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.
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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

Islamophobia in Kosovo, a Muslim-majority country in Europe, differs from ‘typical’ Islamophobia in some member states of the European Union. There are two main assumptions illustrating this difference. First, modeled on Western characteristics of stereotyping Islam, Islamophobia is a ‘tool’ the country’s political elite uses in order to fully be accepted in Euro-Atlantic circles. Numerous state reports for example show that ‘radicalization’ issues are given highest priority in current Kosovar politics. Another example is a 2018 Kosovar NGO report arguing against a possible Kosovo membership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) due to Kosovo’s Euro-Atlantic agenda.

Second, it is argued that Kosovar Islamophobia is one of the harshest in Europe in the sense that it systematically erases ‘Muslimness’ from Albanian, or Kosovar, identity in the national discourses. Islamophobic social media pages, for instance, represent ‘Muslimness’ as something that is not Albanian or Kosovar. The scapegoats of Islamophobia in Kosovo are, on the one hand, the Albanian diaspora living in the West and, on the other, homeland Muslims bearing Islamic signifiers stigmatized by Western Islamophobia, i.e. beards and hijabs. The 2018 verbal attacks on Kosovo-born and Swiss national football player Xherdan Shaqiri and the still ongoing controversies regarding the headscarf in public institutions have shown this.

Kosovar media still represents Islam in Kosovo through the following binary: ‘peaceful’ pre-war Islam vs. ‘radical’ post-war Islam. This discourse is challenged from times to times through articles published in widely read newspapers and written by scholars addressing more complex issues regarding Islam in Kosovo. When it comes to employment discrimination, Islamophobia tends not even to be considered. At the same time, the Kosovo-Albanian diaspora’s vital economic contribution to the country is conceptualized in Islamophobic dichotomies. Furthermore, ‘radical Islam’ is a key word used to delegitimize internal political enemies. The year 2018 represented no exceptions to these tendencies.
Përmbledhje EKZEKUTIVE

Islamofobia në Kosovë, një shtet me një shumicë myslimane në Europë, dallon nga Islamofobia ‘tipike’ e Bashkimit Europian. Në këtë raport do të ilustrohet karakteri specifik i Islamofobisë në Kosovë përmes dy hipotezave: (1) Inspiruar nga karakteristikat perëndimore të stereotipizimit të Islamit, Islamofobia është një ‘mjet’ të cilin elita politike e vendit e përdorë për t’u pranuar plotësisht në qarqet euroatlantike. Shembull për këtë është numri i madh i raporteve shtetërore që merren me ‘radikalizimin fetar’. Një shembull tjetër është një raport i një OJQ-je Kosovare (Instituti i Prishtinës për Studime Politike) i vitit 2018 i cili shpreh këtë të mundshëm të Kosovës në Organizatën e Bashkëpunimit Islam (OBI) për shkak të agjendës euroatlantike të Kosovës.

Country Profile

Country: Kosovo
Type of Regime: Democratic Republic
Form of Government: Parliamentary Government
Ruling Parties: PANA Coalition (Center-Right, Liberal, Center-Left) led by Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj
Opposition Parties: Vetëvendosje (left-wing); Social Democratic Party of Kosovo (Center-Left, the party was created due to internal split within Vetëvendosje after the 2017 elections); and LDK (Center-Right)
Last Elections: 2017 Parliamentary Elections (PANA government + reserved minority seats included: 61 seats; Albanian left-wing opposition [VV]: 32 seats; Albanian center-right opposition [LDK]: 25 seats)
Total Population: 1.7 million (2011)
Major Languages: Albanian
Official Religion: No official religion (Secularism)
Statistics on Islamophobia: In the 2017 police report addressing incidents targeting religious objects, 38 crimes were recorded. The majority of these crimes, 21 in number, were directed against the Islamic community.
Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: According to the 2010 Kosovo Human Development Report, which focused on social exclusion, the Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) communities are “the poorest and most excluded” ones.
Major Religions (% of Population): Muslim 95.6%, Roman Catholic 2.2%, Orthodox 1.5%
Muslim Population (% of Population): 1.6 million (96%) in 2011 (according to the last official census)
Main Muslim Community Organizations: BIK – Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës (Islamic Community of Kosovo) and BTK – Bashkësia e Tarikateve të Kosovës (Union of Kosovo Tarikats)
Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: N/A
Far-Right Parties: N/A
Far-Right Movements: N/A
Far-Right Terrorist Organizations: N/A
Limitations to Islamic Practices
- Hijab Ban: Limitations and controversies regarding the wearing of headscarves in public institutions are still ongoing.
- Halal Slaughter Ban: No
- Minaret Ban: No
- Circumcision Ban: No
- **Burka Ban**: Limitations and controversies regarding the wearing of the burka in public institutions are still ongoing.

- **Prayer Ban**: In 2018, Kosovo limited the police officers’ rights to attend prayers during their working hours.
Introduction

Kosovo is a Muslim\(^1\) country situated in a continent, which discursively defines itself as exclusively Christian.\(^2\) This Albanian position in Europe has provoked a vivid academic discussion with regards to Albanian identity over the last 20 years. Some argue that Europe used this Albanian feature in order to construct Albanians as the infinite internal ‘other’ since the 19th century.\(^3\) In local discourses, Albanian identity exists exclusively in orientalist dichotomies: either one is a ‘Western’ secular Albanian or an ‘oriental’ Muslim one.\(^4\) A third recurrent argument is that Albanian elites (be it in Macedonia, Albania, or Kosovo) use the ‘good European Muslim’ argument, i.e. Albanians, against the ‘bad non-European Muslims’ argument, e.g. Syrians, in the current debates about the ‘Balkan route,’ when dealing politically with the Euro-Atlantic hegemony.\(^5\) This approach necessarily produces Islamophobia.\(^6\)

The Albanian situation within the \textit{ummah}\(^7\) is vital in understanding the nature of Islamophobia in Kosovo. From this perspective, one can better grasp why a common theme of this report is that Kosovar Islamophobia should be contextualized in the strategy of the country’s elite to get accepted fully in Euro-Atlantic political circles. Consequently, Islamophobia in Kosovo is modeled on Western characteristics of stereotyping Islam.\(^7\)

In line with the prior argument, one can also suggest that this form of Islamophobia is one of the harshest in Europe in the sense that it systematically erases ‘Muslimness’ from Albanian, or Kosovar, identity. Furthermore, in a country with a 95.6% majority of Muslims, Islamophobia is not only hybrid but also self-humiliating.\(^8\) To put it differently, habits in daily life derived from Islamic practices are omnipresent in Kosovar society, but Kosovo-Albanian elites fail to reproduce discursively this reality in a non-Islamophobic way. The scapegoat in these discriminatory

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1. Muslim piety is a pluralistic experience in Kosovo. The majority of Muslims are Sunnis (represented by BIK), but there are also Sufis (represented by BTK).
discourses are, first, the Albanian diaspora living in the West, one of the most vital factors of Kosovar society which is represented as the ‘oriental’ Muslim Albanian other, and, second, homeland Muslims bearing Islamic signifiers stigmatized by Western Islamophobia, i.e. beards and hijabs.⁹

All in all, the year 2018 represented no exception to these tendencies. The two common themes of this report will be substantiated with empirical evidence in the following sections.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

In 2018, no official data regarding Islamophobic crimes were published.¹⁰ However, from January 2017 to July of the same year, 38 incidents targeting religious objects including property damage, thefts, and graffiti were reported.¹¹ The majority of these crimes, 21 in number, were directed against objects of the Islamic community.¹² The graffiti on mosques, tagged by opponents of the new mosque planned to be built in Prishtina, Kosovo’s capital city, aroused public attention in 2017.¹³ They were first sprayed on a building of the University of Prishtina on 1 August: “There will be no Turkish mosque in Dardania [a neighborhood close to the city center]” and “Death to Naim Tërnava [Grand Mufti of Kosovo] and Hashim the Turk [allusion to Hashim Thaçi, Kosovo’s president]” (Figs. 1-2).¹⁴ The next day, one saw the same graffiti on different mosques in Prishtina.¹⁵ The Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK) condemned the graffiti as hate speech and invoked the perpetrators to refrain from violence; the police arrested one suspect and looked for others involved.¹⁶

⁹. “Raporti Vjetor 2017”, Central Bank of the Republic of Kosovo, https://www.bqk-kos.org/repository/docs/2017/BQK_RV_2017.pdf, (Access date: 1 September 2019). In 2017, it is estimated that Kosovo’s diaspora remitted around 760 million Euros to Kosovo. It is even believed that the number is twice as large due to unregistered amounts of money entering the country, which would mean that remittances from the diaspora are higher than the Kosovo state budget.


¹³. Ibid, p. 10.

¹⁴. Ibid.


In 2018, Islamophobic attacks were also directed against diaspora Albanians. The most prominent case is the attack on Kosovo-born Xherdan Shaqiri, football player of Liverpool F.C. and Swiss international. After scoring the decisive lead for Switzerland against Serbia, a group stage match of the 2018 World Cup, Shaqiri uploaded a photo with the comment “elhamdulillah” on Twitter (Fig. 3). This post provoked a vivid debate on social media, whose Islamophobic outburst is best captured by the response of a famous Albanian journalist. Here, is an excerpt: “He [Xherdan Shaqiri] can believe in whatever he wants, but greeting the fans of the Swiss national team with a Muslim message (“elhamdulillah”) shows […] that he simply is an illiterate whose intellectual life can be summarized with tallava music [popular music] and meetings with Shefqet Krasniqi [an Albanian Islamic scholar]” (Fig. 4).


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Figure 1: Graffiti on a building of the University of Prishtina: “There will be no Turkish mosque in Dardania”. Source: TV Shenja, 1 August, 2017 (see Footnote 15).

Figure 2: Graffiti on the mosque property: “Death to Naim Tërnava [Grand Mufti of Kosovo] and Hashim the Turk”. (see Footnote 14).
Employment

Given Kosovo’s structural economic problems (high unemployment, lack of physical and job security, and low wages – to mention a few), one can argue that this economic system can be understood as “racial capitalism.” Consequently, Islamophobia in the Kosovar labor market should be seen as an integral part of the intersectional marginalization of “racial capitalism,” which is characterized by the inextricable agglomerate of economic exploitation and the humiliation of racialized subjects.

Run by the country’s elites, Kosovar NGOs working on economic questions tend not to even consider Islamophobia in employment. One could suggest that

20. Ibid.
this ignoring is deliberate and aims at erasing ‘Muslimness’ from Albanian identity. This becomes even more tangible when one compares these NGO reports with the experience of Islamic institutions in Kosovo. According to the BIK, observant Muslims are marginalized in the job market, especially in the public sector.\textsuperscript{22} Besa Ismaili, professor at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Prishtina, highlighted that this discrimination exists for observant Muslim women, too.\textsuperscript{23}

Even though their contribution is vital for Kosovar society, professional life of Albanians living in the West is not valued in Kosovo and is framed in an Islamophobic manner in the national discourse.\textsuperscript{24} The Albanian diaspora is portrayed as ‘stuck in old (Islamic) traditions,’ and being exclusively employed at construction sites (men) or as cleaning personnel (women).\textsuperscript{25} Every summer, when a lot of diaspora families spend their holidays at home, stereotypes of this kind get revived. In 2018, the widely shared satirical online newspaper Kukunews, for example, took an excerpt of a television interview, in which a homeland Kosovar tells about his brother living abroad and wanting him to buy an expensive iPhone this summer (Fig. 5).\textsuperscript{26} What is conveyed here through humorous rhetorical devices is the widespread stereotype of an ‘oriental’ family relative working on a German construction site and whose ‘duty’ it is to dish out money for the economic needs of his family relatives in Kosovo.

Figure 5: The Kukunews post referring to the Albanian diaspora in Europe (called ‘shacë’) by the satirical newspaper. (see Footnote 26).

\textsuperscript{24} “Raporti Vjetor 2017”, Central Bank of the Republic of Kosovo, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{26} Kukunews, Instagram, 16 August 2018, https://www.instagram.com/kukunews/p/BnjjLEWzZsW5/?utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=abwcrx711sz, (Access date: 1 September 2019).
Education

When it comes to how Islam is treated in Kosovo’s high schools, one notices the biased focus on narratives that are ‘Albanian and European.’ This discourse drastically sanctions voices criticizing these national figures, which are at the same time represented as “defender[s] of Christianity in the Balkans” or as “magnificent patriotic and European figure[s]” in school books.²⁷ Moreover, the complexity of the Albanian history during the Ottoman Empire is ignored at the expense of the focus on a Eurocentric account of history.²⁸

A second phenomenon worth mentioning is the tolerance the constitutional secular state of Kosovo shows toward teaching material with Christian symbols. Christmas songs, for example, are part of the music books of Kosovo’s primary schools. In 2018, Husamedin Abazi, imam in Prishtina, criticized this (Fig. 6).²⁹ In 2015, books about the Bible were given as gifts to pupils of a high school in Krajkovë, a village in the Drenica valley.³⁰

Politics

Islamophobia is a ‘tool’ Kosovar foreign policy uses to show loyalty to Euro-Atlantic political circles. Published by the country’s Ministry of Education Science and Technology in 2018, the handbook for teachers on how to counter pupils’ ‘Islamic radicalization’ is a case in point.³¹ It is emblematic in the sense that current Kosovar policy makers give ‘radicalization’ issues highest


Politics

Islamophobia is a ‘tool’ Kosovar foreign policy uses to show loyalty to Euro-Atlantic political circles. Published by the country’s Ministry of Education Science and Technology in 2018, the handbook for teachers on how to counter pupils’ Islamic radicalization is a case in point. It is emblematic in the sense that current Kosovar policy makers give ‘radicalization’ issues highest priority. Interviewed by a Western media, Kosovo’s current Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj unequivocally expressed his loyalty to the West in July 2018 by refusing the Albanian Muslim identity (“I’m Albanian. I’m not Muslim.”) (Fig. 7) and highlighting, “[Kosovo is] a Euro-Atlantic nation. When we were in trouble, the U.S. and NATO [were] with us, so we belong to this club.”

Islamophobia is also a ‘tool’ the Kosovo government uses to delegitimize internal political rivals – be it on a local or national level. Mentor Nazarko, advisor of Kosovo’s foreign minister Behgjet Pacolli, attacked the chairman of the opposition party Vetëvendosje (VV, Self-Determination) Albin Kurti in a widely watched TV debate in May 2018 by stating that his party is flirting with religious extremism. During the local electoral campaign in autumn 2017, Kurti used a local proverb with Islamic references in one of his speeches. Although used only for rhetorical reasons, Kurti’s saying had such a huge impact that that even an influential U.S. newspaper used the saying out of context in order to present Vetëvendosje is an Islamic anti-Western party.
Vetëvendosje refrains from explicit Islamic policies. Yet, it is the only political party to challenge Islamophobia. For example, Kurti repeatedly argues the following: (1) Islamic extremism is not the biggest threat to Kosovo, as the government puts it; the biggest threat is still Serbia, and (2) Islam is part of the Albanian tradition. Hence, using Islamophobia, which some Western states use against Muslim migrant communities, is pointless in the Albanian context.

Media

According to the BIK, Kosovar media portrays observant Muslims in a negative way. Written in a very polemical way, a January 2019 Bota Sot op-ed criticizing Islam for being too ‘Arab’ and not ‘Albanian’ enough is a case in point. The article voices a view on Islam which is widely accepted within the Albanian elitist discourse (Fig. 8).

More in-depth journalistic articles tend to create a binary between ‘traditional’ pre-war Islam and ‘radical’ post-war Islam. In these cases, journalists highlight that Islam in Kosovo is traditionally moderate, peaceful, and ‘European’, i.e. framing Albanians within the ‘good vs. bad Muslim’ dichotomy. In the 2015 Kosovo European Islamophobia Report (EIR), Arber Fetiu argued that Islamophobic claims in Kosovar media are generally stated without proof. The year 2018 was no exception in this regard. An article in Kallxo.com (English version published at Prishtina Insight) in 2017 merits special attention. The article presents the communist measures

42. Sulstarova, 2006, p. 10;
of removing the hijab as ‘emancipatory’ and, thus, addresses hijabi women in Kosovo by completely erasing the Serbian-Yugoslav colonial violence perpetrated against them (Fig. 9). In line with a Eurocentric view on Islam, this article removes these women's agency.

As the Islamophobic attack on Xherdan Shaqiri has already shown, the Albanian diaspora in the West is framed in an orientalist way. In May 2018, an article in Bota Sot addressed Islamic Albanian life in Austria. This article is of discursive relevance in the sense that it implicitly reinforces the Albanian elite’s claim of the difference between the ‘European’ secular Albanian living in Kosovo against the ‘oriental’ Muslim Albanian living in the West.

Even though articles addressing religion in a non-Islamophobic way are published from time to time, one can suggest that Islamophobia – even on an unconscious level – is part of the publishing policy of every influential Kosovar media. Hence, it is difficult to highlight one media outlet that is known for non-Islamophobic coverage. Regarding 2018, Berat Buzhala’s Gazeta Express and Parim Olluri’s Insajderi were very active in reproducing Islamophobic stereotypes. The anti-Muslim content of Gazeta Express articles was already quoted in this report, whereas, for example, Insajderi spread fake news regarding ‘radical’ imams visiting Kosovo (Figs. 10-11).

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Justice System
Laws and regulations defended with Islamophobic arguments or any laws restricting the rights of Muslims in their religious lifestyle are basically used when convenient for the ‘Albanians are good European Muslims’ argument. Prior to the approval of
Pristina Grand Mosque Imam Shefqet Krasniqi was acquitted of inciting terrorism in March 2018. 53 Controversial headlines about students or teachers wearing the headscarf at school, or prohibited to wear it at school, are regularly published in Kosovo’s newspapers. 54 This arbitrary behavior by the Kosovar state suggests a lack of a consistent policy regarding the hijab. Furthermore, the former Pristina Grand Mosque Imam Shefqet Krasniqi was acquitted of inciting terrorism in March 2018 (Fig. 12). 55

Internet

Social media pages spreading Islamophobic messages in the Kosovar context are numerous. They all follow a certain pattern: erasing ‘Muslimness’ from Albanian, or Kosovar, identity. The only thing that differs is the explicitness of their undertaking. With around 50,000 followers, the Instagram account sarcastic_al has a considerable reach and promotes Western feminism and European values, which are represented as

the opposite of Islamic Albanian values (Fig. 13). Anti-Muslim messages are spread more aggressively on Facebook. *FMimages Albania* (more than 100,000 followers) and *Feja e shqiptarit është Europa* (“The Religion of Albanians Is Europe.” around 40,000 followers) are platforms that constantly post content stultifying imams and other signifiers of Islam in a way that is coherent with Western Islamophobia. Often, quotes of imams are taken out of context in order to present the ‘premodern’, ‘aggressive’ and ‘non-rational’ ‘essence’ of Islam. One such example is a posted video of an imam whose speech is summarized in this misleading quote: “One can be a killer, a terrorist, a pedophile, but if he prays he is a better person in the eyes of Allah than somebody who doesn’t pray” (Fig. 14).

Viewed weekly over 200,000 times, the online series *Stupcat*, addressing current social and political issues in Kosovo, is interesting in at least three aspects. First, whereas *Stupcat* problematizes issues like the omnipotence of Western NGOs or gender inequality, Islamophobia is ignored. Second, *Stupcat* illustrates the presence of the society’s daily habits derived from Islam, which are never reproduced as such in elitist discourses. Three, the Albanian diaspora in the West is presented as the ‘oriental’ Albanian whose lifestyle is ‘trapped’ in Albanian tradition rooted in Islamic practices (Fig. 15).

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Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

In Kosovo, central figures in the Islamophobia network can be found in civil society, media, and politics. Their common conviction is that Kosovo is a Euro-Atlantic state and should hence refrain from its Islamic tradition (in a post 9/11 world). For example, in a 2018 report regarding Kosovo’s possible membership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), an NGO based in Kosovo argued that “taking into account its Euro-Atlantic agenda, Kosovo should refrain from becoming a member.”

Being regularly invited to TV shows addressing Islam and Albanians, the political advisor Blerim Latifi argues in favor of an Albanian identity which clearly distances itself from Islam. Arbana Xharra, former editor-in-chief of the widely read daily newspaper Zëri, is another famous figure in the Islamophobia network. She made a name for herself with regularly writing about Islam in Kosovo in a way that is in line with the stereotyping of Islam encountered in some countries (Fig. 16). It is important to mention that she explicitly includes the Albanian diaspora in her anti-Islam arguments. The politician Alma Lama is also famous for her provocative takes on Islam. In November 2018, she made headlines after a state decree revoked her from her position as Kosovo’s ambassador in Italy due to an interview containing once again controversial statements about Islam. The work of the journalists Gani Mehmetaj, Artan Haraqija, and Berat Buzhala has already been cited in the media subsection of this report; these are names that must be kept in mind when it comes to Islamophobia in Kosovo.

Figure 16: An older article by Arbana Xharra which is in line with the European stereotyping of Islam (see Footnote 61).

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

Even though the media is a crucial driving force of Kosovar Islamophobia, some newspapers suggested how Islamophobia can be fought in 2018. For example, the renowned daily newspaper Koha Ditore regularly published articles challenging Islamophobia, especially through the writings of Middle East expert Muhamed Mufaku who reminded the Albanian discourse of the vivid links between Albanians and the Middle East.64 Halil Kastrati, whose Islamic charity foundation Jetimat e Ballkanit (Orphans of the Balkans) built 120 houses for families in need in 2018, was named “Person of the Year” by the widely read online newspaper Insajderi (Fig. 17).65 It is interesting to note that Insajderi, also known for its Islamophobic coverage (as shown in the media section), did not mention that Kastrati’s major motivation is his Islamic educational background.66

On the local level, an initiative worth mentioning is the construction of social housing in 2018 by three municipalities in the south of Kosovo in collaboration with Kastrati’s charity foundation.67 Moreover, it also should not be forgotten that Vetëvendosje challenges Islamophobia on the political level, as has been shown earlier in this report.

Given the importance Kosovar media has in spreading Western-style stereotyping of Islam, a measure Kosovar media regulation bodies could envisage are campaigns that raise the awareness of Islamophobic coverage.68 Another measure against Islamophobia could be the foundation of an observatory institution that monitors to what extent secularism, as defined in Kosovo’s constitution, is respected by civil society and state institutions.


66. Ibid. For the piety of Halil Kastrati see his Instagram account, https://www.instagram.com/halilkastrati/?hl=en, (Access date: 3 September 2019).


Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

As the different state reports have shown, ‘radicalization’ issues are given highest priority in current Kosovar politics. This suggests that, on the one hand, Islamophobia in Kosovo is modeled on Western characteristics of stereotyping Islam and, on the other, that Islamophobia is a ‘tool’ Kosovar policy makers use in order to show loyalty to Euro-Atlantic political circles – the first major assumption of this report. The common pattern Islamophobic social media pages follow is that they represent ‘Muslimness’ as something that is not Albanian or Kosovar. This suggests that Kosovar Islamophobia is one of the harshest in the sense that it systematically erases ‘Muslimness’ from a majority-Muslim population – the second major assumption of this report. As the verbal attacks on Xherdan Shaqiri and the controversies regarding the hijab in Kosovar public institutions have shown, the two scapegoats of Islamophobia in Kosovo are, as indicated in the introduction, the Albanian diaspora living in the West and pious Muslims ‘at home.’

Two policy recommendations for politics and NGOs have already been given: raising awareness of Islamophobia in media coverage, and founding an observatory body that monitors the respect of secularism, as defined in Kosovo’s constitution, in civil society and state institutions.

Furthermore, it is essential to tackle Islamophobia on the governmental and NGO level, because Islamophobia is structural. In this sense, awareness campaigns for Islamophobia should not only focus on journalism but also on civil society and
institutional matters. To put it differently, it should be understood that Islamophobia is as unacceptable as racism, anti-Semitism, or misogyny in political discourses.

Even though numerous state reports on ‘violent extremism’ have shown that Islam is arbitrarily framed as a political danger in Kosovo, it should be made clear that this approach is a violation of the freedom of religion.

The employment policy in state institutions, be it on the national or local level, should be reviewed as well in order to make sure that there is no discrimination based on religion (or on certain practices of piety).

In Kosovo, Islam is an integral part of the local traditions. This crucial contextual difference in comparison to Western Europe should be used by state officials and civil society to adopt a non-Islamophobic stance toward Islam.

### Chronology

- **23.03.2018**: The former Pristina Grand Mosque Imam Shefqet Krasniqi was acquitted of inciting terrorism in March 2018.
- **31.05.2018**: Mentor Nazarko, advisor of Kosovo’s foreign minister Behgjet Pacolli, attacked the chairman of the opposition party Vetëvendosje (VV, Self-Determination) Albin Kurti in a widely watched TV debate by stating that his party is flirting with religious extremism.
- **23.06.2018**: After uploading a photo with the comment “elhamdulillah” on Twitter, Xherdan Shaqiri was verbally attacked by a famous journalist.
- **10.07.2018**: Interviewed by an international media outlet, Kosovo’s Prime Minister refuses his Muslim identity: “I’m Albanian. I’m not Muslim.”
- **30.10.2018**: Prishtina Imam Husamedin Abazi criticizes Christmas songs that are part of the music books of Kosovo’s primary schools.
- **23.11.2018**: Kosovo’s ambassador in Italy Alma Lama gets revoked from her position due to an interview containing controversial statements about Islam.
- **28.11.2018**: Inauguration of social housing built by the Islamic charity organization Jetimat e Ballkanit (Orphans of the Balkans) in collaboration with three municipalities in the south of Kosovo.
- **29.12.2018**: Islamic humanist Halil Kastrati, founder of Jetimat e Ballkanit, is named “Person of the Year” by the widely read online newspaper Insajderi.