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 policymakers 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

The report provides an overview of the main manifestations of Islamophobia and the negative attitude towards Muslims due to their religious conviction in Latvia in 2018. The report uses data obtained by analysing information available in the media, by questioning experts, and interviewing members of the Muslim community in Latvia.

Compared to the three previous years, Latvia did not see a strong increase in Islamophobic attitudes in 2018. No physical attacks on individuals and organisations were reported in 2018. Data on verbal Islamophobic incidents is missing since neither individual Muslims nor Muslim groups have reported such incidents.

There have been no events of Islamophobic nature in Latvia (meetings, pickets, demonstrations, etc.), but stereotypes, prejudices, and dislike towards Muslims are still observed. A contributing factor to the Islamophobic attitude was the entry into the Latvian book market of the Latvian translation of the book *Die verschleierte Gefahr* (The Veiled Threat) (*Aiz plīvura slēptās briesmas*) by the German politician and self-proclaimed feminist Zana Ramadani. For this reason, it would be misleading to think that Islamophobic attitudes have waned in Latvia compared to the data of previous studies, e.g. the results of the Pew Research Center study suggest that only 19% of Latvia’s population would be ready to accept a Muslim in the family.

Islamophobic attitudes in Latvian society are shaped by an intolerant, hateful, and fearful attitude towards immigrants, which in the Latvian context has come to mean Muslims first and foremost.

In 2018, the political climate in Latvia was determined by parliamentary (*Saeima*) elections. The year was marked by the establishment of a new far right political association, *Latvijas Nacionālisti* (Latvian Nationalists), and by the strengthening of populism.

Although the Law on the Restriction on Wearing Face Coverings, steered by the Ministry of Justice (2015), was not approved in 2018, the parliamentary secretary of the ministry stated that the ministry had not abandoned the idea of restrictions on wearing face coverings in public places.

Though Islamophobic sentiment was not peculiar to the leading media of Latvia, the media in general still spread rumours and chase after sensations that are Islamophobic in nature.

The radical right-wing groups in Latvia are small and internally fragmented. Therefore, they were not able to mobilise their supporters for political campaigns in 2018, while the tendency to use the Internet as an instrument for attracting followers, disseminating radical-right ideology, and forming virtual groups emerged more strongly.
Kopsavilkums

Country Profile

Country: Latvia
Type of Regime: Democratic Republic
Form of Government: Parliamentary Republic
Ruling Parties: Jaunā Vienotība (New Unity), Jaunā konservatīvā partija (New Conservative Party), Attīstībai/Par! (Development/For!), KPV LV (Who Owns the State Latvia?), Nacionālā apvienība (National Alliance).
Opposition Parties: Saskaņa (Harmony), Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība (Union of Greens and Farmers).

Last Elections: 2018 Parliamentary Elections: social democratic Party Saskaņa (Harmony) (23 seats); Populist Party KPV LV (Who Owns the State Latvia?) (16 seats); conservative party Jaunā konservatīvā partija (New Conservative Party) (16 seats); liberal political alliance Attīstībai/Par! (Development/For!) (13 seats); national-conservative political party Nacionālā apvienība (National Alliance) (13 seats); conservative political alliance Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība (Union of Greens and Farmers) (11 seats); liberal conservative party Jaunā Vienotība (New Unity) (8 seats).

Total Population: 1.93 million

Major Languages: Latvian is the official state language. Latvia provides ethnic minority education programmes in Russian, Polish, Hebrew, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Belarusian.

Official Religion: No. In accordance with Article 99 of the Constitution of Latvia (Satversme), the Church in Latvia is separate from the state.

Statistics on Islamophobia: Statistics are not available since no quantitative studies have been carried out.

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: In 2018, no incidents against Muslims were reported.

Major Religions (% of Population): The question regarding religion is not included in the population census in Latvia. According to a survey by the ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) (2015): Christianity (62.6 %), No Religion (36.7 %), Other Religions (0.7%), Islam (0.1%).

Muslim Population (% of Population): Estimated number of Muslims in Latvia (0.1%). The question regarding religion is not included in the population census anymore.

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Latvian Islamic Centre, the Riga Muslim community “Iman”, the Muslim community in Riga “Miras”, the society of Tatars of Latvia “Idel”.

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: The society “Shelter Safe House”, Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS.

Far Right Movements: Tēvijas Sargi (Fatherland Guards), Latvijas Nacionālā fronte (Latvian National Front).

Far Right Terrorist Organisations: Gustava Celmiņa centrs (Centre of Gustavs Celmiņš)

Limitations to Islamic practices
- Hijab Ban: No
- Halal Slaughter Ban: No
- Minaret Ban: No
- Circumcision Ban: No
- Burka Ban: No
- Prayer Ban: No
Introduction

Compared to the three previous years, Latvia did not see a strong increase in Islamophobic attitudes in 2018. No Islamophobic events have been recorded in Latvia (meetings, pickets, demonstrations, etc.), but stereotypes, prejudices, and dislike towards Muslims are still present. A contributing factor to Islamophobic attitudes was the translation of the book Die verschleierte Gefahr (The Veiled Threat)\(^1\) by the German conservative politician and self-proclaimed feminist Zana Ramadani published in 2018 by Jumava, one of Latvia’s famous private publishing houses. For this reason, it would be misleading to think that Islamophobic attitudes have waned in Latvia compared to the data of previous studies, e.g. the results of the Pew Research Center study suggest that only 19% of Latvia’s population would be ready to accept a Muslim in the family.\(^2\)

Figure 1: The Latvian translation of the book Die verschleierte Gefahr by the German conservative politician and self-proclaimed feminist Zana Ramadani published in 2018.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

In Latvia, Islamophobia manifests itself primarily as a dislike of otherness, a fear of the unknown, and unjustified hostility towards Muslims. No physical attacks on individuals and organisations were reported in 2018. Data on verbal Islamophobic

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incidents are missing since neither individual Muslims nor Muslim groups have reported any incidents. Individual conversations with Muslim women reveal that they have been subjected to verbal attacks in public places (mainly on the street) aimed at violating personal dignity, intimidation, and creating a hostile and degrading atmosphere. Social networks represent the key environment where hate speech appears on a regular basis.

**Employment**

The Ombudsman’s Office received no complaints on discrimination in the labour market on the grounds of religious affiliation or religious conviction. However, given that the majority of immigrants received during the “refugee crisis” have left Latvia, cases of discrimination cannot be ruled out. Within the framework of the EU relocation programme for asylum seekers, Latvia had pledged to admit 531 refugees. Latvia has hosted 374 individuals (mainly from Syria and Eritrea). In 2018, the State Employment Agency registered only 24 persons, but a job was found for 18 people.³

Unofficial data of the Society Integration Foundation suggest that the majority of people, who received social workers’ advice, have left the country due to the unemployment rate,⁴ low wages,⁵ and the threat of linguistic discrimination in the Latvian labour market as the Labour Law prohibits the recruitment of people who have not passed the official language examination. However, the private sector may employ people with no certificate of proficiency of the official language if their activities do not affect legitimate public interests such as public security, health, morality, health protection, protection of consumer rights and labour law, safety at work, and public and administrative supervision.

**Education**

Compared to what was reported in previous years, the situation in education has not changed: Islamophobia cannot be found in Latvian school curricula and textbooks, which are centred on gaining knowledge of Europe. The ESF (European Social Fund) project “Competency Approach to Learning Content” is currently being implemented in Latvia. It aims to develop, approbate, and introduce, within five successive years, the content of general education and a learning approach that would ensure the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed today.

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⁵. From January 1, 2018, the national minimum wage in Latvia is fixed at €430 per month.
A school is a reflection of society, and the prejudices and stereotypes existing in society are also present in educational institutions, but intolerance and various types of phobias are not monitored in Latvian educational institutions. Bullying, which takes the form of regular physical harassment, verbal humiliation, or the exclusion of someone from the group, are not rare in Latvian schools: 31% of the surveyed pupils reported being bullied frequently, i.e. at least a few times per month. Unfortunately, this problem is well hidden so as not to damage the image of the school. Therefore, cases when parents dare to mobilise the media in order to force schools to deal with problems are extremely rare. Most parents choose the easiest way, i.e. they find a new school for their children. The fact that the number of calls to the country's children's hotline increased in the first months of 2018 confirms the topicality of the problem.

For decades, the Latvian education system has not been focused on preventing aversion to otherness and fear of the unknown; in other words, the competence of Latvian society in the field of intercultural tolerance is weak. A representative of the Muslim community described the situation as follows: “One can face the daily reality of the local [negative] attitude not only towards Muslims but also towards everything that is new and unfamiliar. Many Muslims have told me how they are doing here. Parents of a girl, who married an Egyptian, don’t talk to their daughter’s husband, they ignore him.”

Politics
In 2018, the political climate in Latvia was determined by parliamentary (Saeima) elections. The year was marked by the creation of a new far right political association, Latvijas Nacionalisti (Latvian Nationalists), and by the strengthening of populism. The pre-election programme of Latvian Nationalists included the slogan “Latvia – the State of Latvians! Objective: Prosperity of the Latvian people, defence of national, economic, social, cultural and other vital interests – economic and cultural nationalism. (…) Define the priority of national legal norms over international ones in the Constitution (Satversme). Limit migration and integration. Encourage repatriation.”

A similar position was expressed by the national-conservative political party Nacionalā apvienība (National Alliance): “The key objective of the National Alliance
has always been and will be Latvian Latvia. (..) Let us support the increase in the proportion of Latvians in Latvia and avoid an irresponsible immigration policy.”11 Although none of the political parties directly referred to Muslims or Islam in their pre-election programmes, they expressed their attitude indirectly, i.e. by mentioning refugees and immigration. The position of Jaunā konservatīvā partija (New Conservative Party) was worded as follows: “Opposition to inflows of economic refugees into Latvia and the EU.”12 The slogan of Rīcības partija (Action Party) “Reception of refugees threatens Latvia’s security”13 smacked of identifying refugees from the Middle East with terrorists.

The peculiarity of Latvia’s political environment is the blurred border between the right and the left, which was also confirmed by the parliamentary elections in 2018. The left-leaning party No sirds Latvijai (For Latvia from the Heart) took the position of the right and declared clearly, “We are against the introduction of migrant quotas.”14 Meanwhile, Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskā strādnieku partija (Latvian Social Democratic Workers’ Party), Kristīgi demokrātiskā savienība (Christian Democratic Union), and Gods kalpot mūsu Latvijai (Honour to Serve Our Latvia), which amalgamated in one association, declared their aim to “develop Latvia as a Latvian and national country where an individual with his needs plays the central role, where traditional cultural environment, Christian values and cultural values of other peoples living here are cultivated and preserved.”15

Media

The media in Latvia were confined to one-sided or highly politicised information addressed to the target audience of a political current. The prevailing topics were refugees-terrorists,16 refugees- profiteers of European social benefits,17 the destruction of Europe,18 etc. The refugee issue was reflected narrowly, i.e. as a European “refugee

“crisis” (refugees want to arrive in prosperous Europe) rather than a humanitarian crisis that affects the entire world. The following causes of the so-called refugee crisis were ignored: violent conflicts, persecution, inequality, terrorism, repressive regimes, natural disasters, man-made crises, and persistent poverty.

The Latvian media still spread rumours and chase after sensations, thus representing low quality journalism and not reflecting the deliberate presence of Islamophobia, e.g. the heading of the publication about the National Day celebration organised by the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Latvia on November 29 was “Arab National Celebration with Kalashnikovs in Riga.” The article dealt with the dance performed by Arab men with wooden sticks, faux swords, and even dummy firearms. Although the article reflected the opinion of an expert, i.e. that Arabs see no aggression in this tradition, which is more than 1,500 years old, and perceive it as their folklore, the newspaper’s sensational headline contributed to the strengthening of the stereotype about Muslims as potential terrorists. This was confirmed by the comments following the publication of the article: “Let Us Not Allow Latvia to Be Flooded with the Third World Garbage!”, “They are just bloody killers and rapists! Yes, they know how to do it, they don’t have to be encouraged!”, “Islam is a geopolitical ‘religion’ aimed at subjecting everyone to Allah or killing. Read Quran to find out that ISIS is Islam in its purest form.”

Figure 2: The heading of the publication about the National Day celebration organised by the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Latvia on November 29, 2018: “Arab National Celebration with Kalashnikovs in Riga.”

20. Viena no tām atgādināja PSRS laikā izgudroto automātu AK-47, sauktu par kalašņikovu.
Although Islamophobic sentiment was not characteristic of the leading Latvian media, the term “Islamic” was still used regularly when speaking about DAESHE or other terrorist groups, thus strengthening the stereotype about Islam as a potential threat. Meanwhile, provocative anti-Muslim statements were found in marginal radical publications, e.g. the newspaper DDD of the National Front of Latvia published the article “Barbarians in Latvia and Barbarians in Europe” which stated, “They are Muslim ‘refugees’ who organise attacks, arson, sabotage. There is no doubt that they are barbarians. And it is absurd to say that we have to be compassionate towards them.”

Justice System
The Law on the Restriction on Wearing Face Coverings steered by the Ministry of Justice (2015) was not approved during the previous parliamentary term in 2018. Two draft laws were tabled to parliament to limit the wearing of face-covering clothing, including face-covering Muslim headscarves. The first draft law was rejected by the parliament, while the second draft law, following conceptual objections by a number of experts, including the Saeima Legal Office, was not forwarded by the Saeima Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee for the first reading. The parliamentary secretary of the Ministry of Justice stated that the ministry has not abandoned the idea of face-covering restrictions in public places. The compromise could be as follows: not to ban face covering in all public venues, but only in certain places and institutions, such as schools.

Internet
As in other countries, the most effective means of disseminating Islamophobia is the Internet in Latvia. Due to the fact that the number of Muslims is small in the country, social networks are the main place for expressing hate speech. The interactive environment and anonymity of the Internet are the key factors determining the activity of Islamophobes, racists, and other individuals expressing hate speech in cyberspace. In 2018, hate speech on the Internet was targeted at both the Muslim community and imaginary Muslims: “All evil comes from Christianity and Muslims!!!” “When those immigrants sail in boats to Europe to get its huge benefits, they try to drown

Christians who share the boats with them. Then watch their behaviour on the streets of Europe, a woman can't even pass by without being raped with eyes. In addition, it does not matter whether she is a minor or granny.”26 The notice regarding the prevention of a biological terrorist attack in Germany, organised by a Tunisian, was followed by the comment: “Death penalty! And pack all his relatives off to their native jungle!”27 The news on the French Parliament's ban prohibiting MPs from wearing religious symbols was followed by a comment in which the hamsa amulet was called the “symbol of Islamofascism”.28

Figure 3: Hate speech in a posted comment online: "Death penalty! And pack all his relatives off to their native jungle!"

**Central Figures In The Islamophobia Network**

The radical right-wing groups in Latvia, e.g. Tēvijas sargi (Fatherland Guards) and Latvijas Nacionālā Fronte (Latvian National Front), are small and internally fragmented. Therefore, they were unable to mobilise their supporters for political campaigns in 2018 and joined events organised by other organisations to promote their ideology and counter immigration, the socio-political situation in the country, etc. The activity of these groups was reflected on the following websites: nacionalisti.lv, fronte.lv, pietiek.com, and tautastribunals.eu. Similarly to the press, the topic of refugees also prevailed on the Internet.

A new trend is emerging, namely the radical right has transferred its activity to the Internet: the websites pietiek.com and tautastribunals.eu are not the websites of officially registered associations, but they are groups or virtual communities established on the Internet. Thus, radical right activists in Latvia use the Internet as a tool to attract followers, disseminate their ideology, and build the group's identity. In 2018, the Internet promoted the mobilisation of radical right groups against the UN

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agreement entitled “The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration”: “Both the UN migration pact and refugee pact make one thing very clear, i.e. the left multiculturalists feel that they are losing power. In one country after another, nationally oriented forces come to power, ranking interests of their peoples and countries first, distancing themselves from abstract ‘solidarity’ slogans which actually conceal interests of the international oligarchy.”

Figure 4: A cartoon illustrating the article entitled “UN Refugee Pact or Gambles of the Left Multiculturalists Continue” published on the site pietiek.com maintained by those voicing radical right views.

Observed Civil Society And Political Assessment And Initiatives

The Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS implemented the project “Integration of Society in the Workplace”. The project resulted in the development of the methodological material “Workplace Integration” containing examples of best practices, concerns of employees and employers about the integration process, as well as possible solutions. At the end of the project, a seminar was organised in which information on the prepared material was disseminated to employers and local government employees, while a discussion on integration issues in the working environment was also held.

Initiatives of artists include, first and foremost, the campaign “Openness Is Value” organised in December 2018. The Ģertrūde Street Theatre held a solo exhibition of artist Ieva Kauliņa entitled Tales of the Road devoted to the arrival of individual refugees to Latvia. The exhibition offered not only the opportunity to view illustrations by Kauliņa but also to watch, in an interactive way, video stories about people who due to war, political persecution, and threats were forced to flee their homes. Secondly, director Kārlis Lesiņš, at Juris Podnieks studio, produced a documentary about the Muslim community of Latvia entitled In the Sign of the

30. Ibid.
tions by Kauliņa but also to watch, in an interactive way, video stories about people who due to war, political persecution, and threats were forced to flee their homes. Secondly, director Kārlis Lesiņš, at Juris Podnieks studio, produced a documentary about the Muslim community of Latvia entitled *In the Sign of the Overturned Moon*. Before the premiere of the film, the head of the Islamic Culture Centre of Latvia expressed his hope that the film would enable a dialogue between the Muslim community and society of Latvia. During the production of the film, five people related to the local community of Latvia went to Syria to fight for the DAESH. The creators of the documentary explored how it was possible that people were radicalised in as small a country as Latvia, and why nobody noticed it in a timely manner.

In the academic environment, Inese Ruce, a researcher at the University of Latvia, provided an overview of media activity in Latvia, stressing the need for responsible journalism and the morality of honesty. For the first time, a book was published in Latvia on a topic that frightens people around the world, i.e. terrorism. In his monograph *In the Crossfire of Terrorism. The Islamic State*, Māris Kūlis, a researcher of the University of Latvia, analyses the causes of the formation, history, and the current situation of the so-called Islamic State (DAESH). The author looks at Wahhabism and Salafism, the politics of Arab states, the consequences of the Iraq War, the geopolitical ambitions of the regional and global powers, and people’s dreams of justice in the world.

In the media environment, the problem of anonymous commentators was addressed. To eliminate hate speech in the Internet environment, it is no longer possible to provide comments on material published on the portal *tvnet.lv* without registration. Latvian television regularly reports on the most important events of the life of Muslims, providing neutral information, e.g. on Ramadan, pilgrimage, etc.

**Conclusion And Policy Recommendations**

Although Latvia did not see a strong increase in Islamophobic attitude, representatives of the state power have to call on Latvia’s population to refrain from provocative actions against the cohesion of society and to promote the peaceful coexistence of different religious communities. The following measures need to be taken to combat discrimination and to address problems of social marginalisation:

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ISLAMOPHOBIA IN LATVIA

• Measures to prevent the use of Islamophobic statements in the media.
• Monitoring of Internet publications to detect cases of Islamophobia and discrimination.
• Funding for research aimed at combating Islamophobia and discrimination.
• Measures to prevent young people from joining radical right groups by organising informative activities in educational institutions.
• Active explanatory work among the media on the need to ensure that the presentation of news is objective and does not contribute to the atmosphere of hostility and ill feelings towards Muslims.
• Measures to ensure that official language inspectors carry out a balanced implementation of the Official Language Law, paying particular attention to the principles of respect for human rights.
• Funding for the National Agency for the Latvian Language Training in order to fully meet the demand for official language training in Latvia.

Chronology

• **January 2018:** The publication of the Latvian translation of the book *Die verschleierte Gefahr* (The Veiled Threat) (*Aiz plīvura slēptās briesmas*) by Zana Ramadani.
• **18.03.2018:** The parliamentary secretary of the Ministry of Justice stated that the ministry has not abandoned the idea of face-covering restrictions in public places.
• **02.11.2018:** Anti-Muslim statements published in the newspaper *DDD*.  
• **05.12.2018:** The Parliament of Latvia (*Saeima*) called on the government not to support the UN Migration Pact.