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, brain storming 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

Despite the many issues that were brought to the forefront during the referendum for the name change in North Macedonia, the process did not lead to higher levels of religious intolerance within the community. However, as it has been the case previously, Albanians were targeted both with the Law on the Use of Languages which is supposed to make the Albanian language used nationally, and with the referendum where Albanians are viewed as citizens with no say on the name issue.

Discrimination, Islamophobia, and hate speech have been present during 2018; however, in a lower number of incidents as compared to previous years. Interethnic disputes have consequently led to some incidents on a religious level such as the burning of a mosque or cases of discrimination based on religious affiliation.

Few incidents that occurred in 2018 put North Macedonia on the Islamophobia map. A 350-year-old mosque was burnt as a hate crime in Prilep, the eastern part of the country, while on the western part, in Ohrid, heated discussions over the size of a minaret have stalled the restoration process of the mosque itself. Madrasas are still fighting to get legal recognition by the Ministry of Education, while a primary school in Radovish was fined for allowing an iftar dinner to be organized in its premises. Furthermore, a case of discrimination in employment of a hijabi teacher was reported to the Ombudsman but no mention of it was made in the annual report, let alone any action taken to shed light on the case. On the political level, 2018 saw clashes between the government and MPs, and the president of the Islamic Community of North Macedonia.

The Islamic Community of North Macedonia has not really positioned itself as the pioneer in the protection of the rights of Muslims in the country, leaving the space instead to human rights organizations. The involvement of the Islamic Community with the state institutions in detecting and fighting Islamophobia is more than necessary.
Извршно резиме

И покрај многуте прашања кои беа отворени за време на референдумот за промена на името во Северна Македонија, самиот процес не доведе до по-високи нивоа на верска интолеранција во самата држава. Сепак, како што беше случај претходно, Албанците беа таргетирани како со Законот за употреба на српски јазик, кој предвидува употреба на албанскиот јазик на национално ниво, како и со референдумот каде што Албанците се сметала за граѓани без глас во прашањето за името.

Дискриминацијата, исламофобијата, говорот на омраза врз верска основа беа присутни во текот на 2018 година, сепак, во помал број инциденти во споредба со претходните години. Меѓутим, многу инциденти на релгиозно ниво, како што се соработувањето на цамија или случаи на дискриминација врз основа на исламска верска припадност.

Неколку инциденти што се случиве во текот на 2018 година, сепак, ја стави Северна Македонија на картата на исламофобијата. 350-годишна цамија беше изгорена како злосторство од омраза во Прилеп, источниот дел на земјата, додека на западниот дел, во Охрид, разгорените разговори за големината на минаретот го задушуваат процесот на реставрација на самата цамија. Медресите се уште борат за нивното признавање од страна на Министерството за образование, додека основно училиште во Радовиш беше казнето за тоа што дозволи ифтарска вечерка на територијата. Истото се случило во Радовиш, освен дека истиот не е споменуван во годишниот извештај на Народниот правозащитник, иако истиот се сметал за ниво на Северна Македонија.

Исламската заедница на Северна Македонија не се постави како пионер за заштитата на правата на муслиманите во Македонија, оставајќи простор на организациите за човекови права да го дополнат вакумот. Поголемо вклучуване на Исламската заедница во соработка со државните институции во откривањето и борбата против исламофобијата е повеќе од потребно.
Përmbledhja ekzekutive

Për kundër shumë çështjeve që u hapën gjatë referendimit për ndryshimin e emrit në Maqedoninë e Veriut, vet procesi nuk ka ndikuar në rritjen e nivelit të jotolerancës fetare brenda shtetit. Megjithatë, siç ka ndodhur edhe më parë, shqiptarët janë targetuar si me Ligjin për përdorimin e gjuhëve që supozohet të zgjerojë përdorimin e gjuhës shtipre në nivel kombëtarë, ashtu edhe me referendumin ku shqiptarët shihen si qytetarë pa të drejtë fjalë në çështjen e emrit.

Diskriminimi, islamofobia, gjuha e urrejtjes në bazë të përkatësisë fetare islamike kanë qenë të pranishme gjatë vitit 2018, megjithatë, në numër më të vogël incidentesh në krahasim me vjen e mëparshme. Në shumë raste, mosmarrëveshjet ndëretnike kanë rezultuar me incidente në nivel fetar, siç janë ndihmë apo rastet e diskriminimit të bazuara në përkatësinë fetare.

Disa incidente që kanë ndodhur gjatë vitit 2018 megjithatë kanë vënë - Maqedoninë e Veriut në hartën e Islamofobisë. Një xhami i vjetër 350 vite u dogj si pasojë i një krimi të urrejtjes në Prilep, në pjesën lindore të vendit, ndërsa në pjesën perëndimore, në Ohër, diskutimet e nxehta mbështetësi dhe ndihmë fetare në restaurimin e xhamisë. Madreset ende po luftojnë për të marrë njohje ligjore nga Ministria e Arsimit, ndërsa një shkollë fillore në Radovish u gjobit për lejimin e një darke iftar në ambientet e saj. Për më tepër, një rast diskriminimi në punësimit të një mësues se me hixhab u raportua te Avokati i Popullit, edhe nëse rasti nuk përmbet në raportin vjetor, e lërë më të jetë marrë një prapëtim për të hedhur dritë mbi rastin. Në nivelin politik, gjatë vitit 2018 ka pasur përplasje mes vjenit të më parë dhe depunësisë dhe deputetëve, dhe kryetarit të Bashkësisë Islame të Maqedonisë Veriore.

Bashkësia Fetare Islame e Maqedonisë Veriore nuk e ka vënë veten si pioner i mbrojtjes të të drejtave të myslimanëve në Maqedoni, duke lënë hapësirën për organizatat e të drejtave të njerëzit për të mbushur vakumin e mbetur. Përshirja më e madhe e Bashkësisë Fetare Islame në bashkëpunim me institucionet shtetërore në zbulimin dhe luftimin e islamofobisë është më se e nevojshme.
Country Profile

Country: North Macedonia
Type of Regime: Representative democracy
Form of Government: Parliamentary Republic
Ruling Parties: Coalition SDSM and DUI (leftist), RDK and Alternativa
Opposition Parties: VMRO-DPMNE and Coalition “For a better Macedonia” (right-wing), AA, Besa
Last Elections: 2016 Parliamentary Elections (VMRO DPMNE: 51 seats [39.4%]; SDSM: 49 seats [37.9%]; DUI: 10 seats [7.5%]; Besa Movement: 5 seats [5%]; Alliance for Albanians: 3 seats [3%]; DPA: 2 seats [2.7%]). Current government coalition is a leftist one.
Total Population: 2,022,547 (2002 Census)
Major Languages: Macedonian and Albanian
Official Religion: No official religion (Secularism), although the constitution lists five religious groups: the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Religious Community in Macedonia, the Catholic Church, the Evangelical Methodist Church, and the Jewish Community.
Statistics on Islamophobia: N/A
Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: N/A
Major Religions (% of Population): Macedonian Orthodox 64.8%, Muslim 33.3%, other Christian 0.4%, other and unspecified 1.5% (2002 est.)
Muslim Population (% of Population): 700,000 (33.3%) according to 2002 Census (Macedonia 2017 International Religious Freedom Report)
Main Muslim Community Organizations: Islamic Religious Community of Macedonia
Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of North Macedonia, NGO Legis
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

For North Macedonia, 2018 was a decisive year. After almost 3 decades of diplomatic disputes with Greece, the country changed its name constitutionally from Republic of Macedonia to Republic of North Macedonia. The referendum that preceded this process opened up the way to several dichotomies: the patriots versus the traitors, the Macedonians versus the Albanians, the ones “with a homeland” versus the ones “without a homeland”, the West versus the East, the ones that boycott the referendum versus the ones that promote it. While previously any type of voting process would spark an array of interethnic incidents, the referendum passed without any major clashes between the two major ethnic groups.1

As noted in the previous EIR reports on Macedonia, in the Republic of North Macedonia religious and ethnic differences almost coincide3 and in many cases interethnic incidents also portray or are aided by interreligious intolerance. A case in point is portrayed in Figure 1 where on 18 January, 2018 a photograph of a graffiti on a building wall in Bitola was shared on social media. The graffiti “Смрт за Шиптари!” and “Vdekje për Shqiptarët!” (death for Albanians) was written in both the Macedonian and Albanian languages as an irony related to the bill on usage of minority languages.4 Many cases of ethnic hatred have elements of Islamophobia as well.

Additionaly, there is an increasing trend of anti-Turkey and anti-Erdogan sentiments which in many cases border with an Islamophobic narrative. While the narrative

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1. Given that this report covers the period from 1 January, 2018 to 31 December, 2018, for more information on the political situation in the previous year and how it has affected the Islamophobia-related incidents, please consult the Islamophobia in Macedonia: National Report 2017.
3. The majority of Albanians are Muslim, while the majority of Macedonians are Orthodox, thus the interethnic intolerance in many cases reflects interreligious intolerance.
4. “Во Битола се почитува двојазичност”, Civil Media.
itself is more directed towards what is considered neo-Ottomanism, the language used indicates levels of anti-Islamic attitudes. Such a trend interestingly exists amongst individuals and groups that formally belong to Muslim families and portray any type of Turkish influence as Islamic thus anti-western and primitive. In the wake of elections - be those local, parliamentary, or presidential - there is a regular Islamophobic narrative towards the Besa Movement, an Albanian political party, which is constantly accused of having an Islamic background and being financed by foreign states.

Given that North Macedonia was part of the Balkan route of immigrants, the heightened level of Islamophobia was a result of the negative attitude of the locals towards the immigrants themselves (see Figure 2). Since the route decreased in frequency, there are fewer cases of direct Islamophobic incidents or comments although continuously there are reported cases of attacks on migrants.

This report is mainly based on the reported cases within the office of the Ombudsman, the Commission for Prevention of Discrimination, media reports, contacts with NGOs, religious institutions and individuals that have helped in finding cases with subtle nuances of discrimination based on religious belief. Information has been gathered in the local languages spoken by the Muslim communities in North Macedonia.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

Figure 2: The burnt mosque in Erekovci.

5. Ibid.
7. In the current report, translations from local languages (Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish, Bosnian) to English are by the author.
On 14 November, 2018, a case of discrimination based on religious belief in Portofino-Osteria and Bar, a restaurant in Skopje, was reported. The victim of the discrimination reported the case to the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights Macedonia. The victim, who wears the hijab, together with two friends tried to enter the restaurant Portofino Osteria but were not allowed to enter with the excuse that reservations are needed. Ten minutes later, one of the friends, in an attempt to understand if the reason that they were denied entrance was the fact that the victim was wearing the hijab, tried to enter the restaurant and without any problem was given a table and served. The Commission for Protection from Discrimination after having received a complaint by the HCHR on 28 December, 2018 published an opinion stating that the restaurant by denying service to a hijabi customer had committed a direct act of discrimination based on religious belief. The commission asked the restaurant to stop this practice otherwise further punitive measures will be taken.

On 5 October, 2018, a 350-year-old mosque in the village of Erekovci, in the municipality of Prilep, was burnt (Figure 3). The Islamic Community has reported that indications from the villagers point to the fact that the fire was intentional and the case was reported to the police. As of yet, the case has not been resolved.

**Employment**

Although not often reported, there are cases especially of hijabi women who are refused a job position on the basis of their visible Islamic appearance. In discussions with some Islamic organizations, many Muslim women have applied for job positions in education and the health sector and have been rejected only after the interviews where their Muslimness was considered too visible due to their headscarf. However, such cases are a lot fewer compared to previous years. One specific case was brought to the Office of the Ombudsman by a husband who claims that his wife was not allowed to teach in a primary school in Radovish because of her headscarf, although she had been accepted in the job position previously. Due to lack of supporting evidence, the office of the Ombudsman didn’t pursue the case or report it as a case of discrimination based on religious affiliation. The report of the Ombudsman

13. Personal interview with the personnel in the Ombudsman’s office (January 2019).
published in March 2019 doesn’t mention any case of discrimination based on religious belonging.\textsuperscript{14}

Additionally, Muslims are not given legal means to have shorter working hours during Ramadan or to be exempt from working during the Jummah prayer, although unofficially employers allow their employees to attend the prayer.

\textbf{Education}

Although Islamic education on a high school level is provided at private institutions within the framework of the Islamic Community, the accreditation of these madrasas by the Ministry of Education and Science is still an open issue.\textsuperscript{15} The applications for university studies by the graduates from the madrasas in North Macedonia are rejected by many state universities leaving Islamic Studies in the country and outside of it as the only option for higher education. Some universities have opened their doors to the madrasa graduates although this seems to be an exception to the rule.

On another note, in an attempt to protect secularity in the schools, the state education inspectorate fined the primary school Krste Petkov Misirkov in Radovish with 1,600 euros for allowing an iftar dinner to be organized on its premises, where the \textit{adhan} (ezan) was called, which normally signifies that the time to break the fast has arrived.\textsuperscript{16} Additionally, the principle of the school Olgica Stojanova was fined with 1,120 euros as the person in charge of the school who gave permission for the event. The inspectorate indicated that a request for the termination of the contract of the school principle will be sent to the municipality of Radovish on the basis that she acted against the law when she allowed a religious event to be organized on the school premises, while the Minister of Education Arber Ademi agreed with the verdict of the inspectorate.\textsuperscript{17} This reaction came as a result of very harsh reactions on social media after a video where the \textit{ezan} is called was published, claiming that such an event is in direct breach of the secularity principle that the school is supposed to maintain. However, reactions from Muslims on social media pointed out that this event was taken out of proportion and shows clear Islamophobic sentiments given that the school in its official opening in 2008 was blessed by a religious cleric of the Orthodox faith.\textsuperscript{18}


Politics
The restoration of the Ali Pasha Mosque in Ohrid, has been a contentious issue for a long time in the city and among different state and religious institutions. The reconstruction of the mosque which was supposed to get a 32 m tall minaret (assumed to be the original size of the minaret) as compared to the current one which is 6.5 m tall restored in the last century, has sparked huge debates and dissatisfaction in the city and the country as a whole, with the argument that the new minaret will dominate the landscape of the old bazaar in Ohrid. The former minister of culture in order to respond to the criticism from the local non-Muslim groups had promised to halt the construction work; however, a special commission within the ministry concluded that the minister has no such powers.

The issue of the renovation of the mosque in Ohrid was a topic of discussion with the Minister of Culture Asaf Ademi who said that no investment by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of North Macedonia will be a base for religious intolerance, which is why for the restoration of the mosque, especially when it comes to the height of the new minaret, a common language between the Directorate for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and the Islamic Community of North Macedonia needs to be found. Members of the Association Sovest, who are the ones who have been vocal against the renovation, claim that with the higher minaret the authenticity of the city of Ohrid will be lost, while the whole process will trigger religious hatred and interethnic intolerance. As of now, the issue has still not been resolved.

Another open case regarding a renovation of a mosque - this one being burnt - is the Carshi Mosque in Prilep. In August 2001, during the armed conflict in North Macedonia, an army convoy traveling from Skopje to Tetovo was attacked, where 10 soldiers from Prilep and its surroundings were killed. The citizens of Prilep, as a counter-attack and a gesture of revolt, burnt the Carshi Mosque of Prilep. The rebuilding of the mosque is still a contentious issue although the Islamic Community received permission to rebuild it in 2006, 2010, and 2012. Currently, the structure, which is in ruins, is used as a shelter by alcoholics and has been further vandalized (Figure 4).

Continuing with cases in the political arena, an open question to be resolved is the Bektashi community's official registration/recognition and property issues. A decade-long dispute between the Bektashi order and the state was brought as a case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) with the complaint that the domestic courts of North Macedonia have refused to “allow the Bektashi community to retain its status as a religious organization and to accept its new application for registration.” Another contentious issue related to the Bektashi community is the ownership of the Bektashi complex in Tetovo known as “Arabati Baba Tekke.” The Bektashi community of Tetovo has brought the case to international courts, since the whole property is currently owned by the state. Just to illustrate the complexity of the ownership of the tekke, the property is partly used by the Bektashis, the Islamic Community uses one building as a masjid, while the rest of the buildings (the hotel, the restaurant, the fountain, etc.) are left unmanaged and are in ruins.

There are also more direct political clashes between the government and the Islamic Community of North Macedonia. In 2018, there were several cases of clashes between the leader of the Islamic Community, Sulejman Redzepi, and the government. For the leader of the Islamic Community, the government is showing bias towards the Orthodox community by sponsoring the building of churches while the mosques are always built with the private money of the Muslims.

On that note, in August 2018, the government announced that it would check the legality of the work of the religious communities in the country right after MP Muhamed Zeqiri posed the question of whether the labor inspection will ever con-
duct an inspection of the Islamic Community so as to detect the irregularities and misuse of funds that, according to the MP, are made by its president. To this, the president of the Islamic Community, Sulejman ef. Rexhepi, responded by accusing the state of favoring the Orthodox Church while similar privileges that are given to the Orthodox Church are denied to the Islamic Community.

Media

An article titled “THE EUROPEAN UNION WILL NOT ACCEPT US: We Will Change the Name, But Will You, Albanians Brothers, Change Your Religion to Enter the EU?” published on the news portal Infomax.mk, quoting a Facebook post of Cvetin Chilimanov (see Figure 5), a journalist and adviser to the ex-president of North Macedonia Gjorge Ivanov, claims that the problem of the leading EU powers is with the Muslim population in Macedonia, in the same way they have a problem with Turkey and Albania. The article and the Facebook post both emphasize that since ethnic Macedonians had to negotiate their identity and change the name of the country in order to enter the EU, the problem now is the “Muslim problem” which is the reason why the EU - they claim - is reluctant to accept North Macedonia as a full EU member.

29. Ibid.
Another article posted on the web portal of TV Telma, in reference to the clash between Erdogan and Trump, makes numerous Islamophobic comments, starting from the title of the article itself “In the Fight between Allah and the Dollar, the Loser is Erdogan – The Sultan with Threats to Trump.” At the very start of the article the author sarcastically states, “After addressing Allah and then his people with an attempt to calm them, Erdogan, with a column in the New York Times, addressed Trump, who doubled customs for Turkey yesterday and further knocked down the Turkish lira.” On several occasions in the text the author makes comments that are on the verge of Islamophobia such as “but Allah helps very little in the crisis […]” in addition to mocking Erdogan by calling him a “sultan.” The text overall shows how much Turcophobia and Islamophobia are linked as phenomena. The article sparked quite a mixed response, some deeming it very Islamophobic while others defended the author. Some activists on their Facebook accounts strongly opposed the way that TV Telma offends all Muslims through its criticism of the policies of Erdogan and posited that their insults are on the verge of being hate speech (Figure 7). Although TV Telma was asked by several viewers to retract the news or to formally apologize, in their response to the criticism (Figure 8), they not only defend their position, but also continue with the same line of thought with remarks such as “let Erdogan who addresses Allah apologize to you.”

33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
The conversion of Sllavica Jakimovska, a member of the academic staff at the European University in North Macedonia who converted to Islam during a ceremony organized in Edrem, Turkey, attracted a lot of attention by the media. This conversion was extensively promoted in the media, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. The whole issue sparked quite a negative reaction in the professor’s social circle and in the general public, who saw her conversion as an Islamic propaganda.

**Justice System**

For a longer period of time, the Muslims of North Macedonia have had a difficult relationship with the justice system. A culmination of this negative relationship came with the Monstrum case, in which 6 persons were given life sentence for having committed, as it was labeled, a terrorist act where 6 people were killed in Smilkovo Lake. The government in a police action imprisoned dozens of Muslims, women included, on the grounds of Islamic extremism, and later proceeded with sentencing six of them. Although no real link could be made with religion as a basis for the act, the Ministry of Interior from the onset of the case denounced it as a terrorist act inspired by Islamic extremism; this conviction was viewed as Islamophobic by Muslims. With the new government and the famous “bombs”, around the end of 2017, the Supreme Court annulled the verdict due to procedural mistakes and the case was

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There was an ongoing court proceeding on the obligation of the state to pay reparations for the destruction of the three mosques in Arachinovo (Skopje) during the armed conflict of 2001. In March 2018, the Supreme Court of the Republic of North Macedonia declined the request for the revision of the previous decision of the lower courts, and decided to fine the state with 152,000 euros as reparation costs to be paid to the Islamic Community as the suing party. This decision of the Supreme Court was well-received especially by the Muslim community.

**Internet**

Several of the cases that were mentioned in the previous sections have sparked heated discussions on the Internet. On Twitter, influencers used their platforms to point out the level of Islamophobia stirred by some of the events. One of those cases was the case of the Radovish incident.

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**iftar** dinner that was organized in Radovish. While the initial tweet condemned the **iftar** dinner held at the school, the respondents defended the school decision to allow a religious event to take place outside of school hours. References to the western part of North Macedonia are made in a derogative way since that region has a high concentration of Muslims. In a similar vein, Twitter users were vocal against the article published by Infomax which asks if Albanians would change their religion (Islam) as a precondition to entering the EU.

On a positive note, in an effort to fight hate speech and hate crime, including the Islamophobic incidents discussed in this report, several videos were produced as part of the series of videos in the campaign against hate speech and hate crimes “Hate hurts, don’t tolerate it! Report it!” organized by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights.41 One of the videos features Sumeja Ademi, a young Muslim girl, who in February 2017 was attacked in Skopje due to her **hijab**. Two boys and a girl not only offended her with Islamophobic comments but also with ultra-nationalist ones, assuming that she was Albanian. Sumeja was later attacked by the girl who tried to take off her veil, all the while all three of them shouted insults at her asking her to leave the country. In the video, Sumeja notes that the case was reported to the police, however, no action was taken due to lack of evidence.

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

While there aren’t any specific organizations that deal with the issue of Islamophobia itself, the most vocal advocate against discrimination, including here discrimination based on religious belief (Islam), has been the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of North Macedonia.42 With its online reporting platform, *Zlostorstva od Omraza*,43 it has established itself as the medium through which individuals are able not only to report the cases of discrimination, be it as a victim or a witness, but also to be aided through the whole process. Another NGO that has been active especially in indirectly fighting against Islamophobia is LEGIS, which has been the strongest advocate of migrant rights during the Balkan route crisis. One of its founding members, Mersiha Smajlovikj,44 has also been a very vocal advocate against cases of Islamophobia, especially those related to **hijab**-wearing Muslim women.

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41. Macedonian Helsinki Committee, Youtube, 21 December 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boKzJwDi-28&tc1clid=IwAR2y_Pa9gh5HvxyWJE1e28-11fghJg06lPyTbG4Bt1nt5QOTu0XN77cLo&t=12&s&cap-p=desktop, (Access date: 3 September 2019).


43. Refer to http://www.zlostorstvaodomrza.mk/ for unofficial (and in some cases, unverified) cases of discrimination based on religion from 2013 and onwards.

44. Mersiha Smajlovikj is a human rights activist and lawyer, and the author of “Islamophobia in Macedonia: National Report 2017” in the *EIR*. 
In February 2018, the NATIONAL STRATEGY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA FOR COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (2018-2022) prepared by the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism (NCCVECT) was adopted. The whole procedure of drafting this strategy was aided by the U.S. Embassy in Skopje and the OSCE Mission to Skopje. A multi-stakeholder approach was taken in drafting the procedure by bringing together representatives of NGOs, educational institutions, activists, religious organizations, and state agencies. The general tone of the discussion on countering violent extremism reflected a bias on violent extremism and terrorism acts committed by Muslims; however, the document itself makes an effort to reduce such biases.

A project that has had a very positive impact on tackling the issue of radicalization was the “Mother Schools for Countering Radicalism” organized by Analytica Think Tank up to 2017. “Mother Schools: Parenting for Peace” is a similar model that will be running until January 2020 and is organized by the ZIP Institute.

Another event that was received well in the community was the common iftar dinner organized in the city of Strumica by the Citizen Association “Dost Eli” together with the Bayrampaşa Municipality of Istanbul Turkey. Given that the iftar was attended by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, it brought a sense of understanding and interreligious tolerance in the city of Strumica. The event was attended by municipality officials as well.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

While the number of incidents has decreased, there are still cases of Islamophobia lingering in North Macedonia. The negative sentiments coming either directly as expressions of hatred towards Muslims or indirectly through interethnic intolerance, have been reflected in cases of the burning down of mosques, protesting against the renovation of mosques, and discrimination based on Islamic religious affiliation in employment, education, and other services. In order to make an effort to reduce the level of Islamophobia and with it reduce the number of incidents stemming from it, the following policies are recommended:

46. The author of this report has participated in several focus groups leading to the writing of the strategy.
48. See the website of Zip Institute for more details: http://zipinstitute.mk/projects/, (Access date: 4 September 2019).
- The Islamic Community should play a more active role in fighting Islamophobia, given that human rights NGOs are the frontrunners of this fight.
- The Islamic Community in close cooperation with the state institutions should implement programs of raising awareness on issues related to Islamophobia, how to detect it, and how to respond to it.
- Imams should be trained to detect Islamophobia and hate speech and work closely with the members of their mosques to report cases of discrimination based on religious affiliation and of hate speech/crime.
- More Muslim NGOs should focus on working with the local community in fighting Islamophobia, coming from non-Muslims and Muslims alike.
- Positive discrimination practices should be implemented in the employment and education sectors as to allow more hijab-wearing Muslim women to be present both in schools and in state institutions.
- Incidents related to Islamophobia should be legally recognized as a separate category so as to be able to have clearer statistics on hate speech and hate crimes related to this phenomenon.

Chronology

- **26.01.2018**: A hijab-wearing teacher was not allowed to teach after being employed by the primary school in Radovish.
- **04.06.2018**: The primary school Krste Petkov Misirkov in Radovish was fined for allowing an iftar dinner to be organized on the school premises.
- **14.09.2018**: A hijab-wearing customer was refused service at Portofino-Osteria and Bar, a restaurant in Skopje, due to her Islamic garment.
- **05.10.2018**: A 350-year-old mosque in the village of Erekovci, municipality of Prilep, was burnt.