
EUROPEAN
ISLAMOPHOBIA
REPORT
2016



ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

EUROPEAN
ISLAMOPHOBIA
REPORT

2016

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)



COPYRIGHT © 2017 by SETA

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical or other means, without permission in writing from the publishers.

ISBN: 978-975-2459-00-7

Cover and Layout: Erkan Söğüt

Printed in Turkey, İstanbul by Turkuvaz Haberleşme ve Yayıncılık A.Ş., 2017

**SETA | FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL RESEARCH**

Nenehatun Caddesi No: 66 GOP Çankaya 06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE

Phone:+90 312.551 21 00 | Fax :+90 312.551 21 90

www.setav.org | info@setav.org | @setavakfi

SETA | İstanbul

Defterdar Mh. Savaklar Cd. Ayvansaray Kavşağı No: 41-43

Eyüp İstanbul TÜRKİYE

Phone: +90 212 315 11 00 | Fax: +90 212 315 11 11

SETA | Washington D.C.

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 1106

Washington, D.C., 20036 USA

Phone: 202-223-9885 | Fax: 202-223-6099

www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org | @setadc

SETA | Cairo

21 Fahmi Street Bab al Luq Abdeen Flat No 19 Cairo EGYPT

Phone: 00202 279 56866 | 00202 279 56985 | @setakahire

ABOUT EDITORS

Enes Bayraklı

Mr. Bayraklı earned his BA, MA and PhD from the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna, and conducted research for his PhD thesis at the University of Nottingham in Britain between 2009 and 2010. He took office as a deputy director at Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in London in 2011-2013. Mr. Bayraklı also served as the founding director of Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers in Constanta and Bucharest during the period of August-December 2012. Mr. Bayraklı has been a faculty member in the Department of Political Science at the Turkish-German University since 2013. His fields of research include the Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy, Cultural Diplomacy, Foreign Policy Analysis, German Politics and Foreign Policy. bayrakli@tau.edu.tr

Farid Hafez

Farid Hafez is currently Fulbright–Botstiber Visiting Professor of Austrian-American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He is a lecturer and researcher at the Department of Sociology and Political Science at the University of Salzburg. Hafez earned his PhD in Political Science from the University of Vienna and has been teaching at numerous universities across the world. He has been a visiting scholar at Columbia University. Hafez is the founding editor of the *German-English Islamophobia Studies Yearbook* (www.jahrbuch-islamophobie.de). He was awarded the Bruno Kreisky Award for the political book of 2009 for his German anthology *Islamophobia in Austria*, which he co-edited with Prof. John Bunzl. He has published more than 10 books and 40 articles. His articles have appeared in high-ranking journals such as *Patterns of Prejudice*, *Austrian Journal of Political Science*, *Discourse and Society*, *German Politics and Society*, *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, *Journal of Black Studies*, and many others. E-mail: farid.hafez@sbg.ac.at

For more information about the EIR:

www.islamophobiaeurope.com

islamophobia@setav.org

THE STATE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ

This is the second edition of the annual *European Islamophobia Report (EIR)* which was presented for the first time in 2015. New countries are included in this year's *EIR*; while 25 countries were covered in 2015, the report for 2016 includes 27 country reports. *EIR 2016* is the result of 31 prominent scholars who specialise in different fields such as racism, gender and Islamophobia Studies. In the years to come we will attempt to include more countries in our report. Our final aim is to cover and monitor the developments of Islamophobia in all European countries.

Islamophobia has become a real danger to the foundations of democratic order and the values of the European Union. It has also become the main challenge to the social peace and coexistence of different cultures, religions and ethnicities in Europe. The country reports of *EIR 2016*, which cover almost all the European continent from Russia to Portugal and from Greece to Latvia, clearly show that the level of Islamophobia in fields such as education, employment, media, politics, the justice system and the Internet is on the rise. Since the publication of the last report there is little improvement. On the contrary, one can see from the country reports that the state of democracy and human rights in Europe is deteriorating. Islamophobia has become more real especially in the everyday lives of Muslims in Europe. It has surpassed the stage of being a rhetorical animosity and has become a physical animosity that Muslims feel in everyday life be it at school, the workplace, the mosque, transportation or simply on the street.

The refugee movement and the turmoil it has created in Europe, the unprecedented rise of far right parties all across the continent and the UK's Brexit decision, which took many by surprise, have revealed the importance and relevance of this report, which covers incidents and developments in 2016. The short-term political significance of Islamophobia is as much relevant as Islamophobia's structural dimension. As mentioned before, small successes can be witnessed in some European countries yet great challenges lie ahead for deepening the values of human rights and freedom of religion in Europe.

The Rise of Islamophobia

As a survey conducted by the Chatham House Europe Programme shows, public opposition to any further migration from predominantly Muslim states is by no means confined to Trump's administration (implementation of the 'Muslim-Ban'). Respondents in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain and the UK were presented with the statement 'All further migration from mainly Muslim countries should be stopped'. As the report reveals, the majorities in all but two of the ten states agreed to this statement, ranging from 71% in Poland, 65% in Austria, 53% in Germany and 51% in Italy to 47% in the United Kingdom and 41% in Spain. In no country did the percentage that disagreed surpass 32%.¹

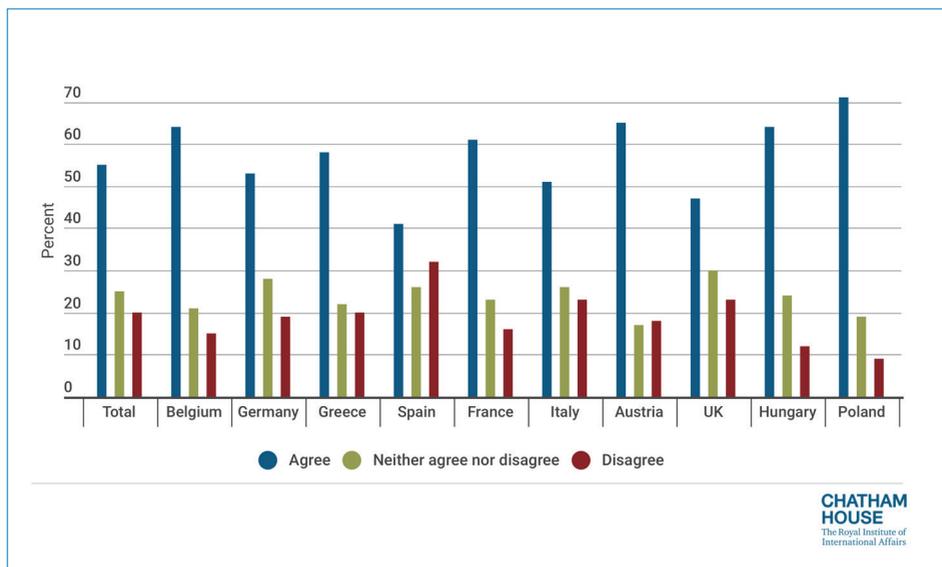


Figure 1: Public opposition to any further migration from predominantly Muslim states in Europe.²

The findings of this report go hand in hand with similar surveys on this topic. The Ipsos Perils of Perception Survey 2016 found that the current and the future Muslim population in Europe are enormously overestimated in most countries. Out of the list of all 20 countries where respondents overestimated the Muslim population by more than 10%, 12 are European, while the USA and Canada are among the remaining 8 countries. When asked "Now thinking about 2020, out of every 100 people, about how many do you think will be Muslim?", the top 20 countries where proponents overestimated the Muslim population again were in majority European (11). The average guess in France is that 40% of

1. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/what-do-europeans-think-about-muslim-immigration#sthash.O6J7kQrj.dpuf>

2. Chatham House, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/what-do-europeans-think-about-muslim-immigration>

the population will be Muslim in 2020 when the actual projection is 8.3%. Italy comes third with 26% overestimation, and Belgium and Germany fourth with 24% overestimation.³

Connecting this to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, we can suggest that this overestimation is connected to unfavourable views regarding Muslims. The report states,

“Opinions of Muslims vary considerably across Europe. Half or more in Hungary, Italy, Poland, Greece and Spain have a very or somewhat unfavorable view of Muslims. And in Italy (36%), Hungary (35%) and Greece (32%), roughly a third hold very unfavorable opinions. Majorities in the other nations surveyed express positive attitudes about Muslims. Nonetheless, at least a quarter in each country have negative views of Muslims.”⁴

These numbers are not shocking if we look at the incidents of Islamophobia and its pervasiveness in power structure across Europe. Muslims are seen as the enemy ‘within’. There is wide consent in Western societies to Muslims not being seen as equal citizens. Othering and differential treatment may also overlap with the dehumanization of Muslims. Thus, physical attacks and political restrictions can often be carried out and even defended in an atmosphere of wide distrust and enmity. Islamophobia is by no means confined to the working poor or the middle class, who have been misinformed about Islam and Muslims. It is especially true for the so-called educated elite. Discriminating policies like the ban of the hijab for certain professions, the ban of the niqab in public, bans of minarets and other laws restricting Muslim’s freedom of religion speak volumes. If politicians can take such decisions and the media, along with large parts of society, accept them, why should we wonder about the strong opposition to immigration of Muslim people in Europe?

Hence, these numbers reveal the necessity of the *EIR*, which looks at the challenge of Islamophobia from a qualitative and not a quantitative research perspective. Its aim is to document and analyse trends in the spread of Islamophobia in various European nation states. There cannot be a claim of full comprehensiveness, since European nation states by majority still lack data collection. Hence, a central recommendation of the *EIR* is that Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hate crime should be included as a category in European nation states’ statistics – a development that has not occurred as of yet. The *EIR*’s primary contribution is to reveal the tendencies of Islamophobia and to give representative examples of its overall unfolding in the investigated states.

3. <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/ipsos-mori-perils-of-perception-charts-2016.pdf>

4. <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/07/Pew-Research-Center-EU-Refugees-and-National-Identity-Report-FINAL-July-11-2016.pdf>

Recognition of Islamophobia

There are various definitions of Islamophobia. However, the definition of Islamophobia used by the *EIR*, as defined by its editors, is as follows,

“When talking about Islamophobia, we mean anti-Muslim racism. As Anti-Semitism Studies has shown, the etymological components of a word do not necessarily point to its complete meaning, nor 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, because Islamophobia tells us more about the Islamophobe than it tells us about the Muslims/Islam”.⁵

We think that with this definition, we clearly address many of the suspicions, which are put against the term as such. As a matter of fact, while supranational institutions such as the OSCE embrace the terminology Anti-Semitism, the OSCE still refuses to use Islamophobia, which we see as part of the problem. Again, we recommend that Islamophobia/anti-Muslim Racism or anti-Muslim hate crime should be included in the collection of “equality data” in all European states. Institutions such as the OSCE need to establish solid monitoring and recording mechanisms for discrimination, hate crime and hate speech towards Muslims. In order to have reliable data, it has to be segregated by bias/category and also segregated by gender. This is even more problematic in countries that do not allow collection of data on religion or race. This seemingly egalitarian approach in reality hides the discrimination of Muslims. Also, response mechanisms seem to be unclear and not adequately used. When there is an incident of discrimination/hate crime/hate speech, there are different response mechanisms available, yet, none of these are familiar to the vast majority of Muslim citizens of European countries. Thus, we recommend that response mechanisms should be made more available, accessible and clear. Last but not least, an empowerment of the Muslim community is needed to strengthen critical citizenship and help European states deepen their democracies.

5. Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2015*, Istanbul, SETA, 2016, p.7.

Policy Recommendations for European Countries

The authors of every respective national report have suggested specific recommendations regarding the country they have covered. The following list of recommendations serves to underscore some of these recommendations and to add some additional suggestions on the supranational level.

We think it is important for civil society to understand that Islamophobia is a problem of institutional racism. The illusion that Europe is a post-racial society prevents large parts of European societies from recognising the severe challenge of Islamophobia to local societies. The focus has to shift from Muslims' actions to those of European societies. Racism, including Islamophobia, tells us more about the racists than about their imagined scapegoat or their victims. Hence, Islamophobia reveals aspects of Europe and the internal problems European societies continue to face. A recognition and a critical consciousness of this societal disease is of utmost importance to be able to create more just societies in Europe. At the same time, Muslims must be allowed to enjoy their spaces of freedom like other dominant religious and political groups in European societies without being securitised or criminalised. The securitisation of Islam, especially policies countering violent extremism and their impact on the freedom of religion of belief for Muslims, and even freedom of movement or free assembly have to be challenged by all democratic forces in Europe. Communities must be consulted and human rights frameworks must be respected. National security is not among the criteria that should permit the limitation of freedom of religion or belief.

We especially urge politicians to speak out against Islamophobia as one of the most pressing forms of racism in our days. Europe needs more courageous politicians who do not only challenge the politics of right-wing populist parties, but also challenge institutionalised forms of racism targeting Muslims in the fields of employment, education, state bureaucracy, and media. We also call for journalists and editors to challenge Islamophobic reporting in their news media and give space to more balanced views. Generally, the issue of religious literacy is a huge problem that does not only concern media but also the police, prosecutors and civil servants. We see that people simply lack basic knowledge on Islam and Muslims' practices. We see a need for the introduction of more comparative religion courses, or religious teaching, in a formal and informal educational setting.

We see that Muslim women are among the most vulnerable direct victims of Islamophobia. ENAR has conducted a report on the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women and presented 37 recommendations, which we can only underscore given the findings of our report.⁶ Women who are visibly Muslim are socially ostracised in many places. The combination of internal community prob-

6. http://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/forgottenwomenpublication_lr_final_with_latest_corrections.pdf

lems, discrimination (education and employment) and hate crimes against Muslim women (data shows that it is 70% more likely for a muslim woman to be attacked in the street) are leaving their horrible mark on Muslim women. Hence, the protection and the empowerment of Muslim women have to be on the central agenda of states and NGOs. The ruling of the European Court of Justice regarding Esmâ Bougnaoui's dismissal by a French company for wearing a hijab when dealing with clients as unlawful discrimination is an important step towards equality and an anti-discriminatory society.⁷ At the same time, the case of Belgian Samira Achbita vs. Belgium, where it was argued that a dismissal due to the headscarf would be permissible against the backdrop of a general prohibition of all outward signs of political, philosophical and religious beliefs exhibited by employees in the workplace, is worrying and challenges the reality of a diverse Europe.⁸

7. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/14/world/europe/france-head-scarf-court.html?_r=0

8. <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=179082&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=678370>

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
CROATIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2016

DINO MUJADŽEVIĆ

The Author

Dr. Dino Mujadžević is a visiting researcher at Lancaster University (Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science) and a Humboldt postdoctoral researcher (Chair of History of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey at Ruhr University Bochum). In 2000, he graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb, Croatia with degrees in History and Turkology. He was employed at the Lexicographic Institute in Zagreb (2002-2007) and the Croatian Institute for History (2008-13) as a research assistant. He obtained his PhD from Zagreb University in 2010. His research focuses on history of the Ottoman Balkans, Socialist Yugoslavia, contemporary Islam in Croatia, and pro-Turkish activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mujadžević has published articles in *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, *Südosteuropa* and *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*. He is author of the monograph *Bakarić* (2011) and the edited volume *Annotated Legal Documents on Islam in Europe: Croatia* (ed., Brill 2015). His monograph *Turkish Foreign Policy and Pro-Turkish Activism in Bosnia. Actors, Discourses and Textual Corpora (2002-2014)* will be published in 2017 (Otto Harrassowitz). E-mail: Dino.Mujadzzevic@rub.de

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. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in the national reports. The editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of the material.

To cite this report: Dino Mujadžević (2017): *Islamophobia in Croatia: National Report 2016*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2016*, Istanbul, SETA, 2017.

Executive Summary

In 2016, Islamophobia in Croatia was present but less intense than in 2015, which saw the explosion of media materials which expressed anti-Islamic attitudes in response to the pan-European so-called immigrant crisis that also affected Croatia. An opinion poll in 2016 showed that the Croatian population is highly concerned about the terrorist threats and is negatively disposed towards immigration despite the fact the Croatian soil has not been attacked in the last two decades by terrorist groups and that immigration is very low. On the other hand, the Islamic Community in Croatia enjoyed, as in previous years, very good relations with the state and the majority of the population, as well as with the leadership of the Catholic Church in Croatia, the country's predominant denomination. Only two possible major Islamophobic incidents stand out in 2016: the extremely critical treatment of Minister of Culture Zlatko Hasanbegović by the media, seen by some as motivated by anti-Islamic sentiment, and the violent attack on two asylum seekers from Muslim countries in December in Zagreb. Mainstream media were not directly Islamophobic, although their widespread use of the adjective "Islamic" to refer to DAESH, al-Qaeda or similar terrorist groups may contribute to the stereotyping of all Muslims as potential security threats. The main supporters of anti-Islamic positions, the Croatian extreme right-wing politicians and Internet media, focused on targeting non-European immigrant Muslims to Europe – as opposed to the existing community of Croatian Muslims of mainly Balkan origin. Some biased and provocative anti-Islamic texts were present in marginal conservative Catholic media. Open Islamophobic hate speech was also heavily present on social media, commentary sections of online media and internet forums.

Sažetak

U 2016, islamofobija u Hrvatskoj bila je prisutna ali s manjim intenzitetom nego u prethodnoj godini, 2015., kada se dogodila eksplozija medijskih materijala koji su, uglavnom indirektno, izražavali anti-islamske stavove u kontekstu paneuropske imigrantske krize kojom je bila pogođena i Hrvatska. Istraživanja javnog mnijenja su u 2016. pokazala da je hrvatsko stanovništvo vrlo zabrinut zbog terorističkih prijetnji, a negativno raspoloženo prema imigraciji, unatoč činjenici da je Hrvatska zemlja nije bila napadnuta je u posljednja dva desetljeća od strane terorističkih skupina te da je imigracija vrlo niska. S druge strane, Islamska zajednica u Hrvatskoj uživala je, kao i prethodnih godina, vrlo dobre odnose s državom i većinom stanovništva, kao i s vodstvom Katoličke crkve u Hrvatskoj, prevladavajuće vjeroispovijesti. Jedina dva moguća veća islamofobna incidenta bila su izrazito kritički medijski tretman ministra kulture Zlatka Hasanbegovića, koji su neki pripisali anti-islamskim osjećajima, i nasilni napad na dvojicu azilanata iz muslimanskih zemalja u prosincu u Zagrebu. *Mainstream* mediji nisu direktno poticali islamofobiju, iako njihova raširena upotreba pridjeva "islamski" za kvalifikaciju ISIS-a, al-Qaide ili sličnih terorističkih skupina može doprinijeti stereotipu o muslimanima u cjelini kao sigurnosnoj prijetnji. Glavni zagovornici anti-islamskih stavova, ekstremno desni političari i internetski mediji, fokusirali su se na neeuropske muslimanske imigrante u Europu - ne na postojeću zajednicu hrvatskih muslimana uglavnom balkanskog porijekla. Neki pristrani i provokativni anti-islamski tekstovi bili su prisutni u marginalnim konzervativnim katoličkim medijima. Osim toga, otvoreni islamofobni govor mržnje bio je prisutan na društvenim medijima, u sekcijama komentara online medija i na internetskim forumima.

Introduction

Islamophobia has played an important role in Croatian history. The presence of Muslims in Croatia, a predominantly Roman Catholic country, until the 20th century has had no continuity to this day due to the breaks caused by persecution and annihilation, which was justified and largely motivated in Islamophobic discourses that have been historically present in the Catholic Church and secular institutions shaped by the latter.

The first presence of Muslims was recorded in eastern parts of the contemporary Republic of Croatia in the 12th century. These Muslims were pressured by the Hungarian (simultaneously Croatian) ruler and the Catholic Church to convert to Catholicism, but managed to survive in some numbers until the end of 14th century, when they were finally religiously assimilated. During the 16th century, Ottomans established their rule over roughly half of the territory of contemporary Croatia. Ottoman rule in Croatia ended after the Reconquista by the Catholic powers, the Habsburg Empire and Venice at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century. The Muslim population left Croatia or was expelled, killed or enslaved. All Islamic religious infrastructures, including graveyards, were destroyed or converted to serve other purposes. The third period of Muslim settlement in Croatia starts in second half of 19th century, when Muslims started to return to Croatia. The Muslim settlement in Croatia grew steadily during the 20th century (from 4,750 residents in 1931 to 62,000 in 2011).

The number of Muslims rose especially after the 1960s when Muslims, predominantly of Bosniak ethnicity, immigrated from Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia as part of inter-Yugoslav economic migrations. The negative stereotypes of Islam and Muslims based on the historical perceptions of the Ottoman danger dominated Croatian academia and the educational system as well as the Catholic Church throughout the 20th century. The Croatian nationalist political elite, however, in the first half of the 20th century - due to its plans to attract Muslim Bosniaks for the Croatian national project - considered Muslim Bosniaks as part of the Croat nation and accepted Islam as part of the country's national heritage. At that time, the nascent Muslim community in Croatia was able to profit from these positive attitudes which helped their quick social integration and protected them from the Islamophobia prevalent in cultural institutions and the Church. The culmination of this positive attitude based on political calculation was the patronising of pro-Muslim behaviour by the Croatian Nazi puppet state ruled by the extreme nationalist and Fascist-like *Ustaše* movement between 1941 and 1945. After the communist-dominated federal Yugoslavia emerged after World War II, some political representation was given to the ethnic groups with Muslim culture, especially Bosniaks, and their culture started to be appreciated, at least in theory, all across Yugoslavia in accordance with and within the boundaries of the proclaimed ideological principles of "brotherhood and unity". Following these principles, socialist Croatia, removed

some of the worst features of pure Islamophobia from history textbooks and academic productions; however, anti-Islamic attitudes associated with the extreme negative perception of Ottomans, continued to be reproduced in Croatian historiography and the school system, partly as a result of Marxist influences and the anti-Ottoman discourses of other Yugoslav historiographies.

Although more discretely than before, Croatian academia and the educational system continued to build discrete resentment towards Muslims, which influenced the outburst of the state-sponsored Islamophobia of the 1990s (to be explained later in the report). During and after the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the newly awakened Croatian nationalism temporarily revived the pro-Islamic tradition. Nevertheless, the Croatian nationalist Islamophilia collapsed during the 1993–1994 period, the so-called Bosniak-Croat war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was an armed conflict in the shadow of Serbian aggression against both Bosnia and Croatia. The conflict started after the leadership of newly independent Croatia attempted to annex parts of Bosnia with the help of the Bosnian Croats, to distance itself from its former allies, the Bosniaks, and to forge closer relations with Bosnian Serbs and Serbia. This led to war between the Croats and the official Bosnian army, largely Bosniak. The Croatian media and academia launched a brief, but harsh, Islamophobic campaign trying to blame the Bosniak side and its Islamic religion for the war with Bosnian Croats, reinventing for this purpose the centuries-old images of Ottoman and Islamic danger. In contrast to Bosnia, where this conflict led to ethnic cleansing and the persecution of the Muslim population, Croatian Muslims didn't suffer state or other persecution, although a smaller number of violent Islamophobic incidents against Bosnian Muslim refugees and local population did occur.

The anti-Muslim campaign ceased in 1994 with the creation of a new alliance between Croatia, the official Bosnian government, and Bosnian Croats. As the nationalists left power in 2000, the positive attitude of the Croatian political elite and media toward Croatian Muslims helped to create an accepting atmosphere for Croatian Muslims in the public domain as well as in academia and the educational system. The linguistic and cultural proximity between the Croatian Catholic majority and Croatian Muslims, as well as a relatively low overall number of Muslims, are seen as major factors enabling this largely successful integration. The diminished migration from other post-Yugoslav countries since the establishment of Croatian independence in 1991 and the growing number of Muslims born and raised in Croatia, contributed to the ever-growing identification of the Muslim population with Croatia.

Nevertheless, the legacy of historical demonization of Islam enhanced by the Catholic retraditionalization of society and the living memory of the 1990s war in Bosnia, kept alive by the huge immigration of Bosnian Croats, have helped Islamophobia to survive. Several polls in 2000s indicated that the social distance between Catholic Croats and Muslim Balkan ethnicities still exists and that some of the anti-Muslim prejudic-

es continue to influence part of public opinion. Since 2001, the general anti-Islamic prejudices were also strengthened by the Western war against al-Qaida, the Taliban and DAESH causing a continuous stream of superficial and unnuanced news representations of Islam. The media discourse in Croatian media, in the very media that sympathetically covered Croatian Muslims, has been saturated by news that associated Islam in other countries with terrorism and atrocities as well as violence and ignorance in general.

Until very recently, Croatia due to its long history of isolation and economic hardship, had no experience with any significant number of Muslims immigrating from outside of Europe. The debates about cultural integration of Muslim immigrants were non-existent. According to the 2011 national census, Muslims in Croatia represent a small portion of the Croatian population, only 1.47% (or 62,977 persons). There is only one Islamic religious community, the Islamic Community in Croatia, which enjoys a good relationship with the state that recognises sharia marriage, provides salaries for imams and financially supports its educational activities. In addition to the good relationship between the state and the Islamic religious establishment, currently there are no visible significant tensions between the resident, mostly Balkan-rooted, Muslim population and the majority Croatian Catholic population. Violent anti-Muslim acts are rare.

Nevertheless, some indicators point to the fact that anti-Muslim sentiment may be influencing the majority population more significantly when dealing with the non-European Muslim population; this is also reflected in some governmental policies. For example, the firm stance of the Croatian government during 2016 towards halting the possible new influx of refugees and migrants was aimed at reassuring the Croatian public which, despite the non-existent terrorism on Croatian soil and the extremely low number of persons who decided to seek asylum or to immigrate, was highly concerned about these issues. According to the Eurobarometer opinion poll research for 2016, funded by the European Commission, terrorism (48%) and immigration (44%) are the two most important concerns of Croatian citizens. The level of concern for terrorism is among the highest in the EU, with only Poland, Cyprus, and Ireland (50%), and Romania (49%) having higher scores concerning this issue in 2016.¹

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Employment

Employment and work-related discrimination based on religious affiliation or belief, as well as discrimination based on ethnic or political background is prohibited by

1. European Commission, "Standard Eurobarometer 85," ec.europa.eu, (July 2016), retrieved January 28, 2017, from <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2130>.

law in Croatia.² There is no data on specific cases or statistics pertaining to any type of discrimination based on Muslimness in the job market for 2016, as for previous years, but the limited existence of this type of anti-Islamic discrimination, especially of recent immigrants, cannot be excluded. According to a 2012 poll of the general population, employment and work discrimination is the most widespread discrimination in Croatia. The same poll concluded that religion is the third common cause of discrimination (after ethnicity and social status).³ A 2013 poll of Croatian citizens published by the Centre for Peace Studies found that the majority of Croatian citizens are unfavourably disposed towards equal rights for employment of immigrants.⁴ According to the 2015 national Ombudsman's report, work and employment are the most common areas in which citizens complain about discrimination. Out of the 124 complaints that were received, only three were based solely on grounds of religious discrimination. Another 13 were based on nationality and ethnicity, and 26 on multiple (unidentified) reasons.⁵

Politics

In recent years, the issue of Islam and Muslim immigrants outside of the Bosnian context was not of great importance to the Croatian conservatives and nationalists. This changed suddenly in the second half of August 2015 after Syrian, Iraqi and other refugees and migrants on their path from Turkey towards Germany and Northern Europe started entering Croatia which after Hungary closed its borders became the only passage for them on the Balkan route. Until mid-December, 505,000 refugees and migrants entered Croatia and virtually all of them proceeded towards the North. At the time, Croatian authorities treated refugees and migrants in a very supportive way, assisting them with food and shelter, and enabling them to cross to or transporting them to the Slovenian or Hungarian borders. Several organised initiatives and a multitude of individuals volunteered in relocation camps, collected humanitarian aid or helped transport people to border crossings.

On the other hand, a large part of the Croatian right-wing political spectrum started expressing unease about the large presence of mostly Muslim foreigners and the lack of control over the national borders. A previously non-existent debate about Muslim immigration and the possibility of Muslim integration into Croatian society

2. Zakon.hr, "The law on prevention of discrimination," *zakon.hr*, (Mai 9, 20008), retrieved October 29, 2016, from <http://www.zakon.hr/z/490/Zakon-o-suzbijanju-diskriminacije>.

3. Dijana Jurasić, "Diskriminacija najveća na poslu i pri zapošljavanju," *Večernji list*, (June 27, 2012), retrieved October 29, 2016, from <http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/diskriminacija-najveca-na-poslu-i-pri-zaposljavanju-424981>.

4. Centar za mirovne studije, "Vrijeme za suočavanje sa ksenofobijom u Hrvatskoj," *cms.hr*, (September 20, 2013), retrieved January 28, 2016, from <http://www.cms.hr/hr/suzbijanje-diskriminacije/vrijeme-je-za-suocavanje-sa-ksenofobijom-u-hrvatskoj>.

5. Pučki pravobranitelj (People's Rights Defender), "Izvjješće pučke pravobraniteljice za 2015. Godinu," *ombudsman.hr*, (March 31, 2016), retrieved November 30, 2016, from <http://ombudsman.hr/hr/component/jdownloads/send/67-2015/745-izvjesce-pp-2015-pdf>.

followed, with right-wing politicians and media claiming that most of the newly arrived people are actually not genuine refugees, that integration of non-European Muslims is impossible, their arrival is unwanted, etc. Nevertheless, prominent racist statements were largely condemned by the Croatian political mainstream and debates started by the right-wing media in the wake of the so-called immigrant crisis have never gained ground in mainstream media. Still, these developments from 2015 announced that the Croatian right wing, previously preoccupied with the ethnic rivalries in the post-Yugoslav context, has finally appropriated the topics present in other European right-wing discourses: principally the supposed danger of Islam for the Christian and white identity of Europe.

During 2016, the influx of refugees and migrants coming from Turkey to Croatia via the so-called Balkan route almost completely ceased, while the border control remained strict and the government expressed a firm stance that further uncontrolled immigration or transit of such persons will not be allowed. The public debate on the immigration of Muslims to Europe and, possibly to Croatia, which was very much alive - with partially Islamophobic overtones - in 2015, diminished in 2016. The Croatian government accepted a very small number of refugees and migrants in accordance to the agreement with other EU states. The first four migrants arrived to Croatia in the framework of this cooperation in July 2016 and were welcomed by the Croatian Interior Minister Vlaho Orepić, who publicly greeted them with “*Salaam alaikoum!*”⁶

Generally, much of this year Croatia was politically unstable. In January, two months after the elections, the government based on the alliance between the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and “Most” political group was established. From its very start, the government was broadly criticised for the extreme right-wing outlook of some of its members, causing widespread protests in the country and international criticism. The coalition was shaky and prone to internal fighting, which resulted in the early demise of the government and the leadership of the HDZ party in June. The period between January and September was marked by an unusually high level of ideological division and tension between the Left and Right. After new elections were held in September, a new, more moderate, leadership of the HDZ, together with “Most” were able to form a government and change the tenor of public discussion towards economic issues avoiding ideological partisanship. In January 2016, Zlatko Hasanbegović, a historian and member of the local board of the Islamic community in Zagreb, became Minister of Culture in the Croatian government. His public statements and previous political associations, described by most of media as extreme right-wing and Croatian nationalist, were subjected to unprecedented and vehement media and social media criticism from mainly liberal and leftist circles expressing outrage that a person

6. HINA, “Prvi migranti stigli u Hrvatsku,” *Jutarnji list*, (July 1, 2016), retrieved December 1, 2016, from <http://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/foto-prvi-migranti-stigli-u-hrvatsku-orepic-ih-pozdravio-sa-selam-aleikum-oni-se-odusevili/4488722/>.

with such views could become a government minister. While political and media critics of Hasanbegović did not use his religious adherence to discredit him, some of the anonymous attacks on Hasanbegović in social media and in commentary sections of online media targeted, occasionally in vulgar fashion, his Islamic background.

Željka Markić, the well-known leader of the conservative Catholic NGO *U ime obitelji* (In the name of family), with whom Hasanbegović had previously collaborated, was first to attempt to defend him by publicly interpreting widespread criticism of Hasanbegović as motivated by Islamophobia; however, she didn't specify whether in her view this was only partially or generally so.⁷ Zagreb's main imam, Alili, defended Hasanbegović during the Friday sermon in the Zagreb Mosque claiming that media criticism of his views was, among others, "based on anti-Islamic sentiment and Islamophobia"; this was later reported in the media.⁸ The Mufti of the Islamic Community in Croatia Aziz Hasanović responded to Alili's claims with a statement claiming that Alili's views are not the official views of the Islamic Community, stressing that the qualification of the criticism against Hasanbegović as anti-Islamic and Islamophobic is "baseless and detrimental", and that criticism of his views is only a product of "his own ideological opinions".⁹

Media

Some of the practices of Croatian mainstream media during 2016 may be seen as contributing to anti-Muslim sentiment. The coverage of jihadi terrorism and the crises in the Islamic world, especially the war in Syria, very often focused on the possible threats and the examples of extreme violence, some of which were presented in a sensationalist fashion with the aim of increasing readership or audience. The sources of such news were usually major international news sources or statements by important international political actors. Within these reports, violent extremist acts were generally associated with Islam, very often by using phrases such as "Islamic terrorism", "Islamic terrorists", "Islamic radicalism", without contextualising such behaviour as only specific to certain smaller groups and as marginal in the framework of mainstream Islam practiced by the majority of Muslims. This type of discourse effectively contributed to stereotyping Islam and Muslims as possible security threats. For example, the report by a major, conservative, daily newspaper *Večernji list* on security threats listed by the

7. Željka Markić, "Zabrinjava islamofobija kojom se krenulo na ministra Hasanbegovića," *Večernji list*, (February 2, 2016), retrieved November 29, 2016, from <http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/zeljka-markic-zabrinjava-islamofobija-kojom-se-krenulo-na-ministra-hasanbegovica-1056808>.

8. Tomislav Mamić, "Zagrebački imam brani Hasanbegovića," *Jutarnji list*, (February 12, 2016), retrieved November 28, 2016, from <http://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/zagrebacki-imam-brani-hasanbegovica-dezurni-moralni-panicari-pokusavaju-ga-ocrniti-i-diskvalificirati-najbezocnijim-lazima/99220/>.

9. VijestiDana.hr, "Islamska zajednica u Hrvatskoj: Napadi na Hasanbegovića nisu islamofobija," *vijestidana.hr*, (February 17, 2016), retrieved January 26, 2017, from <http://www.vijestidana.hr/islamska-zajednica-u-hrvatskoj-napadi-na-hasanbegovica-nisu-islamofobija/>.

Croatian Security and Intelligence Agency named “Islamic terrorism” as a major danger for the country.¹⁰

In September, popular daily newspaper *24 sata* highlighted the statement by the chairman of the NATO military committee, Peter Pavel, about “Islamic terrorism” as a contemporary threat to the Balkans.¹¹ The weekly magazine *Nacional* reported the statement by the French Prime Minister Manuel Valls who said that “Europe will be hit by Islamic terrorism again”.¹² Mainstream media, from time to time, featured articles that commended the Islamic community in Croatia for its successful integration in Croatian society, the cooperation with the authorities in radicalism prevention and its public condemnations of terrorism and violence, but also reported on the Islamic community’s appeals not to use adjective “Islamic” in relation to such crimes.¹³ A major theme in the reporting by mainstream media of terrorist threats to Croatia in 2016, as in previous years, was the existence of Salafis and jihadi sympathisers in neighbouring Bosnia or the activity of Bosnians in terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria.

Presented as a source of imminent danger for Croatian soil and Bosnian Croats this topic was often treated in a sensationalist way. Still, while the terrorist attacks from and in Bosnia remain possible, until now there haven’t been any jihadi terrorist attacks in Croatia and against Bosnian Croats; also, the number of Salafis, but especially jihadis, in Bosnia is very low and they do not possess any political influence or significant resources. For example, in October 2016, *Večernji list*, citing highly questionable Bosnian Serb security sources with a clear record of anti-Muslim bias, reported on the return to Bosnia of “about a hundred persons” who fought “on the side of Islamic terrorist groups in Syria” and who constituted “a real threat”.¹⁴ This perceived threat, expectedly, hasn’t materialised as of the beginning of December. Ivica Šola, a commentator of *Slobodna Dalmacija*, seems to be the only person in mainstream Croatian media who in 2016 openly criticised Islam and Muslims, including Islamic representatives in Croatia. He insisted that there is a tendency by some Muslims to silence critics of Islam by using the notion of Islamophobia and alleged lack of

10. Davor Ivanković, “Sigurnost nacije: Hrvatska na oprezu zbog džihadista, velikosrpskih ekstremista i huligana,” *Večernji list*, (June 26, 2016), retrieved December 1, 2016, from <http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/javno-izvjesce-soa-e-islamski-terorizam-iz-okruzja-najveca-je-prijetnja-sigurnosti-1094962>.

11. HINA /24sata, “Petr Pavel: Balkan još uvijek potencijalni izvor ratnih sukoba,” *24 sata*, (September 17, 2016), retrieved December 1, 2016, from <http://www.24sata.hr/news/petr-pavel-balkan-jos-uvijek-potencijalni-izvor-ratnih-sukoba-491592>.

12. HINA /24sata, “Valls: Islamski terorizam ponovo će udariti ali će Europa pobijediti,” *Nacional*, (November 12, 2016), retrieved December 1, 2016, from <http://www.nacional.hr/valls-islamski-terorizam-ponovno-ce-udariti-ali-ce-europa-pobijediti/>.

13. See for example, Mirua Ef. Delic, “Ne postoji islamski terorizam, postoji gnjusni terorizam grupe nevjernika,” *Glas Slavonije*, (January 15, 2015), retrieved January 28, 2017, from <http://www.glas-slavonije.hr/258187/1/Ne-postoji-islamski-terorizam-postoji-gnjusni-terorizam-grupe-nevjernika>.

14. HINA, “Teroristička prijetnja u BiH je realnost,” *Večernji list*, (October 1, 2016), retrieved December 1, 2016, from <http://www.vecernji.hr/svijet/teroristicka-prijetnja-u-bih-je-realnost-u-zemlju-se-vratilo-stotinjak-gradana-koji-su-se-borili-za-islamisticke-teroriste-u-siriji-1117863>.

self-criticism by Muslim representatives who, as he saw it, use double standards when they talk about the West and fail to recognise radicalism in their own ranks.¹⁵

Internet

The Internet news sites associated with the Croatian populist right-wing spectrum are currently the main agents in spreading Islamophobic stereotypes in the Croatian media landscape. This type of messages are usually conveyed not through open Islamophobic discourse, but through selective and sensationalist coverage of controversies related to immigration, terrorism and foreign policy. Islamophobic views are spread in a much more direct fashion through social media, online media commentary sections and Internet forums. The wave of anti-immigrant sentiment and the associated Islamophobia started in the wake of the 2015 so-called refugee crisis which faced Croatia with the possibility – until now unrealised – of a significant influx of non-European Muslims. The Croatian right-wing scene was previously mainly unconcerned with Islam, outside the Bosnian context. Nevertheless, since the summer of 2015, articles on the incompatibility of Islam with Europe, Muslim immigrant criminality in Western European countries, the growing number of Muslims in Europe, the supposed dangers of the Turkish influence in the Balkans, the supposed risks of the Turkish accession to the EU and similar themes started to appear regularly in right-wing websites or social media sites (for example *direktno.hr*, *dnevno.hr*, *maxportal.hr*, Velimir Bujanec's Facebook fan page). Paradoxically, while casting Islam and Muslims with non-European origins as threats to Europe and Croatia, these media outlets have been publicly supportive of the established Islamic community and the predominantly Balkan-rooted Muslim minority in Croatia, as well as the controversial Muslim (and Croatian nationalist) Culture Minister Zlatko Hasanbegović. While populist right-wing Croatian media expressed Islamophobic racism mostly indirectly, usually through coded messages, since the so-called immigrant crisis of 2015, the commentary sections of online news media, both mainstream and right-wing, as well as Internet forums, exploded with open and vicious Islamophobic hate speech. These messages by anonymous individuals seem to be not only influenced by Western European Islamophobic topics and vocabulary, but very often also by Croatia's own Islamophobic discourse which often refers to rather archaic anti-Ottoman attitudes and the armed conflict in Bosnia in the 1990s. Although the frequency of the publishing of Islamophobic articles by populist right-wing online media diminished in 2016, reporting that highlighted possible or supposed dangers coming from Muslims remained persistent.

15. Ivica Šola, „Ja islamofob? Zašto ne!“, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, (November 29, 2015), retrieved November 29, 2016 <http://slobodnadalmacija.hr/misljenja/agora/clanak/id/294484/ivica-sola-ja-islamofob-zasto-ne>.

In 2016, the conservative Croatian Catholic news site *Bitno.net* published several articles that focused on the supposed threat posed by Islam to Christian Europe. It published, without any critical distance, excerpts from the sermon by the Austrian Cardinal Cristoph Schönborn, in which he claimed that there are many Muslims who want the Islamic conquest of Europe.¹⁶ This news portal also published excerpts from an interview by Camillo Ballin, an apostolic vicar in Northern Arabia, who accused mainstream Islam (“moderate”) for supposedly failing to criticise sincerely or to any extent jihadi terrorism.¹⁷ Paradoxically, this site also published several articles that called for and promoted religious dialogue between the Catholic Church and Islam.

Central figures in the Islamophobia Network

Croatian Islamophobia’s focus on the possible arrival of non-European Muslim immigrants in 2016 has been mainly fostered by populist and extreme right-wing media which largely operate online. This current does not have clear political representation and is fragmented; it has been associated with a minority extreme nationalist faction within the ruling, officially centre-right, HDZ Party. The political right-wing spectrum, however, operates at the moment chiefly outside of the political mainstream encompassing different factions such as smaller right-wing and conservative parties (for example, the *Hrast* Party) and NGOs, as well as single personalities like TV host Velimir Bujanec.

Anti-Islamic sentiments are also present marginally within the Catholic Church in Croatia. Yet, they were not expressed or supported by major personalities and official media who cooperate with the Islamic community in Croatia and insist on dialogue with Islam. The anti-Islamic statements that came from marginal actors in the conservative faction of the Church range from criticism of the mainstream Islamic response to terrorism and the notion of Islam as a “religion of peace” to subtle pointing to Muslims as possible threats to the Christian identity of Europe (see the example of *bitno.net* in the chapter on the Internet). Open Islamophobic hate speech coming from clergy and activists, such as the 2015 Youtube statement by Franciscan Friar Danijel Maljur about Islam being “worse than Nazism”,¹⁸ have been extremely rare in the recent period and were not recorded in 2016.

16. Bitno.net, “Svjedočimo li novom pokušaju islamskog osvajanja Europe? Mnogi muslimani to žele ...” *bitno.net*, (September 14, 2016), retrieved December 1, 2016, from <https://www.bitno.net/vijesti/svijet/islamsko-osvajanje-europe-kardinal-schoenborn/>.

17. Biskup Ballin, “Zar mi trebamo uvjeravati svijet da islam nije nasilan? Što su ikad rekli ‘umjereni’ muslimani?,” *bitno.net*, (August 22, 2016), retrieved December 1, 2016, from <https://www.bitno.net/vijesti/svijet/biskup-camillo-ballin-umjereni-muslimani-islam-nasilje/>.

18. YouTube video, “Islam je gore zlo od nacizma”, (September 29, 2015). Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQnkgxCC1ew> (retrieved January 28, 2017).

Civil Society and Political Initiatives Undertaken to Counter Islamophobia

In 2016, public debate on the National Plan for Fight Against Discrimination, including discrimination against the immigrant population and that based on religion, was held with very little interest. Also, the Centre for Peace Studies (*Centar za mirovne studije*) in Zagreb prepared and published a yearly report for 2015 on racism and xenophobia. During 2016, the same organisation continued its implementation of the project “Racism and Xenophobia: For Refugee and Ethnic Equality (RAX FREE)” financed by the Croatian government and the EU which started in 2015. This projects aims to create a knowledge base as a contribution to the creation and control of policies relating to combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination; to deal with legal and psycho-social assistance to refugees and persons who are in the process of obtaining international protection; and to devise ways to monitor right-wing radical groups in society.¹⁹

The Croatian establishment in 2016 was involved in activities that affirmed Islam’s presence in Croatia, although the stress of these activities focused on the historically established and numerically small Bosnian-rooted Muslim community. The possible diversification and growth of the Muslim community by the significant influx of non-European Muslims hasn’t been addressed. The Islamic community in Croatia celebrated on 27 April the 100th anniversary of the state recognition of Islam in Croatia. The lavish ceremony was held in the Croatian National Theatre with the attendance of Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, Prime Minister Tihomir Orešković and other major politicians, as well as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Bosniak member of the Bosnian State Presidency Bakir Izetbegović, and representatives of Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The event featured speeches affirming the Islamic presence in the country and calling for cooperation across civilisational boundaries by the Croatian and Turkish Presidents, and Croatian Mufti Aziz Hasanović. The event was reported in a positive fashion by virtually all Croatian and most of Bosnian media.²⁰ A very important development in 2016 for the Islamic community in Croatia and for its collaboration with authorities and the general public, was the beginning of the construction of the mosque in Sisak (the Islamic Cultural Centre in Sisak) which is planned as the fourth mosque in the country. This was marked by a foundation stone-laying ceremony on 12 October, which was attended by local politicians and Islamic dignitaries from Croatia and Bosnia. The event was reported in a neutral fashion by all major Croatian media.

19. Centar Za Mirovne Studije, “Rasizam i ksenofobija: za izbjegličku i etničku jednakost,” *cms.hr*, (November 3, 2015), retrieved December 1, 2016 <http://www.cms.hr/hr/suzbijanje-diskriminacije/rasizam-i-ksenofobija-za-izbjegličku-i-etnicku-jednakost>.

20. See for example, tportal.hr/HINA, “Ne govorimo o suživotu, već živimo život,” *tportal.hr*, (April 27, 2016), retrieved November 30, 2016, from <http://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/426268/100-godina-islama-u-Hrvatskoj-Ne-govorimo-o-suzivotu-vec-zivimo-zivot.html>.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Research points to the conclusion that anti-Islamic incidents in Croatian media and politics seem to be fewer than in 2015 due to the easing of the so-called refugee crisis. Nevertheless, public opinion research supports the fact that anti-Islamic stereotypes aimed at non-European Muslims remain strong and that they are, at least partially, reflected in the support of restrictive governmental policies towards the influx of refugees and immigrants from Muslim countries. While open Islamophobia thrives only in the political and societal margins, negative stereotyping and unfair criticism of Islam and Muslims is still present in the mainstream media. Violent incidents towards Muslims are rare.

There are factors which contribute to the difficulty of tracking Islamophobia in Croatia. In addition to the small numbers and low visibility of Muslims, the lack of data and research, it must be stated that the attitude of the political elite and the general public towards Islam and Muslims is inconsistent and paradoxical. The Croatian political elite – but also the Croatian political right wing - actively supports and promotes the established Islamic community in Croatia, whose members have by and large roots in the Balkans and which is a small community in terms of numbers. On the other hand, the Croatian political establishment as well as the general public seem to be unwilling to support the permanent settlement of non-European Muslims in any significant numbers.

The international protection and immigration of non-European Muslims, who rarely migrate or seek asylum in Croatia, should be more openly embraced and not blocked due to pressure by public opinion. The number of persons from Muslim countries who are accepted in Croatia on humanitarian and economic grounds should be increased.

The political factors in Croatia should work to foster in the indigenous population a greater degree of acceptance of ethnic and religious diversity, especially towards non-European Muslims. The widespread expectations of preserving the highly monolithic ethnically and religiously Croatian Catholic society, which contributes to anti-immigration and Islamophobic feelings, should be addressed by local media, scholarship and civil initiatives.

The funding for civil initiatives that support refugees and combat racism should be increased. The instances of Islamophobia and other types of racism should be considered a public priority, and should be addressed immediately and adequately by the relevant bodies that monitor the media and by court authorities.

The Ombudsman's office and Centre for Peace Studies should publish their reports for previous years as soon as possible and start to record and publish data on crimes against specific ethnicities and religions. More resources should be allocated to the recording and publishing of reports on possibly undocumented violent hate-related attacks and the groups and/or individuals that may be responsible for them.

Chronology

- **February 2:** Statement by Catholic activist Željka Markić that widespread criticism of Minister of Culture Zlatko Hasanbegović is motivated by Islamophobia.
- **February 12:** The Chief Imam of Zagreb Aziz Alili claims in the Friday sermon that attacks on Hasanbegović are indeed Islamophobic.
- **February 17:** The mufti of the Islamic community in Croatia, Aziz Hasanović, issues a statement insisting that public criticism of Hasanbegović shouldn't be seen as Islamophobic and is in no way connected to his religion and activism in the community; instead it is a mere reflection of his political positions.
- **31 December :** The only violent incident that can possibly be linked to Islamophobia that was documented in the media or elsewhere was a violent assault on two asylum seekers (from Syria and Libya respectively) in Zagreb near the accommodation facility for asylum seekers in Novi Zagreb borough. The victims were lightly wounded and the relevant criminal investigation is ongoing.

This is the second issue of the annual *European Islamophobia Report (EIR)* which was presented for the first time in 2015. New countries are included in this year's *EIR*; while 25 countries were covered in 2015, the report for 2016 includes 27 country reports. *EIR 2016* is the result of 31 prominent scholars who specialise in different fields such as racism, gender and Islamophobia Studies.

Islamophobia has become a real danger to the foundations of democratic order and the values of the European Union. It has also become the main challenge to the social peace and coexistence of different cultures, religions and ethnicities in Europe. The country reports of *EIR 2016*, which cover almost all the European continent from Russia to Portugal and from Greece to Latvia, clearly show that the level of Islamophobia in fields such as education, employment, media, politics, the justice system and the Internet is on the rise. Since the publication of the last report there is little improvement. On the contrary, one can see from the country reports that the state of democracy and human rights in Europe is deteriorating. Islamophobia has become more real especially in the everyday lives of Muslims in Europe. It has surpassed the stage of being a rhetorical animosity and has become a physical animosity that Muslims feel in everyday life be it at school, the workplace, the mosque, transportation or simply on the street.

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.

