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

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

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

About SETA
Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) is a non-profit research institute based in Turkey dedicated to innovative studies on national, regional and international issues. SETA is the leading think tank in Turkey and has offices in Ankara, Istanbul, Washington D.C., Berlin and Brussels. The objective of SETA is to produce up-to-date and accurate knowledge and analyses in the fields of politics, economy, and society, and inform policy-makers and the public on changing political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. Through research reports, publications, brainstorming sessions, conferences and policy recommendations, SETA seeks to guide leaders in government, civil society, and business, and contributes to informed decision making mechanisms.
EUROPEAN ISLAMOPHOBIA REPORT 2019

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)
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 Bayraklı, 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
KOSOVO
NATIONAL REPORT 2019

ADEM FERIZAJ
The Author

Adem Ferizaj is an independent scholar whose work focuses on the Balkans, Orientalism, and migration. He is the author of the 2018 European Islamophobia Report on Kosovo and the 2019 academic article “Othering Albanian Muslim Masculinities: A Case Study of Albanian Football Players”, published in the journal Occhiali – Rivista sul mediterraneo islamico. He completed his trilingual (German, French, and English) BA in political science and sociology and an MA in international relations at Sciences Po Paris, and publishes in Albanian, German, French, and English. Email: adem.ferizaj@sciencespo.fr

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Executive Summary

Islamophobia in Kosovo, a Muslim-majority country, could be considered paradoxical. On the one hand, Kosovo-Albanian political elites tend to present themselves as ‘good European Muslims’ (as opposed to ‘bad non-European Muslims’) towards their European counterparts. On the other, Islamophobia is a discriminatory praxis threatening the very existence of Kosovo as a state on a global political level.

In this year, the return of 110 Kosovo citizens from Syria was one of the main political topics. Whereas it should be highlighted that condemning Kosovars’ DAESH participation is necessary, the highest political circles of the country focused on considering these nationals as a potential threat to Kosovo’s Euro-Atlantic ambitions instead of seeing them as a problem of their own society. Hence, it could be argued that the country’s political elites were more interested in substantiating their image as ‘good European Muslims’ than dealing with the problem itself. Media coverage of this topic not only reinforced the binary between ‘peaceful’ pre-war Islam and ‘radical’ post-war Islam, but also conflated gender-based violence, extremism, and terrorism with Islam. Moreover, in 2019, a historical mosque (xhamia e Namazgja-but) was vandalised in Prizren, the country’s second largest city.

In 2019, the Austrian novelist Peter Handke, who has denied the Serbian genocide against Albanians in Kosovo, won the Nobel Prize in Literature provoking indignation and criticism in Kosovo. Awarding the world’s most important literary prize to such a writer epitomised an instance of the normalisation of Islamophobic attacks against Kosovo’s right to exist by far-right European public figures. For example, in 2019, Eric Zemmour, Marion Maréchal, and Thilo Sarrazin were quoted using Kosovo for their visions of the Great Replacement theory. Furthermore, the ‘racialisation’ of the Kosovo-Albanian workforce was confirmed in the German debate on the lack of nurses in the country in 2019.

Due to the snap parliamentary elections in late 2019, Kosovo will have its first left-wing prime minister who already introduced anti-colonial vocabulary to Kosovo politics. Moreover, in recent years, his takes on Albanian identity have not been subordinated to Islamophobic discourse dynamics – especially, when compared with former Kosovo prime ministers.
Përmbledhje ekzekutive

Islamofobia në Kosovë, një vend me shumicë musulmane, mund të koniderohet paradoksale. Nga njëra anë, elitat politike të shqiptarëve (të Kosovës) kanë tendencë të paraqesin veten si ‘mysliman të mirë europian’ (në krahasim me ‘myslimanët e këqijë jo-europianë’) ndaj homologëve të tyre. Nga ana tjetër, islamofobia është një praktikë diskriminuese që kërçënon vetë ekzistencën e Kosovës së shtet në një nivel global politik.

Në këtë vit, kthimi i 110 qytetarëve të Kosovës nga Siria ishte një nga temat kryesore politike. Përderisa dënimi i pjesëmarrjes së kosovarëve në ISIS është i do-mosdoshëm, qarqet më të larta politike të vendit u përqendruan në konsiderimin e këtyre shtetasve si një kërçënim është mundshëm për ambicjet euro-atlantike të Kosovës, në vend që t’i shohej ata si një problem të shoqërisë. Prandaj, mund të argumen-tohet se elitat politike të vendit ishin të më të interesuara të vërtetonin imazhin e tyre si ‘myslimanë të mirë europian’ sësia të merreshin me problemin në vetvete. Trajtimi mediatik i kësaj teme jeton në fushën që përforcoi binaritetin midis Islamit ‘paqësor’ të paraluftës dhe Islamit ‘radikal’ të pasluftës, gjithashtu ndërthuri dhunën me bazë gjinore, ekstremizmin dhe terrorizmin me Islamin. Për më tepër, një xhami historike (xhamia e Namazgjashkut) u vandalizua në Prizren në 2019-n.

Në vitin 2019, shkrimtari austriak Peter Handke, i cili mohoi gjenocidin serb kundër shqiptarëve në Kosovë, fitoi çmimin Nobel në Letërsi. Kjo ngjarje ka provokuar ndihmë dhe kritikë në Kosovë. Fakti që çmimi letër më i rëndësishëm i dha një shkrimtarë të tillë paraqet një rast të përshtatshëm për normalizimin e sulmeve islamofobe kundër të drejtës së ekzistencës së Kosovës nga figura të fashmshme të djathtës ekstreme në Europë. Për shembull, Eric Zemmour, Marion Maréchal (nga Franca) dhe Thilo Sarrazin (nga Gjermania) u cituan se kishin përdorur Kosovën për vizionet e tyre Islamofobe për shoqëritë përkatëse (Great Replacement theory) në vitin 2019. Për më tepër, ‘racializimi’ i forcës punëtore kosovare u konfirmua në kuadër të debatit gjerman për mungesën e infermierëve në këtë vit.

Pas zgjedhjeve të parakohshme parlamentare në fund të vitit 2019, Kosova do të ketë kryeministrin e saj të parë të majtë i cili tashmë e ka ndikuar shërbimin politik të shqiptarëve duke e shtuar ligji kemrin anti-kolonial. Për më tepër, qasja e tij sa i përket identitetit shqiptar nuk është në varësi të dinamikës së ligjërit të islamofob në vitet e kaluara – veçanërisht, kur krahasohet me ish kryeministrat tjerë të Kosovës.
Country Profile
EIR 2019

Country: Republic of Kosovo
Type of Regime: Unitary parliamentary constitutional republic
Form of Government: Parliamentary Government
Ruling Parties: PANA Coalition (centre-right, liberal, centre-left) led by Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj until July 2019. As of February 2020: coalition between Lëvizja Vetëvendosje (left-wing) and Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës (centre-right) led by Prime Minister Albin Kurti.
Opposition Parties: Partia Demokratike e Kosovë (centre-right), AAK & PSD, and Nisma & AKR (both left-wing, centre coalitions), and Lista Srpska (Serbian right-wing party)
Last Elections: 2019 snap parliamentary elections (left-wing party Lëvizja Vetëvendosje: 29 seats; centre-right party Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës: 28 seats; centre-right party Partia Demokratike e Kosovës: 24 seats; centre coalition AAK & PSD: 13 seats; centre coalition Nisma & AKR: 6 seats; reserved for minorities: 20 seats - 10 of those seats went to Serbian party Lista Srpska)
Total Population: 1.7 million (2011)
Major Languages: Albanian
Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)
Statistics on Islamophobia: No official state or NGO data available
Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: Although current statistics on this matter are lacking, a 2017 Civil Rights Defenders report on the situation of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian (RAE) communities stated that “[these] communities remain the most vulnerable and discriminated against groups in Kosovo.”
Major Religions (% of Population): Muslim 95.6%, Roman Catholic 2.2%, Orthodox 1.5%
Muslim Population (% of Population): 1.6 million (96%) in 2011 (according to the last official census)
Main Muslim Community Organizations: Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës (BIK, Islamic Community of Kosovo), and Bashkësia e Tàrikateve të Kosovës (BTK, Union of Kosovo Tarikats)
Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: N/A
Far-Right Parties: N/A
Far-Right Movements: N/A
Far-Right Terrorist Organizations: N/A
Limitations to Islamic Practices:
- Hijab Ban: None, but limitations and controversies regarding the wearing of headscarves in public institutions are still ongoing.
- Halal Slaughter Ban: None
- **Minaret Ban**: None
- **Circumcision Ban**: None
- **Burka Ban**: None, but limitations and controversies regarding the wearing of headscarves in public institutions are still ongoing.
- **Prayer Ban**: None, but Kosovo limited police officers’ rights to attend prayers during their working hours in 2018.
Introduction

“Albanian Islamophobia operates within a horizon of Orientalist imaginations, according to which the ‘Other’ is oriental, backward, Muslim, traditional, patriarchal, corrupt, tyrannical, exotic, irrational, fanatical, dangerous, etc.”¹ This quote by Enis Sulstarova suggests how the erasure of Muslimness is enacted in Albanian discourses – and hence applies to Kosovo as well.

Yet, this discursive undertaking can be considered paradoxical as it is “an uncritised import of the European ‘[O]ther’ by the European ‘[O]ther’ itself”.² Kosovo is a Muslim-majority country³ situated in a continent often defining its Christian identity in binary terms.⁴ It is in this geopolitical context that Albanian political elites present themselves as ‘good European Muslims’ (as opposed to ‘bad non-European Muslims’) towards European countries.⁵ The adherence to Eurocentric discourse by Muslims in Europe is not unique to Albanians since it is also used by Bosnian Muslims, the majority population of Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁶

On a global political level, Islamophobia is a discriminatory praxis threatening the very existence of Kosovo as a state. After having committed a genocide against Albanians during the 1998-1999 Kosovo War, Serbia still refuses to recognise Kosovo. This genocide mainly was fueled by Serbia’s anti-Muslim racism that also resulted in the 1995 Srebrenica genocide.⁷ Furthermore, Serbia is constantly undermining Kosovo’s statehood by presenting Kosovo Albanians as “barbarians or Muslim extremists” – probably best exemplified by the Serbian campaign against Kosovo’s attempt to become an UNESCO member in 2015.⁸ In Europe, Serbia’s anti-Albanian racism towards Kosovo is becoming more and more tolerated and widespread due to the rise in popularity of right-wing politics.⁹ One such example is the French right-

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¹. Enis Sulstarova, *Armatija nga Lindja: Orientalizmi shqiptar nga Naimi te Kadareja*, (Globic Press, Tirana: 2007), p. 239. The quote has been translated from Albanian into English by the author of this report.


³. Muslim piety is far from being a monolithic practice in Kosovo. The majority of Muslims are Sunnis (represented by the BIK), but there are also Sufis (represented by the BTK).


wing extremist party Rassemblement National that criticised Kosovo’s independence in 2018 by arguing that “ISIS also seems to have found fertile ground” in Kosovo. In 2019, political actors in Germany and the Czech Republic issued statements in favour of revoking Kosovo’s independence. This report will analyse Kosovar Islamophobia by taking into account internal and external factors.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

Kosovo’s dominant discourses tend to erase Albanian Muslimness. Hence, it comes as no surprise that figures on anti-Muslim discriminations – be it on the physical or verbal level – are not collected by governmental or non-governmental institutions in Kosovo. However, in 2019, a historical mosque (xhamia e Namazgjahut) was vandalised in Prizren, the country’s second largest city. (Fig. 1)

Figure 1: The vandalised historical mosque (xhamia e Namazgjahut) in Prizren.14


In 2019, the return of 110 Kosovo citizens from Syria was one of the main political topics.\textsuperscript{15} (Fig. 2) It should be highlighted that condemning Kosovars’ DAESH participation is necessary and not Islamophobic. Yet, as soon as incidents like this are used to put Islam under general suspicion (for examples see the Media section of this report), Islamophobia becomes apparent. On this occasion, Kosovo’s political elites reproduced Western mainstream Islamophobia by using the discursive framing that conflates DAESH terrorism with Islam.\textsuperscript{16}

After arriving at the Prishtina airport, the returnees were sent to a foreigners detention centre surrounded by heavy police presence.\textsuperscript{17} At a press conference, the then Minister of Justice Abelard Tahiri highlighted that “we [the Republic of Kosovo] cannot allow our citizens [referring to the 110 Kosovo citizens from Syria] to turn as a threat to the West.”\textsuperscript{18} Whereas it should be noted that Kosovo treated its own citizens like foreigners, it also is conspicuous that the highest political circles focused on considering these nationals as a potential threat to Kosovo’s Euro-Atlantic ambitions, instead of seeing them as a problem of their own society. On this occasion, Kosovo’s President Hashim Thaçi issued the following statement: “Kosovo is oriented towards Western values and is committed to supporting international partners in the fight against any terrorism and extremism that violates those values!”\textsuperscript{19} Two things were constantly emphasised on the Kosovar side: First, the return of these citizens was conducted in close cooperation with the United States. Second, Kosovo was highly praised by the U.S. embassy for this step.\textsuperscript{20} Hence, it could be argued that the country’s political elites were more interested in substantiating their image as ‘good Euro-


\textsuperscript{17} Bekim Shehu, “110 kosovarë kthehen nga Siria në Kosovë”, Deutsche Welle, 20 April 2019, https://www.dw.com/sq/110-kosovar%C3%AB-kthehen-nga-siria-n%C3%AB-kosov%C3%AB-a-48413396, (Access date: 26 January 2020).


\textsuperscript{19} Hashim Thaçi, Facebook, 20 April 2019, https://www.facebook.com/HashimThaciOfficial/posts/2612530735483936, (Access date: 26 January 2020). The quote has been translated from Albanian into English by the author of this report.

pean Muslims’ than dealing with the problem itself. In other words, they chose to soften Western Islamophobic anxieties toward Kosovo by subordinating themselves to Islamophobic discourse dynamics.

Figure 2: The return of 110 Kosovo citizens made headlines in 2019. Translation: “110 Kosovo Citizens Return from Syria, Including ISIS Fighters.”

In 2019, one of the most renowned Euro-Atlantic cultural awards, the Nobel Prize, was Islamophobic against Kosovo: the Austrian novelist Peter Handke won the Nobel Prize in Literature provoking indignation and criticism in Kosovo. (Fig. 3) Peter Handke is an author whose literary ‘esthetics’ draw on white supremacist ideas leading him to deny the 1990s anti-Muslim genocides of the Balkans in his books. During the Kosovo War in 1999, Handke expressed his wish to be “a Serbian Ortho-


dox monk fighting for Kosovo” in an interview for a Serbian public TV broadcaster. In 2006, the Austrian writer delivered a eulogy at the funeral of Slobodan Milošević, the Serbian president behind the genocides of Albanians and Bosnians during the 1990s. Kosovo declared Peter Handke a persona non grata in December 2019. Awarding the world’s most important literary prize to such a writer not only suggests a deeply rooted Euro-Atlantic indifference towards the fate of Muslim European countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina or Kosovo, but also epitomises an instance of the normalisation of Islamophobic attacks against Kosovo’s right to exist by European politicians – as outlined in the introduction.

Employment
Interested in avoiding being viewed by their Western partners as Muslims, Kosovo’s political elites aspiring to full acceptance in Euro-Atlantic circles try to keep the public sector free of any conspicuous Muslim markers like the hijab. Hence, frictions between secularism and Islamic piety can be observed regularly in this sphere. For the first time in Kosovo’s history, the 2019 snap parliamentary elections brought two hijabi women into the Kosovo Parliament: Labinotë Demi Murtezi, MP of left-wing ruling party Lëvizja Vetëvendosje and Besa Ismaili.

Figure 3: A caricature criticising Peter Handke, the 2019 laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature, while Serbian dictator Milošević applauds in the background.


28. It should not be ignored that Kosovo’s independence is disputed within the European Union. In 2020, five EU member states (Spain, Slovakia, Romania, Greece, Cyprus) still do not recognize Kosovo, even though Kosovo declared independence in 2008.

Employment

Interested in avoiding being viewed by their Western partners as Muslims, Kosovo’s political elites aspiring to full acceptance in Euro-Atlantic circles try to keep the public sector free of any conspicuous Muslim markers like the hijab. Hence, frictions between secularism and Islamic piety can be observed regularly in this sphere. For the first time in Kosovo’s history, the 2019 snap parliamentary elections brought two hijabi women into the Kosovo Parliament: Labinotë Demi Murtezi, MP of left-wing ruling party Lëvizja Vetëvendosje and Besa Ismaili, MP of centre-right party Partia Demokratike e Kosovës. (Figs. 4 and 5 respectively) Even though controversies regarding the hijab in public institutions are still ongoing, the election of these two women did not cause debates about wearing Islamic signifiers while holding a position in public service.

Figure 4: Lëvizja Vetëvendosje MP Labinotë Demi Murtezi on an election poster.


For many decades now, structural political problems like the colonial and Islamophobic Western approach towards Kosovo are negatively impacting the country’s economy (high unemployment, lack of health insurance, low wages, etc.). Leading to an inextricable mix of economic and racist discriminations, Kosovo’s economy seems to be better understood with Cedric Robinson’s concept of “racial capitalism”. These structural discriminations have resulted in an ongoing history of emigration to Western Europe, especially to Germany and Switzerland. In 2019, a leading topic was how to overcome the lack of nurses in Germany by ‘importing’ more Kosovar workers for these low-wage jobs. (Fig. 6) This is a case in point when it comes to illustrating how the Kosovo Albanian workforce is ‘racialised’ in German-speaking Europe.
ISLAMOPHOBIA IN KOSOVO

Education

The most important factor regarding Islamophobia in Kosovar education is linked to the ongoing controversies whether it should be allowed to wear the hijab or other Islamic markers in the classroom. Even though Islamophobic incidents affecting this area made no headlines in 2019, the open questions regarding secularism and religious signifiers suggest that Islamophobia is still a constitutive factor in education. For example, girls with hijabs not being allowed to attend classes at school made several headlines in previous years. These incidents will most probably continue to occur as long as the controversies regarding Islamic signifiers in classrooms continue.

As a result of the “uncriticised import [of Eurocentric discourses] by the European ‘[O]ther’ itself”, Islamophobia can also be found in educational content in Kosovo. The extent of this phenomenon, which could be called ‘deduced Islamophobia’, has been explained in last year’s Kosovo report.

Politics

After being summoned by Kosovo’s Special Court investigating the war, former Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj resigned from his post in July 2019. Since then, Koso-
Politics were overshadowed by the October snap parliamentary elections. After a stalemate in coalition talks between left-wing Lëvizja Vetëvendosje and centre-right party Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës, the country constituted its new government in February 2020. Led by Albin Kurti, Kosovo will have its first left-wing prime minister who has already introduced anti-colonial vocabulary to Kosovar politics. Moreover, in recent years, his takes on Albanian identity were not subordinated to Islamophobic discourse dynamics – especially, when compared with former Kosovo prime ministers.

In 2019, a bribing scandal involving Serbia, the Central African Republic, and an alleged derecognition of Kosovo by the latter was revealed. This incident is to be contextualised in Serbia’s ongoing campaign against Kosovo’s independence for nearly a decade now – Serbia itself does not recognize Kosovo’s existence. Since it is known that Serbia used overt Islamophobic arguments against Kosovo’s bid for UNESCO membership in 2015 by describing Albanians as “barbarians or Muslim extremists”, it is entirely possible that similar anti-Muslim racist arguments were and will be used against Kosovo by Serbia in diplomatic meetings behind closed doors. Another worrying consequence of the Serbian derecognition campaign is that it is inviting European right-wing politicians to publicly use Islamophobic arguments against Kosovo. (Figs. 7, 8, and 9) Two famous French right-wing extremists, Eric Zemmour and Marion Maréchal, used their white supremacist understanding of Kosovo in order to justify their Islamophobic opinions to French society.

Zemmour compared Kosovo to the Parisian suburb Seine-Saint-Denis in order to illustrate his fears of a civil war in France caused by ‘Muslim proneness to violence’. He stated, “The Great Replacement? Look, Seine-Saint-Denis is France’s Kosovo. A population replacement is happening there. In Kosovo, it ended with war and independence.” Using Kosovo for her understanding of the Great Replacement theory, the granddaughter of Front National founder Jean-Marie Le Pen, Marion Maréchal put it even more bluntly: “I don’t want my France to become Kosovo. […] It is true that today the accumulation of phenomena, and particularly the demographic phenomenon, threatens us.” In 2019, the prominent German Great Replacement theorist Thilo Sarrazin made headlines by his expulsion from the Social Democratic Party of Germany, although his Islamophobic book Deutschland schafft sich ab (Germany Abolishes Itself) was published in 2010. The book also addressed how he used Kosovo in order to develop his Islamophobic view of German society: “The Turks are conquering Germany just as Kosovars conquered Kosovo: through a higher birth rate.” Peter Handke has been mentioned earlier in this report – his literary work follows the same patterns.

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50. Ibid. The quote has been translated from French to English by the author of the report.
51. Ibid.
54. Maxime Macé, “Grand remplacement et Kosovo: le fantasme de Zemmour et Marion Maréchal”.
Figure 7: A French newspaper headline addressing the Islamophobic use of Kosovo by French right-wing figures. Translation of the title: “The Great Replacement and Kosovo: The Fanaticism of Zemmour and Marion Maréchal.”

Figure 8: A racist and Islamophobic article on Kosovo written by Dominique Bilde, a right-wing French member of the European Parliament. Translation of the title: “Migrants, Islamism and Human Trafficking: Kosovo, the Black Hole of Europe.”

Figure 9: An article on Czech Republic President Miloš Zeman’s attempt to revoke the recognition of Kosovo.


Media

Islamophobic anti-Kosovo-Albanian takes by influential European right-wing figures – as presented in the previous section – were not covered by leading newspapers in Kosovo in 2019.

This silence becomes even more odd, when contrasted with Islamophobic media content created “by the European ‘[O]ther’ itself”, i.e. Kosovars. The 2019, the return of 110 Kosovo citizens from Syria was debated by several media outlets following Islamophobic discourse dynamics. This incident was, for example, used to reinforce the dominant discourse creating a binary with regards to Islam in the tradition of Albanian Orientalism by opposing the ‘West’ to the ‘Orient’ – a consequence of the import of colonial European Orientalism(s). This is a discourse that creates Islamophobia on a structural level. In 2019, several leading newspapers wrote articles touching upon the return of Kosovars from Syria equating Islam with gender-based violence, extremism, and terrorism – hence reproducing Western-biased conventional wisdom on ‘political Islam’.

Another controversy was sparked after the Islamic Community of Kosovo (Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës, BIK) dismissed the imam Drilon Gashi for allegedly controversial statements regarding Darwin’s evolution theory. The reactions to this event illustrated how the erasure of Albanian Muslimness is enacted in Kosovo. FM Images Albania, for example, announced the news regarding Gashi’s dismissal with a polemical headline reinforcing stereotypes between the ‘rational West’ and the ‘irrational Orient’: “Medieval BIK Dismisses Modern Imam Drilon Gashi.” Statements subordinated to Islamophobic discourse dynamics were spread in a widely watched TV talk show dedicated to this matter. A few examples follow: investments from the ‘Arab world’ were blamed for ‘radicalisation’ in Kosovo; it was alluded that Islam has...

nothing to do with ‘real’ Albanian identity; and it was stated that Islam is in desper-
ate need of a ‘Christian enlightenment’.  

Interviewing Imam Enis Rama for the TV show “Pressing” in a mosque in June  
2019, the interview resembled a situation where a prosecutor – in this scenario the 
journalist Berat Buzhala – speaks to an accused person in its own ‘house’.  
This dis-
cursive event should not be forgotten: be it for its visual capacity to illustrate, on the 
one hand, Albanian elitist discourse subordinated to Islamophobic structural logics, 
and the power dynamics between political elites and Kosovo’s  ulama on the other. 
(Fig. 11)
Figure 11: The journalist Berat Buzhala interviewing imam Enis Rama in a mosque for his TV show “Pressing.” This debate was emblematic of the attempt of Albanian political elites to erase the country’s Muslimness. Translation: “Rama: Sometimes Science Can Also Be a Guess.”

Justice System

On a legislative level, no law with Islamophobic intentions was issued in 2019, even though such steps were alluded to be linked to the return of 110 Kosovo citizens from Syria in April. However, the tendency to instrumentalise events of this kind in order to highlight that Kosovo is a ‘good European Muslim’ country might lead to the introduction of Islamophobic legislation in 2020.

Internet

Although uncensored Islamophobic hate speech can be found on the Internet, it is predominantly used in Kosovo in order to show that Islam is not ‘really’ Albanian through for example turning religion into something people can make fun of. This is also in line with the elite’s objective to align Kosovo-Albanian identity with ‘Europe’ through erasing what is not perceived as ‘European’ (read: Islam).

Not only a case in point due to its name, the Facebook page Feja e shqiptarit është Europa (“The Religion of Albanians is Europe”, around 40,000 followers) constantly spreads anti-Muslim hate speech to an older audience – as of January 2020,
However, the website seems to have been closed down. On Instagram and Twitter, an account called *Hoxhallari Memes* (Imams Memes) opened and mysteriously disappeared several times over the last years – also in 2019. As the name indicates, the account made jokes of videos by Kosovo imams. Its audience was the ‘cool’ and hipster Prishtina youth. However, some of its followers were Prishtina-based figures of Kosovo’s elites that actively promote a ‘European’-like sense of identity that implies Islamophobic ‘reflexes’.

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Arbana Xharra, former editor-in-chief of the widely read daily *Zëri*, could be considered the most explicit representative when it comes to Kosovar Islamophobia. In 2019, she published several anti-Muslim Facebook posts. Scapegoating Albanians in the diaspora, she claimed: “Articles in the Swiss press show how Albanians are very active in Islamist circles calling for Jihad!” (Fig. 12) In 2019, Albanians in Switzerland were also targeted by the public intellectual Blerim Latifi. After Kosovo’s most famous footballer Xherdan Shaqiri won the 2019 UEFA Champions League with Liverpool FC and celebrated this with a social media post including the word *elhamdulilah*, Latifi criticised Shaqiri for “his inability to clearly define the boundaries of his identity” due to his “lack of education” – suggesting that Islam is not ‘really’ Albanian.

Since Islamophobia is also an external threat to Kosovo’s statehood, this report has showed that in 2019 important European right-wing figures used their blurred understanding of Kosovo in order to create white supremacist arguments. In this sense, renowned European actors like Eric Zemmour, Marion Maréchal, Thilo Sarrazin, Heinz-Christian Strache, and Peter Handke can also be included in the Islamophobia network against Kosovo.

70. The account seems to be deleted. (Access date: 26 January 2020).

71. Whereas the account seems to be deleted on Twitter, it appears to exist still as a private account on Instagram. (Access date: 26 January 2020).


ISLAMOPHOBIA IN KOSOVO

Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

A complaint regarding a 2019 Veriu.info article that included all the names of the 110 returned citizens from Syria was upheld by the Kosovo Press Council.77 Given his previous statements that can be found in last year’s report, the new government by left-wing Prime Minister Albin Kurti could tackle the Kosovar elite’s Islamophobia.78 Yet, the centre-right coalition partner Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës has already participated in earlier Kosovo governments and acted in a subordinated way with regards to Islamophobic discourse dynamics. This suggests that one should be cautious before stating that the new government will be the first one to fight Islamophobia (within Kosovo’s elites).

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

For Kosovo, Islamophobia has internal consequences (the policing and sanctioning of those considered threatening to the Euro-Atlantic road map due to their perceived ‘excessive’ Muslimness) and external consequences (posing a threat to Kosovo’s statehood). This constellation put Kosovo-Albanian elites in situations where they tried, too often, to soften Western Islamophobic anxieties by subordinating themselves to Islamophobic discourse dynamics. At the same time, the scope of the danger to Kosovo’s state existence coming from famous European Islamophobes seems to be played down, or even ignored. Hence, this report ends with the following policy recommendations:

- Instead of conceding to Islamophobic discourse dynamics, Albanian political elites should be taking a more ‘unapologetic’ stance regarding their Muslim identity.
- Since Islamophobia is a form of structural racism like anti-Semitism or anti-gypsyism, awareness with regards to this should be raised in journalism, civil society, and institutional matters, i.e. in every public discourse-shaping sphere.
- State institutions should monitor and provide figures with regards to Islamophobia and racism based on internal factors (conceding to Islamophobic discourse dynamics through erasing what is not perceived as ‘European’, i.e. Islam) and external factors (for example Serbia’s derecognition campaign, or the treatment of the Albanian diaspora in the EU).
- European Great Replacement theorists speaking about Kosovo should be countered not by opportunist victimisation but by highlighting the core motivations of the Albanian struggle in former Yugoslavia, i.e. an anti-colonial liberation struggle against an Islamophobic and anti-Albanian racist Yugoslav regime colonising Kosovo.
- If possible, all these steps should be conducted in collaboration with Albania, since this is another Albanian-speaking Muslim-majority country facing similar problems regarding Islamophobia.

Chronology

- **20.04.2019**: 110 Kosovo citizens returned from Syria.
- **27.05.2019**: A historical mosque (xhamia e Namazgjahut) was vandalised in Prizren.
- **01.06.2019**: After Kosovo’s most famous footballer Xherdan Shaqiri won the 2019 UEFA Champions League with Liverpool FC and celebrated this with a social media post including the word *elhamdulilah*, public intellectual Blerim Latifi criticised Shaqiri for “his inability to clearly define the boundaries of his identity” due to his “lack of education”.


• **03.06.2019:** In a widely watched French TV talk show, Eric Zemmour compared Kosovo to the Parisian suburb Seine-Saint-Denis in order to illustrate his vision of the Great Replacement theory.

• **17.06.2019:** In a French talk show, Marion Maréchal used Kosovo for her understanding of the Great Replacement theory: “I don’t want my France to become Kosovo.”

• **04.07.2019:** A complaint regarding a 2019 *Veriu.info* article that included all the names of the 110 returned citizens from Syria was upheld by Kosovo’s Press Council.

• **11.07.2019:** The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published an article on Thilo Sarrazin’s expulsion from the Social Democratic Party of Germany quoting his blurred white supremacist understanding of Kosovo: “The Turks are conquering Germany just as Kosovars conquered Kosovo: through a higher birth rate.”

• **15.07.2019:** Germany’s Federal Minister of Health Jens Spahn signed an agreement helping to overcome the German lack of nurses with his Kosovar counterpart Uran Ismaili in Pristina. This event highlighted how the Kosovo-Albanian workforce is ‘racialised’ in German-speaking Europe.

• **19.07.2019:** After being summoned by Kosovo’s Special Court investigating the war, former Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj resigned from his post.

• **25.08.2019:** A bribing scandal was revealed involving Serbia, the Central African Republic, and an alleged derecognition of Kosovo by the latter.

• **29.08.2019:** The Islamic Community of Kosovo (*Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës*, BIK) dismissed imam Drilon Gashi for alleged controversial statements regarding Darwin’s evolution theory.

• **06.10.2019:** Albin Kurti’s left-wing *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* won the snap parliamentary elections.

• **10.10.2019:** The Austrian novelist Peter Handke was announced as the winner of the 2019 Nobel Prize in Literature provoking indignation and criticism in the country due to his denial of the genocide in Kosovo.

• **01.11.2019:** The journalist Arbana Xharra claimed via Facebook that “Albanians [in Switzerland] are very active in Islamist circles calling for Jihad!”

• **12.12.2019:** After Peter Handke was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, Kosovo declared him a persona non grata.