

EUROPEAN ISLAMOPHOBIA REPORT 2019

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)



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

Nenehatun Caddesi No: 66 GOP Çankaya 06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE
Phone: +90 312.551 21 00 | Fax: +90 312.551 21 90
www.setav.org | info@setav.org | @setavakfi

SETA | İstanbul

Defterdar Mh. Savaklar Cd. Ayvansaray Kavşağı No: 41-43
Eyüpsultan İstanbul TÜRKİYE
Phone: +90 212 315 11 00 | Fax: +90 212 315 11 11

SETA | Washington D.C.

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 1106
Washington, D.C., 20036 USA
Phone: 202-223-9885 | Fax: 202-223-6099
www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org | @setadc

SETA | Berlin

Französische Straße 12, 10117 Berlin Germany
Phone: +49 30 20188466

SETA | Brussels

Avenue des Arts 27, 1000 Bruxelles, Belgique
Tel: +3226520486

ABOUT EDITORS

Enes Bayraklı

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

Farid Hafez

Farid Hafez, PhD (Political Science, University of Vienna), is a political scientist and non-resident senior researcher at Georgetown University's "The Bridge Initiative" at the School of Foreign Service. He defended his habilitation thesis on "Islam Politics in the Second Republic of Austria" at the University of Salzburg in 2019. In 2017, he was a Fulbright visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley and in 2014, he was a visiting scholar at Columbia University, New York. Since 2010, he has been the editor of the *Islamophobia Studies Yearbook*, and since 2015 the co-editor of the *European Islamophobia Report*. Hafez has received the Bruno Kreisky Award for the "Political Book of the Year" for his anthology *Islamophobia in Austria* (co-edited with John Bunzl). He has more than 100 publications in leading journals such as *Politics and Religion*, *Patterns of Prejudice*, and *German Politics and Society*. His latest publications are *Islamophobia in Muslim Majority Societies* (Routledge, co-edited with Enes Bayrakli, 2019) and *Feindbild Islam. Über die Salonfähigkeit von Rassismus* (Islamophobia. On the Acceptance of Racism. Bohlau, 2019). Email: farid.hafez@sbg.ac.at

For more information about the EIR:

www.islamophobiaeurope.com
islamophobia@setav.org

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
ITALY
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

ANTONIA ROBERTA SIINO

The Author

Antonia Roberta Siino has a PhD in Sociology and Social Research from the University of Bologna and was a visiting student at the Department of Sociology, University of Oxford. Siino has been working for a long time on the study of organized crime (specifically mafia-type organizations) and its interactions with civil society, and conducting empirical research based both on qualitative and quantitative methods. She has published articles, both in Italian and English, in academic journals such as the *Sociological Review* and *Sicurezza e Scienze Sociali Journal*. Email: antoniasiino8@gmail.com

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Executive Summary

The political instability that characterises the Italian scenario has as the direct consequence that political parties seem to be in a perpetual election campaign. All political parties are involved so that the migration issue has become an instrument to use (in different ways by right-wing or left-wing parties) to obtain additional consensus. Public actors do not seem to be aware of the social impact that their words or actions can have on the population expressing anti-Muslim messages. The new element that can be noticed is the trend to distinguish between Islam as a religion and Muslims as people. Attacks pretend to concern just Islam, defining it as extremist and a source of terrorists, and not to target Muslims who peacefully live in Italy and respect the local traditions. Considering the context, this seems to be a pretext which allows the perpetrators to avoid the accusation of being Islamophobic. These kind of attitudes have already expressed their concrete consequences: data shows an increase of verbal and physical assaults both in real life and online dimension. Tweets and messages posted on social networks show an augmentation of hate speech based on racial and religious discrimination. Even if the intervention of people defending Muslims from such attacks are numerous as well, the risk is that a climate of fear and tension grows among people. In 2019, the Casa Pound party was turned into a movement, exiting the election competition. This could be seen as a sign that right-wing extremist ideas gained less traction in Italy. Unfortunately, however, it can be explained by the fact that anti-migration and sovereign positions are now better represented by other political parties, like the *Lega Nord* and *Fratelli d'Italia* that continue to increase their electoral consensus.

Sintesi

L'instabilità politica che caratterizza lo scenario italiano ha come diretta conseguenza che i partiti politici sembrano essere in una continua campagna elettorale. Tutti i partiti politici risultano coinvolti al punto che il tema della migrazione sembra essere diventato uno strumento da utilizzare (in modo diverso da partiti di destra o sinistra) al fine di ottenere maggiore consenso. Gli attori pubblici non sembrano consapevoli dell'impatto sociale che le loro parole e le loro azioni possono avere sulla popolazione trasmettendo messaggi anti islamici. Il nuovo elemento che deve essere sottolineato è la tendenza a distinguere tra l'Islam come religione e il Musulmano come persona. Gli attacchi vengono presentati come diretti al solo Islam, definendolo come religione estremista e fonte di terroristi, e non ai Musulmani che vivono regolarmente in Italia rispettandone le tradizioni. Considerando il contesto, questo sembra essere più un pretesto grazie al quale evitare le accuse di Islamofobia. Questo tipo di comportamenti ha già manifestato le sue concrete conseguenze: i dati mostrano un aumento del numero di attacchi verbali e fisici, sia nella vita reale sia nella dimensione online. Tweet e messaggi postati sui social networks mostrano un aumento dei discorsi d'odio basati sulla discriminazione razziale o religiosa. Anche se si registra l'intervento di molti Italiani in difesa di Musulmani oggetto di questi attacchi, il rischio è che si diffonda un clima di paura e tensione. Nel 2019, il partito di estrema destra Casa Pound è stato trasformato in un Movimento, uscendo così dalla competizione elettorale. Questo potrebbe sembrare un segno che partiti di estrema destra inizino ad avere meno presa in Italia. Purtroppo, questo trova spiegazione nel fatto che posizioni anti-migranti e sovraniste sono oggi meglio rappresentate da altri partiti politici, come Lega Nord e Fratelli d'Italia, che vedono infatti aumentare il loro consenso elettorale.

Country Profile

EIR 2019

Country: Italy

Type of Regime: Democratic Republic

Form of Government: Parliamentary government

Ruling Parties: Five Star Movement, Democratic Party, Free and Equal, *Movimento Associativo Italiani all'Estero*, *Italia Viva* (2019/09/05 - ongoing)

Opposition Parties: Northern League, Forza Italia, Brothers of Italy, *Südtiroler Volkspartei* (2019/09/05 - actual)

Last Elections: 2018 Legislative election: Chamber of Deputies: Five Stars, 133 seats; Centre-Right, 151 seats (League North: 17.3% equal to 73 seats); Centre-Left, 88 seats; Left, 14 seats; Far Right, 0 seats; and Senate of the Republic: Five Stars, 68 seats; Centre-Right, 77 seats (League North: 17.6% equal to 37 seats); Centre-Left, 43 seats; Left, 4 seats; Far-Right, 0 seats.

Total Population: 60.3 million (in 2019)

Major Languages: Italian

Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: Regarding 2019, official data on Islamophobia is not available. The last available data was presented in the Hate Crime Reporting 2018 in which the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights reports 13 incidents against Muslims, including attacks against property (6), violent attacks against people (5), and threats (2).

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: Regarding 2019, official data on racism and discrimination is not yet publicly available. The last data presented by the OSCE ODIHR - including information from the Italian police database (SDI) and the Italian Observatory for Security against Acts of Discrimination (OSCAD) - refer to 2018. According to this data, police authorities recorded 1,111 hate crimes among which anti-Muslim crimes are not registered as a separate category. Local associations (such as Lunaria, Association 21 July, Arcigay) reported 301 incidents during 2018 (13 of which were committed on the ground of bias against Muslims).

Major Religions (% of Population): Christianity (80.8%), No religion (13.4%), Islam (4.9%), Judaism (1%)

Muslim Population (% of Population): 2,960,000 (4.9%) (Pew Research Center 2015)

Main Muslim Community Organizations: *L'unione Delle Comunità Islamiche D'Italia* (UCOII), *Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana* (CoReIs), CoReIs Italian Muslim Youth

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Lunaria, Amnesty International Italia, UCOII, CoReIs, *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia*, Amsi (*Associazione medici di origine straniera in Italia*)

Far-Right Parties: *Forza Nuova*

Far-Right Movements: Casa Pound

Far-Right Terrorist Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices:

- **Hijab Ban:** None (depends on local decision). In 1975, during the so-called Years of Lead, Law n.152 introduced in the Italian Criminal Code the ban to have access to public place with a covered face. Actually, the possibility to wear a hijab or a burka in public places depends on local government. After the sentence of the Court of Appeal of October 2019, this ban has been introduced in Lombardia, Veneto, and Friuli.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None (depends on local decision)
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None (depends on local decision, see above)
- **Prayer Ban:** None (depends on local decision)

Introduction

The main problem in researching the spread of anti-Muslim hate crime is the lack of official data released by governmental institutions¹ and the fact that the circumstances surrounding a number of such deeds very often remain obscure.

Thus, such an analysis has to integrate the available official data with the unofficial data by media and non-governmental organisations.

The data that will be presented underlines that there is a spreading feeling of fear towards migrants and Muslims in particular. In this context, politics play a great role. As Minister of Interior and responsible for migration policy, Matteo Salvini, had the opportunity to apply the concrete anti-migrant measures proposed by his party, *Lega Nord*. After the crisis of government in August 2019, the Italian government is made up of parties that share different political visions of migration.² The political instability seems to lead to migration being treated as a political instrument.

According to ISMU (Iniziativa e Studi sulla Multietnicità), on 1 January 2019, 53.6% of foreigners living in Italy with a legal residency permit (2,815,000) confess the Christian religion,³ followed by Muslims who represent 30.1% (1,580,000).⁴ Even if it is still the main religion practised, data shows a decrease concerning the presence of Christian migrants regularly living in Italy and an increase concerning the presence of Muslim migrants.⁵ Concerning the countries of origin, data shows that Muslim people living in Italy come from Morocco (440,000), Albania (226,000), Bangladesh (141,000), Pakistan (106,000), and Egypt (111,000).⁶

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

According to a social research on Islam in Italy conducted by Fabrizio Ciocca on a sample of 300 Muslims asked to complete a questionnaire through Facebook, 65% of the people interviewed declared to have suffered violence, prejudices, or discrimi-

1. The official data available concerning hate crimes - recorded by Italian police and released by ODIHR - refer to 2018.

2. *Lega Nord* represents the opposition party, together with *Fratelli d'Italia* and *Forza Italia*.

3. Data include Orthodox Christians (29.7%), Catholic Christians (18.6%), Evangelical Christians (3.5%) and Coptic Christians (0.3%).

4. "Comunicato stampa: Immigrati e religioni in Italia", ISMU, 23 July 2019, <https://www.ismu.org/comunicato-stampa-immigrati-e-religioni-in-italia/>, (Access date: 20 January 2020).

5. It can be explained referring to two different aspects: the acquisition of Italian citizenship by 112,523 foreigners and the different dynamics in the migration flux regarding Italy. ISMU, "Comunicato stampa: Immigrati e religioni in Italia".

6. "Comunicato stampa: Immigrati e religioni in Italia", ISMU.

nation because of their religion. The percentage arises to 70% among women.⁷ Some examples of attacks based on religion follow.

After his victory at the Sanremo Music Festival, Alessandro Mahmood was the target of verbal anti-Muslim attacks because of his foreign surname. His Italian nationality did not make a difference in him being considered a foreigner, guilty for having proposed “songs with burka that would endanger the Italian musical tradition.”⁸

On 21 March, in the northern city of Turin, a discussion about two Muslim girls’ fear of a dog on a public bus turned into a brawl. The two girls were verbally and physically attacked by a woman who claimed, “You are scared of a dog but you are not afraid to blow yourself up.”⁹

Musli Alievski, founder of “Stay Human” Onlus, was subjected to verbal attacks such as “Islamic extremist” during his electoral campaign in the 2019 administrative elections, in Pesaro.¹⁰

In Rome, a ticket inspector found a passenger on board a train without a valid ticket. When he understood that the passenger was Muslim, he started to insult him saying “[it’s] better to be a pig than an Arab.”¹¹

In Ferrara, two women accidentally bumped into each other. One of them addressed the other in a vulgar way referring to her Islamic veil.¹²

It should be noted that all these episodes took place in public spaces and that someone acted in defence of the victim(s) by publically denouncing the event.

Employment

The healthcare sector employs about 20,000 foreign workers, mainly from African and Arab countries as well as Eastern Europe.¹³ In the last three years, this sector has registered an increase of 35% in discriminatory episodes and racial assaults concern-

7. Beatrice Tauro, “L’Islam italiano. Un’indagine tra religione, identità e islamofobia” di Fabrizio Ciocca”, Arabpress, <http://arabpress.eu/lislam-italiano-unindagine-tra-religione-identita-e-islamofobia-di-fabrizio-ciocca/81298/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

8. “Canzoni col burka’, sovranisti contro Mahmood”, AdnKronos, 11 February 2019, https://www.adnkronos.com/fatti/cronaca/2019/02/11/canzoni-col-burka-sovrani-contro-mahmood_iOU1HbCijbNCrRwJwIrRrN.html?refresh_ce, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

9. Emanuela Carucci, “Torino, ragazze musulmane aggredite su un autobus”, il Giornale, 21 March 2019, <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/torino-ragazze-musulmane-aggredite-su-autobus-1666412.html>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

10. “Il razzismo quotidiano”, Cronache di ordinario razzismo, http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/il-razzismo-quotidiano/?fwp_data=2019-01-01%2C2019-12-31&fwp_cerca=musulmano, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

11. After an Italian woman denounced it on Twitter, the public local service Atac granted that measures would be taken against the employee. For more information, see: “Il razzismo quotidiano”, Cronache di ordinario razzismo.

12. “Il razzismo quotidiano”, Cronache di ordinario razzismo.

13. “Medici stranieri: è fuga dall’Italia. Ecco i dati Amsi”, 26 November 2019, Quotidianosanità.it, https://www.quotidianosanita.it/lavoro-e-professioni/articolo.php?articolo_id=79151, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

ing foreign practitioners, both medical doctors and healthcare staff.¹⁴ The discrimination concerns the lower-ranking healthcare practitioners of foreign origin rather than their Italian colleagues. Discrimination is also due to the fear of patients being seen by a health professional of foreign origin. In the northern region of Veneto, some medics working in private medical practices have received complaints by patients because of their veil and being Muslim, and as a result they have been fired.¹⁵ According to the Amsi (*Associazione medici di origine straniera in Italia*), similar episodes have been registered in other regions like Trentino-Alto Adige, Lombardy, and Campania.¹⁶ In the public healthcare sector, Muslim doctors have to face other kind of difficulties shared with practitioners of foreign origin in general. Indeed, in order to enter a public competition a foreign doctor has to hold Italian citizenship and hold a certificate of knowledge of Italian language at least of level C1.¹⁷

A research conducted in 2019 reports the experience of Mohamed who was offered a job as long as he accepted that his name tag write “Max.”¹⁸ The same research reports the experience of a young Muslim student wearing the veil:

“During job interviews it happens that I capture the attention with my linguistic knowledge and my education. They offer me the job just as long as I keep the veil off. But I cannot and I do not want it. I continue to look for a job but it is not easy.”¹⁹

Young people also seem to face problems being accepted for a traineeship. An employee of the local Traineeship Office says:

“... just 6% of trainees have foreign origin [...]. When they call and say their name is ‘Mohammed, etc.’, they have already lost that job.”²⁰

14. In 2019, Amsi (*Associazione medici di origine straniera in Italia*, Italian foreign medical association) has received more than 300 denouncements and has stated that the 80% of assaults against foreign practitioners are unreported (the percentage is 60% in the case of assaults against Italian practitioners). For more information, see: Foad Aodi, “Quel razzismo strisciante verso i medici stranieri”, *Amsimed.org*, 9 January 2020, <http://www.amsimed.org/quel-razzismo-strisciante-verso-i-medici-stranieri/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

15. Viviana Franzellitti, “Veneto, Aodi (Amsi): ‘Dottorresse rifiutate da pazienti e direttori sanitari perché indossano il velo islamico’”, *Sanita Informazione*, 8 January 2020, <https://www.sanitainformazione.it/lavoro/veneto-dottorresse-velo-rifiutate/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

16. Luigi Esposito, “Discriminazione dottorresse con il velo. Foad Aodi: ‘Una patologia mediatica’”, *RCS Salute*, 9 January 2020, <https://rcssalute.it/articolo/2304/discriminazione-dottorresse-con-il-velo-foad-aodi-una-patologia-mediatica>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

17. Diana Romersi, “Scuole di Specializzazione, il nuovo bando discriminati i medici stranieri. Scoppia la polemica”, *Sanita Informazione*, 3 May 2019, <https://www.sanitainformazione.it/formazione/scuole-di-specializzazione-il-nuovo-bando-discriminati-i-medici-stranieri-scoppia-la-polemica/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

18. Johanna Mitterhofer and Martha Jiménez-Rosano, “Relazione finale: Dalla scuola al mondo del lavoro: percorsi di transizione di giovani con background migratorio”, *Eurac Research*, May 2019, <http://www.eurac.edu/en/research/autonomies/minrig/publications/Documents/Report-Minderheiten-IT-def.pdf>, p. 21, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

19. Mitterhofer and Jiménez-Rosano, “Relazione finale: Dalla scuola al mondo del lavoro: percorsi di transizione di giovani con background migratorio”, p. 21.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Discrimination episodes on the job market are reduced if a relationship already exists between the aspiring employee and the employer.²¹ Thus, the increase of social capital can redefine the discrimination dynamics within a community.

Education

Behind the constitutional frame of the education system, schools reflect society and its internal dynamics. The fact that schools and universities have been recognised as the main places in which discrimination occur²² forces all of us to be very careful in understanding what is happening in our society.

All other things being equal, students of foreign origin choose training journeys focused on employability more often than others. This seems to be due to an institutional mechanism of subconscious discrimination triggered by teachers themselves. A teacher stated:

“There is a problem in the orientation of vocational school students. [...] Suggesting to a large part of them [students of foreign origin] to enrol in a professional establishment, their competences and capabilities are not recognised.”²³

This mechanism can influence the career perspectives of these young people, and increase their feeling of being foreign.

Being small communities, problems of discrimination can manifest themselves not just in the content of curricula but also in daily practices. The schools’ meals can be a trigger for debate, as happened in Mestre where a group of families asked for a halal menu for their children.²⁴

Politics

Racist and xenophobic tones, registered in politics by the *EIR 2018* report,²⁵ continue to be present in 2019. One of the main issues can be linked to the instability of the Italian political scenario that seems to put Italy in a perpetual electoral campaign. The government formed after the 2018 election - made up of *Lega Nord* and *Movimento 5 Stelle* - has always shown its weakness so that all political actors seek acceptance, looking forward to the next election. During this political experience, the *Lega Nord* proposed a decree - that has not been implemented - aiming to prohibit

21. Ibid., p. 23.

22. Maria Scopece, “I ragazzi di fede musulmana più integrati in Italia hanno la doppia cittadinanza. Parla Ciocca”, *Formiche Analisi, commenti e scenari*, 19 April 2019, <https://formiche.net/2019/04/ragazzi-fede-musulmana-piu-integrati-italia-la-doppia-cittadinanza/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

23. “Relazione finale: Dalla scuola al mondo del lavoro: percorsi di transizione di giovani con background migratorio”, p. 22.

24. Sergio Rame, “Venezia, gli islamici a scuola: ‘Date carne halal ai nostri figli’”, *ilGiornale.it*, 29 September 2019, <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/venezia-islamici-scuola-date-carne-halal-ai-nostri-figli-1760143.html>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

25. *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, ed. Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez, (SETA, Istanbul: 2019), http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/EIR_2018.pdf, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

kosher and halal slaughter, motivated by the desire to defend animal as sentient beings.²⁶ Moreover, in October 2018, it proposed restrictive rules for foreign financing for the construction of new mosques in Italy, pretending to be blocking financing from extremists countries. Actually, policies implemented while the *Lega* has been in power were not specifically against Muslims but against migrants in general such as the Law Decree n. 113 approved on 4 October 2018 which intended to limit the migratory flow.

After the political crisis in August 2019, the new government is now made up of *Movimento 5 Stelle*, the *Partito Democratico*, and *Italia Viva* while right-wing parties represent the opposition. In this context: (1) the migration issue has been used by all political parties that report numbers and figures to support their own theses, and (2) the internet and social networks represent the main instruments in forming consensus and influencing public opinion. During the European election campaign of 2019, Amnesty International conducted a monitoring on hate speech online, analysing the messages published on Facebook pages and Twitter accounts by Italian candidates.²⁷ Among the most active candidates, migration is one of the main issues considered by Matteo Salvini (*Lega Nord*), Giorgia Meloni (*Fratelli d'Italia*), and Nicola Fratoianni (*Sinistra Italiana*).²⁸ An interesting element to consider concerns how much politicians spend to promote their messages. According to the Amnesty International report, the official Facebook page of Matteo Salvini - to whom belongs the 51.5% of interactions -²⁹ invested 128,782 euros for a total of 58 posts between April and June 2019. Most of his problematic posts concern migrants. In this perpetual election campaign, right-wing parties continue to talk about an “Islamic invasion” and the incompatibility between Islam and Western societies. Here are two social media posts published by Giorgia Meloni and Matteo Salvini:

“If Muslims think of bringing holy war into our house, it is time to take even drastic measures: all that remains is to block all forms of Islamic immigration until they clear up their ideas. We intend to defend our classical and Christian roots from the process of Islamisation of Europe, do-gooders and sultans of half the world need to make a reason.”

26. Claudio Cartaldo, “Vietata la macellazione islamica. Arriva la nuova legge della Lega”, *ilGiornale.it*, 2 October 2018, <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/vitetata-macellazione-islamica-arriva-nuova-legge-lega-1583141.html>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

27. “Europee 2019: ha già vinto l'odio”, Amnesty International Italia, 24 May 2019, <https://www.amnesty.it/europee-2019-ha-gia-vinto-lodio/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

28. Meloni and Salvini are among the five politicians who targeted Muslim and refugees with problematic social media posts - as defined by the research team - while no such messages were found to have posted by Fratoianni.

29. “Report Il barometro dell'odio – elezioni europee 2019”, Amnesty International Italia, 26 May 2019, p. 15, <https://d21zrvtkxtd6ae.cloudfront.net/public/uploads/2019/05/29202706/Amnesty-barometro-odio-2019.pdf>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).



Figure 1: Post published by Giorgia Meloni, leader of *Fratelli d'Italia*, on her Facebook page.³⁰



Figure 2: Post published by Matteo Salvini, leader of *Lega Nord*, on his Facebook page commenting on a television report of the TG2 National broadcast: *We do not want to end up like Sweden, this is not integration! NO to the EURABIA. Oriana, look at us from heaven. SWEDEN ATTACKED. STOP EURABIA!*³¹

Thinking about the consequences of negative politic comments, it is interesting to notice that if hate speech is not expressed in the politicians' posts, it is present among their followers' comments.³² It seems that a single negative comment is able to multiply its effect generating hate speech indirectly.

Notwithstanding that migration is a complex phenomenon that Italy cannot solve on its own,³³ dealing too generally with migrants can be understood by two kinds of explanations. First, looking for someone to blame for all the suffered evil is a human mechanism and migrants can represent the scapegoat for politicians who

30. Giorgia Meloni, Facebook, 23 April 2019, https://www.facebook.com/giorgiameloni.paginaufficiale/posts/10157082154732645?comment_id=10157082182302645&reply_comment_id=691268687955011, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

31. Matteo Salvini, Twitter, 25 May 2019, [https://twitter.com/search?f=live&q=eurabia%20\(from%3Amatteosalvinimi\)&src=typed_query](https://twitter.com/search?f=live&q=eurabia%20(from%3Amatteosalvinimi)&src=typed_query), (Access date: 7 February 2020).

32. "Report Il barometro dell'odio – elezioni europee 2019", Amnesty International Italia, p. 37.

33. Niccolò Magnani, "Migranti, Lega Musulmana: 'Ue aiuti l'Italia' Appello al Meeting 'Lora del dialogo'", Il Sussidiario.net, 21 August 2019, <https://www.ilsussidiario.net/news/migranti-lega-musulmana-ue-aiuti-litalia-appello-al-meeting-lora-del-dialogo/1917692/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

want to hide their own political responsibilities. Second, a political party can use popular issues like migration to deflect attention from the party's internal turmoil.

Political campaigns have also seen the participation of the extreme right-wing party of Casa Pound. However, 2019 is the year in which its leader decided to turn the party into a movement.³⁴ This can be explained by the fact that anti-Muslim argumentation and nationalist position are now successfully claimed by the *Lega Nord* and *Fratelli d'Italia*.

Media

The issue of migration is at the centre of the political debate and consequently it is one of the main issues considered by media and journalists.



Figure 3: “Better Chinese than Islamic”. Front page of the newspaper *Libero*.³⁵

Presenting his last book *Stop Islam*, Magdi Cristiano Allam claims that “in Italy, in Europe (...), with full respect for Muslim people, we have the right and the duty to ban Islam as a religion because of its incompatibility with our laws, rules, and values.”³⁶ Maurizio Belpietro, writing about the donation of 10,000 euros to Carola Rackete by the Turkish organization Milli Görüs for her activities, wrote about incitement to conquer.³⁷ Vittorio Feltri wrote about the new trade agreement between Italy and China

34. “Casapound, Iannone: ‘Finita esperienza di partito, torniamo movimento’”, *La Repubblica*, 27 June 2019, https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2019/06/27/news/casapound_torna_movimento_iannone-229739363/, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

35. *Libero*, Facebook, 31 March 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/liberonews/photos/buongiorno-ancora-ecco-la-prima-pagina-di-libero-in-edicola-oggi-qui-il-link-per/2948266671880803/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

36. For more information, see: Magdi Cristiano Allam, Facebook, 16 October 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/MagdiCristianoAllam/videos/1258958127610100/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

37. Ferdinando Primo, “I titoli dei giornali di venerdì 5 luglio 2019”, *La Verità*, 5 July 2019, <https://www.alessioporcuc.it/articoli/i-titoli-dei-giornali-di-venerdi-5-luglio-2019/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

claiming “Better Chinese than Islamic”³⁸ (Fig. 3) and defined the proposal for removing the crucifixes from public schools as a “humiliating submission to Islam”.³⁹

Even if they cannot be considered as central figures of an Islamophobic network, there is an element that these figures seem to share. They claim the possibility to distinguish between Islam as a religion - considered as incompatible with Western society and a source of terrorists - and Muslims as people. They claim that all their insults and verbal attacks are against the religion and extremists and that the Muslims living peacefully in Italy (respecting its culture) should be accepted.

Justice System

The Italian justice system tries to balance two different kind of constitutional principles: public safety and everyone’s right to express their religious confession. The difficulty in balancing these two aspects resurfaces periodically. In 2019, the Court of Appeal of Milan authorised health facilities to use the following sign to prohibit access to whoever wears a burqa.⁴⁰ (Fig. 4)



Figure 4: Sign to prohibit the entrance of masked people in public health facilities.⁴¹

38. Enzo Boldi, “Libero apre le porte alla via della Seta: ‘Meglio i cinesi degli islamici’”, *Giornalettismo.com*, 13 March 2019, <https://www.giornalettismo.com/via-della-seta-libero-islam/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

39. Maria Pezzi, “Vittorio Feltri contro Fioramonti e il vescovo di Bologna: ‘Umiliante sottomissione all’islam’”, *liberoquotidiano.it*, 6 October 2019, <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/politica/13510858/vittorio-feltri-fioramonti-vescovo-bologna-umiliante-sottomissione-all-islam-.html>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

40. “Sentenza”, *Repubblica Italiana in Nome del Popolo Italiano Corte D’appello di Milano*, No: 4330, 28 October 2019, http://images.go.wolterskluwer.com/Web/WoltersKluwer/%7B0ca6102f-8705-4a0f-8766-a90b65820fad%7D_corte-appello-milano-sentenza-28-ottobre-2019.pdf, (Access date: 7 February 2020). The Court underlined that this sentence is not based on a discriminatory perspective but on the necessity to maintain public safety in so far as the prohibition concerns people wearing helmets or ski masks as well (according to the Law 152/75). The matter started in 2015 when the Regional Council of Lombardy adopted a provision in order to strengthen the security measures in public offices, including public hospitals.

41. “Milano, per il Tar legittimo il divieto per il burqa in ospedale”, *La Repubblica*, 20 April 2017, https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/04/20/news/legittimo_il_divieto_per_il_burqa_in_ospedale-163491435/, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

The associations that opposed the use of this kind of prohibition signs argued that it does not require the identification of the person wearing the burqa but it simply prohibits the person from accessing the health facility; in fact, there is no kind of system in place to check identities.⁴² After the court sentence, the sign has been adopted by other regions such as Friuli and Veneto not only in public health facilities but in public offices as well.⁴³

Just a few months later, the Constitutional Court released a sentence that rejected another provision adopted by the region of Lombardy aimed at making the construction of new mosques difficult. In this case, the Court referred explicitly to the religious freedom principle established by the Italian Constitution and the right to have adequate space to practice it.⁴⁴

Internet

Social networks, websites, and blogs play an important role in the spread of ideas, being both accountable and unaccountable sources of news.

A recent study conducted by the Oxford Internet Institute⁴⁵ underlined that news reposted by unaccountable websites is more viral than news diffused by online newspapers.⁴⁶ Moreover, the most shared news published online - coming from unaccountable sources - can be targeted as anti-migrant and anti-Islam.⁴⁷

One of the last posts published on Facebook by the Anti-Islamisation Party in 2019 was a comment on an anti-Semitic attack in New York.⁴⁸ It read as follows: "They will come house-to-house to stalk us because we are not Islamic. Let's open our eyes." (Fig. 5)

42. Laura Biarella, "Ospedale, legittimo divieto di ingresso con il burqa", Altalex.com, 6 December 2019, <https://www.altalex.com/documents/news/2019/12/06/ospedale-legittimo-divieto-ingresso-con-burqa#carattere>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

43. In March 2019, the *Lega* party proposed a motion to the Council of Friuli region that adopted it with a majority including both right and left political parties; for more information, see: Elisabetta Batic, "Friuli: stop a burqa, niqab e caschi negli uffici pubblici e ospedali", *ilmessaggero.it*, 27 March 2019, https://www.ilmessaggero.it/italia/stop_burqa_caschi_uffici_friuli-4389470.html, (Access date: 7 February 2020). The same year, in Padua, the obstetrician clinic of the public hospital posted the prohibition sign too; for more information, see: "Vietato l'ingresso col volto coperto", *Corriere di Verona*, 10 March 2019, <https://www.pressreader.com/italy/corriere-di-verona/20190310/281792810341441>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

44. "Islam. Stop della Consulta alla legge lombarda anti-moschee, furia della Lega", *Dire Agenzia di Stampa Nazionale*, 5 December 2019, <https://www.dire.it/05-12-2019/399443-islam-stop-della-consulta-alla-legge-lombarda-anti-moschee-furia-della-lega/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

45. Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard, *The Global Disinformation Order. 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation*, (University of Oxford, United Kingdom: 2019), <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2019/09/CyberTroop-Report19.pdf>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

46. Rosita Rijitano, "Islam e migranti. Gli euroscettici al voto a colpi di fake news", *ilMattino.it*, 25 May 2019, https://www.ilmattino.it/primopiano/politica/islam_migranti_euroscettici_voto_fake_news-4514094.html, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

47. Rosita Rijitano, "Islam e migranti euroscettici al voto a colpi di fake news".

48. PAI - Partito Anti Islamizzazione, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/PartitoAntiislamizzazione/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).



Figure 5: Post published by the Anti-Islamisation Party commenting on an anti-Semitic attack carried out in New York.⁴⁹

Concerning Twitter, the 4th edition of the Map of Intolerance project released by the Italian Vox-Observatory has analysed tweets published between March and May 2019. Compared to 2018, hate speech against migrants in general registered an increase of 15.1% reaching a total of 32% of negative tweets. (Fig. 6)

	Tweet totali	Tweet negativi rilevati	Tweet negativi geolocalizzati
Migranti	74.451	49.695 (32%)	22.043
Donne	55.347	39.876 (27%)	17.242
Islamici	30.387	22.537 (15%)	8.673
Disabili	23.499	16.676 (11%)	3.430
Ebrei	19.952	15.196 (10%)	6.943
Omosessuali	11.741	7.808 (5%)	3.312
TOTALI	215.377	151.783 (70%)	61.643

Figure 6: Data showing the number of hate speech tweets published categorized according to content (in the coloured rows, in order: migrants, women, Islamic, disables, Jewish, homosexual) and absolute value and percentage (in the columns, in order: the total number of tweets, negative and geotagged ones).⁵⁰

49. PAI - Partito Anti Islamizzazione, Facebook, 29 December 2019, https://www.facebook.com/PartitoAntiislamizzazione/posts/1745336668935095?__xts__%5B0%5D=68.ARAPkVPnbGJYtEcDfu1k08NO6wd3yCuUEx5QBi20oU2B-nI7IA9jtFoAzMmaT3TX9BjJqk6P0uDII-XfClo1jM6JkHqOWAZuOGYyDaNI_jWcHH-NUJcIks6icdfZCJ-OueJz4luSgMRg_vL69nLZgOwwOp2MwUTX85-PAYw9PWwPB3nw7nB_yDW7N5Njp-2JxxtwL1poHhaz-Ih6o58UQmc1GIFGKN6jJo_rgZj3wsMWQEYukzQfywNsF8kxIk8UJap_KWivE4MKIQeuR-9GLx1s2WaIMCj2HhMqOA_Lqef5J5QqyPoPvc_LKV8GtXDJ0UUPuxlQbHAcKezUVRhaJm-1b6gtuw&__tn__=-R, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

50. “La Mappa Dell’ Intolleranza”, Vox Diritti, p. 6, http://www.voxdiritti.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/190610_VOX-Comunicato-mappa-2019_-completo-compresso.pdf, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

Considering just tweets targeting Muslims, the increase of the registered negative tweets is of 6.9%.⁵¹

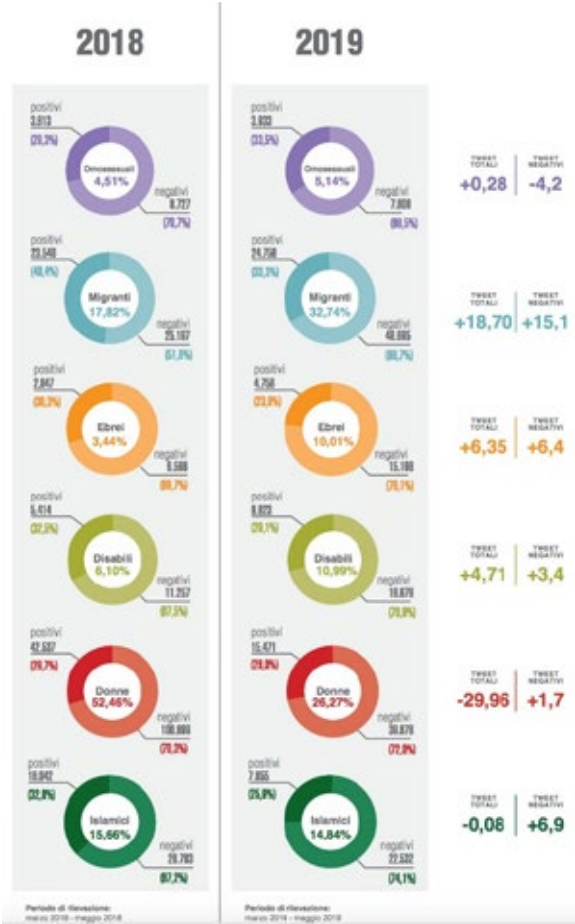


Figure 7: The table shows the comparison between tweets published in 2018 and 2019, distinguishing between positive and negative tweets according the different issue that are (top - down): homosexual, migrants, Jewish, disables, women, and Islamic.⁵²

In this dangerous game, the use of fake Facebook accounts or paid advertisements is just two possible ways to pilot the diffusion of a message.⁵³ In this sense, social networks like Facebook and Twitter should adopt effective measures against such mechanisms.⁵⁴

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid. p. 9.

53. Thanks to the engagement of the no-profit movement Avaaz, 77 European Facebook pages have been blocked. “Islam e Migranti, gli Euroscettici Verso il Voto a Colpi di Fake News”, Il Mattino.it, 25 May 2019, https://www.ilmattino.it/primopiano/politica/islam_migranti_euroscettici_voto_fake_news-4514094.html, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

54. After an investigation among its members, Twitter stated that a system will be put in place so that tweets expressing hate against any kind of religious groups will be erased. For more information, see: “Twitter cancella i post di odio contro le religioni”, La Repubblica, 9 July 2019, https://www.repubblica.it/tecnologia/social-network/2019/07/09/news/twitter_cancella_l_odio_contro_le_religioni-230805295/?ref=drac-2, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

In Italy, there is not a defined Islamophobic network but there are different actors who play a fundamental role in spreading Islamophobic messages. Among them, right-wing publications like *Libero* and *Il Giornale*, both on paper and online with Facebook pages and Twitter accounts stand out. Their main journalists and their directors express negative perspectives on migrants in general and Islam in particular. Linked to them, there are political parties and movement like Casa Pound, *Lega Nord*, *Fratelli d'Italia*, and *Forza Nuova*. In the last years, Islamophobic ideas have been spread in a mystifying way and as a result even those who seem to be the worst enemies of Muslim people are able to reject this accusation.

Other actors are active in trying to nurture a positive and amiable climate. Among them Pope Francis, who proposes an open and inclusive perspective, local associations, and civil movements are engaged in diffusing anti-discriminating points of views and action.

Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

A variety of initiatives have been taken by civil society and institutions against Islamophobia.

At the beginning of 2019, the Ca' Foscari University of Venezia completed the three-year SORAPS project entitled "Study of Religions against Prejudices" addressed to school teachers.⁵⁵ In the guidelines released on the website, the team suggest to teachers to "be equally careful not to adopt Islamist interpretations of Islam and not to present these minority views as representative of Islam and Muslims in general".⁵⁶ In November, the Sapienza University of Rome organised in collaboration with the NGO "Un ponte per..." a workshop on Islamophobia and the available strategies to combat this phenomenon.⁵⁷

Taking a step towards a better integration with the Muslim community, the Archbishop of Bologna proposed to modify the filling of one of the most famous local dishes by substituting pork with chicken.⁵⁸

55. An international team of scholars and experts prepared and offered high school teachers of different European countries new instruments (teaching materials and free online lessons) aimed to help them talk about religion in their classrooms. For more information, see: "The Project", Study of Religions Against Prejudices and Stereotypes, <https://soraps.unive.it/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

56. "Guidelines on Prejudices and Stereotypes in Religions", SORAPS, p. 63, https://soraps.unive.it/files/2019/04/PROFREAD-IO1-Stereotypes-and-prejudices-Guidelines_V4-05_01_19-2.pdf, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

57. For more information, see: "Ciclo Di Workshop-Tirocinio Sull'islamofobia E Sulle Possibili Strategie Di Contrasto Al Fenomeno", Sapienza Università di Roma, 22 November 2019, <https://saras.uniroma1.it/archivionotizie/ciclo-di-workshop-tirocinio-sull-islamofobia-e-sulle-possibili-strategie-di>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

58. "Bologna, tortellini al pollo per favorire l'integrazione coi musulmani: la politica italiana si divide", Leggo.it, 2 October 2019, https://www.leggo.it/italia/cronache/tortellini_pollo_musulmani_bologna_ultime_notizie_oggi-4769715.html, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

The campaign *#Ispeakhuman* organised by Vox - Osservatorio Italiano sui diritti (Italian observatory on rights) was based on the idea that to combat hate speech the use of a different kind of language is necessary.⁵⁹ (Fig. 8)



Figure 8: Campaign *#Ispeakhuman* by Vox - Osservatorio Italiano.⁶⁰

The project *Task Force Osservatori* adopted by Amnesty International Italy instituted a work group focused on the observation, monitoring, and documentation of discriminatory acts concerning Islamophobia, gender, and migration issues.⁶¹

In the market job, the multinational company Ikea Italia has not only authorised employees to come to work with the veil but has produced a work veil with the colors and the logo of the company.

Among the institutional initiatives, attention should be drawn to the conference “School & Religions. Good Practices in the Educational Offer of the Italian Public School”, organised on 26 January at the Palazzo Montecitorio, the seat of the Italian Chamber of Deputies.⁶² Finally, on 31 October 2019, the Senate of the Republic approved the institution of a commission to combat phenomena of intolerance, racism, anti-Semitism, and incitement to hate and violence.⁶³

59. Alice Scaglioni, “Rispetto e tolleranza contro l’odio online: al via la campagna *#Ispeakhuman*”, *Primaonline.it*, 13 May 2019, <https://www.primaonline.it/2019/05/13/289192/rispetto-e-tolleranza-contro-lodio-online-al-via-la-campagna-ispeakhuman/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020). The campaign was organised in collaboration with Bottoni High School and the Università Cattolica of Milan.

60. Rispetto e tolleranza contro l’odio online: al via la campagna *#Ispeakhuman*, *Prima Comunicazione*, 13 May 2019, <https://www.primaonline.it/2019/05/13/289192/rispetto-e-tolleranza-contro-lodio-online-al-via-la-campagna-ispeakhuman/>.

61. For more information, see: “Questa pagina non esiste più o è stata spostata”, Amnesty International Italy, <https://www.amnesty.it/entra-in-azione/task-force-attivismo/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

62. For more information, see: “Intercultural Education Through Religious Studies”, <https://iers.unive.it/news/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020).

63. “Istituita la Commissione per il contrasto dei fenomeni di intolleranza, razzismo, antisemitismo e istigazione all’odio e alla violenza proposta dalla senatrice a vita Liliana Segre”, Osservatorio Antisemitismo, <https://www.osservatorioantisemitismo.it/articoli/istituita-la-commissione-per-il-contrasto-dei-fenomeni-di-intolleranza-razzismo-antisemitismo-e-istigazione-allodio-e-alla-violenza-proposta-dalla-senatrice-a-vita-liliana-segre/>, (Access date: 7 February 2020). The project, proposed by Senator for life Liliana Segre, has been approved with 151 votes in favour and the abstention of right-wing parties like *Lega Nord*, *Fratelli d’Italia*, and *Forza Italia*.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Even if discriminating dynamics have determined the opposition between Northern and Southern Italy since its unification, Italy does not have a known history of systemic racism. However, in the last years, the spread of intolerance and discrimination based on racial or religious factors has been more concrete.

Political actors started to use certain issues in an instrumental way. In this sense, migrants, for which being Muslim is an aggravating circumstance, represent the perfect scapegoat to pin responsibility of all the evil suffered by society from unemployment to the assumed increase of criminality.

The analysis conducted shows an interesting practice. Politicians and journalists base their reflections (or verbal attacks) on the distinction between Islam as a religion and Muslims as a people. They pretend to attack just “radical Islam” and claim to want to defend Muslims who live peacefully in the country respecting Italian traditions. In this way, they protect themselves from the accusation of being Islamophobic. Even assuming that this distinction can be made theoretically, how would it be possible to distinguish an honest Muslim from an extremist just by looking at him/her walking in the street? Public actors should pay more attention to the social impact in the long term. The words and the way in which these actors refer to Muslims can result in a diffusion of the feeling among the public of being authorised to do the same or worse. This kind of attitudes can trigger dynamics difficult to control.

To conclude, the following policies should be supported:

- To promote an effective mechanism to collect - and make public in a short time - official data concerning Islamophobic attacks, assuming that a complete knowledge of a phenomenon is the first step to combating it.
- To promote awareness among public actors of the potential impact of their words on civil society, and not to promote models that legitimise hate speech.
- To improve knowledge at school without stereotypes and prejudices, recognising this as a key role in combating any kind of discrimination. Assuming that it is easier to not be afraid of something you know, school projects aiming at the comprehension of cultural systems other than their own should be promoted.
- To promote a multidisciplinary approach with the collaboration of different actors - such as universities, schools, ministries, police forces, research institutes, institutions, and NGOs - that can contribute to a different way of offering alternative perspectives.
- To promote a real sharing of information and data overcoming the actual fragmentation due to the existence of different observatories on Islamophobia and hate speech in Italy.

- To promote correct attitudes in the job market and the respect of workers' rights, considering this sector as one of the most important in order to accomplish a real integration of people of foreign origin.
- To promote the production of social capital considering how a network of relationships can help both migrants overcome their feeling of being foreigners, and local people understand how it is possible to create bridges with people belonging to different cultures.

Chronology

- **11.02.2019:** Sanremo (Imperia): After his victory at the Sanremo Music Festival, Alessandro Mahmood is the target of verbal anti-Muslim attacks accompanied by comments on his sexual orientation – solely because of his foreign surname.
- **01.03.2019:** Turin: At the conference Torino's business. Andata e ritorno per l'Europa", the *Lega Nord* deputy Danilo Oscar Lancini talks about "atrocities migrants mainly coming from Islamic countries have carried out in Western countries".
- **21.03.2019:** Turin: A mere discussion due to two Muslim girls' fear of a dog on a public bus becomes a brawl.
- **28.03.2019:** Rome: Two women from Morocco who have lived in Italy for 30 years are offered a council house because of mobility disability. When they try to enter the house for the first time, the other residents stop them because they are foreign and Muslim.
- **23.05.2019:** Pesaro: Musli Alievski, founder of "Stay Human" Onlus, decides to run in the 2019 administrative elections and is subjected to verbal attacks such as "Islamic extremist".
- **05.06.2019:** Rome: A ticket inspector discovers a passenger on the train without a valid ticket. When he understands that he is Muslim, the ticket inspector starts to insult him saying "[it's] better to be a pig than an Arab".
- **01.07.2019:** Ferrara: Two women accidentally bump into each other. One of them addresses to the other in a vulgar way referring to her Islamic veil.
- **01.07.2019:** Genova: Maurizio Gregorini, service manager at Genova municipality, publishes a tweet in which he writes, "They want that our sons are homosexual, they want that our countries are Islamised and Africanised".
- **11.07.2019:** Alessandria: A local committee organises a protest demonstration against the project of constructing a new Islamic centre.
- **02.10.2019:** Bologna: Archbishop Matteo Maria Zuppi proposes to modify the filling of one of the most famous local dishes by substituting pork with chicken as a step towards a better integration with the Muslim community.

- **02.10.2019:** Milan: The journalist Vittorio Feltri defines the proposal for removing the crucifixes from public schools as a “humiliating submission to Islam”.
- **31.10.2019:** Rome: The Senate of the Republic approves the establishment of a commission to combat phenomena of intolerance, racism, anti-Semitism, and incitement to hate and violence.

