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

This report shows major Islamophobic incidents and rhetoric in Albania in 2018. Islamophobia in Albania is primarily related to identity politics and historical narratives of Albanian nationalism. During the last year Islamophobia was mostly directed against local Muslims and against Turkey and Iran, due to the geopolitical implications of Albania with these two countries.

The Islamophobic hate speeches and incidents of 2018 started with a violent attack that a group of Catholic radicals made against a Turkish company and their Turkish flag in Mirdita. The attack of Mirdita was followed by statewide commemorations for the “Year of Scanderbeg” that the Albanian government organized in 2018. The government, its state agencies, universities, the Vatican, and the Catholic Church in Albania planned a number of activities to celebrate the 550th anniversary of Scanderbeg’s death. These celebrations and the commemoration of other anti-Ottoman events in the Albanian history led many Islamophobes to make disparaging remarks against Turkey, Islam, the Ottoman Empire, and present Turkish politics in the region. Some Albanian politicians used Turkey as a scapegoat when attacking each other. A number of American politicians and analysts contributed to the anti-Muslim and anti-Turkish Islamophobia by describing Turkey as a country with sinister intentions in the Balkans.

Regarding education, a project that the Ministry of Education launched in 2018 for countering extremism, upset many Muslims. They noted that the project targeted Muslims and Islam as sources of extremism while ignoring other religions and ideologies.

Even though no terrorist attack has been reported in Albania in 2018, the fear of terrorism and radical Islam was amplified by the declarations of Prime Minister Edi Rama. He accused Russia of trying to radicalize the Muslims. The Iranian Mojahedins and their supporters accused Iran of wanting to carry out a terrorist attack in the country even though no such attack ever occurred.
ISLAMOPHOBIA IN ALBANIA

Përmbledhje e shkurtër

Ky raport tregon incidentet dhe retorikën kryesore islamofobike në Shqipëri gjatë vitit 2018. Islamofobia në Shqipëri ndërlidhet me politika identitare dhe rrëfimet historike të nacionalizmit shqiptar. Gjatë vitit të kaluar islamofobia u drejtua në të shumtën e rasteve kundër muslimanëve vendas por edhe kundër Turqisë dhe Iranit, si pasojë e implikimeve gjeopolitike të Shqipërisë me këto dy vende.


Islamofobia ishte prezente edhe në sistemin arsimor. Një projekt i lëshuar nga Ministria e Arsimit në 2018 për të luftuar ekstremizmin, mërziti shumë muslimanë. Ata vunë në pëh në peshi projekti etiketonte Islamin dhe muslimanët si burim i ekstremizmit, ndërsa injoronte fetë dhe ideologjitet e tjera.

Edhe pse në vitin 2018 në Shqipëri nuk u raportua asnjë sulm terrorist, frika e terrorizmit dhe Islamit radikal u amplifikua nga deklaratat e Kryeministrit Edi Rama i cili akuzoi Rusinë sikur kërkon të radikalizojë muslimanët. Muxhahedinët iranianë dhe mbështetjetë e tyre akuzuan Iranin për kryerjen e një akti terrorist në vend, akt i cili nuk ndodhi kurrë.
Country Profile

Country: Albania

Type of Regime: Democratic Republic

Form of Government: Parliamentary Democracy

Ruling Parties: Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë (Socialist Party of Albania)

Opposition Parties: Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë (Democratic Party of Albania), Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim (Socialist Movement for Integration)

Last Elections: 2017 Parliamentary Election (Socialist Party 48.34%; Democratic Party 28.85%; Socialist Movement for Integration 14.28%)

Total Population: 2.873 million (in 2017)

Major Languages: Albanian

Official Religion: No official religion (Secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: N/A

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: There are no official reports

Major Religions (% of Population): Sunni Islam (56.70%), Catholicism (10.03%), Orthodoxy (6.75%), Bektashi Islam (2.09%), Non-affiliated (5.49%), Undeclared (13.79%), Atheists (2.5%), Other Christians (0.14%).

Muslim Population (% of Population): 1.7 million (60%) as of 2011

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Muslim Community of Albania (Komuniteti Musliman i Shqipërisë); The World Center of Bektashis (Kryegjyshata Botërore Bektashiane).

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: None

Far-Right Parties: Demochristian Union Party (Partia Bashkimi Demokristian)

Far-Right Movements: N/A

Far-Right Terrorist Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- Hijab Ban: No official ban
- Halal Slaughter Ban: No
- Minaret Ban: No
- Circumcision Ban: No
- Burqa Ban: No
- Prayer Ban: No
Introduction

Islamophobia was demonstrated in a number of ways in Albania in 2018. The major wave of Islamophobia was related to the policies of the government of Prime Minister Edi Rama who declared 2018 the “Year of Scanderbeg.” Scanderbeg, a mythical hero of Albanian nationalism, is celebrated in Albania for his war against the Ottoman Empire, which is framed as a war against Islam in defense of Christianity and Europe. The Albanian government, state agencies, universities, the Vatican, and the Catholic Church in Albania organized a number of events to celebrate the “anti-Muslim” wars of Scanderbeg.

These celebrations were preceded by a violent attack that a group of Catholic extremists made in Mirdita against a Turkish company which had built a hydropower plant in the village of Qafë Molla.

While the Albanian government did not punish any Catholic extremist for their actions, the deradicalization policies of the government which target Albanian Muslims in the educational system and have incarcerated many Muslims drew the condemnation of many believers and imams. They accused the government of using its state apparatus to target and demonize the Muslim community, while ignoring Christian and Islamophobic extremists.

The Islamophobic policies of the government were accompanied by a number of anti-Muslim, anti-Turkish, and anti-Iranian statements and policies, carried out by many politicians. Prime Minister Rama claimed in more than one occasion that Albania is not a Muslim-majority country and radical Islam is a threat to the country. The Iranian Mojahedins and their supporters accused Iran of wanting to carry out a terrorist attack in the country, even though no such terrorist act ever took place.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

The year 2018 witnessed a number of physical and verbal Islamophobic attacks in Albania. These attacks were related to the anti-Turkish hysteria that radical Catholic groups displayed. The year started with a violent attack against the Turkish AYEN ENERJI company which had built a hydropower plant in Mirdita. Leon Molla, one of the organizers of the violent protest, called for the death of Turks, Greeks, and Slavs on his Facebook page.1

Xhabir Zejnuni, an Albanian who supported the protest against the Turkish company, proposed to bomb the hydropower plant. Eduart Ndocaj, leader of the Demochristian Union Party, praised the violent removal of the “Mongolian barbarian symbols” (Turkish flag) by “the sons of Mirdita” in the “land of the Arber” and asked for the removal of the Turkish company logo since “the Turkish symbols have no place here.” Kastriot Myftaraj who defended the violent action of the Mirditoris declared during a TV show that if Erdogan comes to Albania his head will be chopped off.

Employment

In 2018, a number of work discrimination cases were reported in Albania. The Muslim Forum of Albania reported that a woman (known as “A.S.”) was denied an interview by a private employer in August because she was wearing the hijab. In October, a teacher (“Q.X.”) was insulted by a group of parents in the public kindergarten of Krraba in Tirana because she was wearing the hijab. The parents asked her to leave her job, because the state is secular. In November, a woman (“N.P.”) was fired from her job after her
employer asked her to remove the hijab and wear the work uniform. When she refused, she was fired from work. The Muslim Forum of Albania reported that many Muslims who serve in the military have been prohibited by their superiors in the Ministry of Defense to practice their religion and pray. Many of them have expressed fears that the ministry might fire them and they will lose their jobs. Many practicing Muslims have already lost their jobs in the army. Their commanders have privately told them that they have orders to fire the practicing Muslims from the army.

Education

On 11 January, the Minister of Education Lindita Nikolla announced a project by her ministry to train teachers to fight extremism. The project would cover 2,168 schools and train 22,000 teachers across Albania. The project was directed by Agron Soyati, the national coordinator of the Center for Countering Violent Extremism in the Prime Minister’s office, and was supported by the U.S. Department of State. The training material of this project caused much concern in the Muslim community. Many imams and Muslim activists denounced it by claiming it was aimed against the Sunni Muslim community. The Albanian League of Imams was one of the organizations that criticized the project. In an analysis published on its website, it showed how the materials of the project depicted the Muslims, the imams, the mosques and all the infrastructure of Muslims in the country as a source of extremism. The training materials, which were distributed to the schools, showed Islam as the only source of violent extremism.

The material depicted in negative terms events in the tradition of Islam such as the Shariah, the Caliphate, the Hegira, etc. The analysis concluded that the training materials were totally Islamophobic and biased. They stressed that the program aimed to scare the students of Islam and turn teachers into spies against their Muslim students.

Politics

The year 2018 was declared the “Year of Scanderbeg” in Albania. The Albanian government of Prime Minister Edi Rama, which calls itself the government of Rilindja
(Rebirth),\textsuperscript{11} depicts Scanderbeg as the most important symbol of present-day Albania. Scanderbeg who was turned into the ultimate hero of Albanian nationalism by the Austro-Hungarians,\textsuperscript{12} nowadays is celebrated by the Albanian state and the Vatican as the father of Albanianism. Even though Albania is described as a secular state in its constitution, Scanderbeg is celebrated by the post-communist Albanian state and the Catholic Church\textsuperscript{13} as the crusader who defended Christianity against Islam and the Ottoman Empire. However, Scanderbeg is rejected by many Muslims who perceive him as hero of the reconquista and intolerance against Islam. His massacres against Muslims are compared to those of Ratko Mlladic against Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina.\textsuperscript{14}

The Albanian government organized a number of events to commemorate the 550th anniversary of Scanderbeg’s death. Some of the celebrations that the government organized in 2018 were: (a) the celebration of the 105th anniversary of Albania’s independence from the Ottoman Empire; (b) the commemoration of Scanderbeg’s 550th anniversary of death; (c) the commemoration of the 140th anniversary of the League of Prizren; and (d) the commemoration of the 110th anniversary of the Congress of Manastir. The Albanian historiography describes all these events as major developments in Albanian’s fight against the Ottoman domination and its Islamic rule.

The Year of Scanderbeg started with a violent Islamophobic act in Mirdita. On 31 December, 2017, the Turkish company AYEN ENERJI, which has built a hydropower plant in the village of Qafë Molla, was attacked. The Turkish flag which the company had placed alongside the Albanian flag was destroyed. The attack was carried out by a group of Catholic extremists lead by Paulin Zefi, the director of the Cultural-Historic Office of the city of Lezha. The Catholics justified their attack against the Turkish company and the flag as a national resistance against Turkey and the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{15} When the Albanian authorities declared that they will prose-
cute the vandals, Paulin Zefi challenged the government by calling it in Ottoman “an Arnavut Sancak” which will not be able to subdue seven million Albanians.16

Figure 2: Catholic extremists destroying the Turkish flag in Qafe Molle, Mirdita (31 December 2017).17

The celebrations for the Year of Scanderbeg were accompanied by many insults that extremist Christians directed against the Turks and Albanian Muslims. The American republican politician Joseph Dioguardi sent a letter to the Albanian Catholic Church Zoja Pajtore in Detroit where he accused the Ottomans of “cleansing the Christians” in Albania.18 In June, in an interview given to Koha TV, Dioguardi claimed that Albanian politicians have failed to join Europe and are now left with Turkey and Erdogan. He claimed that Erdogan hated Scanderbeg and during a visit made to the office of ex-Prime Minister Sali Berisha, had ordered him to remove the statue of Scanderbeg by calling him a traitor.19 The Ottoman Turks were also depicted as enemies of Albania, the European civilization, and Christianity in another symposium that the Albanian Catholic Church Zoja e Sbëkodres organized in New York in the presence of representatives from the Albanian and Kosovar consulates in the United States.20

Since in the past years many Albanian Muslim and secular intellectuals have rejected the myth of Scanderbeg, and asked for its scientific revision, in 2018, all state institutions of Albania and the prime minister rushed to his defense by threatening the refuseniks and revisionists. These threats were made public even by Sander Lleshi, the minister of interior, who declared that no one can question Scanderbeg and no intellectual debate will be tolerated about him.

In 2018, all state institutions, schools, and universities of Albania celebrated the myth of Scanderbeg. The government allocated money for the restoration of Scanderbeg’s mausoleum, which has been constructed inside the Selimiye Mosque of Lezha, turned into ‘the grave’ of Scanderbeg by the communist government in 1981. The government allocated 52,200,000 leke (479,000 USD) to the Ministry of Culture to support the activities of Scanderbeg year. State institutions organized exhibitions with historical documents, photographs, and writings that documented the crusade of the popes and Scanderbeg against the Ottomans. The Academy of Sciences of Albania allocated prizes for the best scientific works written about Scanderbeg. Scanderbeg was celebrated even by the Vatican. Albanian deputies and ministers went to the Holy See to commemorate with the pope the anniversary of Scanderbeg’s death, while the Catholic Church in Albania organized a mass in the city of Lezha.

An official commemoration for Scanderbeg’s death came even from the municipality of Lezha. Paulin Zefi, the director of the Cultural-Historic Office who

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led the attack against the hydropower plant, was one of the organizers of the commemoration. The event was attended by the Catholic Church, a number of Arbereshi Christian pilgrims from Italy, and many Islamophobic politicians and activists. One of the attendees was Eduard Ndocaj, an Islamophobe who glorified the violent actions against the Turkish flag in Mirdita and in 2015 appealed to thugs to vandalize the Ottoman plaque of Sultan Selim I in the castle of Lezha.

Figure 3: Paulin Zefi is the director of the Cultural-Historic Office of the city of Lezha who took part in the Mirdita attacks against the Turkish flag. On his right, there is a framed portrait of Father Gjergj Fishta, a quisling Catholic priest who supported Hitler and Mussolini during World War II. Fishta was an anti-Semite who blamed the Jews as enemies of Europe and defended the policies of Hitler against them. Behind Zefi stands a framed engraving of Scanderbeg fighting the Turks. On his left, there is a portrait of Mother Theresa.

30. In the following video, Eduart Ndocaj calls the Turks, barbarians and Mongols and praises the violent attack against the Turkish company in Mirdita. See: Eduart Ndocaj, Facebook, 8 October 2018, https://www.facebook.com/eduart.ndocaj/videos/705928753117272/, (Access date: 1 September 2019).

The commemoration for Scanderbeg was organized inside the destroyed mosque of Sultan Selim I. On one of the walls of the mausoleum, the organizers had placed a picture depicting Scanderbeg killing Ottoman Turks. Imam Agim Terziu, the only Muslim cleric to attend the event, claimed that the Muslim Community of Albania has no problem with Scanderbeg, while the officials declared that Scanderbeg is a unifying figure for all the Albanians.32

Figure 4: A picture inside the Mausoleum of Scanderbeg (Mosque of Selim I) depicting Scanderbeg and his Christian fighters killing the Turks (17 January 2018).

Figure 5: Eduart Ndocaj calls for the removal of Suleiman the Magnificent’s Tughra (Seal) Plaque from the Castle of Lezha.33


In January, following the Albanian government’s anti-Trump vote in the United Nations regarding Jerusalem, Monika Kryemadhi, the wife of President Ilir Meta censured Prime Minister Rama for siding with Turkey on the issue of Palestine. She claimed that Edi Rama’s vote came because he wants to Turkify Albania.\(^\text{34}\) In November, during a visit of President Ilir Meta and the Minister of Diaspora Pandeli Majko to the town of San Demetrio Corone in Calabria, Italy to commemorate the Arbereshi Christian communities who resisted the Ottomans, President Meta described Scanderbeg as a defender of European civilization and Christianity, while the Ottomans were shown as its enemies.\(^\text{35}\)

Figure 6: Monika Kryemadhi, the wife of President Ilir Meta, declaring that Turkey cannot decide the future of Albania (31 January 2018).\(^\text{36}\)

Fahri Balliu, a reborn Catholic convert who was praised by Pope Benedict XVI,\(^\text{37}\) attacked the Turkish people too. In an interview with TV Klan Kosova, he described

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the Turks as Asians, barbarians, and killers of Albanians for 500 years. His son Klevi Balliu, an MP for the Democratic Party, described the Syrian war refugees who might come to Albania as people of Sultan Mehmet who would replace the (Albanian) people of Scanderbeg.

During a visit to Germany, in April, Prime Minister Edi Rama accused Russia of trying to radicalize the Muslims of Albania. When questioned whether Albania is a Muslim-majority state, Rama responded that the religion of the Albanians is Europe. These statements angered many Muslims. They condemned the language of the prime minister who claimed that Islamic radicalism is a danger for the country. Armand Ali, a Tirana-based imam, censured the prime minister’s declaration that “the religion of the Albanians is Europe.” He explained that this declaration was in line with the government’s Year of Scanderbeg agenda and the prime minister wished to make Christianity the religion of the Albanians. However, Edi Rama himself condemned Islamophobia. In an interview given to Anadolu Agency he described Islamophobia as a curse of our time.

Media
Islam and Muslims were denigrated by many articles and debates in the media in 2018. The attacks against Islam, Muslims, Turkey, Iran, the Arab world, etc. came from various sources. On 22 February, RTSH (Albanian State Television) promoted a book that was published in Kosovo by Kole Krasniqi with the title The Development and Appearance of Islamic Extremism in Kosovo and in the Region. In this book, the author writes that Islam was violently imposed on Albanians by the Turks. He writes that any Albanian Muslims who does not accept Scanderbeg and Mother Theresa as

44. “Kryeministri I Republikës Së Shqipërisë, Edi Rama, Intervistë Ekskluzive Për Anadolu Agency”, Ambasadë e Republikës së Shqipërisë në Turqy, http://www.ambasada.gov.al/turkey/sq/kryeministri-i-republik%C3%ABs-s%C3%AB-shqip%C3%ABs%C3%AB-edi-rama-intervist%C3%AB-ekskluzive-p%C3%ABr-anadolu-agency, (Access date: 1 September 2019).
their heroes are radical Islamists. The book lists the Ottomans, the Muslims of central Albania who revolted against Prince Wied, the Islamic Movement of Albanians in Yugoslavia, and any political or religious movement of Albanian Muslims in history as terrorist and extremist. Krasniqi blames, among others, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Muslim communities of Albania and Kosovo, the Arab Islamic Bank, etc. as the sources that have helped the radicalization of Muslims. All the Muslim civil society organizations of Kosovo, including Turkish organizations like the Turkish Development Aid Agency TİKA, the Turkish charity organization İHH, and a number of Iranian and Arab sponsored NGOs are labeled extremist. He claims that even the chief mufti of Kosovo, Naim Ternava, and many imams and preachers are extremists.  

In an article published on 16 April, Gjet Nndonji, ex-director of the National Archives of Albania, blamed the Ottomans for the Islamization of Albania. He described them as barbarians. Albanian Muslims were also described as barbarians and Asian colonists suffering from “Asiatic infection.” He accused the Turks and the Arabs for propagating Asian culture and ideology in order to divide the Albanians from Europe.

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described them as barbarians. Albanian Muslims were also described as barbarians and Asian colonists suffering from “Asiatic infection.” He accused the Turks and the Arabs for propagating Asian culture and ideology in order to divide the Albanians from Europe. Spartak Ngjela, a Tirana-based opinionist, wrote many insulting articles against different politicians in the country, including the prime minister, accusing them of collaborating with Turkey, the Russians, and the Serbs against Albania and Scanderbeg.

In an article entitled “Islam a Primitive Religion That Has Enslaved the Albanians,” Arben Çokaj described Islam as the reason of Albanians’ tragedies. Dorian Hatibi, a lecturer at University of Durres and director in the Municipality of Tirana, wrote that before the coming of the Turks and the death of Scanderbeg, Albania had universities, cities like Florence and Venice, philosophers, etc., but after the coming of the Turks it had nothing.

Local Albanian Islamophobes were supported on their attacks against Islam and Turkey (which is depicted as the new Ottoman Sultanate) by a number of U.S.-based Islamophobes. Arbana Xharra, a notorious Islamophobe from Kosovo, was paired to the United States where she joined two American-Israeli Islamophobes: David Phillips and Alon Ben-Meir. In her articles and interviews, Xharra praised the closing of mosques in Europe and asked for the same in the Balkans. In other articles that she wrote with Alon Ben-Meir, she attacked Turkey for its policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina by claiming that Turkey has an Islamic agenda and appealed to Bosnians to distance themselves from it. In her Facebook posts, she declared that if she could she will “cleanse” the religious radicals in Kosovo in 72 hours. She described

Albanian Muslims as “Talibans” and in other racist comments wrote that (Muslims) who are with Erdogan should not sit with Angela Merkel and Sebastian Kurz, because they are the civilization and Europe. Arbana Xharra and David Phillips attacked the Albanian government in many occasions. During a hearing at Columbia University, they censured the Albanian government for the permission they had granted to Turkey to build a mosque in Tirana.

David Phillips claimed that Turkey is anti-American, an enemy of Europe which has an Islamist agenda, and is not a friend of Albania. He attacked Turkey, President Erdogan, and Prime Minister Edi Rama even on the Voice of America - Albanian Service. He censured Prime Minister Rama for allowing the Muslim Community to build a 30-million-dollar mosque in Tirana, allowing TIKA (Turkish Development Aid Agency) to organize events on Scanderbeg Square, and criticized Edi Rama for attending wedding ceremonies in Ankara.

Justice System

In 2018, the Albanian government continued its policy of blacklisting many Muslim activists and controlling their activities even though they have committed no crimes or violent acts. Many Muslim believers complained that border authorities harassed them with extra searches during their entry and exit from Albania. They claimed that their names were blacklisted by state security services. Many complained that they were not allowed to exit Albania. On 19 October, two days after Albania was visited by Nathan A. Sales, the U.S. Coordinator for Counterterrorism, the office of the Prosecutor of Serious Crimes in Tirana announced that his office had started the proceedings against 34 individuals on suspicion of being sponsors of terrorism.

Ergys Fasllia, Medat Hasani, Bekim Protopapa, and Xhevahir Fishti who were arrested in November 2016 under an Israeli claim that they were planning to stage a terrorist attack against the Israeli national team were held in house arrest. The Albanian courts were not able to convict the arrested who claim they are victims and innocent. The Israeli media who in 2016 accused these Albanian Muslims and DAESH of planning the alleged attack against the Israeli team, in 2018 changed its story and now blamed Iran for the alleged attack. The father of Verdi Morava, whose son was sentenced in 2016 as a supporter of terrorism, continued to ask for the innocence of his son, claiming that he was jailed by Prime Minister Edi Rama who wanted to show Germany that his government is fighting extremism.

While the Albanian government has jailed and blacklisted many Muslim Albanians for their supposed sympathy to violent extremism, Albania hosts on its soil members of two foreign terrorist organizations that are never prosecuted for their sympathy and involvement in violent acts and terrorism. They are the Iranian Mojahedin e-Khalq (MEK) and many members of the Fetullahist Terrorist

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Organization (FETO) which according to former UK Ambassador to Turkey are responsible without doubt for the 15 July coup attempt and the killing of 250 Turkish citizens.67

The MEK, which depicts itself as the democratic opposition of Iran, has throughout 2018 called on the Albanian government to close the Iranian Embassy in the country.68 The MEK and its foreign supporters produced most of the Islamophobic statements against Iran in 2018. The attacks of the MEK in many cases were directed against local and international media which tried to investigate the intimidations and threats that the MEK carries against its own members. In February 2018, when Top Channel TV aired an interview with three MEK defectors,69 the Mojahedins slandered Top Channel as being bought by Iran and described the government of Iran as “religious fascism.”70 The journalists and specialists who analyzed and reported on the MEK were randomly insulted as agents of Iran.71

The Mojahedins distributed many anti-Iranian news in the media and sent letters to security institutions claiming that Iran was trying to carry out a terrorist attack against them.72 They distributed fake news by claiming that two Iranian terrorists had entered the country to carry out a terrorist attack.73 Even though Albanian journalists proved this to be fake news,74 a number of American media outlets repeated the claims of the MEK as true.75

While Iran did not carry out any attack against the Mojahedins, the MEK itself attacked the journalists of the British Channel 4 and slandered almost all other journalists who wanted to independently interview and ask them questions. The excuse that the MEK used for their assaults and insults against the media who wanted to investigate them was that “the journalists were agents of Iran.”

**Internet**
The Internet has been the most prevalent space for Islamophobic comments. Many Facebook pages incite extreme hate, Islamophobia, and depict Albanian Muslims as Arabs and Turks who must be killed or expelled from Albania. Some of these pages are *Bota Arabe* (The Arab World); *Shtetet e Bashkuara te Shtipërise* (The United States of Albania); *Nje Komb, nje Religion* (One nation, one Religion); *Nje Komb* (One Nation), etc. However, the most followed and notorious page which managed to incite even government Islamophobia against Muslims in 2017 is the Facebook page *Feja e Shqiptarit eshte Europa* (The religion of the Albanians is Europe). The ideology that these pages convey is Islamophobia, radical Albanian – Catholic nationalism, and hatred against Turks, Greeks, Slavs, and neighbors of Albania. The people who run these pages are either Catholic extremists or ex-Muslims converted into National-Catholicism and Scanderbegism. Their ideology is similar to the ideology of the Australian terrorist Brenton Tarrant, who committed the New Zealand massacre on 15 March, 2019, and to the Mirditori groups who attacked the Turkish hydropower plant in the village of Qafë Molla.

*Feja e Shqiptarit eshte Europa* is one of the most notorious Facebook pages which incites hate and even death threats against Albanian Muslims, Turks, Arabs, and all other Muslims. It continuously posts articles against Albanian imams, Muslim believers, Islam, Prophet Muhammad, Turkey, etc. Even though many Muslims and intellectuals have denounced this page and other pages for spreading fake news, hate and Islamophobia, so far Facebook has not closed them down. The Facebook page of *Feja*...
e Shqiptarit eshte Europa worships right-wing European leaders and Albanian Islamophobes. It praises Scanderbeg for his massacres against Muslims and the Ottomans and calls Albanian Muslims Anatolian parasites and reptilians who are a minority.

Figure 9: Feja e Shqiptarit eshte Europa Facebook page alludes to Albanian Muslims as reptilians and Anatolian parasites who are a minority thanks to Scanderbeg killing them. The above picture which depicts Scanderbeg killing Muslims is not removed by Facebook even though many Muslims have complained against it and many other violent images and comments (6 May 2018).

Figure 10: A posting by Feja e Shqiptarit eshte Europa containing a video of Piro Misha, who attacks Turkey and Erdogan as anti-European and anti-Albanian (30 May 2018).

84. For a Facebook post praising Sebastian Kurz for his anti-Islamic stance see: https://www.facebook.com/ILLYROPIAN/photos/a.254095831465769/778633529011994/?type=3&theater, (Access date: 1 September 2019).

85. For a posting where the page praises Scanderbeg for killing Muslims, calling the Albanian Muslims Anatolian parasites and reptilians who are a minority in “our” lands, see: https://www.facebook.com/ILLYROPIAN/photos/a.254095831465769/764043313804349/?type=3&theater, (Access date: 1 September 2019).
Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Central figures in the Islamophobia network are a number of Albanian, Iranian, European, and American individuals who incite hate from within Albania, in Europe, or in the United States against Muslims, Islam, and Muslim-majority countries. In Albania, central Islamophobic figures are Paulin Zefi, Eduard Ndocaj, Tritan Shehu, Kastriot Myftaraj, Fahri Balliu, Spartak Ngjela, Piro Misha, and Arbana Xharra. The Iranian Mojahedins and their supporters like Rudy Giuliani, Patrick Kennedy, Struan Stevenson, Giulio Terzi, and Alejo Vidal-Quadras are central in inciting anti-Iranian ideas. Major American contributors who incite Islamophobia and Turkophobia are Joseph Dioguardi, David Phillips, and Alon Ben-Meir.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

There are no organized political initiatives to counter Islamophobia in Albania. However, some NGOs and news portals like the League of the Albanian Imams, the Muslim Forum of Albania, and Gazeta Impakt report anti-Muslim hate speech. Many Muslim and secular intellectuals and journalists challenge the Islamophobic narrative of extreme Catholic groups or organizations like the MEK.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

In 2018, Islamophobia reached unprecedented levels in Albania. The declaration of 2018 as the “Year of Scanderbeg” by the Albanian government legitimized many Islamophobes in their attacks and insults against Muslims and Ottomans in the country. The commemoration of the anti-Ottoman wars of Scanderbeg served as a major tool which inspired hate against Muslims and the Turks in Albania - especially online. The violent acts of Mirdita and the calls for carrying acts of violence against Muslims and Turks were motivated by a Catholicized version of Albanian history and nationalism which has replaced the secularized version of nationalism which Albania developed during the era of communism.

The language that is used nowadays in Albania by Islamophobes describes the Muslims as Turks, Ottomans, Neo-Ottomans, Asiatic infection, Talibans, terrorists, etc. The same language was used by Rakto Mladic against the Muslims in Bosnia. He described them as “Turks” in order to legitimize the massacres carried out against them. The Islamophobes of Albania are helped in their anti-Muslim hate speech by American Islamophobes like David Phillips, Alon Ben-Meir, and Joseph Dioguardi. These Americans are helping the Albanian Islamophobes to look normal and politically correct in Albania and justify their hate in the name of Scanderbeg, the Myth of Greater Albania.

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Europe, and civilization. On the other hand, the anti-Iranian Islamophobes demonize Iran for geopolitical reasons, which has negative effects in the Albanian public.

To stop the Islamophobia in Albania, the Albanian government and other interested parties should:

- Ask the Albanian government to start a deradicalization program in the country, where the Catholic Church and other smaller Christian churches should preach peace, tolerance, and co-existence with the Muslims.
- The Albanian government should distance itself from inciting religious nationalism and must secularize its myths and the historical narrative of the nation. A multicultural, Europeanized, and secularized approach should be found when addressing the history of Albania. The idea of united and secular Europe where Turkey and Islam are part of it should be used to replace medieval Catholic myths of war against Islam and the Turks.
- The Voice of America and other major media outlets should not air extremist American opinionists who incite Islamophobia. Facebook should censor and close extremist anti-Muslim pages that incite hate, violence, and Islamophobia.
- The Albanian government should implement its laws against violent extremism equally among all the sectors of its society. It should bring before the law Christian extremists who call for extermination of Muslims and have carried out violent acts against Turkish and Muslim symbols.
- The Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe should address the issue of terrorism and Christian extremism with the Albanian and Kosovar governments and should undertake the same measures they have taken against radical Muslim groups and individuals.
- The Albanian government should not use its programs for fighting extremism in the school system to target the Muslim community only. The U.S. Department of State and the Center for Countering Violent Extremism in the Prime Minister’s office should reform their counter extremism program by including deradicalization programs for extremist Christian and nationalist groups or individuals that operate in Albania.
- The Albanian government should stop the harassment of Muslims in the workplace. The Ministry of Defense and other state institutions should allow the Muslims to freely practice their religion and should stop firing them from the workplace only because they are practicing Muslims. Muslims, who are the majority in Albania, must be more present in state institutions and ministries. The private sector must be monitored for discrimination against Muslims.
- The Albanian government should not allow its territory to be used by radical and terrorist organizations which create Islamophobia against foreign countries like Turkey, Iran, and the Arab world.
Chronology

- **01.01.2018**: The commemorations for the Year of Scanderbeg started.
- **04.01.2018**: Paulin Zefi declared that Albanian authorities cannot subdue 7 million Albanians in reference to the Catholic mob who attacked the Turkish flag in Mirdita.
- **11.01.2018**: The Minister of Education Lindita Nikolla announced a project to fight extremism. The project targeted Muslims and Islam as sources of extremism.
- **17.01.2018**: In one of the walls of Selimiye Mosque of Lezha, which has been turned into the Mausoleum of Scanderbeg, a picture of Scanderbeg killing the Ottoman Turks was displayed.
- **17.01.2018**: Dorian Hatibi, a lecturer at University of Durres and director in the Municipality of Tirana, wrote in *Gazeta Liria* that before the coming of the Turks, Albania was like Venice and Florence, but when the Turks came they destroyed everything.
- **22.02.2018**: Albanian State Television (RTSH) promoted the book of Kole Krasniqi, which describes the Muslims of Albania and Kosovo and the Ottomans as extremist Islamists.
- **16.04.2018**: Gjet Ndoji, ex-director of the National Archives of Albania, depicted Albanian Muslims as barbarians, Asian colonists, and as suffering from ‘Asiatic infection.’
- **25.04.2018**: Edi Rama declared that Russia wants to radicalize the Muslims of Albania.
- **25.04.2018**: Fahri Balliu declared the Turks to be barbarians, Asians, and killers of the Albanians for 500 years.
- **27.04.2018**: David Phillips and Arbana Xharra censured the Albanian government for the permission they gave to Turkey to build a mosque in Tirana.
- **28.04.2018**: Arben Çokaj wrote in *Gazeta Bota Sot* that Islam is a primitive religion which has subdued and enslaved the Albanians.
- **28.04.2018**: David Phillips attacked Prime Minister Edi Rama in the Voice of America - Albanian Service for allowing Turkey and Erdogan to build a mosque in Tirana and organize events on Scanderbeg Square in Tirana.
- **03.05.2018**: Arbana Xharra praised the closing of mosques in Europe and asked for the same thing to be done in the Balkans.
- **20.06.2018**: Klevis Balliu, an MP of the Democratic Party of Albania, described the Syrian refugees as people of Sultan Mehmet.
- **28.10.2018**: Sander Lleshi, the minister of interior, declared that no
one can question Scanderbeg and no intellectual debate will be tolerated about him.

- **18.12.2018:** Arbana Xharra declared that if she has power she will ‘cleanse’ Kosovo from religious radicals in 72 hours.