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EUROPEAN  
**ISLAMOPHOBIA**  
REPORT  

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2015

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ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

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ISBN : 978-605-4023-68-4

Layout : Erkan Söğüt

Printed in Turkey, İstanbul by Turkuvaz Haberleşme ve Yayıncılık A.Ş., 2016

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*For more information about the EIR:*

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# INTRODUCTION

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ

In June 2014, the website for reporting hate crimes to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) went public. In 2014, only five states officially reported on hate crimes against Muslims, whereas civil society reported in 21 countries. Still, for the majority of the 57 member countries of the OSCE, there is no official information available. Furthermore, if one were to assess the quality of these state reports, it becomes apparent that the collected data does not always rely on a comprehensive systematic collection.

Since Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism has become a growing threat in European societies, we – the editors – felt an urgent need to address this problem. In fact, there are still people denying the very existence of racism against Muslims. Many state and civil society institutions have done priceless work to prove and establish the opposite: from the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) to the countless civil society organisations throughout Europe. Yet, institutions like the FRA publish only irregular reports on a restricted number of countries while most civil society organisations tackle racism in general and only few focus on Islamophobia in specific - this is the urgent gap our report wishes to fill.

The *European Islamophobia Report* (EIR) is an annual report, which is presented for the first time this year. It currently comprises 25 national reports regarding each state and the tendencies of Islamophobia in each respective country. The current report features the work of 37 extraordinary scholars. In the years to come we will attempt to cover even more countries. This report aims to enable policymakers as well as the public to discuss the issue of Islamophobia with the help of qualitative data. At the same time, several of its unique characteristic features make a difference to the current state of the debate on Islamophobia.

## **Contribution of this report**

The national reports in the EIR look at significant incidents and developments in each country during the period under review. The authors look at the employment sector: has there been any discrimination in the job market based on the (assumed) Muslimness of a person? They look at education: has Islamophobic content become part of any curricula, textbooks, or any other education material? The political field in a narrow sense is also a central aspect of the EIR: has Islamophobia played any role in politics, from election campaigns to political programmes to personal statements, etc., be it on a regional or national level? Authors also take a close look at a central force where Islamophobia has spread: the media. Which media events have focused on Islam/Muslims in an Islamophobic way? The justice system is also featured in the national reports: are there any laws and regulations that are based on Islamophobic arguments or any laws restricting the rights of Muslims in their religious lifestyle? Cyberspace as a central space for spreading hate crime is also examined: which web pages and initiatives have spread Islamophobic stereotypes? In addition, central figures in the Islamophobia network are discussed: which institutions and persons have, among others, fostered Islamophobic campaigns, stirred up debates or lobbied for laws?

Since the EIR is not content with pointing a finger at the problem, the reports also look at observed civil society and political assessment and initiatives undertaken to counter Islamophobia in the aforementioned fields. This will empower politicians and NGO activists, who want to tackle the issue. Since the EIR is not a purely scholarly work, at the end of every report, authors offer policy recommendations for politics and NGOs. An executive summary at the beginning and a chronology at the end of every report give the reader an overview on the state and the development of Islamophobia in the respective countries.

Since the single reports share broadly the same structure, the EIR offers the possibility to compare Islamophobia in these countries. Despite the fact that the data in specific fields is not available in an identical way for all countries, the report still facilitates an impulse for identifying research gaps.

Studies on Islamophobia have in the past predominantly concentrated on Western Europe. This is especially the case with reports focusing on Islamophobia. The EIR is the first to cover a wide range of Eastern European countries like Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, or Latvia. This will enrich the debate on racism in general and Islamophobia in Europe in specific.

## **What is Islamophobia?**

Although the term 'Islamophobia' has become widely recognised in the Anglo-Saxon world and has become established in academia as can be seen by the numerous conferences, journals, and research projects dedicated to it, in many European countries, there is still a great amount of opposition to the term. One can understand the opposition expressed by the public not merely as an academic debate, but, in fact, as a sign of the hegemonic power of Islamophobic prejudices. Acknowledging this situation,

at the heart of this project lies the following working definition of Islamophobia:

“When talking about Islamophobia, we mean anti-Muslim racism. As Anti-Semitism studies have shown, the etymological components of a word do not necessarily point to its complete meaning, nor to how it is used. Such is also the case with Islamophobia studies. Islamophobia has become a well-known term used in academia as much as in the public sphere. Criticism of Muslims or of the Islamic religion is not necessarily Islamophobic. Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilising and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat – real or invented – and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/rights/definition of a constructed ‘we’. Islamophobia operates by constructing a static ‘Muslim’ identity, which is attributed in negative terms and generalised for all Muslims. At the same time, Islamophobic images are fluid and vary in different contexts as Islamophobia tells us more about the Islamophobe than it tells us about the Muslims/Islam”.

### Central findings

That Islamophobia works without Muslims and tells us more about the anti-Muslim racists than it tells us about Islam and Muslims, can best be seen in the eastern region of Europe. In countries like Hungary, Finland, Lithuania, or Latvia, where only a small number of Muslims live, Islamophobia functions as a successful means to mobilise people. People not only greatly overestimate the country's Muslim population but, although Muslims have not committed any violent acts in most countries in the name of Islam, they are still often deemed violent and are considered to be terrorists.

It could be observed that both attacks in Paris, which happened in 2015, became a discursive event that shaped the debates on Islam and Muslims throughout Europe. Above that, the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ was a central topic, which many actors linked to the issue of Muslims invading Europe. For example, the leader of the Hungarian Fidesz’ parliamentary club Antal Rogán warned of a future ‘United European Caliphate’,<sup>1</sup> while former Secretary of State László L. Simon urged Hungarians to return to their Christian spirituality and make more babies in order to counter the negative cultural effects of mass migration such as the envisioned ‘impending victory of Islamic parties imposing polygamy and destroying the remainder of European culture’.<sup>2</sup> This strong Islamophobic rhetoric is not restricted to the extreme right. In fact, the *refugee-migration-Islam-terrorism nexus* became the standard argument justifying a number of domestic and international measures. The social democrat Czech President Miloš Zeman claimed the influx of refugees into Europe was masterminded by Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood as “an organised invasion” to “gradually control Europe”.<sup>3</sup>

1. Károly Villányi, “Azt akarjuk, hogy unokáink egy európai kalifátusban éljenek?”, *Magyar Idők*, 14.11.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, <http://magyaridok.hu/belfold/azt-akarjuk-hogy-az-unokaink-egy-europai-kalifatusban-eljenek-5035/>.

2. “L. Simon: Szaporodjunk!”, *Népszabadság Online*, 05.09.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, [http://nol.hu/video/lSimon-a-szaporodasban-latja-a-jovot-1573295?utm\\_source=mandiner&utm\\_medium=link&utm\\_campaign=mandiner\\_201601](http://nol.hu/video/lSimon-a-szaporodasban-latja-a-jovot-1573295?utm_source=mandiner&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=mandiner_201601).

3. Agence France-Presse, “Integrating Muslims into Europe is ‘impossible’, says Czech president”, 18 January, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/18/integrating-muslims-into-europe-is-impossible-says-czech-president> (accessed 8 March, 2016)

## Policy Recommendations

Islamophobia poses a great risk to the democratic foundations of European constitutions and social peace as well as the coexistence of different cultures throughout Europe. Both civil society actors and states should acknowledge the seriousness of this issue and develop concrete policies to counter Islamophobia. Here we have summarised some of the important policy recommendations from the national reports.

- Islamophobia should be acknowledged as a crime and should be included in all national statistics throughout Europe.
- Hate crime legislations should be adopted in all European countries that acknowledge one's religious identity as being a basis upon which one may be targeted.
- In order to collect data about Islamophobic incidents, victims registers must be introduced in all European states.
- In order to help the victims of Islamophobic attacks, counseling services for victims must be established in all European states.
- Journalists, lawyers, Police (security officials) and legal authorities in all European countries should be educated by qualified personnel in regards to Islamophobia.
- Muslim civil society has to be empowered with information to combat Islamophobia, especially in the direction of the creation of a consciousness of the illegality of hate crimes.
- Educational institutions and stakeholders have to work towards creating an alternative narrative of Muslims in the respective countries which will work to dispel the widely accepted negative image of Islam.
- Civil society actors must also push for legislative change in the context of school enrolment policies so that all members of the respective societies are treated fairly when accessing education.
- Governments must draft a policy that ensures that the rights of religious minorities to manifest their faith are respected in education and the workplace; this must not be left to the preferences of individual boards of management or principals.
- Discrimination on the job market towards Muslims and especially Muslims who wear veils is a widespread phenomenon. This should be recognised and seriously addressed by better legal regulations and the creation of a relevant consciousness.
- Civil society actors must engage with media actors/outlets in terms of the publication and broadcasting of standards in order to reduce/minimise the use of racialising discourses vis-à-vis Muslims and other minority communities.
- The civil rights violations experienced by women wearing headscarves should be addressed by lawmakers and politicians.
- An independent media watchdog should be established in order to monitor media reports in real time in all respective countries.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**ALBANIA**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2015

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JULIANA AJDINI



## THE AUTHOR

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**To cite this report:** Juliana Ajdini (2016): *Islamophobia in Albania. National Report 2015*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2015*, Istanbul, SETA, 2016.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study has collected generated and analysed data on the phenomenon of Islamophobia with the aim of informing the stakeholders involved in addressing this phenomenon and the challenges interrelated with it. The research methodology approaches the identification and comprehensive analysis of the context by employing a variety of sources; in this way, the extent and relevance of several factors that enable or fuel Islamophobia in Albania can be understood. During the research period (January- December 2015), a wide range of official, academic and other reliable sources of data were examined. The report finds that Islamophobia in Albania is in its early phase, but in some situations it appears in a powerful way. The phenomenon of Islamophobia may be further developed due to a lack of contextual cooperation between non-security state authorities and leaders of religious communities to prevent the phenomenon. Some of the main findings of this report include the appearance of certain elements of Islamophobia, especially in social networks. Certain events in the international arena, for example the attack on Charlie Hebdo in France, or other terrorist attacks, further promote Islamophobic acts in Albania. In all the sources used, it appears that Western values are associated mostly with the Christian faith, while Eastern ones are connected to the Muslim faith. The report is accompanied by the provision of certain recommendations, which will help stakeholders to address this phenomenon in a comprehensive manner.

## PËRMBLEDHJE EKZEKUTIVE

Përmes këtij studimi është bërë e mundur mbledhja, gjenerimi dhe analizimi i të dhënave rreth fenomenit të islamofobisë në Shqipëri me qëllim informimin e aktorëve të interesuar si dhe adresimin e sfidave që lidhen me të. Metodologjia e këtij raporti mbështet në identifikimin dhe analizimin e thelluar të kontekstit. Duke përdorur një larmi burimesh për të kuptuar shtrirjen dhe seriozitetin e një sërë faktorëve, të cilët mundësojnë apo nxisin islamofobinë në Shqipëri. Gjatë periudhës studimore (janar 2015 – dhjetor 2015) u shqyrtua një volum i gjerë burimesh zyrtare, akademike dhe të dhëna të tjera të besueshme. Ky raport dëshmon se islamofobia në Shqipëri ndodhet në fazat e hershme të saj, megjithatë shfaqet fuqishëm në momente të caktuara. Fenomeni i islamofobisë mund të zhvillohet më tej për shkak të mungesës së bashkëpunimit në drejtim të parandalimit të saj midis autoriteteve shtetërore jashtë fushës së sigurisë, shoqërisë civile dhe drejtuesve të komuniteteve fetare. Disa nga gjetjet kryesore të raportit përfshijnë shfaqjen e elementëve të caktuar të islamofobisë sidomos në rrjetet sociale; për ngjarje të caktuara në arenën ndërkombëtare sic ishin sulmi ndaj revistës Charlie Hebdo në Francë apo sulme të tjera terroriste, që nxisin më tej akte islamofobike edhe në Shqipëri. Në të gjitha burimet e përdorura duket se vlerat perendimore lidhen më së shumti me besimin e krishterë, ndërsa ato lindore me besimin mysliman. Raporti shoqërohet edhe me dhënien e disa rekomandimeve që do të ndihmojnë palët e interesuara për ta adresuar këtë fenomen në mënyrë gjithëpërfshirëse.

## INTRODUCTION

Albania is a European country and as such, cannot be excluded from the map in which Islamophobia has seen recently significantly spread. Albanians have always dreamed of being a part of the European structure, and that Albania be considered to be part of Europe by the Europeans. Throughout history, this dream has been denied more than once. However, Albania is often perceived as an Eastern country because of the prevalence of Islam. Often this perception is used as the main argument for the development of Islamophobic practices. In some countries, such as Albania, the secularization drive was able to produce a population in which the awareness of being Muslim was lost or marginal. In Albania and Kosovo, Muslims represent the majority of the population. However, with a population of nearly 2.8 million people, according to the latest census (2011), the three largest religious communities in the country are Muslim (56.7%), Catholics (10%) and Orthodox (6.8%)<sup>1</sup>. Religious harmony has been broadly recognized as a core societal value in Albania, where members of Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox and other religious communities have co-existed in peace. During his visit to Albania, even the Pope noted that it is a model of religious harmony<sup>2</sup>. However, in reality, problems exist that are linked to religion, and Islamophobia is one of these. Some results of Islamophobia are discrimination, exclusion and prejudice of people, all of which emanate religious beliefs.

## SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Various national and international media reports and research studies have confirmed that Albanian citizens have been involved in the Syrian conflict<sup>3</sup>. This group is perceived as an extremist one and has led to a heated discussion among people, and resulted in some Islamophobic acts. The presence of Albanian fighters in the Syrian conflict has worried the Albanian authorities and foreign companies over the past 3 years. To deal with this phenomenon, the Ministry of the Interior has created a broad anti-terror directorate, including exchange of information with Europol and Western partner services.

To date, there are no exact numbers for Albanians involved in the conflict or how many have died. However, according to data from the Ministry of the Interior it is thought that more than nine Albanians have lost their lives during the conflict in Syria and Iraq (Anti-Terror Department of the Ministry of the Interior, May 2014)<sup>4</sup>.

The SIS (state intelligence service) reports that 13 Albanian and their spouses and children are with DEASH/ISIS. Albania's response to this has so far been de-

1. Source: INSTAT ([www.instat.gov.al](http://www.instat.gov.al)).

2. <http://www.oranews.tv/vendi/papa-francesku-miresevjen-ne-shqiperi-ora-news-ndjek-live-viziten-historike/>

3. <http://www.mapo.al/2014/03/shqiptaret-ne-siri-9-te-vrare-dhe-12-te-plagosur-per-xhihadin>

4. <http://www.shekulli.com.al/p.php?id=263334>

veloped mostly through repressive measures that have an immediate impact outside the national borders. Examples of such measures include amendments to the Criminal Code (2014) to allow for the prosecution of individuals participating in armed conflicts abroad and intensification of intelligence and police cooperation with law enforcement agencies in the region; in addition, a number of individuals who have recruited Albanian citizens to join the Syrian conflict have been prosecuted. However, to date state actions have lacked a solid prevention-oriented perspective or approach within national borders.

Related to the participation of Albanians in the Syrian conflict, nine imams have been arrested for calling the congregation to jihad in Syria<sup>5</sup>. Their trial at first was seen as unfair, both by the accused and by other Muslim people in Albania; it was difficult to believe that people who represented Islam would make a call for jihad.

However, it later became clear that these people represented a structure that was independent from the main Albanian Muslim community. The defendants are accused for recruiting 90 Albanians to join in the fighting in Syria through a network of sermons in mosques. The mosques in Unaza e Re and Mezezi were used as key links for the religious indoctrination of potential jihadists in the network.

However, this year, these hearings have degenerated into threats, curses and insults being expressed by witnesses, and even by the media, judges and prosecutors. In the hearing on December 23, 2015 one of the defendants said "...only Daesh/ISIS soldiers can liberate Albania from the government policies and thieves." Also, during this hearing many threats were uttered against the prime minister, Edi Rama, the minister of the interior, Sajmir Tahiri<sup>6</sup>, the head of the Democratic Party, Lulzim Basha and deputy Ben Blushi<sup>7</sup>. Meanwhile, another defendant, Muslim Fadil, told the judge: "Allah will destroy this country. They are treating us like criminals, I am not a criminal. I did not kill a fly. May Allah destroy His enemies<sup>8</sup>!"

After the attacks in Paris, the head of the State Information Service in Albania, Visho Ajazi, introduced urgent tasks and passed a state of emergency (November 14, 2015)<sup>9</sup>. The main task for SIS was the surveillance of all persons associated with and former radical Daesh/ISIS fighters who had returned to Albania, as well as other people who are from environments that are prone to radicalism or radical thought.

5. <http://top-channel.tv/lajme/artikull.php?id=293856&ref=ml>

6. [http://time.ikub.al/ae8036ad6c/07e432b2dbe6d504e3a35a35082e38a3/lajm\\_Gjyqi-ndaj-imameve-kercenohet-ministri-Tahiri-Nese-u-ka-bere-keq-myslimaneve-ku-do-shkoje-tani-.aspx](http://time.ikub.al/ae8036ad6c/07e432b2dbe6d504e3a35a35082e38a3/lajm_Gjyqi-ndaj-imameve-kercenohet-ministri-Tahiri-Nese-u-ka-bere-keq-myslimaneve-ku-do-shkoje-tani-.aspx)

7. <http://opinion.al/imamet-kercenojne-ben-blushin-e-shpallin-qafir/>

8. <https://www.google.al/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwj0PnN5rblAhUBsiwKHdaGBhYQFggZMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.gazetatema.net%2Fweb%2F2015%2F12%2F29%2Fimamet-mallkojne-shqiperine-allahu-e-shkaterrofte-kete-shtet%2F&usq=AFQjCNHTnua8vlcxt2TE6JnGJJ3OU4Zlww&sig2=tV6b7HlmlhA7WnpL0LNQtCw&bvmb=bv.116573086,d.bGg>

9. <http://shqiparja.com/m/aktualitet/charlie-hebdo-masa-sigurie-dhe-ne-tirane-visho-ajazi-ne-amb--franceze-264570.html>

After the attacks on Charlie Hebdo, various television debates asked the Muslim community and all Muslims of Albania to apologize for what had happened. There were many Muslims who spoke out against such actions, which are regarded as acts associated with Islam; however, there was a refusal to apologise, based on the argument that these acts were not related to religion. In different TV shows, such as “Opinion”, “Tonight” etc., the main argument that was given by the persons identified with Islam was: “A person or group of individuals are not representatives of the entire faith. Suicide is haram, and is one of the unforgivable sins. The Qur’an is clear in these prohibitions when it states, “Whoever kills a soul, it is as if he has slain all of mankind. And whoever saves one, it is as if he has saved all of mankind.”

The visit of the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan caused a great deal of controversy; this included Islamophobic reactions. He and the Albanian president, Bujar Nishani, symbolically laid the first foundation stone of the Namazgja mosque that will be built in the Albanian capital<sup>10</sup>.

When some players from the Albanian national football team went to pray in a mosque before the match between Albania and Armenia, many comments on social networks and news media discussed this event; it was argued that this was a violation of the principle of secularism. Photographs of the footballers praying were spread on social networks. Many people were angry with the players, and this anger-surpassed respect for faith, creed or other rights. Some of the comments suggested strengthening regulations, thus preventing the players from wearing the national uniform during religious rituals or in places of worship. However, almost no comments were made when the coach of the national team, wearing the same uniform, went to pray in church.

## **DISCUSSION OF ISLAMOPHOBIC INCIDENTS AND DISCURSIVE EVENTS IN VARIOUS FIELDS:**

### **Employment**

It is possible to say that in Albania de jure there is no problem of discrimination in the labour market. However, what has been observed is that the more obvious symbols of Muslim identity (hijab for girls/women, and beards and pants above ankles for boys/men) are visible in the public labour market. Generally, these are more involved in businesses which are privately owned by the Muslim community. Thus, girls with headscarves or hijab are more involved in day centres, kindergartens and schools run by the community. According to a study (Kocani, 2015) conducted with 248 women who wear the hijab in Tirana, 18.8 % were employed in the private sector, 2.1 % in public institutions, 5% in NGOs and only 2.5 % were self-employed. Men are more likely to be self-employed in vari-

10. <http://top-channel.tv/lajme/artikull.php?id=299052>

ous activities or by other members of the community.

This practice differs for men and women who do not wear identifiable signs such as hijab, beards or pants above the ankles. Sometimes managers who are not Muslim or practicing Muslims, show prejudice to the prayer time, perceiving it as a threat to the commitment to the work schedule.

In addition, there are cases when the headscarf causes problems, particularly when the position requires contact with clients, and thus impartiality. The employer justifies their decision by referring to the firm's dress code; although this is never in writing, tattoos, slippers and symbols displaying religious convictions are prohibited. However, as a society the cross worn as a necklace is acceptable.<sup>11</sup>

## Education

According to the Albanian constitution, the schools are secular. This means that the curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education must not have a religious content. However, an important fact is that because in Albania, there is a non-inclusion of religious subjects or the history of religion in public education, students receive basic knowledge about religions through world history and/or national history books and sociology books. During the 25 years of democracy in Albania, many problems in these textbooks over the definition of Islam and its historical development have been identified. In 2015 a serious problem was identified.

For years, high school students in Albania learn sociology from a textbook written by Fatos Tarifa, et. al, published by Mediaprint Publishers. On page 109 of this book, where Islam is being explained, and the five pillars of Islam are listed. Here there is a sentence that is in stark opposition to what Islam teaches. "Reciting the slogan of Islam, according to which Islam is one Lord and Mohamed is His son" (11th Grade Sociology, page 109). This sentence goes against the very core teachings of Islam. According to Islam, God is the only God and Muhammad is His messenger. The Qur'an clearly states that God has no father and no offspring<sup>12</sup>.

## Politics

The construction of the largest mosque in the country has been delayed 22 years due to a long debate on the matter; in recent years this has taken on a political background. Both major parties have issued accusations about the construction of this facility, transforming it into an electoral matter, trying to win over the significant number of Muslims in the country. The land on which the mosque is to be built was designated as being behind the Palace of Culture. Representatives from the AIC

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11. Kocani, A. Problemet e vazave të mbuluara në shoqërinë e sotme shqiptare. 2015 (8<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING OF INSTITUTE ALB-SHKENCA)

[http://iash-takimet.org/tv2013/programi/programi\\_shoqeria\\_2013.pdf](http://iash-takimet.org/tv2013/programi/programi_shoqeria_2013.pdf)

12. <http://www.lapsi.al/lajme/2015/02/16/tjet%C3%ABr-skandal-me-tekstet-shkollore-libri-i-sociologjis%C3%AB-muhamedi-%C3%ABsht%C3%AB-biri-i#.VsCLjVQrLIU>

(Albanian Islamic Community) state that the Muslim community will preserve the green space in the new mosque project. However, there have been reactions against this proposed site. An area of 6 thousand square meters was given to the Muslim community before the May 8, 2011 elections by the prime minister, Berisha. The mayor of the city, Lulzim Basha, made the construction of the mosque one of his campaign promises to the Muslim community<sup>13</sup>. Another important debate has been placing a plaque commemorating Sultan Süleyman on the door of Lezha Castle. What was seen to be a symbol of a historical period in Albania has become a religious debate in a city where most of the residents are Christian. Meanwhile, the Lezha PDK deputy and candidate deputy for the Left, Edward Ndocaj (as from 29 October 2015 Ndocaj has become a member of the Albanian parliament) reacted against this symbol, stating that it “is Ottoman influence, not a national one”. On the other hand, a researcher, Gjergj Karaiskaj, states that the plaque is part of the monument and demonstrates an important era in the country’s history.

Another Albanian historian, Artan Lame, states that without the plaques we will have little proof of the fact that people were living in this area at the date in question.

With a backdrop of 1.67 million Muslims in Albania<sup>14</sup>, it is astonishing to see that politicians and artists congratulate all Albanians on Christmas and Easter through social media and/or television speeches, while they congratulate only the Muslims for Muslim holidays!

## The Media

After every international attack, which is carried out, or thought to be carried out by Muslim groups, a series of television debates immediately appear, even in Albania. We can see many debates from journalists and columnists, both pro and anti-Muslim. For examples, in some TV shows, such as “Opinion”, which has a focus on Islam, A.Zheji said “The Muslim king of Albania, Ahmet Zogu, said that the Albanian sun has born in the West”. Others explain the prejudice against Muslims as being linked with the ignorance of the people about Islam. In one episode of “Opinion” (08 January 2015), one of the guests, B. Blushi was asked by E. Mertiri to apologise for the Charlie Hebdo attack<sup>15</sup>. Some of the discussions in the media deal with themes such as the threat created by Daesh/ISIS, religious tolerance - reality or myth, prejudices against Muslim, terrorism in Europe, Islam, Europe and terrorism etc. Moreover, during the Festivali i Këngës (National Song Festival) one of the presenters, P. Laco, cited several composers from earlier years of the festival, and flippantly declared: “All these people with Muslim names have created Albanian music.”

13. <http://hdvhs.webcam/view.php?v=14vJprq9VMs>.

14. Source: INSTAT ([www.instat.gov.al](http://www.instat.gov.al)). A significant number of respondents refused to answer to Census 2011 question on religious background, thus leading to various religious communities contesting the data. The Bektashi community accounts for nearly 2.1%.

15. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJ0rhPLxLq4>

## Cyber-Space

The main concern about Islamophobia in Albania is what is read in cyber-space. It seems that the most common language used to discuss the Muslim faith is a language of hatred, disgust and anger. On different website or in articles that discuss Islam, we can find an aggressive language against Islam; the people using this language are anonymous.

### For example:

- <http://shqiptarja.com/bota/2728/franc--sulme-me-arm--e-bomb--n--paris-60-persona-t--vdekur-326918.html> - “..all the Muslims of the world should go to hell!”
- <http://www.lapsi.al/ide/2015/11/14/koha-p%C3%ABr-t%C3%AB-ndihmuar-islam#.VsCkjFQrLIU> - “...Islam is the most disgusting race..”
- <http://www.balkanweb.com/site/ja-si-visheshin-femrat-ne-iran-para-revolucionit-islamik/> - “Islam is a damnation and ugliness of humanity.”

## OBSERVED CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICAL ASSESSMENT AND INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN TO COUNTER ISLAMOPHOBIA

Civil society has been almost non-existent in encouraging or actually developing an informed discourse on religious radicalization tendencies, Islamophobia and other religious developments in the country. In general, the public discourse on this phenomenon has been superficial and has ignored many important aspects for prevention<sup>16</sup>.

Islamophobia is seen as something that does not exist in Albania. Therefore, in the name of religious harmony, the issue of preventive practices has not been addressed.

## CONCLUSION

### Policy Recommendations for Politics and NGO's

A progress report of the EU (2015) states: “Albania has been affected by the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters and radicalization. Cases of hate speech need to be addressed more forcefully. The phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters needs a specific approach by the intelligence and law enforcement community and a coherent judicial policy on offenders.”

### State Institutions:

Religious brotherhood is an important value for the Albanian people, and this directly concerns the Albanian prime minister. After the events of January in France, at a

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16. Idm. Religious Radicalism And Violent Extremism In Albania. 2015

meeting with heads of religious faiths the prime minister said, “Albania is quite weak and vulnerable to the threat of Islamic fundamentalism.”

- The Islamophobia phenomenon should be addressed by actively involving state institutions and agencies that operate in the area of local governance, education, social affairs, youth, employment and antidiscrimination; in addition, other non-state actors and above all, religious communities and civil society should be involved.
- The design of preventive programs and involvement of influential stakeholders must be associated with a more active role by the state, particularly at the local level.
- For a country like Albania which has so many religions and where freedom of religion is guaranteed in the Constitution, it is important that the treatment of religions and historiography adopt a neutral position, giving students information that has been verified by research.

### **NGOs**

- NGOs must address Islamophobia by establishing forums in which active opinion makers, religious leaders and theologians take part. Their messages against Islamophobia must be spread on social networks, the radio, and television and school programs.
- The promotion of studies, support for research and continuous monitoring should take place to ensure an updated database on the phenomenon of Islamophobia and its trends, thus serving policymakers, as well as religious communities and other societal actors, in developing relevant policies.



Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism poses a growing threat to the democratic foundations of European constitutions and social peace as well as the coexistence of different cultures throughout Europe. Both civil society actors and states should acknowledge the seriousness of this issue and develop concrete policies to counter Islamophobia.

As the leading think tank in Turkey, SETA felt an urgent need to address this problem. In fact, there are still people denying the very existence of racism against Muslims. Many state and civil society institutions, from the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) to the countless civil society organisations throughout Europe, have done priceless work to prove and establish the opposite. Yet, institutions like the FRA publish only irregular reports on a restricted number of countries while most civil society organisations tackle racism in general and only few focus on Islamophobia in particular -this is the urgent gap our report wishes to fill.

The European Islamophobia Report (EIR) is an annual report, which is presented for the first time this year. It currently comprises 25 national reports regarding each state and the tendencies of Islamophobia in each respective country. The current report features the work of 37 extraordinary scholars. In the years to come we will attempt to cover even more countries. This report aims to enable policymakers as well as the public to discuss the issue of Islamophobia with the help of qualitative data. At the same time, several of its unique characteristic features make a difference to the current state of the debate on Islamophobia. Studies on Islamophobia have in the past predominantly concentrated on Western Europe. This is especially the case with reports focusing on Islamophobia. The EIR is the first to cover a wide range of Eastern European countries like Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania and Latvia. This will enrich the debate on racism in general and Islamophobia in Europe in particular.

### 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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