
EUROPEAN
ISLAMOPHOBIA
REPORT

2015

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

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INTRODUCTION

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ

In June 2014, the website for reporting hate crimes to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) went public. In 2014, only five states officially reported on hate crimes against Muslims, whereas civil society reported in 21 countries. Still, for the majority of the 57 member countries of the OSCE, there is no official information available. Furthermore, if one were to assess the quality of these state reports, it becomes apparent that the collected data does not always rely on a comprehensive systematic collection.

Since Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism has become a growing threat in European societies, we – the editors – felt an urgent need to address this problem. In fact, there are still people denying the very existence of racism against Muslims. Many state and civil society institutions have done priceless work to prove and establish the opposite: from the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) to the countless civil society organisations throughout Europe. Yet, institutions like the FRA publish only irregular reports on a restricted number of countries while most civil society organisations tackle racism in general and only few focus on Islamophobia in specific - this is the urgent gap our report wishes to fill.

The *European Islamophobia Report* (EIR) is an annual report, which is presented for the first time this year. It currently comprises 25 national reports regarding each state and the tendencies of Islamophobia in each respective country. The current report features the work of 37 extraordinary scholars. In the years to come we will attempt to cover even more countries. This report aims to enable policymakers as well as the public to discuss the issue of Islamophobia with the help of qualitative data. At the same time, several of its unique characteristic features make a difference to the current state of the debate on Islamophobia.

Contribution of this report

The national reports in the EIR look at significant incidents and developments in each country during the period under review. The authors look at the employment sector: has there been any discrimination in the job market based on the (assumed) Muslimness of a person? They look at education: has Islamophobic content become part of any curricula, textbooks, or any other education material? The political field in a narrow sense is also a central aspect of the EIR: has Islamophobia played any role in politics, from election campaigns to political programmes to personal statements, etc., be it on a regional or national level? Authors also take a close look at a central force where Islamophobia has spread: the media. Which media events have focused on Islam/Muslims in an Islamophobic way? The justice system is also featured in the national reports: are there any laws and regulations that are based on Islamophobic arguments or any laws restricting the rights of Muslims in their religious lifestyle? Cyberspace as a central space for spreading hate crime is also examined: which web pages and initiatives have spread Islamophobic stereotypes? In addition, central figures in the Islamophobia network are discussed: which institutions and persons have, among others, fostered Islamophobic campaigns, stirred up debates or lobbied for laws?

Since the EIR is not content with pointing a finger at the problem, the reports also look at observed civil society and political assessment and initiatives undertaken to counter Islamophobia in the aforementioned fields. This will empower politicians and NGO activists, who want to tackle the issue. Since the EIR is not a purely scholarly work, at the end of every report, authors offer policy recommendations for politics and NGOs. An executive summary at the beginning and a chronology at the end of every report give the reader an overview on the state and the development of Islamophobia in the respective countries.

Since the single reports share broadly the same structure, the EIR offers the possibility to compare Islamophobia in these countries. Despite the fact that the data in specific fields is not available in an identical way for all countries, the report still facilitates an impulse for identifying research gaps.

Studies on Islamophobia have in the past predominantly concentrated on Western Europe. This is especially the case with reports focusing on Islamophobia. The EIR is the first to cover a wide range of Eastern European countries like Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, or Latvia. This will enrich the debate on racism in general and Islamophobia in Europe in specific.

What is Islamophobia?

Although the term 'Islamophobia' has become widely recognised in the Anglo-Saxon world and has become established in academia as can be seen by the numerous conferences, journals, and research projects dedicated to it, in many European countries, there is still a great amount of opposition to the term. One can understand the opposition expressed by the public not merely as an academic debate, but, in fact, as a sign of the hegemonic power of Islamophobic prejudices. Acknowledging this situation,

at the heart of this project lies the following working definition of Islamophobia:

“When talking about Islamophobia, we mean anti-Muslim racism. As Anti-Semitism studies have shown, the etymological components of a word do not necessarily point to its complete meaning, nor to how it is used. Such is also the case with Islamophobia studies. Islamophobia has become a well-known term used in academia as much as in the public sphere. Criticism of Muslims or of the Islamic religion is not necessarily Islamophobic. Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilising and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat – real or invented – and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/rights/definition of a constructed ‘we’. Islamophobia operates by constructing a static ‘Muslim’ identity, which is attributed in negative terms and generalised for all Muslims. At the same time, Islamophobic images are fluid and vary in different contexts as Islamophobia tells us more about the Islamophobe than it tells us about the Muslims/Islam”.

Central findings

That Islamophobia works without Muslims and tells us more about the anti-Muslim racists than it tells us about Islam and Muslims, can best be seen in the eastern region of Europe. In countries like Hungary, Finland, Lithuania, or Latvia, where only a small number of Muslims live, Islamophobia functions as a successful means to mobilise people. People not only greatly overestimate the country's Muslim population but, although Muslims have not committed any violent acts in most countries in the name of Islam, they are still often deemed violent and are considered to be terrorists.

It could be observed that both attacks in Paris, which happened in 2015, became a discursive event that shaped the debates on Islam and Muslims throughout Europe. Above that, the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ was a central topic, which many actors linked to the issue of Muslims invading Europe. For example, the leader of the Hungarian Fidesz’ parliamentary club Antal Rogán warned of a future ‘United European Caliphate’,¹ while former Secretary of State László L. Simon urged Hungarians to return to their Christian spirituality and make more babies in order to counter the negative cultural effects of mass migration such as the envisioned ‘impending victory of Islamic parties imposing polygamy and destroying the remainder of European culture’.² This strong Islamophobic rhetoric is not restricted to the extreme right. In fact, the *refugee-migration-Islam-terrorism nexus* became the standard argument justifying a number of domestic and international measures. The social democrat Czech President Miloš Zeman claimed the influx of refugees into Europe was masterminded by Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood as “an organised invasion” to “gradually control Europe”.³

1. Károly Villányi, “Azt akarjuk, hogy unokáink egy európai kalifátusban éljenek?”, *Magyar Idők*, 14.11.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, <http://magyaridok.hu/belfold/azt-akarjuk-hogy-az-unokaink-egy-europai-kalifatusban-eljenek-5035/>.

2. “L. Simon: Szaporodjunk!”, *Népszabadság Online*, 05.09.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, http://nol.hu/video/lSimon-a-szaporodasban-latja-a-jovot-1573295?utm_source=mandiner&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=mandiner_201601.

3. Agence France-Presse, “Integrating Muslims into Europe is ‘impossible’, says Czech president”, 18 January, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/18/integrating-muslims-into-europe-is-impossible-says-czech-president> (accessed 8 March, 2016)

Policy Recommendations

Islamophobia poses a great risk to the democratic foundations of European constitutions and social peace as well as the coexistence of different cultures throughout Europe. Both civil society actors and states should acknowledge the seriousness of this issue and develop concrete policies to counter Islamophobia. Here we have summarised some of the important policy recommendations from the national reports.

- Islamophobia should be acknowledged as a crime and should be included in all national statistics throughout Europe.
- Hate crime legislations should be adopted in all European countries that acknowledge one's religious identity as being a basis upon which one may be targeted.
- In order to collect data about Islamophobic incidents, victims registers must be introduced in all European states.
- In order to help the victims of Islamophobic attacks, counseling services for victims must be established in all European states.
- Journalists, lawyers, Police (security officials) and legal authorities in all European countries should be educated by qualified personnel in regards to Islamophobia.
- Muslim civil society has to be empowered with information to combat Islamophobia, especially in the direction of the creation of a consciousness of the illegality of hate crimes.
- Educational institutions and stakeholders have to work towards creating an alternative narrative of Muslims in the respective countries which will work to dispel the widely accepted negative image of Islam.
- Civil society actors must also push for legislative change in the context of school enrolment policies so that all members of the respective societies are treated fairly when accessing education.
- Governments must draft a policy that ensures that the rights of religious minorities to manifest their faith are respected in education and the workplace; this must not be left to the preferences of individual boards of management or principals.
- Discrimination on the job market towards Muslims and especially Muslims who wear veils is a widespread phenomenon. This should be recognised and seriously addressed by better legal regulations and the creation of a relevant consciousness.
- Civil society actors must engage with media actors/outlets in terms of the publication and broadcasting of standards in order to reduce/minimise the use of racialising discourses vis-à-vis Muslims and other minority communities.
- The civil rights violations experienced by women wearing headscarves should be addressed by lawmakers and politicians.
- An independent media watchdog should be established in order to monitor media reports in real time in all respective countries.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
NORWAY
NATIONAL REPORT 2015

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2015 saw a further hardening and mainstreaming of Islamophobia, racism and discrimination against Muslims in Norway on the back of the terror attacks in Paris, France in January and November and the global so-called 'refugee crisis' in the autumn of 2015. The populist right-wing Progress Party, in government since October 2013, has continued to mobilise popular support in 2015 by instrumentalising fears relating to the presence of Islam and Muslims in Norway. Norwegian media has provided ample platforms for civil society actors with a long record of Islamophobia.

KORTFATTET SAMMENDRAG

2015 så en tilspissing og en mainstreaming av islamofobi, rasisme og diskriminering rettet mot muslimer i Norge, mot et bakteppe av terrorangrepene i Paris, Frankrike i januar og november, og den globale flyktningkrisen høsten 2015. Det høyrepopulistiske Fremskrittspartiet (FrP), som har sittet i regjering siden oktober 2013, har i 2015 fortsatt å mobilisere velgergrupper på grunnlag av instrumentalisering av frykt knyttet til nærværet av islam og muslimer i Norge, og norske medier har tilbudt norske sivilsamfunnsaktører med en lang historie av islamofobi brede medieplattformer.

INTRODUCTION

Norway, which has a population of 5 million of whom an estimated 4.2 per cent are of Muslim background,¹ has since the parliamentary elections of September 2013 had a coalition government consisting of the liberal-conservative Conservative Party (CP) and the populist right-wing Progress Party (PP). The Progress Party, a party whose voters are more likely to be male, unemployed, have a low level of education, and/or be on social welfare benefits than any other party in Norway has since circa 1987 opposed immigration in general and immigration of Muslims in particular as a central mobilising factor. Representative surveys have also indicated that the party has a number of self-declared right-wing extremists (16 per cent in 2009) among its voters and sympathisers. Subsequent to their coming into government in October 2013, in a two-pronged political strategy designed to retain the support of the party's far right electoral constituencies, individuals appointed to cabinet posts from the party have toned down their historically virulent anti-Muslim and Islamophobic rhetoric, whilst individuals in leading posts as official spokespersons for the party, administrative officials and/or central party Members of Parliament (MPs) have continued apace with their rhetoric. In the context of the current global so-called 'refugee crisis', which the Norwegian government and its PP minister Sylvi Listhaug (appointed to a newly established position as Minister for Immigration and Integration in December 2015) have reacted to by introducing stringent new measures designed to limit both the flow of asylum seekers, the rights to family reunification for individuals already settled in Norway, and to increase the number of forced deportations of asylum seekers who have had their asylum applications turned down. Some of these extraordinary measures, hastily introduced by a resolution of the Norwegian Parliament in late December 2015 against the votes of the Socialist Left Party (SV) and the environmentalist Green Party (MDG) and warnings from leading Norwegian human rights scholars and experts, have been roundly criticised by official representatives for the UN's High Commissioner For Refugees (UNHCR) for, inter alia, being likely to violate international human rights laws. Norwegian media reports indicate, however, that these extraordinary measures had already been discussed two years previously in connection with a report on the 'Sustainability of Immigration' commissioned by the Progress Party's Parliamentary Caucus in April 2013, and presented to widespread condemnation from the media and the opposition in August 2013, one month before the parliamentary elections which would bring the PP to power for the first time in Norwegian history.² This report had been written by some of the most far right MPs in the PP, with assistance of the far

1. Bangstad, Sindre and Elgvin, Olav (2015): 'Norway'. In Scharbrodt, Oliver et. al. (eds.) *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe Volume 7*, 436-449.

2. Hoel, Per A. (2016): 'La innstrammingsplan våren før valgseieren', *Vårt Land* 11.02.16.

right civil society activist Hege Storhaug of the Norwegian NGO Human Rights' Service (HRS). These were measures proposed by Listhaug and her department, and marketed by a rhetoric from Listhaug's side in which asylum seekers arriving in Norway – who are now disproportionately likely to have a national background from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq – were told that they could not expect the Norwegian state to receive them whilst being “carried on golden chairs”, while political and civil society opponents of the government's stringent new measures were described as suffering from a “tyranny of goodness.” What by subtle rhetorical subterfuges is not expressed clearly here and which is in line with the populist right-wing's long-standing conflation of the terms ‘immigrants’, ‘refugees’ and ‘Muslims’, is of course that many refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Norway at present are in fact of Muslim background. It seems quite clear that the PP in government has learned that to single out ‘Muslims’ as a separate immigration category would risk violating national laws against discrimination (The Norwegian Anti-Discrimination Law of 2005, as well as the Human Rights Law of 1999) and international law, but before it came into governmental power, the PP has in fact had a long-standing record of proposing restrictions on immigration targeting Muslims in particular, dating back to political speeches made by the then party Chairman Carl I. Hagen invoking conspiratorial ‘Eurabia’ ideas about an impending ‘Islamic colonisation’ of Norway as early as 1987, and in a report on the ‘sustainability of immigration’ commissioned by the PP's parliamentary caucus and ghost-written by the far-right and PP-aligned civil society activist Hege Storhaug of the state-supported think tank Human Rights Service (HRS) in 2007, which proposed restrictions on Muslim immigration to Norway in particular.

SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS

The year 2015 started with marches in Oslo in early January in support of the German anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant PEGIDA movement organised by Norwegian far right activists affiliated with the Norwegian Defence League (NDL), Stop the Islamisation of Norway (SIAN) and the Oslo secondary school teacher Max Hermansen. The first pro-PEGIDA demonstration in Oslo on 13 January was estimated to have been attended by 190 people marching in the snow and carrying Norwegian flags.³ For far right activists in Norway who rarely manage to get more than 30 to 50 activists on the street, this was a relatively high number, and the demo received significant attention in national and international news media. Max Hermansen's claims to the Norwegian media that the demonstrators involved were not “extremists” (ekstremister) was belied by the presence of several well-known neo-Nazi sympathisers from Oslo, including a white male in his thirties, who upon being asked what he was

3. Yttervik, Linn K. and Arntsen, Erlend Ofte (2015): ‘Pegida-demonstrasjon ga rekordoppmøte’, *VG* 13.01.15.

doing in the demo replied to the private Norwegian broadcaster TV2 reporter Kadafi Zaman (who happens to be of Pakistani-Norwegian Muslim background) that he was “here to demonstrate my disgust towards such Muslim bastards as you. Such immigrant shit like you.” whilst harassing Zaman by blowing smoke directly in his face.⁴ Hermansen would later claim that he had never met the person in question, but camera footage revealed that the man in question and Hermansen walked side by side and exchanged words at the head of the demonstration for much of the time. In 2015, the young far right activist would be charged with racist abuse under Norwegian General Penal Code § 185 Concerning Hate Speech for Facebook comments against a well-known Norwegian TV presenter of Norwegian-African background, Haddy N’jie.⁵ Media reports indicated, however, that far right and anti-Muslim activists aligned with the so-called Norwegian Defence League (NDL) and Stop the Islamisation of Norway (SIAN) had been involved in recruiting demonstrators from pubs and bars close to Oslo City Hall on the eve of the demonstrations. Max Hermansen (54), the Oslo secondary school teacher who initiated the pro-PEGIDA demonstrations and who holds university degrees in History, had been on sick leave after complaints from Muslim pupils at the secondary schools in Oslo East where he taught social science about his anti-Islamic sentiments since the autumn of 2014. Much was made about Hermansen’s freedom of expression and the Oslo Municipality’s responsibility to protect this from both legal and media experts, but media interviews with Hermansen as well as former Muslim pupils of his 2015 course suggested that he had in fact actively engaged in discriminatory practices against pupils of Muslim background, and not only expressed discriminatory attitudes in his classroom. Though there is no available academic research on this to date, anecdotal evidence which surfaced in the context of a public meeting with Muslim youth in a central and mainstream mosque in Oslo in November 2015 attended by hundreds suggests that experiences with discrimination and Islamophobic statements from teachers at secondary schools in Oslo has been far from uncommon in recent years. The Hermansen affair ended with Hermansen being offered a non-teaching desk job at one of the same secondary schools where he had previously taught in January 2016.⁶ In line with historical experiences, the demonstrations, which by then had also spread to other smaller cities in Norway (Ålesund, Stjørdal, Sarpsborg, Tønsberg), soon fizzled out amidst internal divisions and personal acrimonies among the far right activists involved, with Ronny Alte of the NDL and the former SIAN activist Arnt Ove Kvile breaking out and creating a splinter group under the same

4. Ekehaug, Jenny-Linn, Bjørnstad, Nora Thorp and Ekehaug, Cathrine (2015): ‘TV2s reporter kalt ‘muslimjævel’ på direkten’, VG 12.01.13.

5. Jensen, Ingvild (2015): ‘34-åring siktet for å ha hetset Haddy’, *TV2.no* 04.12.15.

6. NTB (2016): ‘Max Hermansen tilbudt kontorjobb’, *NTB* 27.01.16.

name.⁷ In 2015, the jihadist terrorist attacks on the offices of Charlie Hebdo, the anti-Semitic terrorist attacks on a kosher supermarket in Paris on 7-9 January, and the attacks in Paris on 13-14 November led to an increased level of popular suspicion of Muslims in Norway. Norwegian Muslims reported increased levels of intolerance and harassment in public after these attacks. After the Paris attacks of November 2015, a 21-year-old man of African background was stabbed by an unknown assailant at Slependen in Asker after reportedly being queried whether he was Muslim and “whether he recalled Paris.”⁸ After the stabbing, which led to hospitalisation, the victim was told by the perpetrator that he was a “Muslim bastard.” Media reports based on statements from a witness also recounted Muslims being kicked by unknown assailants aboard a bus in Oslo, with no one coming to the victims’ assistance, and the perpetrator declaring to the witness that he had not kicked “a fellow human being, but a Muslim bastard.”⁹ The year also saw significant shifts in Norwegian popular opinion regarding the global so-called ‘refugee crisis’, with popular mobilisations in support of refugee rights in August and September in light of the extensive media coverage of the ongoing tragedies in the Mediterranean gradually being replaced by a hardening popular attitude, and the introduction of stringent measures initiated by the government in order to further limit the rights of asylum and family reunification in December.

EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION

There are no updated statistics on labour market discrimination targeting Muslims in particular in 2015. What we do know from available research on labour market discrimination from 2012 is that applicants with Norwegian-Pakistani (and Muslim)-sounding names are 25 per cent less likely than ‘ethnic’ Norwegian applicants, given exact similar qualifications and work experience, to get called in for interviews by Norwegian employers.¹⁰ Reports suggest that Norwegian Somalis in particular experience labour market and housing discrimination, with men reporting more discrimination than females in all age categories.¹¹ The Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud (LDO), which provides a formal complaint service for citizens who think they may have experienced discrimination in various fields under criteria specified in the Norwegian Anti-Discrimination Law of 2005, reported an

7. Vepsen (2015): ‘Full PEGIDA-splid’, *Vepsen.no* 14.01.15.

8. Acharki, Fouad and Martinsen, Elin (2015): ‘Spurte om han var muslim før han stakk med kniv’, *NRK Østlandsendingen* 21.11.15.

9. Smørvik, Ingvild (2015): ‘Muslimjævelen er ingen terrorist’, *gjest.blogg.no* 21.11.05.

10. Midtbøen, Arnfinn og Rogstad, Jon (2012): *Diskriminerings omfang og årsaker: Etniske minoriteters tilgang til norsk arbeidsliv*. Report no. 1: 2012. Oslo: Institutt For Samfunnsforskning.

11. Tronstad, Kristian R.(2008): *Diskriminering*. In Blom, Svein and Henriksen, Kristin (eds.) *Levekår blant innvandrere i Norge 2005/06*. Oslo: Statistisk Sentralbyrå.

increase of 15 per cent in cases reported. It is however unclear what proportion of these cases related to Muslims in particular or to what extent there was an increase in reported cases from Muslims in 2014. There is, in any case, few empirical grounds to suggest that labour market discrimination against Muslims in Norway has decreased in 2015, and anecdotal reports of Muslim females, for example, being denied work on the grounds that they wear a hijab remain common. A newspaper report from the Progress Party-governed municipality of Oppegård outside Oslo, for example, has two Norwegian social workers tell of young Norwegian Muslim hijab-wearing females regularly told by prospective Norwegian employers that they will not employ them as long as they continue to wear the hijab.¹²

Education

Academic research on the coverage of minorities and immigrants past and present in the Norwegian school curriculum at various levels suggest a far from ideal situation with regard to how these topics are covered in schools.¹³ In 2015, there have been regular anecdotal reports about discontent from Muslim minority students about how Islam and Muslims are covered by mostly non-Muslim white middle-class teachers of both sexes, who are of course also affected by prevailing negative societal attitudes towards Islam and Muslims in Norway.

The legal field

Norwegian authorities have for a number of years now been singled by international human rights monitoring bodies such as the European Council's European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the UN's CERD (Convention Against All Forms of Racial Discrimination) Commission, as well as the Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud (LDO) for their lack of sustained and efficient efforts against hate speech.¹⁴ A 2012 report from the HL-Centre in Norway documents, based on national representative surveys, that Muslims according to social distance scales are among the least desired citizens in Norway, after the Roma.¹⁵ Hate speech based on an individual's ethnic or national background, religious or other belief, sexual orientation and mental or physical ability is subject to up to three year's imprisonment under Norwegian General Penal Code § 185 against Hate Speech [previously § 135 (a)], first in-

12. Stubberudlien, Yana (2016): 'Million mot ekstremisme', *Oppegård Avis* 28.01.16.

13. Midtbøen, Arnfinn H., Orupabo, Julia and Røthing, Åse (2014): *Etniske og religiøse minoriteter i læremidler*. Report 11: 2014. Oslo: Institutt for Samfunnsforskning.

14. ECRI (2015): *ECRI Report on Norway. Fifth Monitoring Cycle*. Strasbourg: European Commission Against Racism And Intolerance (ECRI). CERD (2015): *Concluding observations on the combined twenty-first and twenty-second periodic reports of Norway*. CERD/C/NOR/CO/21-22. Geneva: CERD. LDO (2015): *Hate Speech and Hate Crime*. Report. Oslo: The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud.

15. HL-Centre (2012): *Antisemitism in Norway? The Attitudes of the Norwegian Population towards Jews and Other Minorities*. Oslo: The HL-Centre. Available at: <http://www.hlsenteret.no/publikasjoner/antisemitism-in-norway-web.pdf>

roduced in 1970 as a direct result of the Norwegian state's ratification of UN ICERD 1965 the same year.¹⁶ The threshold for both prosecution and sentencing is however high and stringent, and in actual practice, few cases involving hate speech against Muslims have ever been successfully prosecuted in Norwegian courts of law. The Norwegian Prosecutor General (Riksadvokaten) has since 2000 asked local police districts to prioritise hate crimes, but until recently efforts in this field can at best be described as limited in scope and efficiency. So much so, that Norwegian Muslims interviewed for a newspaper report about this issue in August 2015 asserted that "Muslims do not report hate crimes" since they allegedly "have no confidence in the police taking it seriously."¹⁷ Norway's first ever Hate Crimes Unit, established at Manglerud Police Station in 2013, has, however, in 2015, both prosecuted and successfully led cases involving hate crimes against Muslims to conviction. The number of hate crimes cases reported to the police in Norway has – mostly as a result of this particular unit's efforts and public calls for citizens to report such cases to the police – risen significantly in both 2014 and 2015. However, since there are no such police units in any other cities or towns in Norway, and local police districts lack both the investigative capacities and the specialised legal knowledge that prosecuting such cases require, most of the increase in reported cases has occurred in Oslo, the capital of Norway. Civil society activists as well as legal experts in this field indicate that there is a significant under-reporting of such cases, for reasons which include a lack of confidence in the local police, a lack of knowledge of existent laws and their applicability in hate speech cases etc. In a verdict from the Oslo Magistrate's Court on 17 March, 2015, a white unemployed Norwegian man (57) was sentenced to 18 days imprisonment and 15, 000 Norwegian kroner (NOK) for violations of Norwegian General Penal Code § 135 (a) (now § 185) and § 390 (a). The second paragraph, first introduced in 1955, is designed to protect individual citizens against intimidating, harassing or inconsiderate behaviour. The case, which was prosecuted by the Oslo Hate Crimes Unit, related to an incident in October 2014, when the defendant had verbally assaulted a hijab-wearing Muslim woman of North African background at a local supermarket in Oslo East. The defendant, who did not know the victim, had passed the woman as she was standing near a supermarket shelf, and according to the victim declared that "all Muslims ought to be slaughtered." The Oslo Magistrate's Court found that in the absence of any witnesses to the defendant's initial remarks, it could not be established beyond any 'reasonable doubt' that the defendant actually made these remarks. What the court found no reason to doubt, however, is that the man then proceeded to spit at the victim's face, and that when shop assistants alerted by the victim's screams came to her aid, the defendant declared that he had spat

16. Bangstad, Sindre (2012): 'Failing to Protect Minorities Against Racist and/or Discriminatory Speech? The Case of Norway and § 135 (a) of The Norwegian General Penal Code', *Nordic Journal of Human Rights* 30 (4): 483-514.

17. Stokke, Olga, Torset, Nina Selbo and Slettholm, Andreas (2015): 'Muslimer anmelder ikke hatkriminalitet: De har null tillit til at politiet tar det alvorlig', *Aftenposten* 04.08.15.

at the woman because he “hated all Muslims.”¹⁸ By Norwegian standards, this can be considered a relatively lenient sentence: what is noteworthy is that it appears to be the first ever sentence against a Norwegian citizen for hate speech targeting a Muslim in Norwegian legal history. In another case dating from February 2015, three males in their thirties, two of whom had known affiliations to neo-Nazi groups in Norway or to the so-called Isko Boys, a group of football hooligans who support the Oslo football club VIF, were charged with racist-motivated violence against two Norwegian Kurdish males of Muslim background in their twenties on a street in downtown Oslo. According to the charges, one of the defendants is alleged to have shouted “Fucking Muslims, you don’t have anything to do here” and “Go back, fucking terrorists” before the three men kicked and punched the victims in their heads and bodies.¹⁹ The perpetrators were sentenced to 120, 75 and 60 days imprisonment in late 2015. Noteworthy in this case is how the figure of ‘the Muslim’ comes to stand in for the figure of ‘the terrorist’²⁰ in motivating hate crimes against individuals of Muslim background, even in cases in which the victims’ ‘Muslimness’ may not have been all that important. According to media reports about this particular case, the victims were at the time of the assault walking back from a visit to a bar and had consumed alcohol.

The Oslo Hate Crimes Unit’s report for 2015 was not yet available at the time of writing this report, but according to Senior Advisor For Diversity Ingerd Hansen at the Oslo Police Headquarters, the number of reported cases to the Oslo Hate Crimes Unit in 2015 more than doubled from 2014 when the figure stood at 69 cases. Out of these 69 cases from 2014, 15 involved hate crimes against individuals on the basis of their religion. It remains unclear how many of the 15 involved hate crimes against Muslims, but according to Hansen, the number of reported cases based on a motive of religious bias has also increased significantly in 2015. There are also valid reasons to believe that hate crimes based on the target’s real or perceived religion are severely under-reported by available Norwegian statistics in this field. It should be noted, however, that hate crimes registered under this category in police statistics would also include inter-Muslim hate crimes: in 2014, the Oslo Police’s Hate Crimes Unit registered reported cases involving hate crimes against adherents of the Ahmadiyya sect likely committed by Sunni Muslims, and in 2015, reported cases involving hate crimes against Shia Muslims likely perpetrated by Sunni Muslims. There is, in any case, every reason to believe that the hate crime cases brought to the Norwegian police’s attention by Norwegian citizens of Muslim background merely represent the proverbial tip of the iceberg.

18. See *Oslo Tingrett*, case no. 15-010833MED-OTIR/04.

19. Thjømøe, Silje Løvstad (2015): ‘Tiltalt for rasistisk motivert vold: «Fucking Muslims, you don’t have anything to do here’, *VG* 22.04.15.

20. Kundnani, Arun (2014): *The Muslims Are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the War on Terror*. London and New York: Verso.

In the legal field, a verdict from the Kristiansand Magistrate's Court from February 2015 provides some grounds for cautious optimism with regard to the Norwegian legal system's willingness and ability to confront anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia in Norwegian society at present. The case, a civil lawsuit, had been brought by Arne Tumyr, a founding member and until 2013 chairperson of the Norwegian far-right and Islamophobic organisation Stop the Islamisation of Norway (SIAN, established in 2007), against Imam Akmal Ali of the Muslim Union Agder for having publicly defamed him under Norwegian General Penal Code § 247 in an interview with the public broadcaster NRK Sørlandet in April 2014 by citing SIAN's activities as "grounded in racism, hatred propaganda and a whole lot of lies" and using them as grounds for his refusal to meet Tumyr for a public debate in the local library in Kristiansand. By bringing the case to the courts, Tumyr effectively sought to limit not only Ali's, but also the wider Norwegian Muslim community's right and ability to engage in 'counter-speech.' In court, Tumyr, a former founding member of the Secular Humanist Association (Human-Etisk Forbund, HEF) in Bergen, Norway in the 1950s, and long-time media editor, characterised Islam as "worse than Communism, Nazism" and as a "cancerous tumor in our society." Associate Professor Lars Gule of the Oslo and Akershus University College (HiOA) and Dr Sindre Bangstad from the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo (UiO) testified in Ali's legal defense and on the basis of extensive reports on Tumyr's public statements about Islam and Muslims in his capacity as a SIAN chairperson from 2007 to 2013, and both concurred in their conclusion that many of these could be characterised as being "grounded in racism." In a verdict later confirmed upon appeal from Tumyr three votes against zero by a higher court, the Kristiansand Magistrate's Court in case no. 14-158854TVI-KI-SA/26 found in favour of Ali, and sentenced Tumyr to pay the costs of the trial and the legal defense for Ali. Though the fact that the case was decided by a lower court means that it will have limited legal precedent for future cases of this sort, it is, in effect, the first time on historical record that a Norwegian court in sentencing has accepted arguments relating to the conceptualisation of racism which goes beyond its narrow conceptualisation as being exclusively applicable to cases in which notions of biological 'race' are invoked. Given that the widespread 'denials of the existence of racism'²¹ against Muslims in Norway often take the form of denying that Muslims can be subjected to racism and racialisation, since they do not qualify as a 'race' (as if 'race' is anything but a social and cultural construction²² and as if 'race' has not historically almost always included constructions relating to 'culture' and/or 'religion'),²³ this verdict must be said to constitute some progress in the legal field.

21. Van Dijk, Teuns A. (1992): 'Discourse and the Denial of Racism', *Discourse & Society* 3 (1): 87-118.

22. Sussman, Ronald Wald (2014): *The Myth of Race*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

23. Bethencourt, Francisco (2013): *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century*. Princeton, New Jersey and London, U.K.: Princeton University Press.

Politics

In spite of the fact that the current government has made efforts against hate speech a central part of its 2014 'Action Plan Against Radicalisation and Violent Extremism',²⁴ minimal funding for academic research on hate speech has so far been made available, and the funding allocations made available to local police districts for the purpose of prioritising and increasing investigative and prosecutorial skills and competencies in combatting hate speech seem negligible. More disturbingly still, is the fact that the two parties in power in Norway since October 2013, the Conservative Party and the Progress Party, courtesy of initiatives from their respective youth wings, still have the abolishment of Norwegian hate speech laws on their party political platforms, and that any number of centrally placed PP politicians leave racist, Islamophobic and discriminatory posts from their political followers on their Facebook pages untouched whenever these appear. Open public reference to the far right and the racist 'Eurabia'-conspiracy theory²⁵ was last made by an MP aligned with the PP, namely Ulf Leirstein, who sits on the Justice Committee in the Norwegian Parliament (Storting), in August 2014.²⁶ On Facebook, Leirstein fumed against one of the very few Norwegian MPs of Muslim background, former Norwegian Minister of Culture and Chair of the Justice Committee in the Norwegian Parliament Hadia Tajik of the social democratic Labour Party, and insinuated that she both supported beheadings by 'ISIS' and serial human rights violations and practiced taqiyya.²⁷ Leirstein's Facebook posts went completely unsanctioned by the party leadership of the PP and were defended by the PP's Vice Chairman MP Per Sandberg as an exercise in 'freedom of expression.'²⁸ They form part of a relatively consistent pattern whereby PP officials have long instrumentalised popular fears about Islam and Muslims in the Norwegian social and political contexts, and provided both tacit and open support of PP members and politicians who engage in hate speech and speech seeking to harass and intimidate moderate and peaceful Muslims in Norway.²⁹ Though one has in recent years seen many cases of PP members and politicians engaging in various forms of hate speech against Norwegian Muslims on social media, the party,

24. Ministry of Justice (2014): *Handlingsplan mot radikaliserings og voldelig ekstremisme*. Oslo: Ministry of Justice. Available at: <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/Handlingsplan-mot-radikaliserings-og-voldelig-ekstremisme/id762413/>

25. Carr, Matt (2006): 'You Are Now Entering Eurabia', *Race & Class* 48 (1): 1-22. Bangstad, Sindre (2013): 'Eurabia Comes to Norway', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24 (3): 369-391.

26. Bangstad, Sindre (2016): 'Recoding Nationalism: Islam, Muslims and Islamophobia in Norway'. Forthcoming in Hafez, Farid (ed.) *Islamophobia Studies Yearbook*. p. 60.

27. Blindheim, Anne Marte (2014): 'Uheldig muslimdominans å ha Hadedta Taquia som leder i justiskomiteén', *Dagbladet* 23.08.14.

28. Bangstad, Sindre (2016): 'Recoding Nationalism: Islam, Muslims and Islamophobia in Norway'. Forthcoming in Hafez, Farid (ed.) *Islamophobia Studies Yearbook*. p. 60.

29. Bangstad, Sindre (2015): *The Politics of Mediated Presence: Exploring the Voices of Muslims in Norway's Mediated Public Spheres*. Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press.

ostensibly wedded to a programme of non-tolerance for racism, has yet to sanction a single member or politician for such speech. When the Ministry of Justice, led by the Progress Party's Minister of Justice Anders Anundsen in November 2015, launched a Facebook page intended to dissuade potential asylum seekers from applying for asylum in Norway, the page had to be closed down due to the sheer number of racist posts inciting violence against refugees and asylum seekers, many of them directed against Muslims.³⁰ There are, in other words, reasons to doubt whether the current Norwegian government, and Progress Party cabinet ministers in particular, treat this with the seriousness it requires, and are conscientious – rather than ‘calculatedly ambiguous’³¹ – about the signals their own discourse and rhetoric about refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and Muslims are sending out to the population at large and their electoral constituents in particular.

In a shadow report to the CERD Commission authored by the Norwegian Centre Against Racism (ARS) in connection with Norway's 21st/22nd Periodic Report under Article 9 of the ICERD Convention in Geneva, Switzerland in August 2015,³² and submitted on behalf of 21 Norwegian non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the NGOs alerted the CERD Commission to the fact that the Norwegian NGO Human Rights Service (HRS), established and led by the former journalist Hege Storhaug since 2001, when it entered the state budget through an extraordinary allocation proposed by the Progress Party³³ in spite of routinely engaging in statements that are Islamophobic in nature, was still receiving state funding under a grants scheme meant to “support organisations that work to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities, rights and obligations as regards participation in society and making use of their own resources.” Since the PP's coming into power in October 2013, the PP-appointed Minister of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion Solveig Horne has seen to the HRS receiving an unsolicited 80 per cent budget increase in the revised state budget for 2014, from 500,000 NOK to 900,000 NOK. That led Hege Storhaug herself to declare to the media that her organisation, the HRS, was literally “having funds thrown after them” by the new government.³⁴ Since 2001, the HRS has received over 10 million Norwegian kroner (the equivalent of 1 million Euro) in direct state support. In the same revised budget, Minister Horne cut state funding for civil society organisations

30. NTB (2015): ‘Regjeringen lanserer asylkampanje på sosiale medier’, *NTB* 07.11.15.

31. Wodak, Ruth (2015): *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. London and New York: Sage.

32. Linløkken, Mari (2015): *NGO Alternative Report: Supplementing and Commenting on Norway's 21st/22nd Periodic Report Submitted by Norway under Article 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*. Oslo: The Norwegian Centre Against Racism.

33. See Razack, Sherene H. (2004): ‘Imperilled Muslim women, dangerous men and civilised Europeans: legal and social responses to forced marriages’, *Feminist Legal Studies* 12: 129-74. Fekete, Liz (2007): *A Suitable Enemy: Racism, Migration and Islamophobia in Europe*. London and New York: Pluto Press.

34. NTB (2013): ‘Vi får bare pengene slengt etter oss’, *NTB* 09.11.13.

with a long record in the field of anti-discrimination work which had been public about their opposition to the PP, and its policies and discourse on immigrants and minorities in Norway. Though obfuscations about this matter abound in media representations, the relevant analytical question here is not whether Storhaug and the HRS has a right to freedom of expression: Storhaug and the HRS receive lavish mainstream media coverage in Norway, and enjoy a privileged access to op-ed and opinion page columns in mainstream Norwegian newspapers. Furthermore, the Norwegian Supreme Court in its 1981 Vivi Krogh verdict (a case relating to a Norwegian neo-Nazi who had distributed some 10,000 self-authored racist leaflets against Pakistani immigrants in Norway) established a precedent whereby statements regarding Islam – however offensive – were considered legally protected speech under the Norwegian Constitution’s § 100, which Norwegian courts have followed ever since. The blasphemy provisions of the Norwegian General Penal Code § 247, in practice dormant since the 1930s in Norway, were abolished by the Norwegian Parliament in May 2015.³⁵ The relevant question is to what extent an NGO with a long and sustained record of racist, discriminatory and hateful speech directed at Muslims, which has in the recent past promoted ‘Eurabia’ theories, advocated that the Norwegian state violate international laws and human rights provisions relating to freedom of religion and belief by closing down mosques, and publicly harassed a Somali refugee family living in a small municipality in Norway with minor children identified with full names and pictures on their website at rights.no³⁶ be entitled to lavish funding from a liberal and secular state.³⁷

The media

In 2015, Norwegian mainstream media has continued its long-standing and established practice of referring to even far right civil society activists who regularly engage in both racist, discriminatory and Islamophobic rhetoric targeted at Muslims, as “critics of Islam”, thereby implying that what organisations such as SIAN and the HRS are involved in is part of a venerable Enlightenment tradition of ‘critique of religion’, rather than in advocacy for stigmatisation, exclusion and discrimination against Norwegian Muslims.³⁸

How close the PP has long been to the HRS was illustrated by the fact that the party’s long-standing Vice Chairman and since a cabinet reshuffle in December 2015 Norway’s Minister of Fisheries Per Sandberg, who has a long and sustained record of Islamophobic speech and fabrications about Islam and Muslims

35. Myklebust, Anders (2015): ‘Nå er det lov å håne andres tro’, *Vårt Land* 05.05.15.

36. Bangstad, Sindre (2016): ‘Recoding Nationalism: Islam, Muslims and Islamophobia in Norway’. Forthcoming in Hafez, Farid (ed.) *Islamophobia Studies Yearbook*. p. 61.

37. Brettschneider, Corey (2012): *When the State Speaks, What Should It Say? How Democracies Can Protect Expression And Promote Equality*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

38. Elgvin, Olav (2013): ‘Tore Tvedt, afrikaner-kritiker’, *Aftenposten* 15.02.13.

in Norway,³⁹ chose to personally intervene when a senior state official from the PP's coalition partner the Conservative Party, on a radio show made unfavourable comments about Storhaug, by demanding that the official in question retract her statements. Upon being queried on a radio show broadcast by the national broadcaster NRK about who the most dangerous persons in Norway at present were, the official in question, Laila Bokhari of the Prime Minister's Office (SMK), responded that the jihadist sympathiser Arfaan Bhatti and Hege Storhaug were two of "the most dangerous persons in Norway". In his statements to the media Sandberg equated the PP's views with those of Storhaug and fumed that Bokhari had "equated Hege Storhaug with terrorists."⁴⁰ Never mind that the jihadist in question, Arfaan Bhatti, a previous career criminal diagnosed as a psychopath by psychiatric experts in his first criminal trial in the 1990s, has never been convicted under charges relating to terrorism in Norwegian courts, but relating to blackmail, violent assaults and domestic abuse. After a new city government in Oslo consisting of the social democratic Labour Party (AP), the Socialist Left Party (SV) Party and the Green Party (MDG) was formed as a result of the municipal election results of September 2015, the municipality of Oslo cut all support for the HRS, a support to the tune of 1 million NOK a year (circa 100,000 Euro) which had been initiated and guaranteed by an Oslo City Government then controlled by the Progress Party and the Conservative Party. In the media blitz which surrounded the publication of Hege Storhaug's self-published popular book *Islam – The Eleventh Plague Of The Nation* (*Islam – Den Ellevte Landeplage*), which scholarly critics have demonstrated to be replete with distortions and fabrications,⁴¹ Storhaug not only called for prohibitions against mosques in Norway, but also insinuated on the basis of non-existent empirical data, that some "thirty to forty per cent of Norwegian Muslims could be characterised as 'fundamentalist.'"⁴² Quite what that term is supposed to mean is, of course, left deliberately ambiguous on Storhaug's part, but in the Norwegian discursive terrain in which Storhaug and the HRS operate, it clearly connotes both support for violence and terror. Storhaug was, unusually for an amateurishly written self-published book, provided with a massive amount of media coverage, including uncritical interviews in mainstream Norwegian newspapers. This confirms what scholars of the far right in Europe have been pointing to for quite some time now, namely that the rise and mainstreaming of political far right formations in Europe can hard-

39. Bangstad, Sindre (2014): *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia*. London and New York: Zed Books.

40. Moen, Marie Kingsrød and Ertzaas, Pål (2015): 'Raser mot Erna-rådgiver: Hun sidestiller Hege Storhaug med terrorister', *VG* 03.06.15.

41. Gule, Lars (2016): 'Storhaug er en ukritisk kritiker', *Dag og Tid* 29.01.16.

42. Sveen, Erik Hind (2015): 'Storhaug: - 40 prosent av muslimene kan være fundamentalister. Forskere: - Nåja...' *NRK Finmark* 09.12.15.

ly be understood without reference to these formations' ample platforms in and skillful use of the media.⁴³

In its Concluding Observations on the 21st and 22nd Period Reports of Norway, issued on 25 September, 2015, the CERD Committee refrained from commenting on this particular case, but noted its concerns about “the increase in such [hate] speech and xenophobic discourse by politicians, in the media and in other public platforms” in Norway, noted its concern over a lack of adequate and effective measures to “prevent and protect against hate speech” and over the lack of a “long-term strategy aimed at firmly combating hate speech” with reference to Articles 2, 4, 5, 6 of the ICERD Convention.

Cyberspace

Central nodes for the propagation of Islamophobia in Norway are websites like *document.no*, run by the former Maoist-Leninist and self-declared Christian conservative former media reporter Hans Rustad; *rights.no*, run by Human Rights Service (HRS); and *sian.no*, run by the Stop the Islamisation of Norway (SIAN). Though of more marginal impact, the right-wing extremist blogger Peder Are Nøstvold Jensen (aka 'Fjordman'), believed to be living in Copenhagen, Denmark, where he is closely aligned with Lars Hedegaard of the Danish Free Press Society, also serves as a node for dissemination of Islamophobia in Norway and Scandinavia through his writings on various far right websites. Additionally, online comments fields in mainstream Norwegian newspapers also serve to propagate Islamophobic views and sentiments, with limited moderation by the newspapers concerned.

Central figures in the networks of Islamophobia

By virtue of her extensive links to the governing Progress Party, extensive state funding and long-standing links with Lars Hedegaard and Helle Merete Brix, Hege Storhaug and her partner, Rita Karlsen of the HRS is the most central and influential person in current Norwegian Islamophobia networks.

Policy recommendations

Given that the government in power in Norway since October 2013 bases much of its popular and electoral support on opposition to immigration in general and Muslim immigration in particular, and especially the fact that the governing Progress Party continues to instrumentalise Islamophobia for their own political purposes, appeals to the government to counter-act Islamophobia and its public expression in the form of hate speech against Muslims are likely to fall on deaf ears in the future too, and to be met with non-committal talk. However, part of the state bureaucracy, various directorates (IMDI) and ombudspersons (LDO), as well as the Hate Crimes Unit at Oslo Police are well aware

43. Ellinas, Antonio E. (2011): *The Media and the Far-Right in Western Europe: Playing the Nationalist Card*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Rydgren, Jens (2007): 'The Sociology of the Radical Right', *Annual Review of Sociology* 33: 241-262.

of the prevalence of hate crimes and speech against Muslims in Norwegian society at present, and have also at times registered their concerns over it. Norwegian NGOs working in the relevant fields are both underfunded and under-resourced, but have been able to consistently raise their concerns over these issues with international monitoring bodies such as ECRI, the UN's ICERD Commission and the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA).

Norway has a comparatively weak tradition of academic scholarship on racism and discrimination. It is generally difficult to obtain funding for research on these topics from state-funded research bodies like the Norwegian Research Council (NRC). This also means that one lacks adequate empirical data on the prevalence and impact of hate speech and hate crimes against Muslims in Norway, as well as adequate systems for registration of these on a national basis.

Countermeasures

Civil society organisations such as the Norwegian Centre against Racism (ARS), OMOD (The Organisation Against Public Discrimination) and other organisations have continued their long-standing work of countering racist and discriminatory attitudes and ideas, but have not had the resources available to launch new initiatives and campaigns in this field. The Lutheran State Church in Norway, through its interreligious dialogue and involvement in national and international ecumenical bodies has continued its work for interreligious tolerance, also in extensive formalised contacts with the Islamic Council of Norway (IRN).⁴⁴

CHRONOLOGY

January 2015

- Pro-PEGIDA demonstrations gathers up to 190 far right demonstrators in the capital Oslo and spreads to smaller Norwegian towns, before fizzling out by March.

February 2015

- Three football hooligans and neo-Nazi sympathisers in Oslo assault two males of Kurdish and Muslim background on an open street in Oslo city centre at night. Later sentenced to 120, 75 and 60 days imprisonment.

February 2015

- A Magistrate's Court in Kristiansand acquits a local imam for defamation in a civil lawsuit against Arne Tumyr of the far right and Islamophobic Stop the Islamisation of Norway (SIAN) under Norwegian General Penal Code § 247 for having alleged in a media interview that SIAN's activities are "grounded in racism, hatred, propaganda and a whole lot of lies."

⁴⁴ Leirvik, Oddbjørn Birger (2015): 'Policy toward Religion, State Support, and Interreligious Dialogue: The Case of Norway', *Interreligious Studies* 25 (1): 92-108.

March 2015

- Norwegian man (57) sentenced for violations of Norwegian General Penal Code § 135 (a) (now § 185) and § 390 (a) for public racist hate speech and harassment of a hijab-wearing young Norwegian Muslim woman of North African background. The verdict is the first of its kind in Norwegian legal history. The case was brought by the Oslo Hate Crimes Unit.

August 2015

- Twenty-one Norwegian NGOs and the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud (LDO) express strong criticism over the Norwegian government's lack of concrete action on hate speech and hate crimes, and its continued funding of the far right and Islamophobic NGO Human Rights Service (HRS) at hearings at the UN ICERD Convention in Geneva, Switzerland.

December 2014

- The self-published book by far right and state-funded Islamophobic civil society activist Hege Storhaug *Islam-den ellefte landeplage* receives lavish and often uncritical media attention in Norwegian mainstream media and becomes a best-selling title. In media interviews, Storhaug characterises some 30 to 40 per cent of Norwegian Muslims as 'fundamentalists' and argues for prohibitions against the building of mosques.

December 2014

- The far right politician Sylvi Listhaug of the Progress Party becomes Minister of Immigration and Integration in the Norwegian government and proposes a series of extraordinary measures to curb immigration of asylum seekers and refugees to Norway as well as measures to limit rights to family reunification which Norwegian human rights experts and international human rights organisations characterise as being in violation of international law and Norway's commitments under international conventions.

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Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism poses a growing threat to the democratic foundations of European constitutions and social peace as well as the coexistence of different cultures throughout Europe. Both civil society actors and states should acknowledge the seriousness of this issue and develop concrete policies to counter Islamophobia.

As the leading think tank in Turkey, SETA felt an urgent need to address this problem. In fact, there are still people denying the very existence of racism against Muslims. Many state and civil society institutions, from the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) to the countless civil society organisations throughout Europe, have done priceless work to prove and establish the opposite. Yet, institutions like the FRA publish only irregular reports on a restricted number of countries while most civil society organisations tackle racism in general and only few focus on Islamophobia in particular -this is the urgent gap our report wishes to fill.

The European Islamophobia Report (EIR) is an annual report, which is presented for the first time this year. It currently comprises 25 national reports regarding each state and the tendencies of Islamophobia in each respective country. The current report features the work of 37 extraordinary scholars. In the years to come we will attempt to cover even more countries. This report aims to enable policymakers as well as the public to discuss the issue of Islamophobia with the help of qualitative data. At the same time, several of its unique characteristic features make a difference to the current state of the debate on Islamophobia. Studies on Islamophobia have in the past predominantly concentrated on Western Europe. This is especially the case with reports focusing on Islamophobia. The EIR is the first to cover a wide range of Eastern European countries like Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania and Latvia. This will enrich the debate on racism in general and Islamophobia in Europe in particular.

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



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