

Islamophobia in Slovakia

Report

2014

Islamic Foundation in Slovakia

Bratislava, 2014

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Introduction

Following paper summarizes status of islamophobia in Slovakia in 2014. Due to the specific character of islamophobia the structure of the paper does not strictly follow the scheme provided.

Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (INS) is not aware of any physical attack on Muslims or islamic buildings that were reported to authorities. However we did notice number of cases of hate speech from political representatives in Slovakia and from various individuals on internet. Below is the summary of those incidents. There is a short description for each issue. More detailed description of any of them is available at any time upon request (info@islamweb.sk).

Taking into consideration the relatively small muslim community in Slovakia – Muslims make up to 0,1% of the total population) is it obvious that islamophobia is not hot topic in slovak discourse. Most of the incidents are happening as a reaction to the situation abroad. Therefore by far most obvious is islamophobia on internet and islamophobic statements by slovak politicians and real-life attacks are much more rare than in european countries where muslim minorities are much bigger.

Muslims in Slovakia are dealing with problems among which main are of course lacking registration of Islam as a state religion, without which Muslims are feeling as 2nd class religious group in compare to members of other religions such as Christians or Jews. Another issue is missing official mosque or Islamic center and refusal of the local governing organs to grant permission to build one. We could discuss and guess what motivated authorities not to allow islamic center to be build in Slovakia so far, however without any kind of official statements it would be nothing more than giving away our ideas and impressions. We think that there is not enough evidence to call this islamophobia and so we decided not to include these issues into the report in spite of the undeniable influence they have on the everyday life of Muslims in Slovakia.

Recognition by the state

Recognition by the state however can be included. This is because we recorded actual declaration of at least one political party member that voted for the law, who mentioned that the reason for approving a new law was to prevent Muslims from getting more rights in Slovakia.

According to Slovak legislation every religious community that wants to have equal rights with he already recognized religious communities in Slovakia (such as catholic

or orthodox church, jewish religious community etc.) has to fulfill set of requirements before it is allowed to apply for the recognition by the state.

Until this day Islam is not officially recognized by Slovak state as a religion with rights equal to religions that obtained official registration. Among these rights is the right to perform religious marriages equal to civil state marriages, the right to educate Islam in state schools, the right to offer religious support of Imams to prisoners and soldiers or the right to have official islamic cemeteries.

The lack of registration is caused especially by – in compare with other EU member states – unusually strict law stating the requirements religious community has to meet before applying for recognition by the state.

There used to be theoretical chance to achieve the registration until 2007, when the government embraced novelization of the law that deals with the requirements for state registration of the religious community. Prior this novelization it was sufficient to provide signatures of 20 thousand supporters, who agreed that the religious community shall be recognized by the state.

However the novelization changed these conditions and decided that the state would require 20 thousand signatures of the members of the religion, who are citizens of Slovakia, have permanent residence in Slovakia and are more than 18 years old.

These requirements are far from the reality of Muslim community in Slovakia, which has up to 5 thousand members including children and students, refugees and seasonal workers, who don't have the citizenship not permanent residence.

While the government officially didn't mention any Muslim-related reason for the change, the head of one of the governing parties SNS Ján Slota said shortly before the change was approved: „With the registration of islamic faith in the Slovak republic as the official church in such a boom-boom [quick] way, and than Muslims in turbans will run around in there, so this is something that SNS disagrees with.“¹

The idea to change the law came short after a group of Muslims announced that they want to begin to collect signatures for the registration.²

The current registration law is repeatedly mentioned in the International Religious Freedom Report conducted annually by U. S. Department of State.³ The report

¹ Government parties opposed to small churches <http://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/152603-vladne-strany-sa-postavili-proti-malym-cirkvam/> (accessed 1/3/2015)

² Government parties opposed to small churches <http://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/152603-vladne-strany-sa-postavili-proti-malym-cirkvam/> (accessed 1/3/2015)

³ United States Department of State: International Religious Freedom Report for 2013 – Slovak Republic <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/222479.pdf> (accessed 30/3/2015)

criticizes the law as discriminatory towards small religions citing examples such as inability to perform religious marriages with official recognition or religious funerals.

Internet

Islamophobic comments on internet are specific kind of hate speech in slovak internet context. It would take for separate project to collect and categorize most of them. For the purpose of this summary we can state that comments of this kind were present in most of popular news websites below articles touching the topic of islam or muslims in one way or another.

Apart from websites hate speech was present on social networks, especially Facebook. Possibly biggest islam-oriented Facebook page in Slovakia to this day is [Facebook.com/IslamOnline.sk](https://www.facebook.com/IslamOnline.sk), which was no exception for this kind of hate speech.

Except for hate speech in comments, we witnessed rise of dedicated anti-islam and anti-muslim Facebook groups and pages.⁴ Various individuals created weblogs dedicated to spreading hatred about Islam and Muslims.⁵

Politicians

Andrej Danko, new leader of right-wing Slovak National Party, appeared in the television discussion on slovak state TV channel before elections to the European Parliament on 13th of May 2014⁶. There he again warned the Europe against the threat of islamization and “muslimization” and repeated his statement that “mosque has no place in Bratislava (slovak capital)”.

On 23rd of March 2014 Slovak national party published on its official website article of Viktor Bondarenko⁷, in which he expresses his thoughts on Islam and Muslims.

⁴ For examples of some of those pages and groups see attachment nr. 1.

⁵ See attachment nr. 2, where we include some those that were active to the recent time.

⁶ News and Comments – Elections to European Parliament 2014, see 00:15:30 to 00:17:15 <http://www.rtvs.sk/televizia/program/detail/24/spravy-a-komentare-volby-do-europskeho-parlamentu-2014/archiv?date=13.05.2014> (accessed 17/05/2014)

⁷ Viktor Bondarenko: Mosques in Slovakia <http://www.sns.sk/blog/viktor-bondarenko-mesity-na-slovensku/> (accessed 17/04/2014)

Bodarensko in a simplifying manner argues that just as was the case with communism in the past, today Europe is endangered by Islam that is according to him by its very nature intolerant and aggressive ideology.

Islam is by his words nowadays supported by EU politicians, whom he calls „nearsighted naive fools of Brussels“. Later on Bondarenko touches the typical argument: why should we let them build mosques when there are no churches in Muslim countries. Finally Bondarenko appreciates the minaret ban in Switzerland that should serve as an example to follow.

Andrej Danko repeated his statement on the mosque in Bratislava once again in interview for The News Agency of the Slovak Republic (TASR) on 21th of September 2014. He said he respects everyone regardless of his or her belief but immigrants should adapt to the way of life in EU.⁸

Recommendations and Conclusion

Dealing with islamophobia in Slovakia should reflect its specific character. While there is not much to be done with the statements and comments of political representatives (except maybe for official announcements of Islamic Foundation in Slovakia condemning those, which was the case in the past⁹) and physical attacks are not major issue, we think most of the energy shall be aimed at combating internet islamophobic comments and articles.

This could be done in various ways. Our internet projects¹⁰ are offering proper informations about Islam and Muslims and except for other content are trying to combat misconceptions and stereotypes.

As for hateful comments, strong „Islam and Muslim positive“ internet community can already argue with those individuals in comments sections by itself without the need for much of the intervention from our site. All comments below our content are of course monitored by us and those violating slovak laws and moral principles are being deleted.

⁸ A. Danko: I dislike that in politics everyone is everyone's friend <http://www.teraz.sk/eurovolby-2014/sns-danko-strache-hrnko-kozak/98833-clanok.html> (accessed 23/09/2014)

⁹ Slovak Muslims: SNS shall deal with real problems instead of creating made-up causes <http://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/192806/moslimovia-sns-ma-riesit-realne-problemy-nie-vytvarat-pseudokauzy/> (accessed 20/08/2013)

¹⁰ Website www.IslamWeb.sk, Facebook page Faebook.com/IslamOnline.sk, Twitter channel @IslamOnline.sk and YouTube channel YouTube.com/IslamOnlineSk

We think it is important to deal with islamophobic expressions on internet by fighting the misconceptions themselves, providing alternative sources of informations and cultivating our own internet communities that can react and „fight back“ to aggressive comments and posts.

Attachments

Attachment nr. 1

- <http://www.facebook.com/SlovakDefenceLeague>
- <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Islám-na-Slovensku-nehceme/513913821962375>
- <http://www.facebook.com/groups/132658023470304/?fref=ts>
- <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Islam-v-Slovenskej-republike-nehceme/245636878913277>
- <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Som-proti-vyjadreniu-biskupov-že-katol%C3%ADci-podporujú-islamizáciu-Európy/213073992062860>

Attachment nr. 2

- <http://mokova.blog.sme.sk>
- <http://jurajpolacek.blog.sme.sk>
- <http://jurajpolacek.blogspot.sk>
- <http://www.blogovisko.sk/author/main>