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.
EUROPEAN ISLAMOPHOBIA REPORT 2019

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Executive Summary

The Estonian Muslim community makes up approximately 0.1% to 0.3% of the national population, based on different estimations. The local Muslim community, historically comprising largely of Tatars, is rarely the target of any negative attention. However, Islamophobic attitudes are rising in the context of immigration.

In 2019, there were two examples of physical attacks that could be considered Islamophobic, although it is difficult to make a distinction between anti-migrant bias and specifically Islamophobic bias. Verbal attacks were more common, according to refugee organisations, but they were usually not reported to the police. The attacks reflect a hostile attitude towards refugees and migrants, promoted by right-wing politicians. After the elections in March 2019, the far-right nationalist Conservative People’s Party of Estonia (EKRE) became part of the ruling coalition. The figureheads of the EKRE actively spread anti-refugee and anti-immigration views, which often include Islamophobic stereotypes.

In 2019, the Estonian media mainly focused on incidents involving Muslims in other EU countries; however, there were examples of reporting styles that generate fear and distrust towards Muslims and migrants in general.

There are no legal restrictions to the practice of Islam. However, there is a need to amend the regulation concerning hate speech and hate crime, to ensure that people are held accountable for inciting anti-Muslim hatred, and prosecuted accordingly when committing hate crimes against Muslims or other minority groups.

There were a few positive examples of initiatives aimed at challenging stereotypes and promoting equal treatment of different minority groups. There are no initiatives directly targeting Islamophobia, as it is usually dealt with in the context of xenophobia.
Kokkuvõte

Erinevate hinnangute põhjal moodustab Eesti moslemikogukond umbes 0,1–0,3% riigi elanikkonnast. Kohalik moslemikogukond, millest on ajalooliselt moodustanud suure hulga tatarlased, satub harva negatiivse tähenduse alla, kuid islamofoobsed hoikud on tõusetunud immigratsiooni kontekstis.


Eesti meedia keskendus 2019. aasta jooksul peamiselt moslemitega seotud intendentidele teistes Euroopa Liidu riikides, kuid leidus näiteid artiklitest, mis õhutavad hirmu ja usaldamatust moslemite ja migrantide suhtes üldiselt.

Eesti seadused ei sätesta takistusi Islami praktiseerimisele. Samas vajab muudatusi vaenukõne ja vaenukuritegude regulatsioon, et tagada vastutusele võimatu moslemivastase vaenu õhutamine eest ning kuriteole vastav karistus vaenukuritegude toimepanijatele.

Positiivsena on võimalik esile tõsta mõned näited algatustest erinevate pagulasorganisatsioonide ning Sotsiaalministeeriumi eestvedamisel, mille eesmärk on stereotüüpide mürdmine ja erinevate vähemusrühmade võrdse kohtlemise edendamine.
Country Profile EIR 2019

Country: Republic of Estonia
Type of Regime: Democratic Republic
Form of Government: Unitary Parliamentary Republic
Ruling Parties: Centre Party, Conservative People's Party of Estonia, Pro Patria (coalition)
Opposition Parties: Reform Party, Social Democratic Party
Total Population: 1.3 million (estimated in 2019)
Major Languages: Estonian
Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)
Statistics on Islamophobia: There are no available statistics on Islamophobia.
Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: N/A
Major Religions (% of Population): Christianity (28%), No religion (54%)
Muslim Population (% of Population): 1,508 (0.12%) according to the last national census in 2011
Main Muslim Community Organizations: Estonian Islamic Centre, Estonian Islamic Congregation
Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: NGOs that focus, amongst other things, on equal treatment of Muslims and other minorities in Estonia are the Estonian Human Rights Centre, Estonian Refugee Council, Johannes Mihkelson Centre, and International House Tartu.
Far-Right Parties: Conservative People’s Party of Estonia
Far-Right Movements: Soldiers of Odin
Far-Right Terrorist Organizations: N/A
Limitations to Islamic Practices:
- Hijab Ban: None
- Halal Slaughter Ban: None. According to the Animal Protection Act, to slaughter a farm animal for a religious purpose, a religious association must obtain the relevant permit.
- Minaret Ban: None
- Circumcision Ban: None
- Burka Ban: None
- Prayer Ban: None
Introduction

The Muslim community in Estonia is one of the smallest in Europe, although it is difficult to estimate its exact size. According to the last national census in 2011, there were 1,508 people in Estonia who stated their religion to be Islam, making up approximately 0.12% of the Estonian population. However, it is estimated that the actual number is higher, as many Muslims preferred not to state their religious affiliation in the census. In 2005, based on the Estonian Islamic Congregation’s estimation, the number of practicing Muslims was approximately 3,500. In 2013, due to increased immigration, Estonians’ and Russians’ conversion to Islam, and the increased religious activity of younger descendants of Central Asian and Caucasian immigrants, the number was estimated to be nearly 4,500. The three largest ethnic groups in Estonia who identified themselves as Muslims in 2011 were Tatars, Azer-baijanis, and Estonians. In the past years, there has also been a growing proportion of new immigrants from North Africa and Asia.

There are no mosques in Estonia. At first, the Estonian Islamic Congregation held religious services in rented rooms. In 2009, the congregation’s activities moved to a permanent location in a former office building near Tallinn Airport. In 2015, the Estonian Islamic Centre was established with the main goal to administer, maintain, and use these premises, as well as to represent Islam in Estonia.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

According to the Ministry of Justice, there was one crime recorded in 2019 that was possibly motivated by anti-Muslim bias. It was a case of physical abuse (§121 of the Estonian Penal Code). Before the attack, the perpetrator asked the victim about Muslims, Islam, but also about Russians.

Another attack with a possible Islamophobic motivation was reported in the news: on 22 May 2019, a man from Pakistan was verbally and physically attacked in Tallinn. The police started an investigation under §262 of the Estonian Penal Code (Breach of Public Order). It is not possible to claim that the motivation was specifically related to anti-Muslim hatred, as the victim appeared to be targeted because of his migrant background. The perpetrator yelled at the victim “Go home, this is Estonia.”

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3. Ibid, p. 11.
According to the Estonian Refugee Council, there have been several cases of verbal abuse against Muslims in Tallinn, for example, on public transport, especially towards women and girls wearing a hijab.7 There have also been cases of verbal abuse in Tartu, according to the Johannes Mihkelson Centre. Furthermore, at the end of 2019, a woman wearing a hijab was spat on in Tartu. These incidents were not reported to the police.8

**Employment**

According to the Labour Inspectorate of Estonia9 and the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner,10 no discrimination cases against Muslims or persons perceived as Muslims have been registered in the job market.

**Education**

Islamophobic content has not become part of curricula, textbooks, or other education materials.

**Politics**

During the period under review, both the 2019 Estonian parliamentary election and the European Parliament election were held in Estonia.

One of the key narratives of the far-right Conservative People’s Party of Estonia (EKRE) in both election campaigns was aimed against refugees and migration, and the discourse was Islamophobic in nature.”

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8. Interview with Johannes Mihkelson Centre, 5 February 2020.
The EKRE’s parliamentary election programme stated the following: “We are helping to rebuild the war-affected areas by sending back refugees staying in Estonia”, and their European Parliament programme stated that “Europe’s rapidly growing Muslim population has put European identity and values at risk”.

One of EKRE’s election campaign videos for the parliamentary election that was broadcasted on TV and social media showed people coming in boats and destroying the city, while the voiceover read, “Muslim immigrants are given housing at the expense of the state” (Fig. 1).

During the campaign period, party members also published various opinion pieces in national newspapers, where they mentioned Muslims in a negative context. For example, the party chair’s wife Helle-Moonika Helme stated the following: “They are Muslims, they carry another culture that is dangerous to us. They have already done their evil deeds.”

Far-right politicians also actively share hate speech and negativity about Islam online, especially on Facebook. For example, then just a candidate, and now a new member of the European Parliament, EKRE’s Jaak Madison shared his opinion that the Notre-Dame de Paris fire could have been an accident, but could also have been the work of Muslims.

**Figure 2**: EKRE’s Jaak Madison shared his opinion on Facebook that the Notre-Dame de Paris fire could have been an accident, but could also have been the work of Muslims.

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12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
been the work of Muslims. He also added that many Muslims were happy about the incident.\textsuperscript{17} (Fig. 2)

**Media**

In 2019, different media outlets published opinion pieces by members of the Conservative People’s Party of Estonia, using anti-immigration rhetoric and Islamophobic statements. For example, in one opinion piece Jaak Madison promised to focus on “curbing the spread of terrorism and Islam”.\textsuperscript{18} In another article, Martin Helme spoke out against multiculturalism, using France and Sweden as threatening examples for the spread of Islam.\textsuperscript{19} However, most of the media coverage on Islam or Muslims focused on incidents from other countries, usually in a neutral way, but sometimes using extreme examples of crimes committed by Muslims in a sensationalist manner, for example, “DIE, DIE, DIE! Yelled a Refugee While Stabbing the Child of His Helper”.\textsuperscript{20}

**Justice System**

There have been no Islamophobic laws or regulations introduced in 2019. However, one problem that can be outlined is that the current Estonian legislation does not provide an effective possibility for prosecuting hate crime and hate speech against Muslims or other minority groups. Estonia has not transposed the Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law. Estonian Penal Code does not include hate crime as a specific type of crime, nor bias motive as an aggravating circumstance. The Penal Code does include a provision for “incitement to hatred”; however, since the provision requires the existence of “danger to the life, health or property of a person”, it is difficult to apply in real situations.

**Internet**

There are several websites that regularly spread Islamophobic stereotypes, but there are no websites specifically dedicated to covering topics related to Islam. For example, there is the blog Rahvuslane (The Nationalist)\textsuperscript{21} that posts stories like “There’s No Place for Islamic Propaganda in Estonian Schools, Islam Is Not

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.


Part of Europe!" Also, there is the EKRE news portal *Uued uudised* (The New News), which has 17,000 followers on its Facebook page. Some of the 2019 headlines include “Martti Kalda, Expert on the Orient: ‘The Goal of Islam Is to Destroy Europe and the West’”; “Recommendations of Finland’s Minister of the Interior, Extremist Maria Ohisalo, Give Islamic Extremists a Chance to Infiltrate Law Enforcement”; and “Estonian Muslim: National Broadcasting Portrays It as an Idyllic Fairy Tale”. The list goes on, and all of them feature negative stereotypes.

In addition, *Objektiiv* (The Lens), a popular fundamentalist Christian website, publishes stories such as “Muslim of the Year Finalist Called for Jihad” and “Muslims Rejoice at the Fire of Notre-Dame on Social Media”. *Objektiiv* also has a significant following on Facebook; around 17,000 users read its posts.

### Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Islamophobic stereotypes are mainly promoted by the Conservative People’s Party of Estonia in the context of their anti-immigration platform. The most active members spreading hostile content against migrants and refugees, including Muslims, are the party leader and current Minister of the Interior Mart Helme, Minister of Finance Martin Helme, and MEP Jaak Madison. In addition, Varro Vooglaid, the founder of *Objektiiv*, regularly shares Islamophobic content in the context of immigration.

Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

There are no initiatives that specifically target combating anti-Muslim racism, but there are projects and campaigns targeting equal treatment of minority groups. For example, the Ministry of Social Affairs has launched a campaign entitled “Everyone Is Different, But Equally Human” encouraging good will towards all minorities. It aims to raise awareness of equal treatment and to highlight the contributions made to Estonian society by members of its minorities.32

The Estonian Refugee Council, the Johannes Mihkelson Centre, and the Tartu International House initiated the project ‘Let’s Meet’, during which they organised 45 different events all around Estonia bringing together beneficiaries of international protection, foreigners living in Estonia, and the local population. The project aimed to challenge the stereotypes surrounding ‘otherness’ and give everyone the possibility to discover new cultures and make personal connections.33

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The expressions of Islamophobia in Estonia are usually connected to fear of immigration. This means more awareness-raising activities among the general public could be beneficial. As the Estonian Muslim community is small and most people only hear about Islam in the media, where it is often discussed in a negative context, more attention could be paid to introducing the historical Muslim communities in Estonia.

In addition, to ensure effective prosecution of incidents of hate speech and hate crime against Muslims and other minority groups, the Estonian Penal Code should be reviewed and necessary amendments should be adopted to bring Estonian legislation in line with EU law, in particular the Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA.

Chronology

- **28.01.2019**: The EKRE published an election campaign video that showed people coming in boats and destroying the city, while the voiceover read, “Muslim immigrants are given housing at the expense of the state”.

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• **08.04.2019:** The EKRE published its programme for the European Parliament elections stating that “Europe’s rapidly growing Muslim population has put European identity and values at risk”.

• **22.05.2019:** A man from Pakistan was verbally and physically attacked in Tallinn. The police started an investigation under §262 of the Estonian Penal Code (Breach of Public Order).