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)”.

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**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.
EUROPEAN ISLAMOPHOBIA REPORT

2018

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

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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

According to the latest census in Estonia, there are 1,508 people who define their religious affiliation as Muslim. Thus, Estonia has one of the smallest Muslim communities in Europe. Although the Muslim community in Estonia has a long history and is open to new members and people interested in Islam, the community activities are generally not so well known to the public.

The Muslim community is mainly reflected in the media within the framework of various events aimed at introducing Islamic culture and religion to the wider public. To a lesser extent, it is featured in cases where an act of vandalism has been committed against the community or its individual members. However, as the Estonian Islamic community is small, such attacks are not frequent. Verbal and physical attacks are also exceptional and they are usually committed by people under the influence of alcohol, rather than by members of extreme right movements.

In 2018, there were no significant Islamophobic incidents highlighted in the media or registered by the authorities. The most serious incident in 2018 was an act of vandalism on the building of the Estonian Islamic Centre in which the facade of the building was covered with incomprehensible text that could be considered Islamophobic.

Local law allows the practice of Islam without imposing any special restrictions. There are no bans on wearing a hijab or a burka. According to the legislation, in order to slaughter a farm animal for a religious purpose, a religious association must have the relevant permit.

Although the media doesn’t represent the local Muslim community in a negative or Islamophobic way, the articles about the attacks or incidents committed by Muslims in other European Union member states still sow mistrust in the general population. In addition, the attitude of the public towards Muslims is influenced by the negative statements made by opinion leaders and politicians on general migration issues, which often refer to immigration problems in other member states. Although such statements are not necessarily hostile and are not directed directly at Muslims living in Estonia, they do indirectly affect the welfare and sense of security of the local Muslim community.
ISLAMOPHOBIA IN ESTONIA

Kokkuvõte

Country Profile

Country: Republic of Estonia
Type of Regime: Democratic Republic
Form of Government: Parliamentary Republic
Ruling Parties: Centre Party, Social Democrats, Pro Patria (coalition),
Total Population: 1,3 million people (estimated in 2018)
Major Languages: Estonian
Official Religion: No official religion (Secularism)
Statistics on Islamophobia: There are no available statistics on Islamophobia.
Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: N/A
Major Religions (% of Population): Christianity (29 %), No religion (54 %)
Muslim Population (% of Population): 1.508 (0,14%) in 2011 (according to Statistics Estonia) (estimated maximum in 2018: 3.000)
Main Muslim Community Organizations: Estonian Islamic Centre, Estonian Islamic Congregation
Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: NGOs that focus, amongst other things, on equal treatment of Muslims and other minorities in Estonia are the Estonian Human Rights Centre, the Estonian Refugee Council, and the Integration Foundation.
Far Right Parties: N/A
Far Right Movements: Soldiers of Odin
Far Right Terrorist Organisations: N/A
Limitations to Islamic Practices
- Hijab Ban: No
- Halal Slaughter Ban: No. According to the Animal Protection Act, to slaughter a farm animal for a religious purpose, a religious association must obtain the relevant permit.
- Minaret Ban: No
- **Circumcision Ban**: No
- **Burka Ban**: No
- **Prayer Ban**: No
Introduction

The Estonian Muslim community is relatively small. Historically the biggest Muslim minority have been the Tatars, who migrated to Estonia in the early 18th century under the rule of Tsarist Russia. Mostly they were military men who settled in the country after their army service had ended. During the Soviet rule, practicing Islam publicly was strongly prohibited. It was only in the end of the 1980s that the Islamic community re-established the Estonian Islamic Congregation. The congregation mainly comprises of Tatar, Azerbaijani, Kazakh, and Uzbek minorities and also of native Estonians. Moreover, it is one of the few congregations where both Sunni and Shia Muslims coexist side by side.

According to the 2011 census, there were 1,993 Tatars living in Estonia, which is slightly less than in the beginning of the 20th century. The census indicated that there are 1,508 people in Estonia who describe themselves as Muslims; however, it is highly probable that the actual number is somewhat higher (around 2,000). This situation can partly be explained by the fear of local Muslims to share the information about their religious convictions or by the reluctance to give out personal details to public officials. Also there is a significant number of Muslim students and persons with temporary residence permits who are not included in the statistics and who visit the local Islamic Centre rarely due to lack of time, fear of publicly showing their religious convictions, or weak religious ties.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

There is no precise statistical data which would give a profound and comprehensive overview of anti-Muslim hate crimes. In most of the cases, incidents that concern the entire Muslim community in Estonia or refugees and asylum seekers from Muslim countries are covered by mainstream media. Incidents that occur on a personal level may easily stay unreported and therefore undocumented. In such cases, the local Muslim community can only refer to separate incidents and attacks against their community members that they are aware of. According to the representative of the Estonian Islamic Centre, there have been only few unrelated cases of verbal discrimination based on religious beliefs and one physical attack that was reported several years ago. Verbal discrimination in public space is considered also rare and the perpetrators are usually drunk individuals. Inappropriate and anti-Muslim comments can mostly be found in the commentary sections of different online media outlets, but not in the articles themselves.

In 2018, an anti-Islam slogan was written on the front façade of the Estonian Islamic Centre in Tallinn. The slogan contained the message, “Bomb it! Isolated Islam,
ISLAMOPHOBIA IN ESTONIA

don’t remember their sins? In God we trust. Why?” The Islamic Centre personnel notified the Estonian Police and Border Guard Board which started the procedures in order to find the perpetrator of the act of vandalism.¹

Employment
According to the representative of the Estonian Islamic Centre, there have been no reported cases of discrimination of Muslims in the job market. On the contrary, business owners are willing to employ foreigners including those with a Muslim background. The major issue in finding a job is not related with the “Muslimness” of a person but with sufficient Estonian language skills. It has been noted, however, that it is more difficult for beneficiaries of international protection with Muslim background to find rental apartments.² Those have also been cases dating back to the migration crisis in Europe in 2015 and 2016.

Education
There is no Islamophobic content that has become part of any curricula, textbooks, or any other educational materials. The educational material composed and provided by state authorities (e.g. Ministry of Education and Research) is unbiased and aims to give information without any prejudice towards Islamic teachings and religion.

Politics
There have been no comprehensive political campaigns directly aimed against the Estonian Islamic community nor Islam in general. The Conservative People’s Party of Estonia, however, has used anti-Islamic rhetoric highlighting the negative incidents involving Muslims in other EU member states. Also among the party’s public meetings and rallies there have been signs that could be considered anti-Islamic in their nature. Such a case was detected at a public demonstration against the UN’s Global Compact for Migration. A supporter of the Conservative Party held a banner with a silhouette of a Muslim city with several minarets. Next to the image was written “Is this the new Tallinn?”³ The message strongly indicates the fear of the Islamisation of Europe. In this manner, it spreads discord and mistrust among the Estonian population, and is, therefore, highly deplorable.


Media
The main topics covered by the Estonian mainstream media in 2018 concentrate predominantly on incidents in other member states. The topics concerning Islam focused mainly on migration from Islamic countries and terrorist attacks committed by Muslims. There was also coverage of Islamophobic incidents in other member states, e.g. right-wing extremists’ attacks on Muslims. Such articles are mostly objective and in coherence with good journalism practice or “code of ethics”. There are only a few online media publications that can be considered biased when it comes to covering migratory and Islamic content. One such is Uued Uudised (New News) which covers migration and Islamophobic issues mainly from the viewpoint of the Conservative People’s Party. The second conservative online news portal is Objektiiv (Objective), which concentrates on the Islamisation of Europe and threats of uncontrolled migration to Europe and Estonia. Most of the Islamophobic content can be found in the commentary sections of different online news portals covering migratory and Islamic topics. Such comments are usually posted by individual readers as reactions to the articles and may contain anti-Islamic slogans or viewpoints.

Justice System
There have been no changes in legislation nor regulations in Estonia in 2018 that are connected to Islamophobic ideology.

Internet
There are no Internet webpages or initiatives that regularly spread Islamophobic content. Islamophobic content can only be found in the commentary sections of different online news portals and public and/or private social media accounts e.g. Facebook page “Женщины Против Исламизации Прибалтики”4 (Women against the Islamisation of the Baltics).

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network
There are no central figures nor institutions that concentrate per se on Islamophobic campaigns or stir up anti-Islamic debates. The figureheads of the Conservative People’s Party of Estonia use Islamophobic statements in public debates and interviews, but mostly do so in the context of general anti-migration issues. The agenda of the party foresees a conservative and controlled migration policy. In defending their political views on migration issues, the members of the party often use extreme examples of crimes committed by Muslims in other EU member states, such as terrorist attacks, sexual assaults, and alleged practicing of Sharia law while ignoring

national legislation. The most active members who use such examples are the party leader Mart Helme, and Martin Helme and Jaak Madison who the party’s board members are elected to the Estonian Parliament. Although not in 2018, Kristiina Ojuland, who is the chairman of the Party of People’s Unity, has also stood out with her anti-Islamic statements mostly speaking out against mass migration to Estonia and other EU member states. In 2016, she started a Facebook page “Женщины Против Исламизации Прибалтики” (Women against the Islamisation of the Baltics) aimed at the Russian-speaking population and mostly containing Islamophobic articles and comments in the Russian language.

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

There are no distinguishing initiatives in Estonia that are specifically designed to combat anti-Muslim racism. Nevertheless, there are general integration initiatives and measures which, among other things, aim to increase the cohesion of people with different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

The general objective of the integration policy in Estonia is to increase social cohesion and ensure the social inclusion of people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The development plan “Integrating Estonia 2020” serves as the basis for the integration policy that will be carried out in the period 2014–2020. Its aims are:

- To increase the cohesion of society
- To increase the competitiveness of the Republic of Estonia
- To ensure security
- To preserve the Estonian language and culture
- To preserve the culture and language of the ethnic minorities
- To ensure increasing tolerance towards different groups of society
- To ensure a stronger civic identity

There is also the possibility for newcomers (including Muslim immigrants) to participate in the adaptation programme (also referred to as “welcoming programme”) which is offered to support the migration process of newly arrived immigrants in Estonia, their rapid and convenient adaptation, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for independent living.

Such measures and programmes have a crucial part not only in integrating newcomers to Estonian society, but also helping to increase tolerance in society and, among other things, reducing anti-Muslim sentiment.

5. Ibid.
Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Since there is no strong anti-Muslim sentiment in Estonia, it is difficult to give definitive recommendations that would specifically tackle the issue of Islamophobia.

According to the representative of the Estonian Islamic Centre, the local Muslim community lives quite peacefully and is open to everyone who wishes to know more about Islamic culture and religion. Although the Islamic Centre does not hold public information campaigns about Islam, the representative highlights the necessity of dialogue between the general population and the local Muslim community in order to increase awareness.

The main recommendation in the context of Estonia - also mentioned by the representative of the Islamic Centre - is to stop generating artificial problems and stop using anti-Islamic statements as a means of promoting populist ideas regarding anti-immigration agendas by conservative political parties. Such populist statements cause discord and mistrust in the general population not only towards the historical Estonian Muslim community but also towards Muslim newcomers, e.g. students, researchers, specialists, asylum seekers, etc.

Chronology

- **15.11.2018:** An anti-Islam slogan was written on the front façade of the Estonian Islamic Centre in Tallinn. The slogan contained the message “Bomb it! Isolated Islam, don’t remember their sins? In God we trust. Why?” The Islamic Centre personnel notified the Estonian Police and Border Guard Board who started the procedures in order to find the perpetrator of the act of vandalism.8

- **12.12.2018:** Minister of Justice Urmas Reinsalu stated, “European security must be protected and Islamic extremism that exacerbates violence must be rooted out of Europe!” 9

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