
EUROPEAN

ISLAMOPHOBIA

REPORT

2016



ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

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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

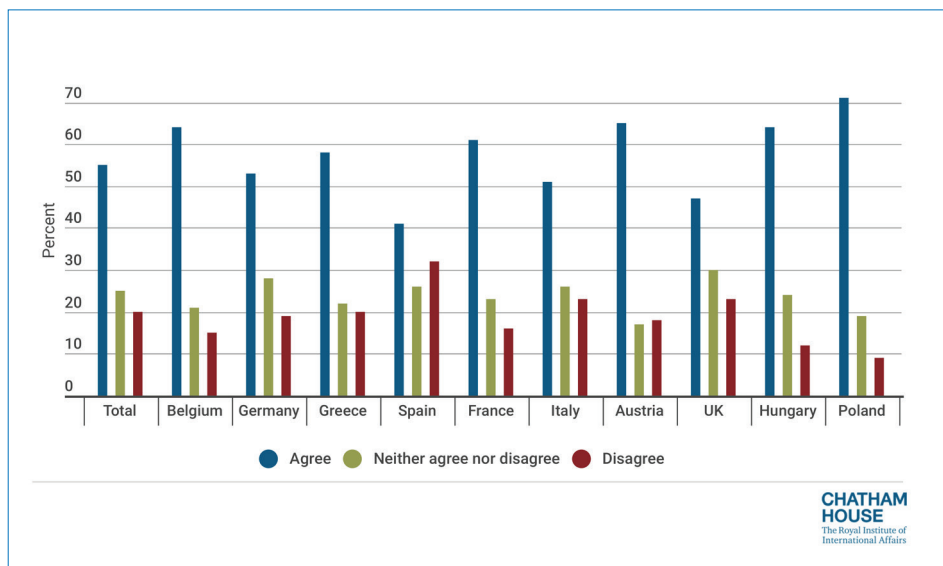


Figure 1: Public opposition to any further migration from predominantly Muslim states in Europe.²

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
SLOVAKIA
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Executive Summary

Islamophobic tendencies in Slovakia are observed in three contexts: politics, mass media and in the perceptions of the ordinary citizens of Slovakia. Certain individual declarations of politicians may be classified as Islamophobic; they are rare, but appear repeatedly in the case of certain politicians. Muslims in Slovakia consider the amendment to the *Law on freedom of religious faith and the status of churches and religious associations* No. 308/1991 as Islamophobic. This law increases the number of required members of a religious community from 20,000 to 50,000 to be able to aspire to state registration. The coexistence of Islamic migrants and citizens of Slovakia is peaceful. There are, however, some individual instances of negative experiences by migrants when communicating with state officials. Muslim women routinely go veiled in public; year by year their numbers increase, so that they become less unusual and people become accustomed to their presence. However, when an incident related to veiling occurs abroad and the mass media inform the public about it, there is more interest and emphasis on the subject among citizens of Slovakia. This remains at the level of discussions, without further implications. Credit for accepting schoolchildren of Islamic religious groups belongs to teachers who with their approach within the educational process instil in children mutual love, understanding and respect of those whose religious, ethnic or racial anchoring is different from that of the majority of the community in the classroom and school. The prevention of Islamophobia is also aided by educational and entertainment programmes on television and radio shows, where meetings, sharing cultural practices, interviews with children or adult foreigners of Muslim faith, demolish existing prejudices, misconceptions and hostility towards the unknown. On the academic level, as the prevention of Islamophobia in Slovakia has been important for years, lectures on Islam by experts are prepared for the public, including debates; and representatives or believers of Islam are invited to academic courses in the fields of Religious Studies, Ethnography, Cultural Studies, Political Science, etc., where students can directly get acquainted with the contents of the Muslim faith and religious practices. Islam as a world religion is also included in textbooks of Religious Education, which, in Slovakia, has a Christian background.

Zhrnutie

Islamofobické tendencie v Slovenskej republike vnímame v troch kontextoch: v politickom, masmediálnom a v kontexte vnímania bežných občanov Slovenskej republiky. Určité individuálne vyhlásenia politikov sa dajú klasifikovať ako islamofóbne; sú to ojedinelé, ale u daných politikov opakované prípady. Vyznávači islamu vnímajú ako islamofóbnu novelizáciu *Zákona o slobode náboženskej viery a postavení cirkví a náboženských spoločností* č. 308/1991, ktorou sa zvyšuje počet potrebných členov náboženstva aspirujúceho na registráciu štátom z 20 000 na 50 000. V spoľužití s občanmi Slovenskej republiky sa nevyskytujú problémy, skôr individuálne záporné skúsenosti migrantov v komunikácii s úradníkmi s xenofóbnym nastavením. Moslimské ženy chodia bežne na verejnosti zahalené; rokmi pribúda takýchto outfitov na uliciach, stávajú sa menej nezvyčajnými a občania toto neriešia. Keď sa však vyskytne zahraničný incident spojený s problematikou zahaľovania, úlohu zohrávajú masmédiá, ktoré sprostredkovaním správ vzbudia väčší záujem a akcent na túto tému aj u občanov. Zostáva však v rovine diskusií, nie praktických konzekvencií. Zásluhu za akceptovanie školopovinných detí islamského vierovyznania detským kolektívom, majú učitelia, ktorí svojím prístupom v rámci edukačného procesu vstúpajú deťom vzájomnú lásku, rešpekt a pochopenie iného človeka, resp. dieťaťa, ktorého náboženské, etnické či rasové zakotvenie sa líši od toho, aké má majorita kolektívu v triede i škole. Ako prevencia pred islamofóbiou slúžia aj edukačné a zábavné programy v televízii a relácie v rozhlase, kde sa formou stretávania, zdieľania kultúrnych zvykov, rozhovorov s deťmi či dospelými cudzincami moslimského vierovyznania, búrajú predsudky a nepriateľstvo voči neznámemu a nepochopenému. Na akademickej úrovni sú ako prevencia islamofóbie v Slovenskej republike dôležité rokmi praktizované laikom prezentované prednášky expertov na islam s diskusiou, pozývanie predstaviteľov či vyznávačov islamu na univerzitné predmety religionistiky, etnografie, kulturológie, politológie, etc., kde sa študenti môžu priamo oboznámiť s obsahom viery a náboženskou praxou moslimov, pýtať sa a diskutovať, a to bez interpretačného vkladu pedagóga, ktorý je vždy potenciálnym pri jeho individuálnej prednáške na hocijakú tému. Islam ako svetové náboženstvo je aj v učebniciach pre Náboženskú výchovu, ktorá má v Slovenskej republike kresťanské pozadie.

Introduction¹

The Slovakian Muslim community, which counts about 5,000 members, is not a registered religious community and therefore is not financially supported by the state. In general, we can say that in Slovakia there are three particular professional groups that adhere to Islam:² students, intellectuals, and families who are working in the catering industry. Muslim gastronomic specialties are highly appreciated both by locals and foreigners. There is a peaceful coexistence of the Muslim community and other social groups or communities. Rare Islamophobic incidents nevertheless disturb this harmony and we will focus in detail on these negative features in the report below.

Significant Incidents and Developments

The Slovak nation is peaceful. Nevertheless, exceptions such as neo-Nazis and extremist individuals or groups, who participate in public protests to attract attention to themselves, also exist. These individuals exhibit Islamophobic tendencies. The majority of the population, however, condemns such manifestations. Isolated Islamophobic manifestations among Slovak citizens were recorded in the following cases:

- One of the hotels in Bratislava refused to accommodate Turkish students on the ground that for security reasons they do not provide accommodation for Turks and citizens of Arab countries. Turkish Ambassador Gülhan Ulutekin classified this case as an act of racism. The hotel employees dismissed the accusation claiming that they do not accommodate any citizens of countries where there is still a military conflict or military change of government, in order to protect their clients.³
- The attack on guests at the restaurant Döner Istanbul Kebab in Piešťany. Reporter Lubo Trautenberger reported the incident on TV Joj and the police has started a criminal investigation.⁴

1. The author of this report tried to record extensively and dispassionately the important events and attitudes affecting the direction of the country and the mood of ordinary citizens in relation to the issue of Islamophobia in Slovakia. Nevertheless, she is aware that she may have unintentionally made some mistakes, which someone could find offensive, and for that she apologizes in advance. The author would like to express special thanks to her precious academic colleagues, political scientists PhDr. Tomáš Jahelka, PhD and PhDr. Jozef Lenč, PhD, as well as to her long-term esteemed associates, President of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia Mohamad Safwan Hasna and JUDr. Abdulwahab Al-Sbenaty.

2. See an article on three personal stories of influential Muslims living in Slovakia: Jozef Tvardzík, "Ako žijú moslimovia na Slovensku? TREND.sk prináša tri príbehy," *trend.sk*, (October 7th, 2014), retrieved January 1st, 2017, from <http://www.etrend.sk/ekonomika/ako-ziju-moslimovia-na-slovensku-trend-sk-prinasa-tri-pribehy.html>.

3. Zuzana Dzurdzíková, "Bratislavský hotel odmietol ubytovať tureckých študentov, veľvyslankyňa hovorí o rasizme," *Denník N*, (August 3, 2016), retrieved November 7, 2016, from <https://dennikn.sk/527569/bratislavsky-hotel-odmietol-ubytovat-tureckych-studentov-velvyslankyna-hovori-o-rasizme>.

4. Rašto Striško, "Útok v Piešťanoch," *Noviny.sk*, (August 18, 2016), retrieved November 2, 2016 from <https://www.noviny.sk/slovensko/trnava/165098-mladik-chcel-robit-poriadky-s-arabmi-skoncil-v-rukach-policie>.

- Repeated assaults on a Somalian woman and her young son. A detailed interview with the victim who experienced six attacks in Slovakia was published on 6 September, 2016.⁵
- The website Sympatizanti Ľudovej strany – Naše Slovensko (Supporters of People's Party - Our Slovakia)⁶ published a photo of a praying Muslim woman in Nové Zámky with the comment that somebody tried to shoot her and ran away. In a short time, this photo got many “likes” and was shared many times. There were comments under the photo that were hateful and malicious. The author of the blog Denník N, was informed about this incident, and made a complaint to the police who started to investigate the case. As of yet, the case is still under investigation.⁷
- Islamophobic comments of Slovak citizens to veiled Muslim women in Slovakia.
- Two anti-Islamic demonstrations were organised in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. The first was on 29 May, 2016,⁸ and the second on 25 June, 2016. In the second demonstration, there were two groups of people: a group of extremists, who were also anti-Islamic, and a group that was antifascistic.⁹

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Employment

There are no reports that show that there have been problems in this area. However, an instance is cited by a colleague working at the university, who openly declared his Islamic faith and on this basis had some problems from influential people in the university environment, while the head of his department received anonymous letters about his person.¹⁰

Education

According to the President of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (INS) Mohamad Safwan Hasna “we know of no change in 2016, but the problem exists, especially in the historic description of the function of the Ottoman Empire in our country, which

5. Roman Cuprik, “Somáľčanka sa bratislavskej hromadnej doprave vyhýba, napadli ju šesťkrát,” *domov.sme.sk*, (September 6, 2016), retrieved January 12, 2017, from <http://domov.sme.sk/c/20264509/bratislavka-mhd-somalcanku-napadli-sestkrat.html>.

6. This political party started its work in 2009. Its leader is Marián Kotleba. The party's programme is based on “Ten Commandments” that are available in Slovak and English on its the official website: <http://www.naeslovensko.net/en/our-program/>.

7. Blog Denníka N, “Modliť na verejnosti sa neoplatí, niekedy na vás môžu aj vystreliť,” *Denník N*, (October 2, 2016), retrieved November 6, 2016, from <https://dennikn.sk/blog/trestne-oznamenie-na-sympatizantov-kotlebu-alebo-ako-slobodne-nenavidiet/>.

8. Video recording of this demonstration is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXjHNqc_mUM.

9. Veronika Šoltinská/Tomáš Ferenčák, “Bratislava zažila dva protesty. Extrémisti slovné útočili na prezidenta aj europoslankyňu Smeru,” *HNonline.sk*, (July 25, 2016), retrieved September 6, 2016, from <https://hnonline.sk/slovensko/686049-bratislava-zazila-dva-protesty-extremisti-slovne-utocili-na-prezidenta-aj-europoslankynu-smeru>.

10. Information given by the political scientist Jozef Lenč in our written communication.

subsequently creates stereotypes in children, which they carry into their adulthood and sometimes act upon... The subject, however, would deserve detailed elaboration.”¹¹

Politics

The greatest impact on public opinion in terms of Islamophobic statements has occurred in relation to the terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels; by the opinions of Prime Minister Robert Fico and like-minded politicians and media activists that “Islam is not compatible with our culture”¹² and the equating of Islam as a religion to the destructive phenomenon of terrorism. The parliamentary elections in March 2016¹³ have intensified this issue, particularly in the context of the so-called refugee crisis and the campaign of extremist political parties: “Kotleba – ĽSNS and Sme rodina – Boris Kollár, but also by the political comments and campaign slogans by the majority of mainstream political parties, namely SMER-SD, SaS, SNS. A broad political base was created, which in 2016 encouraged more pronounced manifestations of Islamophobia in Slovakia than several years ago.”¹⁴

The process of acceptance of the amendment Act No. 308/1991 *Law on freedom of religious faith and the status of churches and religious associations* raised additional Islamophobic reactions from politicians, which we will analyze in the section dedicated to the discussion of Islamophobic incidents in the justice system.

The concept of Islamophobia is most associated – both in Slovakia and abroad – with the names of the following Slovak politicians: Fico, Sulík, Danko, Kotleba, and Kollár. A very interesting case occurred in the political scene in connection to the book *Samos-tudijní kurz politického islamu* (Self-study Course of Political Islam) by the famous conspiracy author Bill Warner, which was delivered to parliamentarians by the Centrum pre štúdium politického islamu Slovensko (Centre for the Study of Political Islam Slovakia) before the voting about the amendment of the Law No. 308/1991 (see Justice System below). The President of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (INS) Mohamad Safwan Hasna claimed that the sending of this book to parliamentarians could be considered lobbying.¹⁵ The leader of the largest opposition party Sloboda a solidarita (Freedom and Solidarity) R. Sulík went as far as to reference this book for the description of the life of the Prophet.¹⁶

11. Position given by the President of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (INS) Mohamad Safwan Hasna in our written communication.

12. Tomáš Pilz, “Sulík bez servítky: Islam nie je kompatibilný snašou kultúrou,” *Parlamentné listy*, (August 18, 2016), retrieved December 13, 2016, from <http://www.parlamentnelisty.sk/arena/monitor/Sulik-bez-servitky-Islam-nie-je-kompatibilny-s-nasou-kulturou-275050>.

13. Besides the already mentioned politicians, Islamophobic rhetoric was also recorded in speeches by, among others, Podmanický, Kotleba, Mazurek, Mizík.

14. Information given by the political scientist Jozef Lenč in our written communication.

15. Ibid.

16. ISLAMONLINE.sk, “Slovenskí poslanci dostali protiislamskú knihu. Autorom je známy konšpirátor,” *islamonline.sk*, (October 28, 2016), retrieved January 2, 2017, from <http://www.islamonline.sk/2016/10/slovenski-poslanci-dostali-protiislamsku-knihu-autorom-je-znamy-konspirator/>.

Media

Many TV stations inform the public primarily of negative news, such as violence and disasters. This covers the domain of Islam as well. The public lacks positive information on the cooperation of members of the Islamic community in Slovakia in various fields with members of other confessions, predominately from Christian denominations. This positive side of the coexistence of different religions should be presented to the same extent, or even more than negative information. Good examples and mutual acceptance is what society needs to see as real and factual; such stories can diminish the fear of Islam as a religion, which so far is mostly associated with terrorism and introducing conflict into previously peaceful areas and relationships. For major mainstream Slovak TV stations, radio, newspapers, websites and other sources of information we can say that they maintain objectivity and inform promptly, professionally and without unnecessary affects, which are present in some alternative information sources.

Mass media cover both national and foreign affairs in relation to Islam, its different aspects and its consequences on ordinary life. The greatest focus is given to Muslim extremist actions that are often perceived as sufficient reason for a general condemnation of Islam by readers, listeners and viewers. After our research of Slovak mainstream sources of information we conclude, that they can not be characterised as Islamophobic. Those that we can label as Islamophobic are of a conspirative and alternative nature.

- The assaults on women in Cologne and in Pegida's demonstration on New Year's Eve in 2016 have been well documented in Slovak media.¹⁷ In February, there was another demonstration of Pegida in Dresden counting 8,000 people, which was factually reported by Slovak media.¹⁸
- The police action in Molenbeek was presented in Slovak media as an anti-terrorism act. Mayor Françoise Schepmans expressed her concerns about the "influence of the conservative wing of Islam that may be characterized by the use of violence. Already eight-year-old girls often wear a headscarf".¹⁹ Such statements from abroad have an impact on the greater sensitivity of the Slovak population on the aspect of Muslim women's clothing.

17. VZ, "Búrlivé demonštrácie v Kolíne. Islam je rakovina a Pegida je liek. Bohom je daná povinnosť chrániť naše ženy. História Merkelovej nikdy neodpustí. Do kancelárky sa pustil aj Paška," *parlamentnélisty.sk*, (January 10, 2016), retrieved September 26, 2016, from <http://www.parlamentnelisty.sk/arena/monitor/Burlive-demonstracie-v-Koline-Islam-je-rakovina-a-Pegida-je-liek-Bohom-je-dana-povinnost-chranit-nase-zeny-Historia-Merkelovej-nikdy-neodpusti-Do-kancelarky-sa-pustil-aj-Paska-259899>.

18. ČTK, "Na demonštráciu Pegidy v Drážďanoch prišlo 8-tisíc ľudí," *Správy.Pravda.sk*, (February 6, 2016), retrieved September 29, 2016, from <http://spravy.pravda.sk/svet/clanok/382596-na-demonstraciu-pegidy-v-drazdanoch-prislo-8-tisic-ludi/>.

19. TASR, "Hrozba islamu v Molenbeeku. Domové prehliadky odhalili stovky podozrivých," *Aktuálne.sk*, (September 20, 2016), retrieved December 6, 2016, from <http://aktualne.atlas.sk/zahranicie/europa/obyvatelia-stvrte-molenbeek-pocitili-domove-prehliadky-obavy-z-konzervativneho-islam-su-stale-aktualne.html>.

- The shooting at the Islamic centre in Zürich was reflected on the webpage Konzervatívny výber (Conservative Digest) according to the report of SITA on 20 December, 2016.²⁰ Another website, Webnoviny.sk, states the following: “Swiss police has not detected any Islamist or far-right motive by the offender. The local head of the criminal police Christiane Lentjes Meili stated that the investigation of the attack by the suspected perpetrator – a 24-year-old Swiss man - continues...The man was, according to current knowledge, interested in the occult and had a number of objects relating to this field in his home. So far, however, there is no evidence that he underwent an psychiatric treatment. The Swiss man held a permit for a firearm and after the incident at the centre shot himself.”²¹
- The attack on the Berlin Christmas Market on 19 December, 2016 was given the most publicity of all stories covered by the media at the end of 2016. Denník N has until now published articles amounting to 12 pages on this topic alone.²² The first information was published on 19 December, 2016 at 8:43 p.m. and the last on 14 January, 2017 at 10:12 p.m.²³ All the information is factual. Slovak citizens perceived the attack on a market associated with the great Christian feast as a great scandal.

Justice System

According to Islamic author and translator Abdulwahab Al-Sbenaty, who lives in Slovakia, in the justice system, we can observe “hidden regulations and tools of inter-institutional nature which are directed against Muslims. A very good example is the issue of temporary residence on the territory of Slovakia, its granting and extension.”²⁴

In November 2016, the amendment of the *Law on freedom of religious faith and the status of churches and religious associations* No. 308/1991 was approved. This amendment is very important mainly for the aspiring religious communities which are not yet officially registered, but have been trying for a long time to fulfill the requirements and become nationally recognized. The problem of the Muslim community in Slovakia is the radically increased number of the required members of communities aspiring to official recognition. This number increased from 20,000 into

20. SITA, “Švajčiarsko: Strelba v islamskom centre v Zürichu, útočník je mŕtvý,” *Konzervatívny výber*, (December 20, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.konzervativnyvyber.sk/v2/svajciarsko-strelba-v-islamskom-centre-v-zurichu-utocnik-je-mrtvy/14517/>.

21. SITA, “V islamskom centre v Zürichu sa strieľalo, útočník zomrel,” *Webnoviny, sk*, (December 19, 2016), retrieved January 5, 2017, from <http://www.webnoviny.sk/svet/clanok/1126836-v-islamskom-centre-v-zurichu-sa-strieľalo-hlasia-zranenych/>.

22. Take a closer look at all these articles on the website: <https://dennikn.sk/tema/utok-vianocne-trhy-berlin/>.

23. Since this report will be submitted on 15 January, 2017, it is not possible to take into account further development and articles published after this date.

24. The opinion of JUDr. Abdulwahab Al-Sbenaty from our written communication.

50,000.²⁵ The proposal of changes in the aforementioned law were brought to parliament by parliamentarians of the National Council of the Slovak Republic A. Danko, D. Tittel, E. Smolíková, A. Hrnko, S. Kmec, and T. Bernaták. Danko, the leader of Slovenská národná strana (the Slovak National Party), stated that his proposal was aimed against the Islamic community.²⁶ Some parties proposed even higher criteria, specifically 250,000 members for an aspiring community. “Parliamentarians of the Kotleba’s party LSNS (parliamentarian Mizík) proposed the increase of required members to 250,000. This proposal was supported by the parliamentarians of the party Sme rodina (We are family) – Boris Kollár, three independent parliamentarians (Šimkovičová, Marček a Holúbek) and was supported in the voting also by the parliamentarian Kondrót (SMER-SD).”²⁷

Internet

According to experts, the websites spreading Islamophobic stereotypes in Slovakia are the following: nazorobcana.sk, medzicas.sk, hlavnespravy.sk, konzervativnyvyber.sk, slobodnyvysielac.sk/?v=13dd621f2711, niejetotak.sk, zemavek.sk, magnificat.sk, sho.sk.²⁸ Also worth mentioning are naseslovensko.net/casopis-nase-slovensko/, protiprudu.org, panobcan.sk, as well as some Facebook sites and groups like *We do not want Islam in Slovakia*.²⁹ The tacit tolerance of the existence of websites spreading hatred and Facebook groups including anti-Muslim content was considered as a real problem by the President of the Slovak Republic Andrej Kiska in his statements on a TV session on RTVS.³⁰

Civil Society and Political Initiatives Undertaken to Counter Islamophobia

President of Slovakia Andrej Kiska has in his public speeches and official statements for the press clearly taken an anti-Islamophobia position. This attitude is repeatedly evidenced by his meetings with the President of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (INS) Mohamad Safwan Hasna. At the beginning of last year, on 14 January, 2016, in their meeting Hasna expressed the worries and uncertainty of highly educated

25. Národná rada Slovenskej republiky, “Detaily návrhu zákona. Návrh skupiny poslancov Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky na vydanie zákona, ktorým sa mení a dopĺňa zákon č. 308/1991 Zb. o slobode náboženskej viery a postavení cirkví a náboženských spoločností v znení neskorších predpisov,” *NR SR*, (November 30, 2016), retrieved January 14, 2017 from <http://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=zakony/zakon&MasterID=6090>.

26. Information given by the political scientist Tomáš Jahelka in our written communication.

27. Information given by the political scientist Jozef Lenč in our written communication.

28. Information given by the President of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (INS) Mohamad Safwan Hasna in our written communication.

29. Information given by the political scientist Tomáš Jahelka in our written communication.

30. ISLAMONLINE.SK, “Prezident Kiska upozornil na nenávisťné webové stránky na Slovensku, vrátane protimuslimských,” *islamonline.sk*, (May 8, 2016), retrieved November 10, 2016, from <http://www.islamonline.sk/2016/05/prezident-kiska-upozornil-na-nenavistne-internetove-stranky-na-slovensku-vratane-protimuslimskych/>.

Muslim Slovak citizens about their well-being and that of their families as a result of the statement of Prime Minister Robert Fico, to prevent the creation of a coherent Muslim community in Slovakia. Hasna pointed out that the long-standing coexistence of Muslims and Slovaks has shown that the Muslim community in Slovakia is fully integrated and peaceful, and that Slovakia unlike other countries has not had to deal with riots. On the immigrant topic Hasna noted that it can not be seen as crucial, because Slovakia has almost no new illegal refugees. Slovak Muslims have a special relationship, according to Hasna, with Slovak non-governmental organisations such as the Human Rights League (HRL), the Center for Research of Ethnicity and Culture (CVEK), and the Open Society Foundation.

On the occasion of the New Year's meeting with the church and religious representatives, President Kiska openly said that the current established use of the word "Muslim" in politics creates the impression that it is synonymous with the words *fear* and *danger*. This approach has the impact of projecting hostility on ethnic, religious or minority groups. According to the head of state it encourages fear, open hostility or hatred: "This does not belong in today's Europe, it can not be justified and awakens demons of the past." The President of the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia Igor Rintel said that the terror tempts us to perceive immigrants as a threat, another source of terror, or the beginning of the extinction of Western civilization. He subsequently stated: "We condemn the persecution of any group of people and we call for honour and respect for every man and religion." Rintel continued, "I wish us all in this year to find the strength to face fear and prejudice, but especially to lend an auxiliary hand to those who knock on our door without side intentions, and learn to recognize those, who are at this door knocking to cause us pain."³¹

In the academic sphere in Slovakia we are not just fighting Islamophobia, but also preventing it for years to come. Examples include lectures for the public by experts on Islam, followed by debates; inviting guests and Muslim community leaders in Slovakia for lectures and discussion in undergraduate programmes, so that they familiarise students with the thinking and practices of Islam from the perspective of their faith and religious experience; the organization of scientific conferences and publications that analyze the phenomenon of Islamophobia from various aspects – an example of such a conference was the conference organised under the heading "Religiophobia – Reality, Prevention and Education".³²

The Hanns Seidel Stiftung Slowakei (HSS) and the Institute for Public Affairs (IVO)³³ on 12 December, 2016 organised at the Goethe-Institut Slowakei in Bratisla-

31. Topky.sk, "Odborníci z moslimskej komunity uvažujú o odchode zo Slovenska: Majú strach o svoje rodiny," *topky.sk*, (January 14, 2016), retrieved November 12, 2016, from <http://www.topky.sk/cl/10/1521761/Odbornici-z-moslimskej-komunity-uvazuju-o-odchode-ze-Slovenska--Maju-strach-o-svoje-rodiny>.

32. The author of this paper first introduced this practice in her university courses more than 10 years ago.

33. The abbreviation IVO is derived from the Slovak name of the institute: *Inštitút pre verejné otázky*.

va a discussion on the topic Extremism in Slovakia: how to defend democracy?“ The discussants were the authors of the study entitled “*The current right-wing extremism and ultra-nationalism in Slovakia. Status, trends, support*”,³⁴ namely political scientist Grigorij Mesežnikov and sociologist Oľga Gyárfášová of the Institute for Public Affairs (IVO). The publication, among others, dealt with the issue of Islamophobia.³⁵

Very important steps in the prevention of Islamophobia and xenophobia are taken by Christian churches and religious communities. Of the many initiative, we mention only some:

- 13 April, 2016 – a public debate on Christianity and Islam at the Kunsthalle Bratislava. The main debaters were the Head of the Department of Comparative Religious Studies of the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University Professor Milan Kováč; writer and preacher of Brethren Church Daniel Pastirčák; political scientist and Professor Jozef Lenč; and President of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (INS) Mohamad Safwan Hasna.³⁶
- 26 April, 2016 – a remembrance meeting of the tragedy of 27 August, 2015, when 71 migrants died of suffocation in a delivery truck close to the Slovak borders in Austrian Parndorf. The meeting took place in the Big Lutheran Church in Bratislava. The main speakers were the evangelical priest of the host parish Anna Polcková, writer and preacher of Brethren Church Daniel Pastirčák, Rabbi Miša Kapustin, and President of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (INS) Mohamad Safwan Hasna. The Slovakia-Austrian children’s choir Superar participated as well.³⁷
- 17 May, 2016 – a public debate on society’s acute problems in the form of an interreligious dialogue in the cultural centre Prielom. The debaters were President of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia Mohamad Safwan Hasna, official of the European Parliament Branislav Škripek, doctor and Professor Vladimír Krčméry, as well as missionary and Professor Ladislav Bučko.³⁸

34. Grigorij Mesežnikov/Oľga Gyárfášová, *Súčasný pravicový extrémizmus a ultranacionalizmus na Slovensku: Stav, trendy a podpora* (Bratislava: IVO, 2016).

35. Institute for Public Affairs, “Public debate on extremism at the Goethe Institut, “*Institute for Public Affairs*, (December 12, 2016), retrieved January 13, 2017, from <http://www.ivo.sk/7987/sk/aktuality/verejna-diskusia-o-extremizme-v-goethe-institute>.

36. ISLAMONLINE.sk, “Diskusia o kresťanstve a islame v Bratislavskom Dome umenia,“ *islamonline.sk*, (April 14, 2016), retrieved December 29, 2016, from <http://www.islamonline.sk/2016/04/krestan-muslim-politolog-a-religionista-diskutovali-o-krestanstve-a-islame/>.

37. ISLAMONLINE.sk, “Predseda Islamskej nadácie hovoril vo Veľkom evanjelickom kostole v Bratislave o pomoci utečencom,“ *islamonline.sk*, (April 26, 2016), retrieved December 29, 2016, from <http://www.islamonline.sk/2016/04/predseda-islamskej-nadacie-hovoril-vo-velkom-evanjelickom-kostole-v-bratislave-o-pomoci-uteccenom/>.

38. ISLAMONLINE.sk, “Muslimsko-kresťanský dialóg na Slovensku realitou,“ *islamonline.sk*, (May 17, 2016), retrieved December 26, 2016, from <http://www.islamonline.sk/2016/05/muslimsko-krestansky-dialog-na-slovensku-realityou/>.

- 25 July, 2016 – an international meeting of the Central European Interfaith Forum (CEIF) in Nitra, Slovakia. It was attended by well-known personalities from the political, scientific and public scene in Slovakia and abroad.³⁹
- 6 October, 2016 – a meeting of two Muslims with asi twenty young people, the members of Community of Sant’Egidio, in the Roman Catholic parish in Bratislava with the goal of getting to know the Muslim faith, way of life, and values.⁴⁰
- 8 October, 2016 - Festival Arteterapia in Bratislava (5-8 October, 2016) dedicated the last day of its agenda to the topic of interreligious dialogue. The main debaters were the Ambassador of the Parliament of the World Religions, founder and the Chairman of the Slovak-Indian Friendship Society and the National Co-ordinator of European Anti-Poverty Network Anna Galovičová, President of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia Mohamad Safwan Hasna, writer and preacher of Brethren Church Daniel Pastirčák, and political scientist Jozef Lenč.⁴¹
- 8 November, 2016 – a public debate between the Bishop of the Czechoslovak Husite Church Juraj Dovala and the President of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia Mohamad Safwan Hasna. It was attended by 35 people and stands as evidence of a dignified and constructive relationship between two Abrahamic religions.⁴²

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

- Politicians should responsibly acquire knowledge on Islam, whether from individual study or consultations with experts, and only then publicly comment on Islam or cite specific authors as universally accepted researchers of Islam, Islamophobia, etc. Such an approach will minimise offensive public discourse.
- Politicians should not spread hatred, lies, and verbal abuse of refugees.
- Improving public education and the quality of information on Islam by making accurate statements about its teachings, practices, history and its role in the world.
- Politicians should call upon representatives of Islam in Slovakia to publicly condemn the malicious interpretations of the Quran and its implication in terrorist attacks; and to publicly confirm that they cultivate respect of the Constitution of

39. Central European Interfaith Forum, “Stredoeurópske medzináboženské fórum – CEIF 2016,” *Central European Interfaith Forum*, (July 25, 2016), retrieved November 5, 2016, from <http://fwr.sk/ceif-2016/>.

40. ISLAMONLINE.sk, “Nechcú sa báť, chcú spoznávať. Mladí kresťania v Bratislave pozvali muslimov na faru,” *islamonline.sk*, (October 6, 2016), retrieved December 12th, 2016 from <http://www.islamonline.sk/2016/10/nechcu-sa-bat-chcu-spoznavat-mladi-krestania-v-bratislave-pozvali-muslimov-na-faru/>.

41. Malá scéna STU, “Festival Arteterapia 2016,” *Malá scéna STU*, (September 16, 2016), retrieved October 8, 2016, from <http://www.malascena.sk/aktuality/festival-arteterapia-2016.html>.

42. ISLAMONLINE.sk, “Husitský biskup a muslimský duchovný sa stretnú na katolíckej fare. Výsledok? Skvelá debata!,” *islamonline.sk*, (December 9, 2016), retrieved December 28, 2016, from <http://www.islamonline.sk/2016/12/husitsky-biskup-a-muslimsky-duchovny-sa-stretnu-na-katolickej-fare-vysledok-skvela-debata/>.

Slovakia and the principles of religious freedom in a democratic country in their congregations. This step could decisively change the general understanding of the status of the Islamic community in Slovakia and open new opportunities for mutual cooperation between the state and the Islamic community.

- A serious discussions must follow for a mutual agreement on the legislative status of Islam in Slovakia.
- Practical steps should be taken by state authorities in combating all manifestations of racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia in verbal and practical form (notably on the Internet or as attacks on the representatives of these minorities).
- NGOs should highlight the false information and warn against demagogic campaigns spreading hatred.

Chronology

- **29 May, 2016:** Anti-Islamic demonstration in Bratislava.
- **25 June, 2016:** Anti-Islamic demonstration in Bratislava.
- **3 August, 2016:** One of the hotels in Bratislava refused to accommodate Turkish students on the ground of security reasons. They claimed not to provide accommodation for Turks and citizens of Arab countries.
- **18 August, 2016:** The attack on the restaurant Döner Istanbul Kebab in Piešťany.
- **6 September, 2016:** An interview with a Somalian woman and her young son who were attacked six times in public is published.
- **2 October, 2016:** Shots at praying Muslim woman in Nové Zámky.
- **November 2016:** The amendment of the *Law on freedom of religious faith and the status of churches and religious associations* No. 308/1991.

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.

