lack of funds and public calls intended to advocate in favor of the protection and promotion of human rights and the elimination of discrimination caused a drop in CSO activities.

During 2018, the Office of Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the government of the Republic of Croatia held several conferences intended to fight hate speech and hate crimes, and integrate persons under international protection. In 2018, they completed the implementation of a project entitled “Support to the Integration of Third-Country Nationals to Whom International Protection Approval Applies.” The project contributed to the process of integration of these people by raising the awareness of the expert and the general public on the challenges of integration in the Republic of Croatia, strengthening the capacities of the stakeholders in the integration system, and strengthening coordination activities.

The Islamic Community in Croatia continues to offer free legal assistance to all members of the community, including migrants. Legal assistance is organized within the legal service of the Islamic Community and entails general legal information and legal advice. During 2018, they managed about 20 cases.47

---


During 2018, the Islamic Community in Croatia both organized and participated in numerous conferences promoting Islam in a positive atmosphere and contributing to the prevention of extreme behavior unjustified by religion. The most significant of these were the 25th international symposium Religion and Politics, the signing of the Berlin Declaration on dialogue, promoting Croatia at the World Tolerance Summit in Dubai; hosting the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs; and the membership of Mufti Hasanović in the Governing Board of the World Peace Forum.

The Center for Promotion of Tolerance and Holocaust Remembrance organized a cycle of debates on the topic “Why Do We Hate Each Other?” One of the debates concerned religious prejudice as a cause for hatred. The guests were representatives of four religions.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

While most countries in the world today guarantee the protection of human rights, none of them are free of violations of human rights. Some have bigger, some smaller discrepancies between the letter of the law and reality - theory and experience; the challenges and obstacles that citizens face every day remain. Croatia, of course, is no exception.

The Migration Policy for 2013 - 2015 has not been supplemented with the new one, and many questions remain about migration in the Republic of Croatia, which is compounded by the fact that the Republic of Croatia does not have a special integration policy as of yet. Although the Action Plan for the Integration of Persons Provided International Protection from 2017 to 2019 contains concrete, useful, and measurable tools that can improve their integration, it targets a very small group of people.

Censoring hate speech on social networks and the Internet would certainly contribute to preventing Islamophobia, and prevention is also necessary in the form of


educating individuals responsible for protecting the rights of citizens or informing them about their rights - state and public officials, social workers and law enforcement officers, judges and state attorneys, and others - especially with regards to fighting discrimination. Education on human rights and equality is also necessary to improve media literacy. Cases must be prosecuted in order to test the currently questionable limits of the law. It is necessary to conduct research and build the capacities of civil society organizations and independent institutions. It would also be beneficial if the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior provided more intensive trainings for judicial and law enforcement officials, judges, and state attorneys.

Prompted by inquiries of Muslim citizens, the Ombudswoman recommended that the Ministry of Labor and Pension System put forth a proposal of changes that should be made to the Holidays, Memorial Days and Non-Working Days Act of the Republic of Croatia to ensure that the rights of religious communities are clearly regulated and that the need to observe holidays particularly important for certain religious traditions is respected.

Chronology

- **06.02.2018**: The media in Croatia published a statement by the Croatian member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Dragan Čović when he was visiting Zagreb alleging that the term “civil state” in BIH means an Islamic state.
- **08.02.2018**: The media in Croatia reported the reaction of Bosniak member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bakir Izetbegović who refuted the existence of an Islamic state in BIH and affirmed the existence of the Croatian radical right.
- **29.03.2018**: Lumps of lard placed on death notices of two Muslims in Zagreb.
- **11.09.2018**: Electronic and print media published the statement by the President of the Republic of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović alleging that the Croatian Muslims live in great fear.
- **12.09.2018**: Electronic and print media published the reaction of Mufti and President of the Mesihat of the Islamic Community in Croatia Aziz Hasanović Effendi alleging that the Muslims in Croatia fear no one but God.
- **12.09.2018**: The president of the Republic of Croatia reacted and sent a message through the media explaining that journalists took her message about Muslims in Croatia living in fear out of the context.
- **25.10.2018**: The media shared the message by Mate Mijić, a communicationist, about the state taking the funds from veterans and giving them to migrants.
ISLAMOPHOBIA IN CROATIA

• **28.10.2018**: Migrants are portrayed as soldiers conquering Europe on some official Facebook profiles of parishes, with parishioners commenting: “Throw a bomb at them, make them go away.”

• **03.11.2018**: Boris Havel, a Croatian professor and political analyst, posted on his Twitter account, “Croatia was taken over by a clique of untouchable Brussels servants. Their main project is mass settlement of Middle East Muslims in Croatia. Or I’m wrong?” with the sarcastic use of the hashtags #RefugeesWelcome and #ReligionOfPeace.

• **22.11.2018**: The media published the statement by Željana Zovko, a Croatian MP in the European Parliament, in which she labeled the Islamic community in BIH and Turkey as the main culprits for the victory of Željko Komšić in the presidential elections in BIH.

• **23.11.2018**: MP Zovko’s statement elicited a response from the member of the BIH Presidency Željko Komšić who stated, “This is nothing but lies and nonsense, unbecoming of a member of the European Parliament. Also, this statement has all the trappings of chauvinism and Islamophobia.”

• **29.11.2018**: The Islamic community in BIH reacted to the statement of Zovko by stating that Croatian extremists were campaigning against Muslims.

• **November 2018**: The spreading of false news about migrants’ movement and location, and false photographs about migrants.

• **21.12.2018**: The Internet news portal www.dnevno.hr published the Islamophobic article espousing the idea that halal food and beverages are inappropriate for Catholics and that eating food sacrificed for the Muslim holiday Eid is dangerous.

• **30.12.2018**: The Facebook group “Ministry of Truth” organized a public event on Facebook that invited the wider public to join them in mass protest against the “forced Islamization of Croatia.”

• **2018**: Verbal attacks and messages like “Go home!” addressed to women wearing the hijab in Zagreb.