"Islamophobia", or is it Permissible to Criticise Islam?

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Abstract

Due to terrorist attacks and failures of integration in Western societies, the tension between majority social groups and Muslim immigrants is increasing, which often leads to verbal and physical violence. Many organisations have been established to monitor perceived and real attacks against Muslims, and often accuse not only those who hurl the insults, but also politicians and public figures who speak critically about Islam, of "Islamophobia". In the absence of a universally accepted definition, the accusation of "Islamophobia", as well as its dismissal, have now become political weapons, and the discourse is now dominated by the extremes on both sides.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Islam in Europe, Anti-Muslim Discourse, Xenophobia, Immigration

1. Introduction

Due to terrorist attacks, mass migration, and challenges of integration, fear of cultural loss and other reasons – not the mention the activity of fearmongers – antipathy towards Muslims, and Islam in general, is constantly on the increase in some Western societies.[1] Some sociological research examining this topic views this simply as a result of the increase in the number of Muslims in European countries.[2] Others see it as largely counterproductive that, due to various government measures and institutional policies, the visibility of Muslims in public life and the public sphere far exceeds their actual numbers, so people perceive the Muslim presence and cultural influence to be greater than it actually is.[3] Still others see the antipathy as a symptom of frustration with multicultural societies.[4]

Muslims also sense this growing tension. Since September 11, 2001, public discourse has been radicalised in both America and Europe, and in the wake of

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[1] Pew Research 2019.
[2] Haddad 2002.
[3] Vertovec 2002.
[4] Meer 2009.

the 2015 migration crisis and the increasing number of terrorist attacks, insults to their communities and physical attacks against mosques and Muslim-owned properties have increased.[5] Of course, in many cases, the awareness of being frowned upon or discriminated against is not based on objective facts, but on the basis of subjective experiences and feelings in individuals and groups. What is more, members of minority communities can be more sensitive to perceived or real grievances: the consciousness of collective victimhood strengthens the sense of identity among those belonging to the group, increases solidarity within the community, and at the same time reifies the categories of "us" and "them", thereby destroying social cohesion.[6]

The term "Islamophobia" entered Western public discourse more than three decades ago. First, academic cliques used it against their Islamic-critical political and ideological opponents, whence it spread throughout both political and social discourse. In the absence of a clear, universally accepted definition, "Islamophobia" and the fight against it have become highly politicised. In many cases, the monitoring of violence against European Muslims is not carried out by state institutions, but by human rights organisations, peripheral immigrant groups and institutes established by foreign countries, often further worsening the relationship between majority societies and Muslim communities.

This study examines the debate surrounding "Islamophobia" and the social and political fight against it. First, explores the processes and important events that led to the development of the negative image of Islam, and how Western European and North American political discourse reacted to it. It then examines the birth and spread of the term "Islamophobia", and investigates the most important groups and organisations that monitor "Islamophobia", focusing on their political and ideological affiliations.

2. The history of a sometimes problematic relationship

In the distant past, the security of European political entities was threatened more than once by powers that happened to be Muslim. However, the Moorish occupation of Iberia and the Ottoman conquests of South-Eastern Europe have not – or just partially – been incorporated into the historical memory of Western European countries (the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium or the

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[5] FRA 2017, Pew Research 2012, Pew Research 2020.
[6] Noor 2017.

Scandinavian states) where a large number of Muslim immigrants live today. One exception is France, where the memory of the invasion of Iberia and the battles of Charles Martel remained part of French cultural awareness into the twentieth century. Historians, however, have immortalised these not exclusively as religious conflicts, but at least as much as ethnic clashes and power struggles.

In most Western countries, historical memories of the encounter with Islam are linked to a lesser extent to the Crusades (or more precisely, to the reinterpreted memory of them generated during the Renaissance) and to a greater extent to colonialism. In the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, the available knowledge about Islam came mainly from Orientalists and colonial bureaucrats, who wrote about the Eastern religion and its followers, at times in a positive and at times in a negative light. At the same time, many people (especially French authors) also considered colonisation as a civilizing mission, with the colonised peoples considered inferior to the colonisers on cultural, ethnic or even religious grounds, and for whom – in their interpretation – colonisation meant the arrival of culture and civilisation.

From the 1960s, the inhabitants of former colonies and other regions outside Europe began to flow en masse into Western European countries in search of work, which caused significant social tensions even in the beginning. Since the new arrivals included both Muslims and Christians (and, in the case of France, Jews) who identified themselves not primarily based on their religion, but on the basis of their country of origin and nationality, the nascent anti-immigration forces also framed the problems of integration and culture in the same manner. Anti-immigration discourse followed suit, earning several politicians the label of racism, and putting them in political quarantine.[7]

Third World immigration to the United States in general, and Muslim immigration in particular had different patterns. Strict immigration policies meant that mainly educated people with a higher social status reached the US, and thanks to their small number, they quickly integrated. Americans' image of Islam was thus not shaped by direct experience, but by foreign policy. This essentially neutral relationship turned negative as a result of the 1979 Iranian revolution and the embassy hostage drama, which led to an increase in films, books and other works depicting Muslim societies as violent and barbaric, and these representations soon appeared on European markets as well. The negative image thus formed was again

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[7] Good examples of this include the French National Front (1972), the Belgian Flemish Bloc (1982), the British National Party (1982), or the Swedish Democrats (1988), which initially opposed immigration on the basis of nationality and culture rather than religion.

confirmed in 1989, when Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa calling for the death of Salman Rushdie, the UK-based author of *The Satanic Verses*.[8]

With the end of the Cold War, public discourse again shifted in the United States, as voices interpreting Islam as a political ideology similar to communism became ever louder. In 1993, *Foreign Affairs* published Samuel Huntington's article "The Clash of Civilizations?", which predicted a battle between "the West" and "Islamic civilization". This idea has also been promoted by think-tanks such as the Middle East Forum, founded by Daniel Pipes.[9]

The real shock, however, came with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, after which, on the front page of Newsweek, Fareed Zakaria asked a question foremost on the minds of the American masses, who in general knew little about foreign policy: "Why do they hate us?"[10] The answer to this question was not given primarily by scholars of Islam, but by lay public writers on the subject, most of whom tried to explain complex political, social and historical phenomena through Islamic source texts available in English translation. Among many others, these included professional apocalypse watcher Joel Richardson, physics teacher Bill Warner and journalist Robert Spencer, who founded the *Jihad Watch* blog in 2003.[11] At the same time, neoconservative and neo-Protestant groups, which interpreted Islam from a Cold War perspective, were given influential positions in the George W. Bush administration, so the distinction between "Islamism" and "Islam" became increasingly blurred. In 2007, the Reverend Pat Robertson – who himself campaigned for the 1988 presidential election, on a platform of placing American politics on evangelical foundations – defined Islam as a "worldwide political movement".[12] His views then spread throughout the Western world through various born-again Christian networks.

In the 1990s and 2000s, Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Tablighi Jamaat, various Salafist networks and other groups established themselves in Western European countries, where they began the "re-Islamisation" of second- and third-generation Muslim immigrants who do not practice the religion, or who lived it only as a cultural tradition. Although their social base was not very significant, the vast majority of the members of Muslim communities had reservations about them, their most prominent figures demanded exclusivity and made statements in the name of "Islam", made alliances with various political

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[8] The guardian 2009.
[9] The Nation 2004.
[10] Zakaria 2001.
[11] The website can be accessed at: https://www.jihadwatch.org/
[12] The Washington Post 2017.

(typically left-wing) forces and successfully steered the agenda of Muslim public discourse. They set themselves up as "defenders of Islam" and responded with aggressive rhetoric to perceived or real criticism of their religion, as well as to the growing number of insults against Muslims.[13] The same groups (frequently in conjunction with their more moderate sympathisers) adapted notions thematising the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, as part of a "war against Islam" and reinforced the illusion among Muslim immigrants of a kind of global "persecution of Muslims".

The relationship between societal majorities and Muslim minorities was further worsened by the terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2004, the murder of the Islam-critical Dutch film director Theo Van Gogh in the same year, the 2005 London terrorist attacks and the Danish caricature scandal, also in 2005. Anti-immigration parties, such as the French National Front, the Dutch Freedom Party, the Sweden Democrats and other formations, seeking to inoculate themselves against accusations of racism and anti-Semitism, have increasingly adopted the predominantly American conception of Islam as an ideology, i.e. as something not inherently linked to a particular ethnicity, and so open to criticism. They quickly found allies in authors with Muslim and/or Middle Eastern roots, both in the Old and New Worlds, such as Ayan Hirshi Ali, Ibn Warraq, Robert Spencer and Tawfik Hamid, who, although they did not have academic backgrounds in the subject, nevertheless positioned themselves as authorities on religious and complex social issues simply by virtue of their origins. In addition, since 2003, numerous lobbying groups linked to the Israeli right have been established to counterbalance what they regarded as biased pro-Palestinianism of Western European mainstream politics, and these reinforced the narrative that Europe and Israel face the same common enemy: radical Islam.[14]

In response to the radicalisation of public discourse, more and more Muslim and non-Muslim organisations began to monitor European "Islamophobia", often boosting their own political careers in the process.

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[13] In 2000 there were 354 hate crimes against people of Middle Eastern origin in the United States, but in 2001 this figure rose to 1,501, representing an increase of 324 percent. Oswald 2005.

[14] Examples of such lobby groups include the European Coalition for Israel, the Friends of Israel Initiative, the AJC Transatlantic Institute, the Israel Allies Caucus, the European Foundation for Democracy and the European Leadership Network.

3. The scholarly and "Islamophobia"

Many terms are used in European languages to describe antipathy towards Islam (anti-Islam, anti-Muslim, etc.), but of these, "Islamophobia" is the most politicised. The word is a 20th-century neologism, combining "Islam" with the Greek "phobia" (meaning unreasonable anxiety or instinctive fear). It first appeared in the 1910s in various French works, used by the French elite ruling Algeria, as well as Western-educated Muslims, to characterise antipathy towards practicing Muslims and popular religiosity.[15] The term later appeared in various Spanish and French writings, typically paired with anti-Semitism.

The word entered the English language, which now dominates international public discourse, in 1985, when Edward Said, the Palestinian-Christian literature professor at Columbia University, in his article "Orientalism Reconsidered", like previous French authors, compared Western prejudices towards Islam and Muslims to anti-Semitism.[16] The term began to spread slowly, but after the social tensions and political conflicts following September 11, 2001, it became a focus of left-wing academic interest.

Since the 1990s, the left-wing, anti-colonialist, pro-Palestinian trend, which defends minorities, such as Muslims and Islam in general, on liberal grounds, has significantly strengthened in the English-speaking academic world. These groups are in a constant ideological battle with conservative and/or pro-Israeli scholars, who are in the minority in academic life, as well as with conservative think tanks and political activists who attack Islam.

The loudest voices in the discourse surrounding "Islamophobia" have thus started to take place on an ideological level, where scholarship and political activism are blurred. One example of this is the Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project, established under the aegis of the Race and Gender Center of the University of California in the second half of the 2000s, whose members also started a scholarly journal called the *Islamophobia Studies Journal* to investigate the phenomenon.[17]

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[15] ALLEN 2007.

[16] SAID 1985.

[17] The official website of the project: https://www.crg.berkeley.edu/research/islamophobia-research-documentation-project/.

In the English- and French-language academic environments, it is common to see left-wing scholarly apologists for Islamism. One prominent representative of this trend is John Esposito, a professor at Georgetown University and one of the doyens of research on Islamist movements, who defended Islamists in the Egyptian and Malaysian contexts, and has authored several books and countless articles on the topic of "Islamophobia".[18]

There are quite a few immigrant academics with a Muslim background who have personal ties to Islamist groups. One of the most well-known is the Swiss-Egyptian Tarik Ramadan, a teacher at Oxford University, who, in addition to his academic career, has appeared in the role of a "Muslim reformer" and had close ties to various Islamist movements, including the Muslim Brotherhood, whose founder was his grandfather. Tariq Ramadan has also spoken out against "Islamophobia" (see later).

4. Interpretative frameworks for "Islamophobia"

Academic works examine "Islamophobia" primarily at the level of discourse, starting from what was laid down by Edward Said in the book *Orientalism* (1978), according to which the colonialist West considers the once colonised peoples – thus, Muslims – to be culturally inferior to itself in order to justify its power ambitions. Some people consider the prejudice against former Catholic Irish immigrants to be among the historical antecedents of 21st-century American "Islamophobia": according to this, Anglo-Saxon Protestants viewed Catholicism – like Islam now – as an incorrigibly totalitarian religion, and looked down on Catholic immigrants for being poorer and less educated than themselves. They also feared that these communities would produce criminals and terrorists.[19] Others believe that anti-Islamism has its roots in McCarthyism, i.e. the "witch hunt" carried out against perceived and actual communists during the 1950s.[20] Still others see "Islamophobia" as a religious reinterpretation of traditional racism against Arab and other non-white immigrants.[21]

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[18] Books written and edited by John Esposito on the subject: *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (1999), *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century* (2011) and *Islamophobia and Radicalization* (2019).

[19] Saunders 2012.

[20] Kaplan 2007.

[21] Poynting 2007.

On the European scene, several scholars have drawn parallels with pre-World-War-Two anti-Semitism, claiming that, just like Muslims now, Jews were once accused of believing themselves to be better than others due to their secret religious doctrines, of wanting to build a parallel society, of reshaping the culture of the majority and striving for power, and of representing a privileged group posing an internal threat.[22]

Such views support the declared goal of some groups to classify "Islamophobia" as a political label similar to racism and anti-Semitism, excluding all those tarred with it from public and political life.

5. Criticisms of the term "Islamophobia"

Following the Jyllands-Posten Mohamed cartoon scandal, in March 2006 twelve writers and public figures, known for their hostile attitude towards Muslim, or at least for their controversial notions on Islam including Salman Rushdie and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, published a joint article in the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo, in which they warned that accusations of "Islamophobia" would prevent criticism of "Islamic totalitarianism".[23] Later, Hirsi Ali called it an artificially constructed term, used as a screen by radicals to avoid criticism.[24]

Douglas Murray, a British critic of Islam, went further, pointing out that the term has no meaning, since the word phobia means irrational fear, while the fear of Islam in general, and especially of its most fundamentalist sects, is entirely rational.[25] The British writer Maajid Nawaz, who used to be a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir and then left it to become an anti-radicalisation expert, pointed out that "Islamophobia" is a misleading term when it comes to discrimination against Muslims. There is a big difference between criticizing an idea and rejecting a specific person because of their political or religious views.[26] Philippe d'Iribarne, an anthropologist at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique, one of France's most prestigious scientific institutions, took a similar position, arguing that the term Islamophobia "is a trap created to prevent the understanding of reality, and to hinder the free spirit in the exercise of its rights", and suggesting that the term is impeding rapprochement between the Muslim and non-Muslim

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[22] Schiffer 2011.
[23] BBC 2006.
[24] The Guardian 2017.
[25] Murray 2013.
[26] LBC 2020.

French population.[27] Similarly, many public figures have suggested abandoning the term "Islamophobia" and instead using "anti-Muslim", "anti-Islamic", "Islam-critical" and others.

6. Organisations fighting against "Islamophobia"

In all Western European countries, discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or religion, and especially hate speech or violence, carry criminal consequences. As such, insults against Muslims, if they are reported by their victims and the fact is proven, will lead to charges. On the other hand, a more general critique of Islam, especially if it criticises the religion on an ideological basis, is not punishable.

Muslim countries and larger diasporas rarely respond to Western criticism of Islam in general. There are many layers to the identity of Muslim societies and individuals, of which religion is only one and often not the most defining one. Since the authority and responsibility of religious and political leaders does not extend to Muslims in general, but only to particular groups of them, and since, additionally, there are innumerable ideological, religious, political, economic, social and other contradictions within the Islamic world, "Islam" and the generic protection of "Muslims" is almost always overridden by rational considerations: one generally only enters a conflict that does not seem to entail too much risk and damage.

It follows that the formulation of the problem as one of "Islamophobia", as well as monitoring it or challenging it, are largely the preserve of actors who have some sort of political and/or economic interest in this, or who, thanks to their position, can afford to approach the topic from an ideological rather than a pragmatic perspective. These are typically the above-mentioned academic circles, human rights organisations, socially alienated Islamist groups, international organisations and – in rare cases – state actors. In the absence of a single definition, various groups tend to define "Islamophobia" both broadly and arbitrarily.

Below, we provide a non-exhaustive list of the most important past and present actors in the fight against "Islamophobia".

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[27] Le Figaro 2019.

Local focus groups

The UK

In Europe, the formulation of "Islamophobia" as a problem, and its inclusion in political discourse, is linked to the left-wing English think tank the Runnymede Trust, which in its 1994 study investigating anti-Semitism, found that, like Jews, Muslims also suffer insults in their everyday lives.[28] In 1996, the organisation founded the British Muslims and Islamophobia Committee (CBMI), which a year later, with the support of Labour Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, issued a report on attacks and negative discrimination against British Muslims.[29]

In 2000, liberal Muslims in London founded the rights group Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR), which primarily investigated the portrayal of Muslims in the media. After the terrorist attacks of 2001, FAIR began investigating security measures against Muslims and violence against Muslims.[30] FAIR organised several joint movements with the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). The organisation, which considers itself representative, but which is highly divisive among British Muslims, partnered with the British government after the 2005 terrorist attacks, but that cooperation ended after some of its conservative statements proved unacceptable to the government, and some of its high-ranking officials were proven to be in contact with Islamist organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami.[31] Since then, FAIR has ceased operations and the MCB has shrivelled.

The United States

In the United States, the history of the civil rights movement goes back more than a century and there is a long tradition of organizing to campaign for the rights and interests of various religious and ethnic groups. Since Muslims were traditionally few, came from many countries and represented many ethnicities and religious trends, and were moreover geographically scattered in terms of settlement, they were late in coming together to represent their interests, and their influence lags far behind that of African-American, Latino, Jewish and other groups. The pioneering

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[28] Runnymede 1994.
[29] The website of the organisation: https://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects/commission OnBritishMuslims
[30] Fair 2004.
[31] The Economist 2014.

Muslim lobby group, the Council on American–Islamic Relations (CAIR), was founded in Washington in 1994 and organised its operations on the model of American human rights organisations. Since its establishment, CAIR has not been able to gain serious popularity among Muslim communities, but it has strengthened its political connections on the left.[32] Monitoring of "Islamophobia" is one of the organisations's most important activities, as part of which it documents incidents, and also monitors the network of contacts of institutions and persons classified as Islamophobic.[33] Similar activities are carried out by various Democratic think tanks, including the Center for American Progress (CAP).[34]

France

The Collective Against Islamophobia in France (Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France, CCIF) was founded in 2003 by Samy Debah, who is affiliated with the Islamist organisation Tabligh Jamaat, together with his colleagues. The CCIF has long worked with the Collective of Muslims in France (Collectif des musulmans de France, CMF), which is linked to the aforementioned Tariq Ramadan and the Muslim Brotherhood. In 2011, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) granted the CCIF special consultative status, and in 2015 they submitted their first report. The organisation was also invited by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.[35]

Emmanuel Macron has declared war on groups classified as radical and under foreign influence, as part a campaign to bring Islam under state supervision in France.[36] In December 2020, the Council of Ministers passed a motion dissolving the CCIF, and the decision was approved by the State Council in September 2021.[37] The French President is also trying to bring the monitoring of Islamophobia under state control: the French Islam Forum (FORIF), an organisation called into existence by Macron, proposed the creation of a group that monitors the increasing number of attacks against Muslims and mosques.

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[32] MacFarquhar 2007.

[33] CAIR 2022.

[34] Wajahat et al. 2011.

[35] Le Figaro 2016.

[36] Sayfo – Veres 2021.

[37] Rfi 2022.

Global focus groups

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

One of the most important players internationally is the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The organisation, which was founded in 1969 and now has 57 member countries, 49 of which are Muslim-majority, has been publishing its annual and monthly Islamophobia reports, which are global in scope, since 2008.[38] They typically interpret "Islamophobia" in a broad sense, including physical and verbal attacks against people and institutions, as well as negative statements. At the same time, due to the number of member states in the organisation, as well as the complexity of their interests and international relations, it approaches the topic cautiously. This is clearly demonstrated by the 2010 declaration on "Islamophobia" signed by the foreign ministers of the OIC, the content of which does not go beyond general platitudes emphasizing the need for peaceful coexistence.[39] For similar reasons, the (anonymous) authors of the reports also shy away from holding any state actor responsible for perceived or real atrocities. The investigated events are usually described by quoting relevant material from the mainstream media, followed, in any exist, by an acknowledgement of official reactions or refutations. Criticism is typically directed only at peripheral groups/persons.[40] The preface to the 2013 report, in which the organisation's general secretary of Turkish origin, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, writes about the worrisome processes taking place in the West, is perhaps the clearest statement about Islamophobia. It is also a sign of this cautious attitude that the Council of Foreign Ministers has so far issued only one joint communique, back in 2010, in which it criticised the minaret construction ban passed in the Swiss referendum, albeit in a diplomatic, concerned tone.[41]

Turkey

Since the ruling AK Party came to power in 2002, Turkey has been pursuing an active diaspora policy in Europe. Going beyond traditional linguistic and ethnic mobilisation, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan began to open up to non-Turkish

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[38] The OIC Islamophobia reports are available here: www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=182&p_ref=61&lan=en
[39] OIC 2010a.
[40] OIC 2013.
[41] OIC 2010b.

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Muslim communities as well, positioning himself in his rhetoric as a defender of Muslims.[42]

The human rights subcommittee of the Turkish parliament has been monitoring anti-Islamic public discourse in Western Europe and America since the terrorist attack of the Norwegian Anders Breivik in June 2011, and since 2015, the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA), a think tank closely linked to the AK Party, has published its annual European Islamophobia monitoring report, the presentation of which is attended by high-ranking representatives of the AK Party. In parallel with this, Turkish organisations encourage all Muslims living in Europe to report any harassment they face to the nearest Turkish consulate.

SETA's annual publication is edited by a student of the aforementioned John Esposito, Farid Hafez,[43] who invites researchers from the examined countries to write the reports.[44] The report's political implications are indicated by the fact that the cover page of the 2021 report includes a photograph of Emmanuel Macron, whose dispute with Tayyip Erdoğan regarding the Libyan Civil War, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean region erupted into a sharp exchange of messages in October 2020,[45] on the pretext of Macron's efforts to reform Islam.

Although the topics of the chapters follow a uniform template, the authors have a great deal of freedom due to the lack of a clear methodology or system of criteria, so their personal opinions find their way into their analyses. This is clearly demonstrated by the analyses of Hungary, which have been prepared by two CEU researchers since 2018. In contrast to the chapters on Germany, Sweden and other countries, which are limited to discourse analysis and a factual listing of events, the chapter on Hungary uses emotive language and presents political opinions as objective facts.[46]

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[42] TRT 2021.

[43] Farid Hafez was searched by the Austrian police because of his alleged ties to the Muslim Brotherhood.

[44] GIOR 2021.

[45] Sayfo 2020.

[46] The 2021 report classifies the governing party, Fidesz, together with Jobbik and Mi Hazánk Mozgalom, as a far-right party. Similarly, it lists the social media presence of the Migration Research Institute as a „hate-spreading" site, alongside Dzsihádfigyelő and Vadhajtások.

Summary

Public discourse on Islam, at both a political and social level, has been continuously radicalised in the West since the terrorist attacks of 2001, the migrant crisis of 2015 and the rise of Islamic State, a process chiefly driven by radicals on both sides. Until now, the monitoring of the fears of European Muslims and their incorporation into a unified framework has typically been carried out by ideologically, religiously and politically motivated groups, who had in fact only a limited or non-existent presence in the Muslim communities of Western societies. Thus, their activities cannot be considered genuinely representative or protective of these groups' interests. These organisations often formed alliances with mainstream (primarily left-wing and liberal) political forces, who in turn hoped to win Muslim votes. Recently, Turkey has also used the fight against "Islamophobia" as a tool to increase its international influence.

Although there is no consensus definition of "Islamophobia", the stated goal of the groups listed above is for "Islamophobia" to become a label similar to racism, and for the persons and organisations accused of it to lose their platform, as they are put under political and social quarantine. The most important question is therefore not what can be considered "Islamophobia", but which groups have the power to tar others with this label.

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