By gathering 35 local scholars, experts, and civil society activists specialized in racism and human rights, the fifth edition of the European Islamophobia Report addresses a still timely and politically important issue. All 32 country reports included in this book follow a unique structure that is convenient, first, for comparing countries and, second, for selected readings on a particular topic such as politics, employment, or education with regard to Islamophobia across Europe.

The present report investigates in detail the underlying dynamics that directly or indirectly support the rise of anti-Muslim racism in Europe. This extends from Islamophobic statements spread in national media to laws and policies that restrain the fundamental rights of European Muslim citizens and threaten the whole of society. As a result, the European Islamophobia Report 2019 discusses the impact of anti-Muslim racism on human rights, multiculturalism, and the state of law in Europe.

This fifth edition of our report highlights how European societies are progressively overwhelmed by the Islamophobic discourse of the “Great Replacement” and other far-right conspiracy theories. The 32 country reports demonstrate how governments and mainstream media participate in reproducing such discourses that put the fundamental rights of millions of European citizens in jeopardy and how one can counteract these developments. This compendium of useful insights and data aims to provide European policy-makers, institutions, and NGOs with recommendations on how to tackle anti-Muslim racism in Europe seriously.

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., Berlin and Brussels. The objective of SETA is to produce up-to-date and accurate knowledge and analyses in the fields of politics, economy, and society, and inform policy-makers and the public on changing political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. Through research reports, publications, brainstorming sessions, conferences and policy recommendations, SETA seeks to guide leaders in government, civil society, and business, and contributes to informed decision making mechanisms.
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Executive Summary

In 2019, Bulgaria’s Pandora’s box of Islamophobic and racist hate speech was opened by Deputy Prime Minister Krasimir Karakachanov, leader of the IMRO party, after an altercation between two Roma brothers and a commando of Bulgarian ethnic origin took place on 6 January in the village of Voivodinovo, near Plovdiv. The conflict was not religious in nature, but it was a source of interethnic tensions, backed by hate speech emitted by TV stations and numerous discussions on social networks. The latter targeted Roma Muslims by claiming that adopting Islam by representatives of the ghetto was a negative development catalysing the conflicts between the Roma community and the other groups within Bulgarian society. The next apple of discord was a bill proposed by the Coalition between Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) and the MRF for an amendment of the Law of Religions, submitted to parliament on 31 January and voted at the first reading on 7 March. The bill foresaw the state subsidizing of religious denominations, and the pardoning of their debts to the state up to 31 December 2018. When it became clear that the greater part of the mentioned debts belonged to the Muslim community, the Chief Mufti’s Office and the party representatives who had submitted the bill became the target of multiple attacks, echoed by most media. This led to a change in the text of the amendment before its second vote on 21 March, according to which the debts were only deferred.

In May, the Prosecutor General rewarded prosecutor Nedialka Popova from the Pazardzhik District Prosecutor’s Office for her performance during a case regarding the spread of radical Islam, a year after an Islamophobic speech she had given raised a serious concern among the local Muslim community. The case in question, brought in 2009, led in December 2019 to the effective sentences of 14 people for preaching religious hatred and ISIS ideas: allegations without any clear evidence. On the other hand, the Bulgarian prosecution continues to be ineffective against perpetrators of alleged Islamophobic attacks, such as the attack on the building of the Chief Mufti’s Office in June, and does not impose any sanctions on anti-Muslim hate speech.
Резюме

През 2019 г. в България пълната с ислямофобско и расистко слово кутия на Пандора, беше отворена не от кой да е, а Красимир Каракачанов – лидер на партия ВМРО, с ранг заместник министър-председател, след като на 6 януари пловдивското. Бойводиново при спечкване между двама брать от ромски и командос от български етнически произход, последният пострада сериозно. Конфликтът нямаше религиозен характер, но стана повод за генериране на междуетническо напрежение, подплатено от слово на омразата от телевизионните екрани и множеството дискусии в социалните мрежи. Въпросните атакуваха Ромите-мюсюлмани, посредством твърдението, че приемането на ислама от страна на представители на гетото, катализира конфликтите между ромската общност и останалите групи в българското общество.

Следващата ябълка на раздора, се оказа предложеният от ГЕРБ и ДПС проектозакон за изменения в закона за вероизповеданията, внесен в парламента на 31 януари и гласуван на първо четене на 7 март. Въпросният предвиждаше субсидиране на вероизповеданията, а също и опрощаване на натрупаните от тях до 31 декември 2018 г. задължения. След като се разбра, че Главно мюфтийство е най-големият длъжник, то и вносителите на проектозакона станаха мишена на множество нападки, получили отзвук по всички медийни средства, довел до нова промяна преди второ гласуване на 21 март, според която дълговете само се отсрочват.

През май Главният прокурор награди за работата й по дело за разпространение на радикален ислям обвинителя Недялка Попова от Окръжната прокуратура в Пазарджик, която година по-рано с ислямофобско изказване, предизвика сериозно безпокойство сред мюсюлманската общност. Въпросното дело, образувано 2009 г., доведе през декември налагането на ефективни присъди на 14 души за проповядване на религиозна омраза и идеи на „Ислямска държава“ – обвинения, за които липсват ясни доказателства. За сметка на това българската прокуратура продължава да е неефективна по отношение на извършителите на несъмнени ислямофобски атаки, каквато имаше през месец юни над сградата на Главното мюфтийство, и да не санкционире анти-мюсюлманското слово на омразата.
**Country Profile**

**EIR 2019**

**Country:** Bulgaria  
**Type of Regime:** Democracy  
**Form of Government:** Unitary Parliamentary Republic  
**Ruling Parties:** Coalition between Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) (acronym translated in Bulgarian as “coat of arms”, a right-centrist, populist party) and United Patriots (an elective alliance formed by the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria [NFSB], the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation [IMRO], and [until 25 July 2019] Ataka [Attack], all of them conservative, ultranationalistic parties).  
**Opposition Parties:** Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) (center-left, social-democratic, left-wing populism with a pro-EU stance); Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) (a centrist, liberal party); Volya (literally “Willpower”, a populist party).

**Last Elections:** 27 October/3 November 2019 (Local Elections): On the provincial level (from a total of 25), GERB won 16 mayoral positions; BSP 4; The Movement for Rights and Freedoms 1; The Union of Democratic Forces 1; Direct Democracy 1; The Bulgaria for Citizens Movement 1; Independent candidates 2.  
26 May 2019 (European Parliament Elections): The list of parties, seats, and percentage of votes won is as follows: GERB (member of EPP) 6 seats (31.07%); Bulgarian Socialist Party (member of PES) 5 seats (24.26%); Movement for Rights and Freedoms (member of ALDE) 3 seats (16.55%); Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (member of ECR) 2 (7.36%); Democratic Bulgaria (member of EPP) 1 (6.06%).  
26 March 2017 (Parliamentary Elections): GERB won 33.54% of the vote with 95 of 240 seats; The Bulgarian Socialist Party 27.93% and 80 seats; United Patriots 9.31% and 27 seats; Movement for Rights and Freedoms 9.24% and 26 seats; Volya party 4.26% and 12 seats. GERB formed a coalition with the United Patriots, and Boyko Borisov (leader of GERB) was elected prime minister for a 3rd subsequent time.

**Total Population:** 7,364,570 (in 2011)  
**Major Languages:** Bulgarian, Turkish, Roma  
**Official Religion:** No official religion (secularism). The constitution designates Eastern Orthodox Christianity as the “traditional religion” of the country.  
**Statistics on Islamophobia:** In 2019, the Chief Mufti’s Office reported 1 Islamophobic attack and 1 attack against a place of worship. Both figures represent a decrease of 50%.

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:** No special statistics and database on racism and discrimination.
**Major Religions (% of Population):** Eastern Orthodox Christianity (76% or 4,374,135 individuals); Islam (7.8% or 577,139); No religion (4.7% or 272,264); Protestantism (1.1% or 64,476); Catholicism (0.8% or 48,945); Judaism (0.015% or 1,162)

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 7.8% or 577,139 in 2011. (2011 Population Census in Bulgaria [Final Data])

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Muslim Denomination in Bulgaria (Chief Mufti’s Office).

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** There is no specific NGO dedicated to combating Islamophobia.

**Far-Right Parties:** Bulgarian National Union – New Democracy; Ataka; National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria; Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation; Vazrazhdane (Revival) party

**Far-Right Movements:** National Resistance, Blood and Honour, Fortress Europe Alliance (since April 2019)

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**
- **Hijab Ban:** None
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** N/A (depends on local municipality decisions)
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** The parliament adopted the so-called anti-burqa law or “Law for Prohibiting the Wearing of Clothing Concealing One’s Face in Public Spaces” (30 September 2016).
- **Prayer Ban:** None
Introduction

Bulgaria is home to the largest indigenous Muslim minority within the boundaries of the European Union. Despite the continuing rise of Islamophobic views with nationalistic and xenophobic overtones supported even by high-ranking officials, both Bulgaria’s historical Muslim population (Turks, Pomaks, and Roma), and the recently formed, relatively small, Arab Muslim community,¹ did not face major conflicts with Bulgaria’s non-Muslim majority. Nevertheless, in 2019, there were several cases in which Muslims, and Islamic symbols, were subjected to various forms of violation. These included biased representations of religious identity by the media, the refusal of public prosecutors to initiate criminal proceedings for public instigation of religious hatred, and, to a lesser degree, hate crime and vandalized places of worship.

After the parliamentary elections held in 2017, the extreme nationalist parties known for their anti-Muslim positions (namely the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria [NFSB], the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation [IMRO], and Ataka) formed the United Patriots alliance and became coalition partners with the leading center-right party, Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB). The United Patriots entered politics through the use of hate speech and aggressive stances towards vulnerable groups, such as refugees from the Middle East, ethnic Roma, and Turks belonging to local Muslim communities. Accordingly, Islamophobic hate speech not only remained a common phenomenon in the Bulgarian political and media landscape, but it also found propagators among representatives of the judiciary and the educational system.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

There is a tendency in recent years towards a decrease in the number of physical attacks against representatives of the Muslim community and Muslim shrines. Nevertheless, anti-Muslim verbal assaults undertaken even by high-level officials have become a routine. Given the fact that this type of oral discourses remains unsanctioned, and thus tolerated by the judiciary, this phenomenon comes as no surprise.

¹. This group consists of immigrants in transit to Western Europe, and former university students who came to the country during the communist period.
On 2 July 2019, the historical Kurshum Mosque in Karlovo, Plovdiv Province, was desecrated with graffiti. On one of the walls of the oldest architectural monuments in Karlovo, built in AD 1485, the word “pig” (Bulg. “прасе”) was written, a swastika, an “advertisement” for sexual services provided by a “married widow”, and names of heavy metal bands such as “Metallica” and “AC/DC” placed alongside other images with vague purpose. (Fig. 1) The Chief Mufti’s Office reacted with a call to the law enforcement authorities and the Municipality of Karlovo to take measures for finding the perpetrators and for preserving the centuries-old cultural monument. The announcement regarding the attack issued by the Muslim Denomination read: “We consider it outrageous and highly inappropriate to express Nazi and sexual predilections on a religious temple. This serial act of abusing a Muslim shrine is unacceptable, especially the ‘Kurshum Mosque’ which has sentimental value for the Muslims in Bulgaria.”

3. Ibid.
Just a couple of days after the aforementioned occasion in Karlovo, on 4 July 2019, in front of dozens of witnesses, an unidentified person stoned the windows at the ground floor of the Chief Mufti’s Office building on 27 Bratya Miladinovi Str. in Bulgaria’s capital, Sofia. (Fig. 2) Nobody was injured during the act of vandalism, which was recorded by the security cameras. The video recordings showed that the perpetrator ran in an unknown direction. The violent act can be added to the list of such actions perpetrated over the last years against the Chief Muftiate. As usually the Muslim Denomination insisted that the case was to be investigated as a hate crime, and not just as an act of hooliganism.5

In January 2020, a 54-year-old resident of Izgrev village, Shoumen district, alerted the police about the destruction of Muslim tombstones in the local cemetery. According to him, this had happened between December 2019 and January 2020. An on-site inspection was carried out and four tombstones were found to have been destroyed. As a result of further investigations the perpetrators were identified and the police detained two 15-year-old minors from the same village. Pretrial proceedings have been instituted for the crime committed by the two young men.6

**Employment**

The main law in Bulgaria banning discrimination based on race, ethnicity, belief, and religion is the Protection against Discrimination Act (PADA).7 The organ established under PADA as an independent collegiate semi-judicial authority with adjudicating

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5. Ibid


powers exercising control over its implementation is the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPAD). It is worth mentioning that two of its nine current members, Baki Hyuseinov and Sabrie Sapundzhieva, are Muslims. For 2019, there was no data issued by the CPAD or any other state equality body concerning discrimination cases in the Bulgarian job market based on being Muslim. However, even a brief survey of the matter (undertaken among friends for the purposes of this report) has shown that there are cases that never make it to the official statistics. Such is the story of A.M. who wanted anonymity: “When I decided to put on a headscarf (in June 2019), I was working at a pharmacy. I, as a conscientious person, warned my employers in advance of my decision, because I was aware of the fact that in our country putting on a headscarf is considered ‘abnormal’. My boss’s first reaction was to tell me that he did not have the legal right to sack me since I had not committed any violation. He wanted to keep me, but the lady, our job superior, was not happy with my decision, and she convinced my boss to change his mind. So, the next day, he called me again and said that we should end our work relationship without any legal notice.” This type of discrimination is hard to prove, which maybe explains why the majority of Muslims in Bulgaria do not expect their rights to be defended.

Education
Two years ago, in 2018, Nia Staykova, an ethnic Bulgarian studying in high school converted to Islam. After she started wearing a headscarf (similarly to the abovementioned case of A.M.) the attitude of her teachers and classmates towards her changed drastically. In 2018 and 2019, she was subjected to systematical pressure in class by her tutors. They openly wanted her to reject Islam, to stop wearing a headscarf, and even proposed Buddhism as an acceptable alternative. One of her teachers even blamed her by saying, “One day you will come to school and shoot us all!” Besides being marginalized, she was forced to regularly visit a psychologist. In January 2020, Nia shared her story as part of an online project titled #nooffencebut maintained by the Bulgarian Fund for Women. In support of the Muslim women wearing headscarves, Nia published a photograph of herself in which she holds a whiteboard with the most common words of intimidation she was subjected to: “Why did you put a veil, aren’t you a Bulgarian?” (Fig. 3) The photograph caused a significant impact on social networks such as Facebook and Instagram. Many commentators blamed her for pursuing quick fame and even for discrediting Islam. The roots of the Islamophobic approach Nia was subjected to by her teachers and schoolmates are deeply implanted in the history and literature-related subjects taught in the Bulgarian schools.

Despite the total revision of all school curricula after the end of the Communist era (1944-1989), history textbooks regarding the Ottoman period still preserve most of their Islamophobic characteristics. In the newest textbooks on the subject called “History and Civilizations” for the 6th and 10th grades approved by the Ministry of Education in 2019, the notorious myth about the compulsory individual and mass conversions of Orthodox Christians to Islam is reconfirmed. One of the crucial issues triggering the absolute negation of the Ottoman legacy is the fact that most Bulgarian politicians have never accepted the otherwise obvious fact that for almost five centuries the Bulgarian lands were a significant part of a multiethnic and multicultural texture and that Bulgarians as subjects of the Ottoman state more or less actively contributed to the formation of its common cultural environment. The students are introduced only to the nameless figures of the sultan, the janissaries, the Muslim fanatics, etc., acting in a continuum, spread over the whole Bulgarian territory for centuries-long periods. This fact results in establishing the mindset in students of a trivial collective image of Muslims as uncivilized conquerors, unjust rulers, and bloodthirsty oppressors. Subsequently, the historical vision of grinning janissaries armed with yataghans, and tax collectors forcing Christian families to pay their “blood-tax” is used as a founding milestone of Islamophobia in present-time Bulgaria.

**Politics**

In April 2019, the Vazrazhdane party (after registering to participate in the forthcoming elections for Members of European Parliament) released a statement accusing the Ministry of Education of falsifying Bulgarian history. It read,

“Since the beginning of this year, the Ministry has been conducting an extremely aggressive campaign to completely replace the methodology used to teach

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10. Ibid.

Bulgarian history, with the main aim being to make Bulgarian teachers suggest to Bulgarian children that Bulgaria’s main enemy is Russia, that our closest ally is Turkey, that Turkish slavery did not exist, that Bulgarians adopted Islam and gave their children to be raised as Janissaries voluntarily…”

The leaders of Vazrazhdane “warned” the public, despite the fact that Islam and Muslims are still portrayed in a rather negative manner. The accusations were meant to serve electoral purposes (adequately rejected by the Ministry of Education), and were unfounded.

On 6 January, two young men from the Roma ghetto in Voivodinovo village, near Plovdiv, beat up a 33-year-old special forces corporal (Valentin Dimov). As a response, the authorities launched an operation for the demolition of the illegal constructions in the Roma neighbourhood. While commenting on the situation to the media, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Krasimir Karakachanov made the following generalisation: “Gypsies in Bulgaria have become extremely arrogant…”


rogant… It’s a fact that in the last year or two, they have started adopting Islam.”14 (Fig. 4) The Roma community and a number of NGOs reacted to this biased statement and the demolishing of houses in the middle of winter, by organising a protest in front of the Council of Ministers.15 As a guest of the TV program “Hi, Bulgaria”, and in front of the cameras broadcasting the protest, the Roma activist Lilyana Kovacheva criticised the authorities for imposing a collective responsibility on the Roma community because of a domestic crime and informed the audience that she had filed a complaint against Karakachanov with the Commission for Protection against Discrimination. She also complained that politicians like Volen Siderov and Valeri Simeonov (two months earlier he had called Roma women “bitches”) were also using hate speech at the expense of the Roma.16 As a matter of fact, representatives from all levels of the IMRO, Ataka, NFSB, and Vazrazhdane parties exercise anti-Muslim discourse as a major tool of campaigning for votes from voters with nationalistic inclinations.

**Media**

Figuratively speaking, if Bulgarian education is the soil, Islamophobic flora is rooted in, local media is the gardener, who takes care of its growth, its giving fruit, and its transportation to the market. Due to the progress in the field of communications fueled by the vast use of social media, the stages of this otherwise long-term process occur faster and have broadened their range.

The champions in the category “Islamophobic media” in Bulgaria for 2019 are the television channels Skat TV and Alfa TV. This comes as no surprise since these usual suspects are owned by the far-right parties NFSB and Ataka. The list of cases in which anti-Muslim discourse has been used in different programs through the year is too long, and we will confine ourselves to mentioning only a couple of striking examples. On 2 May 2019, the presenter of the TV program with the meaningful title “Unveiling” Nikolay Pankov chose the following provocative theme: “If You Are a Mufti, It Is as If You Are Minister Vladisslav Goranov’s Best Man”, suggesting that the Minister of Finance tolerated the Chief Muftiate. The words of the host were full of dangerous speculations and offensive qualifications directed at the head of the Muslim Denomination. “The mufti of Turkey Mustafa Hadji threatens the country with terror if he is not paid… We are becoming the Bulgarian Trojan scarecrow of Europe, because this is where Diyanet [the Turkish Directorate of Religious

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15. Протест на циганите пред МС заради думите на Каракачанов за Войводиново (Protest of the Gypsies in Front of the Council of Ministers Because of the Words of Karakachanov about Voivodinovo), Youtube, 14 January 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9n9eupz8Tg0, (Access date: 14 February 2020).

Affairs] personnel expelled from Europe will be brought up… Bulgaria will become the nucleus for the jihadists returning from ISIS for their respective march towards a Balkan caliphate. We are looking after people who are a threat to our national security…”17 (Fig. 5)

Figure 5: Nikolay Pankov, host of SKAT TV’s weekly program “Unveiling”: “If you are a mufti, it is as if you are Minister Vladisslav Goranov’s best man”.18

On 29 April, Liubomir Zhelev from Skat TV, on his program “On the Bosporus” demonstrated how the lack of basic knowledge about Islam results in misleading interpretations. “But when we say ‘Allah’, there comes the cruel principle of the Islamist jihad, the principle of monotheism, which forbids any understanding and tolerance of the other’s faith. In Turkish it is vahdet, from here comes the word tevhid: you know well what happened in the name of this principle last Sunday (Sri Lanka Easter Bombings on 21 April)...”19

Justice System
Islamophobia is often manifested in parliament when MPs debate laws and bills related to religious denominations. In this sense, the year 2019 was no exception. On 31 January 2019, the GERB and MRF submitted a bill for an amendment to the Law of Religions foreseeing a state subsidizing of religious denominations, as well as

18. Ibid.
the pardoning of their debts to the state up to 31 December 2018. When it became clear that the greater part of the mentioned debts belonged to the Muslim Denomination, the Chief Mufti’s Office and the party representatives who had submitted the bill (voted at first reading on 7 March) became the target of multiple verbal attacks from the microphone of the National Assembly and most media organs. This led to a change in the text of the amendment before its second vote on 21 March, according to which the debts were only deferred. The Turkish Foreign Minister was also involved in the scandal after his comment concerning the same draft law was interpreted as interfering in Bulgaria’s internal affairs. Prof. Stanislav Stoilov, a MP from Ataka party, commented on the case for Alfa TV claiming that Turkish President Erdogan had phoned Bulgarian PM Boyko Borisov to ask him for the debt forgiveness in question. (Fig. 6) The host of the program Magdalena Tasheva claimed that the Law of Religions was written or at least edited by the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs, the (Turkish) National Intelligence Organization, and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency. This would allow Turkish, Arab, and Saudi funding of Bulgarian Muslim communities aimed at radicalising the latter.

On 20 May 2019, the Prosecutor General Sotir Tsatsarov rewarded prosecutor Nedialka Popova from the Pazardzhik District Prosecutor’s Office for her performance during a case regarding the spread of radical Islam, a year after she delivered an Islamophobic speech which had raised a serious concern among the local Muslim community. The case in question, brought in 2009, led in December 2019 to the effective sentences of 14 people for preaching religious hatred and ISIS ideas; the allegations were made without any clear evidence. On 7 May 2019, the Supreme Muslim Council adopted a declaration “in connection with the actions of the investigating authorities causing fear and disturbance in the ranks of the Muslim Denomination by carrying out investigating actions based on complaints and signals, which

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25. “Цацаров награди прокурорката Недялка Попова за работата й по делото за радикалния ислам”, Lex News, 20 May 2019, https://lexnews.bg/%D1%86%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%BD%80%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D0%BD%80%D0%B0%BD%BD%D0%BE%D1%83%D1%80%BD%0D%BA%D0%BD%1%82%D0%B0-%D0%B0%D0%B5%D0%B4%D1%8F%D0%BB%D0%BA/, (Access date: 1 February 2020).
can be qualified as claptrap."26 In the meantime, the Bulgarian prosecution continues to be ineffective against perpetrators of alleged Islamophobic attacks, such as the attack on the building of the Chief Mufti’s Office in June, and does not impose any sanctions for anti-Muslim hate speech.

Internet

On 9 January, Angel Dzhambazki, a member of the European Parliament and deputy-chairman of IMRO, commented on the aforementioned incident in Voivodinovo on his blog (which is part of his personal webpage). (Fig. 8) “We have always insisted that the (Roma) ghetto should be demolished. And we will demolish it. Because the ghetto is an ulcer. Because the ghetto is the soil in which the poisonous weeds of Islamic radicalism grow.”28 Only in Facebook, this text entitled “Gypsy Arrogance” was shared more than 12,000 times. (Fig. 9) Nine out of ten of all 74 comments under the text praised Dzhambazki’s approach. A person by the name of Ivan Petrov even exclaimed: “Get the army into the ghetto with infantry fighting vehicles and fire, fire, fire… If there is no one to do it, just tell me, and I, as a former army officer, will come and participate for free, I will sit in the first of machines to enter the ghetto!”

27. Ibid.
perpetrators of alleged Islamophobic attacks, such as the attack on the building of the Chief Mufti’s Office in June, and does not impose any sanction for anti-Muslim hate speech.

Internet

On 9 January, Angel Dzhambazki, a member of the European Parliament and deputy-chairman of IMRO, commented on the aforementioned incident in Voivodinovo on his blog (which is part of his personal webpage). (Fig. 8) “We have always insisted that the (Roma) ghetto should be demolished. And we will demolish it. Because the ghetto is an ulcer. Because the ghetto is the soil in which the poisonous weeds of Islamic radicalism grow.” 28

Only in Facebook, this text entitled “Gypsy Arrogance” was shared more than 12,000 times. (Fig. 9) Nine out of ten of all 74 comments under the text praised Dzhambazki’s approach. A person by the name of Ivan Petrov even exclaimed: “Get the army into the ghetto with infantry fighting vehicles and fire, fire, fire… If there is no one to do it, just tell me, and I, as a former army officer, will come and participate for free, I will sit in the first of machines to enter the ghetto!”

Figure 8: Angel Dzhambazki’s webpage addressing the Roma problem: “No to the ethnic, domestic and gypsy crimes.”29

Figure 9: Racist commentaries under Angel Dzhambazki’s text “Gypsy Arrogance”.30

As usually, state security agencies did not react to these racist, anti-Muslim statements, nor did the Commission for Protection against Discrimination. Since there are no sanctions or any measures imposed by the state authorities to combat Islamophobia, similar comments accompany almost all news related to

29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
Islam and Muslims, and consequently, moderators rarely take action to remove or criticise them.

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Major figures triggering Islamophobia in Bulgaria are the leaders (including MPs and EPMs) of the far-right nationalistic parties and movements: NFSB, IMRO, Ataka, Vazrazhdane, Bulgarian National Union – New Democracy, National Resistance, Blood and Honour, and Fortress Europe Alliance. They are backed by various channels for dissemination of anti-Muslim propaganda such as media organs, either owned by their parties or via national TV, or radio programs and daily press, whose producers evaluate the participation of “scandalous” politicians and the broadcasting of hate speech as a source of increased viewer/listener/reader interest and higher ratings, a process undisturbed by any kind of censorship or state control.

Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

Initiatives, both on the federal and local level, aimed at combating anti-Muslim racism are a rarity in Bulgaria. The only official event of this kind for 2019 was a discussion titled “Islamophobia: Causes and Consequences” held on 26 March by the Chief Mufti’s Office, the only institution reporting anti-Muslim incidents and rhetoric. The discussion started with an exposé of Prof. Mihail Ivanov, who traced the origins of Islamophobia back to the Bulgarian history textbooks. He stated,

“One of the elements that fuel Islamophobia is Turkophobia... Bulgarian nationalism is formed as ethno-nationalism, not as civic nationalism... What the school does is later reproduced and multiplied throughout the community. Naturally, part of the politicians, media owners, journalists, and reputable public figures become bearers of negative attitudes inherited from the school years... The influence of this public elite on public opinion is dominant and through the media, it inevitably affects the minds of the general public. The social environment “inflamed” by racist - in this case Islamophobic - attitudes is nourishing for the political speculations of national populism...”

Therefore, the “medical” treating of the listed causes should start with a discussion within the whole community and the rewriting of history in a more objective manner. Hayri Emin, an expert at the International Affairs Department of the Chief Mufti’s Office, contributed to the discussion by giving up-to-date examples of Islamophobia such as the announcement in parliament of the amendments to

the Law of Religions on the grounds of national security, and called on the state to take concrete measures.\textsuperscript{32}

On 8 December, in Sofia, the Supreme Muslim Council presented the first Honorary Award of the Hodzhazade Mehmed Muhyyiddin Efendi annual awards, which were established by the central collective body of the Muslim Denomination, to the Chairman of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee Krasimir Kanev. He was nominated for his long-lasting activities in the field of human rights, and especially for defending the religious rights of the Bulgarian Muslims and combating Islamophobia.\textsuperscript{33}

### Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The content of this report shows that in Islamophobic terms, the year 2019 was dominated more by unpunished (both political and civilian) anti-Muslim hate speech instances than physical attacks on Muslims and mosques. Populist politicians used the momentum to unleash hatred towards Muslims by exploiting negative historical sentiments, problems within the Roma communities, and concerns mounted due to the movement of refugees from the Middle East passing through Bulgaria on their way to Europe. Despite the fact that the domestic criminal code contains articles sanctioning this type of discourses, these are rarely applied. Therefore, there is an acute need for NGOs to monitor media on a daily basis and generate pressure on the judiciary and the Commission for Protection against Discrimination to take adequate action in cases and events dictated by Islamophobia, especially those that negatively impact the Muslim community. Presumably, over time, this civilian pressure is expected to generate a preventative effect and force politicians to abstain from using hate speech publicly. The media should take the opportunity to change the negative image of Islam by broadcasting popular science and documentary films dedicated to various aspects of this religion, as well as programs discussing up-to-date Islamic issues. The lack of adequate knowledge about Islam enables the spread of false and distorted information about it in the public domain by pseudo-experts and malevolent public figures. Educational institutions also have to work towards creating an alternative narrative of Muslims. In the long list of history textbook authors, there are no Muslims. Keeping in mind that the curricula include topics related to Islam, the Bulgarian ministry should engage if not an author, at least an adviser appointed by the Chief Mufti’s Office in Sofia to comment on the content from a Muslim perspective.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.

Chronology

- **26.03.2019:** The Chief Mufti’s Office held a discussion entitled “Islamophobia: Causes and Consequences”.
- **20.05.2019:** Prosecutor General Sotir Tsatsarov awarded prosecutor Nedyalka Popova from the Pazardzhik District Prosecutor’s Office, investigator Daniela Yaneva, and the SANS (State Agency for National Security) team who worked on the so-called notorious Case of 13 Imams for spreading radical Islam.
- **02.06.2019:** Vandalism against the historical Kurshum Mosque in Karlovo, which was desecrated with graffiti.
- **04.06.2019:** An unidentified person stoned the glass entrance on the ground floor of the Grand Mufti’s Office building in Sofia.
- **01.12.2019 – 15.01.2020:** In the cemetery of Izgrev village, in the Shoumen district, four Muslim tombstones were desecrated by two 15-year-old minors from the same village.