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

Public Islamophobic speeches were transferred from social networks to the grounds of the Slovak Parliament in 2018, but in contrast to 2017, no law was passed that would be directed directly against the Muslim community in Slovakia. Spreaders of Islamophobic views have, however, received a relatively large media space. In particular, this occurred during debating the proposal to tighten the abortion law and the parliamentary debate on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and the so-called Istanbul Convention. Politicians who spread Islamophobic views had a larger media space not only during parliamentary debates but marginalised expressions of Islamophobia also emerged during municipal elections and by the end of 2018, when a campaign for the presidential election in March 2019 began.

Some politicians (coalition and from the opposition) used Islamophobic narratives for media communication, communication with voters on social media, and during election campaigns before local elections (autumn 2018). Politicians in Slovakia repeatedly ignore the fact that Muslims are citizens of the Slovak Republic and that they have the same rights and obligations as other citizens such as members of currently registered churches and religious communities. Slovak Muslims are repeatedly associated with terrorism, illegal migration, and labelled as a security threat to Slovakia.

A positive change in 2018 was that the legislative position of Muslims didn’t worsen. Several times, President Kiska publicly supported the Slovak Muslim community. In 2018, several non-governmental organisations, in cooperation with the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia, joined a series of discussions on interfaith dialogue to mitigate the effects of Islamophobia.
Zhrnutie


 Niektorí politici (vládnej koalície aj opozície) islamofóbný naratív využívali tiež v mediálnej komunikácii, v komunikácii s voličmi na sociálnych sietách a počas voľebnej kampane pred voľbami do miestnej samosprávy (obce a mestá). Politici na Slovensku opakované ignorujú, že muslimovia sú občanmi Slovenskej republiky, a že majú rovnaké práva a povinnosti ako občania iných – dnes registrovaných cirkví a náboženských obcí. Slovenskí moslimovia sú tiež opakované spájaní s terorizmom, nelegálnou migráciou a označovaní za bezpečnostnú hrozbu pre Slovensko.

Country Profile

Country: Slovakia
Type of Regime: Democratic Republic
Form of Government: Parliamentary System
Ruling Parties: Coalition of Smer-SD, SNS, and Most-Hid (Left-Wing Populism, Nationalism, Centre)
Opposition Parties: SaS (National Liberalism, Euroscepticism); OĽaNO-NOVA (Conservativism); K-LSNS (Neo-Fascism); Sme Rodina (National Conservativism)
Last Elections: 2014 Presidential Election (Andrej Kiska [Independent] won 59.4% of the vote against 40.6% of Robert Fico [Smer-SD]); 2016 Legislative Election (Smer-SD; Robet Fico: 49 seats, SaS; Richard Sulik: 21 seats, OLaNO-NOVA; Igor Matovič: 19 seats, SNS; Andrej Danko: 15 seats, K-LSNS; Marian Kotleba: 14 seats, Sme Rodina [We Are Family]; Boris Kollár, 11 seats, Most-Híd; Béla Bugár, 11 seats, Siet; Radoslav Prochážka, 10 seats)
Total Population: 5.45 million (in 2018)
Major Languages: Slovak
Official Religion: No official religion (Secularism)
Statistics on Islamophobia: The Slovak Republic doesn’t have official statistics that report Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims.
Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: In 2018, 950 racist incidents were reported to the police, down 16% from 2017, which itself saw a fall from the 2,000 reported in 2016.
Major Religions (% of Population): Catholic Church (62.0%), No Religion (13.4%), Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (5.9%), Greek Catholic Church (3.8%), Reformed Christian Church (1.8%)
Muslim Population (% of Population): 4,800 – 5,000 people (0.001%) in 2017
Main Muslim Community Organisations: Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (ISN), Foundation al-Huda in Kosice, Association of Muslims in Central Slovakia – al-Bakara
Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Islamic Foundation in Slovakia, Forum of the World Religions Slovakia, Open Society Foundation, Centre for Research of Ethnicity and Culture
Far-Right Parties: Kotleba – People’s Party Our Slovakia (Kotleba – Ludová strana našie Slovensko, K-LSNS)
Far-Right Movements: Slovenské hnutie obrody (Slovak Revival Movement, SHO)
Far-Right Terrorist Organisations: N/A
Limitations to Islamic Practices
- Hijab Ban: No
- Halal Slaughter Ban: No
- **Minaret Ban:** No. In 2017, members of the far-right and the populist party We Are Family - Boris Kollar - submitted a law banning the construction of mosques to the Parliament, which was not accepted.
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** No
- **Prayer Ban:** No
**Introduction**

The year 2018 was different from the last few years. Political expressions of Islamophobia weren’t passed into concrete draft laws that would exacerbate the legal and social position of Muslims. Nevertheless, several parliamentary debates emerged during the year, in which, in particular, the deputies of the far right-wing party Kotleba – The People’s Party Our Slovakia (Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko, K-ĽSNS)¹ expressed attitudes that had signs of Islamophobia.²

At the beginning of 2018, Muslims were supported by the president of the Slovak Republic when the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia received a grant from the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic aimed at improving the image of Muslims and carrying out an interreligious dialogue.³ This was a positive effort towards improving the perception of Muslims in Slovakia.

In the first half of 2018, some extremist organisations (political parties or minority Christian groups) tried to combine the issue of tightening the abortion law with the protection of Slovakia against migrants (Muslims). This position was particularly true of MPs of the political party K-ĽSNS.⁴

The second half of 2018 was influenced by the cases of two citizens of the Slovak Republic accused by the Czech Republic and Bosnia and Herzegovina of terrorism, and the parliamentary debate on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). In the first case, Muslims were again linked to terrorism, which was reflected in a negative outlook on Islam and Muslims.⁵ In the second case, the parliamentary debate derailed to lies about immigrants, and the alleged threats to Christian values and deterioration of security in Slovakia.⁶

Significant events in the context of Islamophobic activities in Slovakia included the parliamentary debate on the tightening of the Artificial Abortion Act and on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM); the dissemination of false reports on the so-called Istanbul Convention; media reports on Slovak

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Muslims suspected of belonging to a terrorist organisation; the activity of certain extreme far-right organisations that spread lies about Islam and Muslims; and the election campaign before the presidential election in March 2019.\(^7\)

**Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events**

**Physical and Verbal Attacks**

The year 2018 witnessed certain direct physical attacks against Muslims that had Islamophobic characteristics or were directly motivated by Islamophobic statements by politicians\(^8\) or Islamophobic statements of alternative media.

Verbal attacks were directed against representatives of the Muslim community, who regularly express themselves in the media or try to respond to attacks against Muslims by Slovak politicians.\(^9\) Most of the attacks were after the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia published a report (and videos) from the common \textit{iftar} (the breaking-fast dinner during Ramadan), which it organised for both Muslims and non-Muslims.\(^10\)

What was particularly striking was that the people who according to their profile photos appeared to lead ordinary, law-abiding lives and were and were photographed with their children, on social networks expressed vulgar, Islamophobic opinions on Muslims.

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\(^11\) Islamic Foundation in Slovakia.
In addition to attacks against Muslim representatives in Slovakia, verbal and physical assaults against women in hijabs were also recorded. Furthermore, certain Muslim women have complained that they have become victims of “stalking”, often due to hate speech and articles shared by politicians and the encouragement of certain websites.

Figure 2: “Who knows if the leader of Slovak terrorists and Sulik’s (chairman of the party SaS) friend, Jozef Lenč, lobbied at Gal (Gabor Gal is Minister of Justice).” Commentary on grant allocation from the Ministry of Justice.

Figure 3: “...is probably the pupil of Jozef Lenč, who also converted to Islam and vehemently defended him. All these Mohammedan traitors have to be watching.” Commentary on the news of the arrest of a Slovak accused of terrorism.

Figure 4: The pictures are a screenshot of published photos of the persecution of Muslims in a Slovak shop. Photos were subsequently published in Islamophobic groups on Facebook. (October 2018).

12. Ibid.


**Employment**

I have not recorded any significant Islamophobic instances that could be labelled as discriminatory in the context of the employment of Muslims in Slovak workplaces in 2018.

**Education**

The education system in Slovakia is largely responsible for spreading Islamophobia. The insufficient hourly subsidy for the humanities, the lack of education on world religions, and the low qualifications of teachers for teaching religion and civic or political education can be seen as the source of the problem. Addressing these shortcomings requires a comprehensive approach, vision, and a lot of active work from the Ministry of Education, pupils, and especially teachers.

At most Slovak schools, space is not given for clarifying the contribution of Muslims and Islam to contemporary medicine, science, art, and philosophy. Textbooks don’t mention the contribution of Muslim travellers from the early Middle Ages to the historical knowledge of Central and Eastern Europe at the time. In Slovakia, students know only a fraction of information about Muslim communities in Hungary (for example, in the vicinity of Nitra) or the contribution of Tatars, settled in Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus to the Polish army and society. All this is a significant reason why public and latent Islamophobia is widespread in Slovakia and Central Europe.15

Young people rely on three sources of information, or a combination of them, to create attitudes: (a) they may speak with parents or other relatives and acquaintances, or with teachers who, through discussion, are involved in shaping student views on a subject; (b) some of them have access to quality literature, documentary series, or Internet resources to help them find objective information about Islam and Muslims; (c) others look for support points on the Internet and among peers who are often lost in the world of information and do not know how to discern the truth from lies.

The Slovak education system has long depicted Muslims as an alien element that threatens the traditions and future of Slovak society. We can say that the standard education system in Slovakia contributes to the negative mystification of Islam and Muslims.

**Politics**

At the beginning of 2018, there were reverberations of the 2017 parliamentary debate, which accompanied the negotiations on the amendment of Law No. 308/1991 Coll. on the Freedom of Religious Faith and the Position of Churches and Religious Communities, and the effort of the party We Are Family – Boris Kollár (Sme Rodina – Boris

Kollár; SR-BK] to ban the construction of mosques in Slovakia. The topic of migration, the threat of Islamisation of Slovakia, and the threat to the security of the state from the so-called “Islamic terrorists” have gradually disappeared from the political debate. In 2018, politicians were only marginally involved in debates full of Islamophobic innuendos or attempts to further limit the rights of Muslims in Slovakia. Despite this improvement in policy debates and policy content – especially by the government coalition and part of the opposition – deputies who represent the far-right politics in the Slovak Parliament found several occasions to express their Islamophobic rhetoric.

Muslims were depicted negatively when an amendment to the Artificial Abortion Act was discussed in Parliament, at the end of May 2018. The law, which was supposed to ban abortions and even punish women who decide to have an abortion, was presented by MPs of K-ĽSNS. As part of the argument in favour of adopting an amendment to the law, they - as in the past - were not shy about using statements that attacked Slovak Muslims. In order to defend the proposal, MPs in Parliament created bizarre ideological clusters of conspiracy, hatred, and xenophobia directed especially against Islam and Muslims. In his speeches, MP Stanislav Mizik repeatedly “warned” against the threat of Islamisation to Slovakia, which may also be caused by liberal legislation in the field of abortion. He criticised the opponents of the law, whom he described as “persons wielding human rights, furious decency, fierce protection of otherness, protection of Muslims, protection of trees, protection of dogs, protection of cats, or protection of slugs and lizards”. He said that the opponents of the law “protect the Islamic occupants of Europe who do not recognise abortion and the first whom they will exterminate when they enforce the Shari’a law, will be exponents of wicked NGOs.” Mizik and some of his party colleagues warned that by not adopting this law, Slovakia would “become a caliphate in the future”.

In November 2018, the Chairman of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Andrej Danko (Slovak National Party; Slovenská národná strana, SNS submitted a draft statement to the Slovak Parliament asking for a rejection of anti-Semitism. In particular, the MPs of the K-ĽSNS stood up against this proposal. They even combined the draft of this statement with the 2015-16 so-called migrant crisis. MP Grausová proclaimed, “It is worth noting that the definition of anti-Semitism was created and adopted only a year after the launch of the Muslim invasion of the European Union.”

Jews and their institutions is proven to be associated with a sharp increase in Muslim populations, immigration to Europe, and their radicalisation.” In her opinion, this is concealed by non-governmental organisations that support the Islamisation of Europe. Similarly to Andrej Danko in 2015, she warned against the Muslim world government: “The goal is world government of Islam ... in the holy book of the Koran, Muslims and the Shari’a legal system, we will find everything – from the way to behave to slaves, women and Jews, Christians and other religions.”

In November 2018, the Slovak Parliament began a debate on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (also known as the “Istanbul Convention”). The politicians of the government coalition (Smer-SD and SNS) and most of the opposition (SaS, SR-BK) and the far right (K-LSNS) rejected both documents and often argued that Slovakia will be “flooded” by migrants who disrupt the Christian traditions. Aversion to migration was associated with the spread of hatred of Muslims. “Economic migrants pose, many risks to the security of the Slovak people,” said MP Kéry (Smer-SD). “As shown by the pictures from European metropolises, they also increase the risk of terrorism.”

“Hundreds of thousands of migrants from African, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries will come and they suddenly will not understand that a European woman is not a whore, how they tell them especially in Germany and France. And they don’t understand at all that they can’t rape them,” MP Mizik said. His fellow MP Mazurek again spoke of the so-called no-go zones, Muslim criminals, and Islamic extremists who would threaten Slovak citizens. In connection with Muslims, they also mentioned Ottoman expansion, and the threat of decapitation of Slovak citizens and of their domestic animals. The result of the whole parliamentary hysteria was the creation of a constitutional majority (90 votes from Smer-SD, SNS, K-LSNS, SR-BK and some of the independent deputies), which rejected Slovakia’s participation in the UN conference in Marrakech.

At the turn of 2018-19, an electoral campaign for the presidential elections in March 2019 began. Part of the candidates supported by the far right – Marián

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Kotleba, Štefan Harabin – and who represent conservative ideas – Milan Krajnariak, Juraj Zábojník – again used Islamophobic rhetoric, promoted fear of Muslims, and supported the need to protect Slovakia and Christian traditions from migrants and Islamisation.

**Media**

In the Slovak media, the same phenomenon that indirectly supports rooted stereotypes about Islam and Muslims is present. The year 2018 was no exception: Slovak media repeatedly used tabloid-style information about Muslims and Islam in news and commentaries. Some of them, when informing about Muslims, approached the form of processing used by the so-called conspiracy media (fake news).

The most common is the use of inappropriate imagery to accompany parts of published texts. In most cases, when Slovak media publish a reports about Islam, they use the image of a woman in a niqab or burqa or display a violent event that took place in the Middle East or cities in Western Europe. Such illustrative pictures support deep-rooted stereotypes about Islam and Muslims and propagate the Islamophobic tropes of the inequality of women in Islam and the violent nature of Islam.

**Figure 5**: Several articles from the newspaper *Plus 1 deň*. Reports from Slovak media showing a negative image of Islam and Muslims. "Cursed Family: Mum Andrea Was Kidnapped by Balkan Mafia, the Islamic State Attracted Her Son, Eric."; "Shock: Eric Is the First Slovak Who Is Linked to Islam and Is on the List of Wanted Terrorists!"; "Muslim Women with a Veiled Face Can End up in Prison! From Now on, a New Law Applies in Denmark."


Another negative phenomenon in the context of most Slovak media, which contributes to the spread of Islamophobia, is the selection of tabloid and often-irrelevant messages to increase readability. Most of the information about Islam presented to the Slovak reader concerns terrorism, political violence, civil wars, the threat of migration, or false reports of religiously motivated attacks in Muslim countries. Thus, stylized media coverage of topics about Islam and Muslims fosters the public’s fear of Islam.  

Incorrect use of Islamic terminology in the news and commentaries of Slovak journalists is a factor that also exacerbates the image of Muslims in Slovakia. The problem is that the deeds and actions that are contrary to Islam are called “Islamic”. The media create the image that rape is part of Islam, that abuse of social benefits is a religious practice, etc. The media refer to all Muslims as “Islamists”, while the public has the word “Islamists” connected with terrorists. 


Most of the Slovak media (Denník N, týždeň, Pravda, Nový Čas, RTVS, TV JoJ, TV Markíza and also radio stations and online media) use the word “jihad” as a synonym for terrorism. They create a standard view that all Muslims who perform jihad are terrorists and that terrorism is an essential part of Islam.

The most active in spreading Islamophobia are the conspiracy media. Among them are the quasi-news pages of the Hlavné správy, Slobodný výber, and Parlamentné listy, which until 2018 was known as Medzičas. Another Islamophobic media source in Slovakia is the journal and internet portal of Tibor E. Rostáš Zem a Vek.

Justice System
Since 2017, legislation has been tightened in Slovakia. The National Council of the Slovak Republic finally approved the amendment of Law No. 308/1991 Coll. on Freedom of Religious Faith and the Status of Churches and Religious Communities. The law: (a) increased the number of signatures required to register churches and religious communities in Slovakia from 20,000 to 50,000; (b) determined that the

signatories must be citizens of the Slovak Republic who are members of the church or the religious community; (c) the signatories must confirm their signature by submitting personal data. These conditions of registration are discriminatory because only four churches from the 18 currently registered churches and religious communities in Slovakia meet the conditions. Of these, thirteen did not meet the original registration requirement of over 20,000 believers.34

In 2018, no other manifestations of Islamophobia stemming from the Slovak justice system were recorded in Slovakia. No members of the judiciary dealt with the issue of Islamophobia in 2018 or were directly involved in proceedings that we could call discriminatory in the context of the Slovak Muslim community.

Internet

In addition to the pages of conspiracy media, the most active in spreading Islamophobia in Slovakia were the webpages of extremist political parties, movements, and organisations (K-ĽSNS, SR-BK, etc.). The above is also true for some of the presidential candidates’ websites – Štefan Harabin, Marian Kotleba, and Robert Švec – which appeared at the end of 2018.

Figure 8: The newspapers of the political party Kotleba – LSNS: “Western Europe Is Already Lost. Don’t Let It Happen in Slovakia!” The Kotleba-LSNS party repeatedly reports on the decline of the West on the pages of its newspapers, for which migrants and Muslims are responsible, (September 2018)35.

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Indeed, the list of individuals we can consider as the main figures of the Islamophobia network in 2018 is very wide and diverse.

MPs for Smer-SD, SNS, K-ĽSNS, and SR-BK have repeatedly framed Muslims as problematic. In particular, the latter two and the Slovak National Party (SNS) have been active in the dissemination of Islamophobia in the parliamentary debates.

Andréj Danko (SNS) has repeatedly presented his negative attitude towards Muslims, mosques, and his desire to prohibit the burka in Slovakia. The chairman of the party Šmer-SD, Robert Fico, has repeatedly said that he will “not allow the creation of an integrated Muslim community in Slovakia”, while the chairman of the party Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) and an MEP Richard Sulík claimed that “Islam is incompatible with democracy” and also shared and wrote several articles, commentaries, and blogs with Islamophobic content.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

During the parliamentary discussions in which Islamophobic narratives appeared, the opposition deputies Ondrej Dostal and Martin Klus (both SaS) and members of the movement Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLaNO) defended the Slovak Muslim community. The most active advocate in civil society is the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia, the Forum of World Religions (Mário Nicolini), the Centre for Ethnicity and Culture Research (Elena G. Kriglerová), the Open Society Foundation (Ján Orlovský), and the League for Human Rights (Zuzana Števulová).

From the media, photographer and publicist Andrej Bán, journalists from the Denník N, SME, and Pravda, and members of the editorial staff of IslamOnline.sk stand out. Some church organisations, the Jewish community, and teachers at certain primary and secondary schools help to alleviate Islamophobia.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The level of Islamophobia in Slovakia in 2018 was modest compared to previous years. Although there has been a reduction in the public expression of Islamophobia, it has permanently settled in parliamentary debates, where it is mainly expressed by MPs of the far right.

The most prominent problem is that Islamophobia has definitively shifted from social networks into Slovak politics. It has become part of the de facto political communication of all political parties (coalition and opposition). It continues to influence elections and has become part of the election campaign before the presidential elections in March 2019. An unpleasant finding is that Islamophobic content has been consciously and unconsciously established in all Slovak media (conspiracy, tabloid, and mainstream).

The biggest challenges for the coming period will be the spread of general awareness that Islamophobia is as dangerous to Slovak society and democracy as xenophobia. Society – politicians, media, and teachers – should realise that the destruction of democracy and the onset of totalitarian regimes in the 1930s were triggered by anti-Semitism, manifested in the same accompanying phenomena that characterise Islamophobia in Slovakia.

Chronology

- **20.06.2018**: The start of a parliamentary debate on the law regarding abortions during which far-right MPs used Islamophobic narratives.
- **08.07.2018**: MP Blaha (Smer-SD) repeatedly criticises the Pohoda music festival and uses Islamophobic narrative.42
- **31.08.2018**: A Muslim woman with a small child was attacked in Bratislava.43
- **16.10.2018**: Another case of harassment and persecution of Muslim women in Bratislava.44
- **November 2018**: Parliamentary debate about the Global Migration Pact.
- **December 2018**: The publication of a book on interreligious dialogue entitled *A Christian, A Muslim, And A Jew Will Meet*.45

• **2018:** Discussions at high schools organised by the Forum of the World Religions, which aims to alleviate the manifestations of Islamophobia in Slovakia.\(^{46}\)

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