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, brain storming sessions, conferences and policy recommendations, SETA seeks to guide leaders in government, civil society, and business, and contributes to informed decision making mechanisms.
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ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
CROATIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

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Executive Summary

In Croatia in 2019, incidents that can be addressed as hate speech against Muslims or potentially Islamophobic mostly occurred in the field of politics or involved politicians since two elections took place in the year in question: the EU parliamentary elections and the presidential elections.

The polarization of society and the use of populist rhetoric in political campaigns for the EU parliamentary elections and the election for the presidency of the Republic of Croatia with regards to migrants were present on almost every social level, media, and platforms. Unacceptable messages and hate speech against Islam marred the media, the Internet, and political appearances in election periods.

The lack of self-criticism in the context of recognizing discriminatory messages is also evident in some of the media. Often, they correctly recognize the discriminatory speech of public figures, politicians and others, however, do not show sufficient willingness to renounce their own unacceptable speech and condemn the egregious examples of their employers in articles.

People are reluctant to speak up when they feel discriminated against for being Muslims, because of vulnerability when expressing religious beliefs in public and respecting religious customs. This is why we don’t have true insight into the frequency of discrimination on the basis of Islam in Croatia.

On the other hand, government bodies and institutions as well as other religious communities spread the message of social cohesion, their openness to policies that promote and secure diversity and equality, and the coexistence and acceptance of all Croatian citizens regardless of religious differences. The few incidents that took place are considered individual and sporadic occurrences, and were condemned by the majority. Overall, comparing to other European countries, Croatian society does not follow the trend of fast growing Islamophobia. One of the reasons is that Republic of Croatia is one of the few countries in Europe that institutionally recognized Islam as an equal religion.
Sažetak

Incidenti koji nagovještavaju govor mržnje prema muslimanima ili potencijalno islamofoobne incidente u Hrvatskoj u 2019. godini uglavnom su bili u području politike ili su dolazili od strane političara obzirom da je 2019. godina u Hrvatskoj obilježena predsjedničkim izborima i izborima za Europski parlament.

Polariziranje društva te korištenje populističke retorike pri razračunavanju s migrantima i izbjeglicama a u svrhu političkih bodova na izborima za Europski parlament i Predsjednika Republike Hrvatske bilo je prisutno na svim društvenim razinama, medijima i platformama. Neprihvatljive poruke i govor mržnje prema islamu obilježile su kako političke istupe tako i medije i internet u periodu izbora.

Nedostatak samokritičnosti u kontekstu prepoznavanja diskriminatornih poruka, vidljiv je kod dijela medija. Oni nerijetko ispravno prepoznaju diskriminatoran govor javnih osoba, političara i drugih, međutim, ne pokazuju dovoljnu spremnost da se odreknu vlastitog neprihvatljivog govora i osude eklatantne primjere u člancima svojih zaposlenika/ca.

Pojedinci, kada smatraju da su diskriminirani temeljem toga što su muslimani, nerado o tome progovaraju, zbog ranjivosti kojoj su izloženi prilikom javnog očitovanja religijskih uvjerenja i poštivanja vjerskih običaja, a to je razlog zašto izostaje pravi uvid u kvantitet diskriminacije prema muslimanima u Hrvatskoj.

S druge strane, tijela i institucije vlasti u Republici Hrvatskoj kao i druge religijske zajednice širili su poruke vrijednosti socijalne kohezije i pokazali volju za politikama koje promoviraju i jamče raznolikost i jednakost, zajednički život i prihvaćanje svih hrvatskih građana neovisno o njihovim religijskim razlikama.

Sumirajući, možemo reći da pokazana anti-muslimanska netrpeljivost predstavlja pojedinačne i sporadične ispade individualaca koji su bili osuđeni od većine. U suštini, u poredenju s drugim zemljama Europe, hrvatsko društvo ne prati trend brzog rasta islamofobije u Europi. Svakako da je jedan od razloga tome i činjenica da je Republika Hrvatska jedna od samo četiri zemlje Evrope koja je institucionalno priznala islam kao ravnopravnu religiju.
Country Profile  
EIR 2019

Country: Croatia  
Type of Regime: Democratic republic  
Form of Government: Unitary parliamentary constitutional republic  
Ruling Parties: Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ)  
Opposition Parties: Social Democratic Party (SDP)  
Last Elections: 2014 Presidential Election (Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović won 50.74% of the vote against 49.26% that went to Ivo Josipović in the second round); 2016 Legislative Election (HDZ, HDS, HSLS: 61 seats; SDP, HNS, HSS, HSU: 54 seats; MOST: 13 seats; ŽIVI ZID, PH, AM: 8 seats; IDS, PGS, RI: 3 seats; STRANKA RADA I SOLIDARNOSTI, REFORMISTI, NOVI VAL, HSS-SR, BUZ: 2 seats; HDSSB, HKs: 1 seat; NL-ŽELJKO GLASNOVIĆ: 1 seat; National Minorities: 8 seats)  
Total Population: 4,284,889 (2011)  
Major Languages: Croatian  
Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)  
Statistics on Islamophobia: N/A  
Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: N/A  
Major Religions (% of Population): Christianity (86.28% Catholics and 4.44% Orthodox), No Religion (3.81%), Islam (1.47%), Others (less than 1%)  
Muslim Population (% of Population): 62,977 (1.47%) (2011)  
Main Muslim Community Organizations: Islamic Community in Croatia (Islamska zajednica u Hrvatskoj)  
Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Center for Cultural Dialogue (CCD), The International Red Cross, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Human Rights House Zagreb, Are You Serious, Center for Missing and Abused Children, Centre for Peace Studies (CMS; CPS), Centre for Promotion of Tolerance and Preservation of Holocaust Remembrance, Croatian Legal Center  
Far-Right Parties: N/A  
Far-Right Movements: N/A  
Far-Right Terrorist Organizations: N/A  
Limitations to Islamic Practices:  
- Hijab Ban: None  
- Halal Slaughter Ban: None  
- Minaret Ban: None  
- Circumcision Ban: None  
- Burka Ban: None  
- Prayer Ban: None
Introduction

The Islamic Community in Croatia continues to play an integrative role in Croatian society. The Republic of Croatia used the position of the Islamic Community as a role model of integrating Muslim minorities into European societies and as an instrument in building its democratic, inclusive, and intercultural state brand. Institutionally and strategically regulated relationships through the Treaty on Issues of Common Interest between the government of the Republic of Croatia and the Islamic Community in Croatia from 2002 were used as examples of promising practice in integrating religious minorities into societies around the world. The construction of the Islamic Cultural Center in Sisak continues and with it Croatia will get its fifth mosque (in addition to the ones in Zagreb, Rijeka, Bogovolja, and Gunja). The Islamic Community in Croatia hosted a gala dinner to celebrate Eid al-Fitr with the presence of all state leaders, their presence there testifies to their good relations with the country’s Islamic Community and Muslims. The President of the Republic of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia Andrej Plenkovic, Speaker of the Croatian Parliament Gordan Jandrokovic, and President of the Croatian Episcopal Conference (HBK) Zelimir Puljić expressed their best wishes on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha to the Mufti and President of the Islamic Community of Croatia Aziz Hasanovic and all Muslims in Croatia with the warm messages of coexistence, respect, and acceptance as values underpinning the intercultural Croatian society.

The annual report published by Croatia’s Security Intelligence Agency (SOA) stated, “Although Islamist radicalism has gained a significant number of supporters in the western EU countries and in the countries neighboring southeastern southeastern Croatia, it has not been able to gather more followers in the Republic of Croatia. One of the main reasons for the absence of significant Islamist radicalism in Croatia is the good position, reputation and integration of the Islamic community

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in Croatian society.”

The Croatian neighborhood includes Bosnia and Herzegovina whose relations with Croatia in 2019 were marked by a scandal in which the SOA was accused of smuggling weapons into places connected with the Salafi Islamist movement in Bosnia.

The SOA in its annual report also reported that there is no serious anti-immigration extremism in Croatia, although the trend of the growing popularity of anti-immigration movements in Europe could lead to the equivalent developments of similar groups in Croatia.

The question of financing religious communities with funds from the public budget was raised in public discourse and in the Croatian Parliament. According to Eurostat data, the Republic of Croatia is among the member states that allocate the highest percentage of their GDP to religious communities (0.6% in 2016), with only Hungary allocating more. A proposal to start negotiations on amendments to the treaty between the Holy See and the Republic of Croatia was raised in Croatian Parliament and several organizations including the Movement for Secular Croatia raised the issue of the Catholic Church being in a privileged position compared to other religious communities, a fact that violates constitutionally guaranteed secularity. In 2019, the Croatian Parliament and government rejected the proposal to amend the treaty.

It remains positive that religious leaders from different religious communities in most cases emphasized the quality of mutual cooperation and the importance of building friendly relationships. One example of interreligious dialogue is the establishment of the Interreligious Council of Rijeka which brought together the most represented religious communities in the city within the framework of the Rijeka – European Capital of Culture 2020 program to further advance interreligious dialogue. Catholic religion teachers on several occasions pointed out the beauty and purity of Islam and how different it is from the distorted interpretation of the faith often found in the media or often circulated in popularist publications.

The issue of Croatian border safety in relation to migrants heading to Europe was raised several times in public discourse and media. Under the excuse of guarding the Croatian border and ensuring the security of Croatian territory, the humane approach and compassion for refugees increasingly faded. Politicians such as Ivan Pernar continued sharing negative stories and foreign media news about refugees, instilling fear of migrants and refugees in the local population. On the other hand, non-governmental organizations reminded the public of the fact that the EU and

Croatia weren’t facing a migration crisis but rather a solidarity and humanity crisis presented under the pretext of a so-called security issue.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks
Hate crimes that threaten basic human rights and freedoms were often not reported, were not sufficiently recognized, and their prosecution was sometimes inadequate. The non-reporting of hate crimes occurs because of the victims’ lack of confidence that the authorized institutions will provide them with adequate protection, and because of the fear of revictimization.

According to statistics of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the basis of discrimination in 9 complaints was religion (3% of all recorded complaints). Eight crimes were against Jews (specifically identified by the Ministry of Internal Affair as anti-Semitism), while the motive of one crime was religion. Authorities didn’t specify whether that was against Muslims because they do not label crimes as Islamophobic. Anti-Muslim hate crime doesn’t exist as a separate category in the hate crime statistics. According to the Ministry of Justice, courts have dealt with 35 hate crimes cases, and in 13% of them the motive was religion.

In April 2019, a group of seven Muslim tourists prayed in a parking lot in the Croatian city of Split. Several people reported the situation to the police, who determined that no misdemeanor or criminal act had been committed. Photographs and a video were published online by the media, causing a number of negative reactions. City Council member Martin Pauk wrote a Facebook post saying that the praying individuals marked their territory and sent a message that they have arrived and that there will be more of them, comparing the prayer to the act of dogs when they urinate to mark their territory.

The question of the difference between Muslims praying in the parking lot in Split and Catholics praying in front of a hospital providing abortions was raised by critics and freedom advocates, who concluded that Muslim individuals praying at least didn’t condemn the actions of others.

Employment

Research shows that the presence of discrimination in society is still much higher than reported to the relevant authorities. For example, in 2019, the request of a Muslim woman to wear a hijab in her working place was denied by a public institution in Croatia. The decision of the institution's directorship referred to the practice and previous rulings of the European courts. This case wasn’t reported to relevant institutions for discrimination.

11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
The Ombudswoman received inquiries from Muslims about the right not to work on religious holidays, which happened in previous years as well. Also, the Catholic Faculty of Theology continued demanding baptismal certificates as part of the application documentation in the process of hiring administrative and technical staff, which is a case of direct discrimination based on religion.

Education

The Islamic Community in Croatia published the following books: The Islamic Encyclopedic Almanac that listed almost 500 Muslims who have contributed to the development of the Islamic community and Croatian society in different areas, and Halal – Standard for Humankind by the author Aldin Dugonjic, PhD, about the importance of halal and the halal market in every segment of life.

There were accusations that the textbooks for Croatian language and for religious education potentially encouraged discrimination. The Ministry of Science and Education stated that they would consider the remarks and adopt the necessary changes in future textbook editions.

The association of students of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Zagreb Virtus on the occasion of International Women’s Day in 2019 organized a panel on the position of women in monotheistic religions with representatives of Islam, Catholicism, and Judaism. During the event, an incident occurred when several students interrupted and complained about a public educational institution in a secular country like Croatia hosting a discussion on a religious topic with religious representatives. The left-wing Internet news portal index.hr reported that during the event shaytan (devil) entered the imam when he said that we are all equal but we have different roles in this world and that was the moment when the situation escalated. He also stated that society shouldn’t force gender equality because it is unnatural. However, when listening to the entire speech, it becomes clear that what he was actually referring to were the different biological characteristics of men and women, and he was not implying that they shouldn’t be respected in the same way and treated equally in the context of human rights.

Politics
In March 2019, the independent news website zurnal.info,17 based in Sarajevo, published interviews with Bosnian Muslims who said the Croatia’s Security Intelligence Agency (SOA) had tried to coerce them into smuggling weapons into places connected with the Salafi Islamist movement in Bosnia.

The “discovery” of these arms caches would then justify comments by Croatia’s President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic. Two years ago she said there were 10,000 people with “very radical rhetoric and intentions” in Bosnia – remarks which caused outrage at the time.18

Not surprisingly, the website’s allegations caused a furor. Croatia’s Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic called the story “a matter of creative manipulation” during a visit to the Bosnian town of Neum. The SOA described the claims as “false and malicious,” though it confirmed that its officers had been in contact with the Bosnian citizens quoted in the story.19

Meanwhile, Bosnia’s Security Minister Dragan Mektic rushed to claim credit for foiling a “false flag” operation which would have tarnished his country’s international reputation. “The plan was to discredit Bosnia and show it as a terrorist hub and a threat to the region and Europe,” he said.

It seemed logical when Bosnia’s state prosecutor stepped in to investigate the allegations. But then it turned out that the focus of the investigation was Mektic.20 The prosecutor suspected the security minister of revealing secret information and giving false statements. Mektic called the investigation “a farce, to mislead the public.”21

Confusion would be understandable. But Bosnians understand that the claims and counter-claims fit into a queasy ethnopolitical game which has persisted since the Dayton Agreement brought an end to Bosnia’s ruinous conflict in 1995.22

The BIH presidency sent a protest note to Croatia. It stated that the Prosecutor’s Office of BIH will not investigate persons mentioned in an alleged intelligence affair that is part of the affair known as ‘the Salafia affair’ in media.

In July 2019, the President of the Republic of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, who won the 2014 presidential elections as a candidate of the right-wing Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), visited Israel on the occasion of the Holocaust commemoration. One of the most influential Israeli newspapers, The Jerusalem Post, published an article claiming that during the meeting of Croatia’s president with the Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic stated, “Bosnia and Herzegovina is a very unstable country and under the control of militant Islam; in some aspects it has been taken over by people associated with Iran and terrorists.”

This statement provoked a strong resonance in the media and political public of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH). There were many reactions from BIH stating that the statement by Croatia’s president tried to revive wartime ideologies, and that the BIH citizens are clearly targeted as a threat and enemy not only to their neighbors but also to one another. Very negative reactions came from the Croat member of the presidency Zeljko Komsic, the Bosniak member of the presidency Sefik Dzaferovic,
from chairmen of the political parties Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Party of Democratic Action (SDA) in BIH, from the President of the Jewish community in BIH Jakob Finci, etc.

All media in Croatia and BIH reported on this event. For example, Al Jazeera Balkans published a commentary on their portal entitled “Is Militant Islam Guilty for Jasenovac?”

The head of the Islamic Community in BIH Hussein Kavazovic also reacted: “This person who calls herself the Croatian president is known for her attitudes and attempts to dehumanize Muslims. It is a two-faced person who tells one story in Muslim countries and another in Israel and other countries. It’s about political opportunism and nothing more. That’s the worst kind of politician!”

The first reaction to the scandal from Croatia came from the former Croatian Prime Minister Jadrinka Kosor via her Twitter account: “Apologies to neighboring and friendly Bosnia and Herzegovina. To all nations.”

Finally, the president of the Republic of Croatia denied the claims of the Jerusalem Post and later on this portal issued a correction and deleted the controversial

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30. Ibid.


statement that caused turmoil. The journalist who wrote the article apologized for the mistake.

The Austrian newspaper *Der Standard* published an article stating that President Grabar-Kitarovic, for the purpose of her re-election campaign, was "running an anti-Muslim campaign" and "hustling on neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina."

Croatia’s president commemorated the second anniversary of Praljak’s death who was found guilty for war crimes in BIH by The Hague tribunal. Praljak was a Bosnian Croat general who served in the Croatian Army and the Croatian Defence Council, an army of the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia, between 1992 and 1995. The convicted Bosnian Croat war criminal killed himself on live television by drinking poison in a courtroom in The Hague upon confirmation of his 20-year jail term for crimes committed during the Bosnian War.

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36. Ibid.

In August 2019, the senior Berlin-based Croatian diplomat Elizabeta Madjar-
nev was accused of damaging her country’s reputation after writing inflammatory
Facebook posts alongside idyllic images of the Adriatic coast. She posted the fol-
lowing comment: “Pure and authentic Europe. Just white Europeans as it used to
be only 30 years ago in the whole Europe. This should be a good advertisement for
vacations. One would think this is no longer possible but luckily it is.”

Initially she defended her post, arguing that she has a right to speak as a pri-
vate individual. She also suggested her Facebook page had been hacked. Howev-
er, Croatian news portal index.hr reported that in earlier Facebook posts she had
written about the “Islamization agenda” of Muslims and espoused homophobic
views. Madjarnev was also outspoken about German attempts to integrate mi-
grants into society.

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38. Ibid.
hr, August 2019, https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/skandalozni-rasizam-nase-diplomatkinje-u-berlinu-hrvats-
The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs considered the situation a serious breach of official duty and Madjarevic was suspended.42

Islamophobic speech was part of presidential election campaigns in 2019 run by candidates such as Anto Djapic from the party Right. He accused Muslims in BIH of cooperating with Serbs in the Islamization of Croatian territory.43

41. Ibid.
Croatia’s Member of Parliament and presidential election candidate Ivan Pernar continued posting and sharing news about migrants that painted them as responsible for explosions, fires, knife attacks, etc.

The EU parliamentary election campaigns in 2019 featured negative political opinions about Islam in Europe such as Ladislav Ilcic’s political platform which advocated for Europe as a dominantly Christian continent. He said that Christian values and culture produce freedom and equality for all people unlike those of Islam.

When Croatia’s and BIH’s relations were disrupted, Muslims and Islam usually were mentioned in a negative way such as by the MEP Zeljana Zovko.

Media

Migrants are often portrayed in an unacceptable way and some media continue to market content filled with hate speech and other forms of unacceptable speech. On occasion, media outlets published articles that unnecessarily emphasized the nationality or religion of the perpetrators of illegal acts despite the fact that omitting this information would not affect the quality of the reporting.

Examples of such abuse occurred during a broadcast on six regional televisions when the host said that migrants are savages who come from the east to rape, and during a broadcast in which the alleged victim of a robbery stated that migrants should be beaten to a pulp, while guests in the studio talked about migrants as a sick group of people infected with serious and transmissible diseases such as AIDS and hepatitis. The Electronic Media Council in Croatia found that the broadcast violated the Electronic Media Act and temporarily revoked the concession. For three local television stations concessions were withdrawn for 24 hours, while the remaining stations had their rights revoked for 3 hours. Following this decision, the Electronic Media Council members received death threats, which they reported to the authorities.47

Ivica Sola, a Croatian theologian, professor, communicologist, and journalist for Globus (Hanza Media) wrote that the Pope’s document on the reception of migrants is pure misuse of the Gospel for political purpose. He wrote that the Christ’s teachings were not conceived as part of a political program which is characteristic of the Qur’an and Islam where there is no difference between religious and worldly in terms of “competence.” He argued that migration policy is the responsibility of the secular state and religious institutions should not intervene.48

Sola also wrote columns in which he argued that Islam in masculine to the point of being brutal (as opposed to the feminized Europe), and that it takes advantage of the commotion to sneak up on the “woman” Europe.49 In another column he claimed that we should call migration by its real name namely an invasion from the Islamic world.50

**Justice System**

Most of the proceedings in 2018 and 2019 were conducted for criminal offenses based on discriminatory grounds of sexual orientation and language, followed by national origin, race and ethnicity, gender, religion, social status, and other characteristics.\(^51\)

The Ombudsman acted on the basis of several events that highlighted problems in prosecuting hate crimes and the inadequate punishment of perpetrators. For example, traces of an unknown substance similar to lard were observed on Muslim obituaries on a streetlight in Zagreb. Although this indicated a hate crime, police officers didn’t determine the circumstances, the identity of the person, or the motive behind the act after the criminal investigation had been carried out.\(^52\)

In the case of a student recorded by his/her classmates while sharing discriminatory opinions, and expressing contempt and intolerance against Serbs and Muslims, the State Attorney’s Office responded in a timely manner acting on reasonable suspicion that a crime against public order had been committed by inciting violence and hatred as referred to in Article 325 (1) of the Penal Code. The State Attorney’s Office proposed the investigative detention of the alleged perpetrator because of the risk of influencing witnesses. The process is still ongoing.\(^53\)

In general, hate speech towards Islam and migrants was present in online content including social networks. The Croatian government announced the Law on Preventing Inappropriate Behavior on Social Networks so as to apply the best solutions that will effectively counter this negative phenomenon while respecting the highest standards of protection and respect for the human rights of freedom of expression in accordance with the Croatian Constitution and international conventions.\(^54\)

**Internet**

Several Croatian news portals including dnevno.hr\(^55\) shared a news story about the results of a research by the Pew Research Center that showed that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world and that due to the increased number of migrants in Europe, Islam will become the world’s leading religion by 2070. Another story that circulated was that in 80 years according to figures by the United Nations, Islam will be

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52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
the most popular religion in the world. This story was reported by poskok.hr⁶⁶ that shared news from the website of the Atlantic.⁷ The Croatian portals mentioned above presented this information as alarming facts that Croats should be worried about. Following these publications, dnevno.hr published stories about weaknesses in Islam and how St. Francis defeated the God of Islam.⁵⁸

![Figure 9: Screenshot of Croatian news portal dnevno.hr that tagged research results of Islam becoming the dominant world religion as alarmist data.⁵⁹](image)


59. Ibid.
Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Central figures that portrayed Islam in a negative context, spreading hatred towards this religion, can be divided into three groups based on their functions and area of work. The first group consists of politicians such as the president of the Republic of Croatia and 2019 presidential candidate Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, Croatian Parliament member and 2019 presidential candidate Ivan Pernar, 2019 presidential candidate Anto Djapic, and member of the European Parliament Zeljana Zovko. The second group consists of diplomats such as the senior Berlin-based Croatian diplomat Elizabeta Madjarevic. The third group consists of journalists and academics like Ivica Šola who wrote for different media outlets like *Globus* and *Jutarnjih.hr* (Hanza Media).

Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

In 2019, many steps in social development were taken by different actors in Croatia in order to prevent and condemn discrimination.

The Islamic Community in Croatia and the World Muslim Communities Council organized a conference that gathered 25 European countries in Zagreb where the Croatian model of integration of Muslims was presented as a model that can be used in countries around the world.60 The Minister of Justice Drazen Bosnjakovic was present during this event. Usually, every event organized by the Islamic Community in Croatia is attended by representatives the state and government. The Islamic Community in cooperation with other religious communities, especially the Croatian Episcopal Conference, organized a number of encounters and events such as *The Spirit of Assisi*,61 etc.

The Center for Cultural Dialogue organized the Balkan Youth School, an educational program for youth on the challenges of Islam in the contemporary world. It also marked World Hijab Day62 with the panel where the culture of women’s dressing and covering in this region was presented.

The Human Rights House Zagreb in partnership with the Center for Peace Studies organized the panel discussion “Regulation of Hate Speech on Social Networks – Threats to Freedom of Expression.” The panel discussion galvanized a public debate in the wake of the Croatian government’s plan to enact a Law on Preventing...
Inappropriate Behavior on Social Networks, a new legislation designed to combat, inter alia hate speech online, fake news, and cyberbullying.

The Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities and NGOs also organized activities and events designed to raise awareness and protect minorities’ human rights and the principles of non-discrimination.

Croatian national television HRT produced a documentary film about the integration of migrants in Croatian society entitled “New Neighbors” which was intended to fight stereotypes about those who come from a different culture, have a different skin color, religion, etc. The film is the result of the joint collaboration with eight national televisions from eight European countries that also produced films on the same topic in their countries. HRT will show all nine films in its 2020 program.

HRT also broadcast a live stream of prayers on Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha in 2019 from the cities of Zagreb and Rijeka.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The Islamophobic incidents mentioned in the report do not have wider public support, a significant number of followers, or even a driving potential. They can be treated as individual outbursts and actions by single individuals. In general, we can still note the peaceful coexistence between Muslims and other religious groups in Croatia.

Government efforts showcased the desire to put sound policies in place for social cohesion and acceptance. Religious institutions have displayed their choice to live together and understand one another.

On the other hand, there were politicians who used anti-Islam and anti-Muslim rhetoric to incite Islamophobia and win political points that would give them power. Behaviors and attitudes of politicians are merely the results of political populism.

Recommendations follow:

- At a time when hate speech and occurrences of extremism in Europe are on the rise, the joint work and efforts of all actors in implementing prevention programs and using dialogue to reverse the tide, to heal, to support human rights, and religious freedoms are more important than ever.
- Prevention as part of a system for protecting against discrimination should gain more importance (informing citizens about how to protect themselves, educating people who face discrimination cases through their work so that they don’t deny someone their right to equal treatment while making decisions).
- Croatian authorities should raise awareness among media professionals and their organizations about the danger of racism and intolerance.
- All media should act objectively and allow the public to form their own opinions based on facts provided by journalists rather than present the public with
personal conclusions made by authors, derogatory epithets, and unacceptable statements. Media should strive to offer information that can create unbiased perceptions. It is the responsibility of all segments of society, including the media, politicians and other public figures to convey messages in a non-discriminatory and non-hateful way, even though they might resonate with a smaller number of people.

Chronology

- **16.03.2019**: BIH journalists and Bosnia’s Security Minister Dragan Mektic accused Croatia’s Security Intelligence Agency (SOA) of smuggling weapons into places connected with the Salafi Islamist movement in Bosnia.
- **17.04.2019**: EU Parliament candidate Ladislav Ilcic stated that Christian values and culture produce freedom and equality for all people unlike those of Islam.
- **25.04.2019**: Following a group of seven Muslim tourists praying in a parking lot in the Croatian city of Split, City Council member of Split Martin Pauk stated that they had announced their invasion in European territory and compared their prayer to dogs urinating to mark their territory.
- **30.07.2019**: The media published a statement by President of Republic of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic that BIH is a very unstable country and under the control of militant Islam, and that in some aspects it has been taken over by people associated with Iran and terrorists.
- **31.07.2019**: The president of the Republic of Croatia denied having said what was published in the Jerusalem Post.
- **08.08.2019**: The senior Berlin-based Croatian diplomat Elizabeta Madjar-jevic stated that pure and authentic Europe means a Europe inhabited only by white Europeans.
- **19.08.2019**: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Croatia suspended Croatian diplomat Elizabeta Madjarevic.
- **08.11.2019**: Presidential candidate Anto Djapic from the political party Right accused Muslims in BIH of cooperating with Serbs in the Islamization of Croatian territory.