

**Islamophobia in Slovakia**  
Report  
**2015**

Islamic Foundation in Slovakia  
Bratislava, 2015

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## Introduction

Following paper summarizes status of islamophobia in Slovakia. Taking into consideration the relatively small Muslim community in Slovakia – Muslims make up to 0,1% of the total population) islamophobia did not use to be a hot topic in Slovak discourse. This however changed dramatically during the so called „refugee crisis“ in Europe in the second half of 2015. But since Slovakia offered shelter to little to no refugees, the discourse was mostly virtual. Therefore by far most obvious is islamophobia on internet and islamophobic statements by Slovak politicians and real-life attacks are much more scarce than in European countries where muslim minorities are much bigger.

There were couple of studies on the topic of dealing with islamophobia in the context of Slovakia by local NGOs such as People Against Racism or Center for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture, however mostly in the form of rather shorter chapters and comments as a part of bigger projects on wider topics. It is pure fact that issues with other minorities, especially Hungarians and Roma are of much larger significance in the context of Slovak republic. Specific studies and projects focused solely on the case of islamophobia in Slovakia are lacking.

This is not to say that Muslims in Slovakia would be without any problems. On the contrary, they are dealing with severe issues, of which the main one are 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<sup>1</sup>. 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 prove that islamophobia is the cause for the denial of permission to build an islamic culture center, so we chose not to include these issues into the report. We however do have reason to think that the lacking registration of Islam as a religion in Slovakia can be linked to anti-muslim sentiments. We lay out our reasons in the following paragraph.

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<sup>1</sup> See International Religious Freedom Report for 2015, Slovak Republic – U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256241#wrapper> (accessed 22/9/2016)

## Recognition by the state

According to Slovak legislation every religious community that wants to have equal rights with the already recognized religious communities in Slovakia (such as Catholic or Orthodox Church, Jewish religious community etc.) has to fulfill a set of requirements before it is allowed to apply for the recognition by the state. Until this day Islam is not officially recognized by the 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 teach Islam as a part of religious education in state schools, the right to offer religious support of Imams to prisoners and soldiers or the right to perform funeral rituals in accordance with the Islamic religious tradition.

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 a 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 to 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 the 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 nor permanent residence.

The current registration law is repeatedly mentioned in the International Religious Freedom Report conducted annually by the U. S. Department of State.<sup>2</sup> The report criticizes the law as discriminatory towards small religions citing examples such as inability to perform religious marriages with official recognition or religious funerals.

While the government officially did not mention any Muslim-related reason for the change, several political actors uttered remarks suggesting that the issue of possible registration of Islam was indeed present when the novelization was created and approved by the national assembly.

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<sup>2</sup> 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)

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.<sup>3</sup>

The head of one of the governing parties at that time 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.“<sup>4</sup>

SNS's deputy Rafael Rafaj, when arguing in the national assembly for support of the novelization, said: „It was announced that there is proposal for the registration of Islam, I have informations that even the Scientology church is active in Slovakia. Politicians have to reflect on those events in advance.“<sup>5</sup>

9 years later in a TV debate Minister of Culture Marek Maďarič confessed that in his opinion the law is positive because it prevents „islamism“. He said: „I am proud of the fact that it the Ministry of Culture under my leadership in the first term initiated legislative amendment that requires 20.000 members to register a church. It is a very good law especially thanks to this, that it prevents penetration of the forces of, not Islam, but islamism.“<sup>6</sup> Maďarič was Minister of Culture not only in 2016, but also in 2007, when the amendment was proposed and approved.

The very author of the amendment MP Ján Podmanický confessed to his anti-Muslim sentiment in the interview for website Webnoviny.sk on 21th of August 2016. Here he claimed that the fact that London elected its first Muslim major is a sign of incoming death of native Europeans. He argued that once Muslims start to be elected in leading positions in European countries, they gain access to their weapons, such as nuclear warheads, which is a great security risk.<sup>7</sup>

## Attacks

Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (INS) is not aware of any physical attack on islamic buildings that was reported and confirmed to be a hate crime against Muslims by

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

<sup>4</sup> Government parties opposed to small churches <http://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/152603-vladne-strany-sa-postavili-proti-malym-cirkvam/> (accessed 1/3/2015)

<sup>5</sup> SME: They want to stop small churches <http://www.sme.sk/c/3129969/chcu-zastavit-male-cirkvi.html> (accessed 22/9/2016)

<sup>6</sup> RTVS: O 5 minute 12 <http://www.rtvs.sk/televizia/archiv/10013/84336> (accessed 22/9/2016)

<sup>7</sup> Webnoviny.sk: Podmanický: Muslim politicians can gain access to weapons <http://www.webnoviny.sk/slovensko/clanok/1094876-podmanickymuslimski-politici-sa-mozu-dostat-k-zbranim/> (accessed 22/9/2016)

Slovak authorities, we are however aware of several physical attacks on individual Muslims.

In the aftermath of the attacks on Charlie Hebdo in Paris in the beginning of 2015 Islamic Foundation in Slovakia asked members of its community to report any hate crimes, since the attack led to the wave of islamophobic incidents in the West. Two events were reported.

One Muslim woman claimed to find the tires on her car to be pierced by someone several days after the attack in Paris. It happened during the night in her neighborhood, Her car was parked among others in the parking area. After she got her tires fixed, the other morning she found them pierced again. She feels it could be due to her religion because she is well-known in the neighborhood and she knows there are people who oppose to her being Muslim.<sup>8</sup>

The other case is about a Muslim child who was bullied in the school for being „terrorist“. The kid was even followed by older school mates on his way from school and someone threw soil on his head.<sup>9</sup>

Gathering of far-right groups against immigration and islamization of Europe took place in Bratislava on 21st of June. In aftermath of the gathering group Arab family was attacked by a group of protesters near the main train station. Protesters were throwing stones and bottles at the family including its small children. Police officers present at the moment tried to protect the family and later escorted them to Taxi, which took them back to hotel.<sup>10</sup>

With the beginning of school year, group of parents in a primary school in Topoľčany, town in central Slovakia, began to collect signatures for petition against muslim child that was going to attend local school. According to the director of the school the petition was never submitted to them.<sup>11</sup>

On 21st of September 2015 certain man saw a Muslim woman with face covering getting on the trolley in downtown area of Bratislava. As she stepped out towards the bus stop, a man waiting for bus kicked her down to the ground. The attacker was 20 to 22 years old. The Muslim woman was holding a meal that spread around as she fell. She hit her face and was bleeding. The attacker jumped on the following trolley

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<sup>8</sup> Slovak Muslims are afraid. The effects of attacks in Paris were reflected in here too <http://www.islamonline.sk/2015/01/takto-na-slovensku-po-parizi-utocili-na-muslimov-zakazovali-mesity-aj-prepichovali-gumy/> (accessed 1/3/2015)

<sup>9</sup> Slovak Muslims are afraid. The effects of attacks in Paris were reflected in here too <http://www.islamonline.sk/2015/01/takto-na-slovensku-po-parizi-utocili-na-muslimov-zakazovali-mesity-aj-prepichovali-gumy/> (accessed 1/3/2015)

<sup>10</sup> The Slovak Spectator: Attacked Saudi family was here for son's graduation <http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20058370/attacked-saudi-family-was-here-for-sons-graduation.html> (27/01/2016)

<sup>11</sup> Denník N: Muslims in Topoľčany? Sometimes they spit on them <https://dennikn.sk/241190/moslimovia-v-okresnom-meste-obcas-lietaju-nenavistne-sliny/> (27/01/2016)

and left. Someone called an ambulance. Witness reported this on his Facebook profile, from where it was shared further.<sup>12</sup>

## Politicians

On 1st of September 2011 vice president of SNS (Slovak national party) Andrej Danko announced that SNS will propose ban of minarets in Slovakia in Slovak national assembly.<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that at that time (and until this day) there exists no official mosque or Islamic centre in Slovakia and there were as well no plans for construction of any minarets.

He returned to this topic in aftermath of the attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris. He held a press conference on 12th of January 2015, where he stated his goal to increase the minimal number of signatures of believers required for the recognition from 20 thousand to 50 thousand while clearly explaining that the purpose of it would be to prevent Muslims from obtaining the registration.<sup>14</sup> He also reminded that he will continue to promote the legislation preventing Muslims from building mosques and minarets. During the television discussion on the TV channel TA3 later in the same day Danko also mentioned that he „could not imagine that his Muslim employee would perform the prayer during working hours.“<sup>15</sup>

Slovak government made its way into headlines of world's media after its announcement, that Slovakia will accept and integrate 200 refugees under the condition that they has to be Christians<sup>16</sup>. This decision came during the so called „refugee crises“ in August 2015 where hundreds of thousands of refugees started to move to Europe from Middle East and Africa. When the journalist from the Wall Street Journal asked Slovak government about the reason behind this decision, he was told by the spokesmen of Ministry of Interior that Slovakia as no mosque nor

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<sup>12</sup> Facebook status from 21/09/2015: <https://www.facebook.com/cemanpeter/posts/10200859612527937> (23/11/2015)

<sup>13</sup> SNS found new threat: minarets <http://www.sme.sk/c/6038438/sns-nasla-dalsiu-hrozbu-minarety.html> (accessed 19/08/2013)

<sup>14</sup> Danko: We need to adopt legislative measures against islamization of Slovakia <http://www.hlavnespravy.sk/danko-treba-prijat-legislativne-opatrenia-proti-islamizacii-slovenska/502021> (accessed 1/3/2015)

<sup>15</sup> The security in EU after the attacks / The threat of Islam? <http://www.ta3.com/clanok/1054231/bezpecnost-v-eu-po-utokoch-hrozba-islam.html> (accessed 1/3/2015)

<sup>16</sup> BBC: Migrants crisis: Slovakia 'will only accept Christians' <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33986738> (19/09/2015)

other services for Muslims to profess their faith.<sup>17</sup> Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (INS) issued a statement where it expressed sadness over the decision.<sup>18</sup>

The prime minister of Slovakia Robert Fico uttered a bunch of islamophobic remarks while in his office. It is very interesting that he the topic of Islam for completely invisible for him up until the year of 2015, but when he decided to dive in to islamophobic rhetoric, his comments quickly became of the most severe ones in the Slovak political space.

On 24th of January 2015 he said in talk show on the national radio station that „since Slovakia is the country where catholic church is the dominant one... we could hardly tolerate that 300-400 thousand Muslims would come here and start to build their mosques and change the charger of the state.“<sup>19</sup>

He returned to the topic in on 9th of September 2015 when he commented on the decision of Slovak government to only accept Christian refugees into Slovakia. „Forgive me but I find it hard to imagine how Muslim could be integrated in Slovakia, because he has no background nor relatives here...“<sup>20</sup>, he said.

During his press conference on on 15th of September 2015 as part of the answer on one of the questions prime minister said: „One day we could have here 40-50 thousand of Muslims, who will have their own church, they will be present in army, in police, is this what we really want? We know nothing about them. The security risk is too high.“<sup>21</sup>

On 15th of November 2015, few days after the terrorist attacks in the France capital, prime minister said in television debate on TA3 station with regard to the steps that Slovak government took to prevent similar attack in Slovakia: „We are monitoring every single Muslim, who is currently present in the territory of Slovakia.“<sup>22</sup> Islamic Foundation in Slovakia issued a highly critical statement on the

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<sup>17</sup> WSJ: Migration Crisis Pits EU's East Against West <http://www.wsj.com/articles/migration-crisis-pits-eus-east-against-west-1439957453> (19/09/2015)

<sup>18</sup> Statement of Islamic Foundation in Slovakia with regard to picking migrants on religious basis <http://www.islamonline.sk/2015/07/stanovisko-islamskej-nadacie-na-slovensku-k-vyberu-migrantov/> (19/09/2015)

<sup>19</sup> Fico: We could hardly tolerate thousands of Muslims with mosques <http://www.webnoviny.sk/slovensko/clanok/915511-fico-tisicky-moslimov-s-mesitami-by-sme-tolerovali-tazko/> (accessed 1/3/2015)

<sup>20</sup> Would we accept even Muslims? Fico can hardly imagine their integration, although his speech softened <http://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/303773/prijali-by-sme-aj-moslimov-fico-si-ich-integraciu-vie-len-tazko-predstavit-ale-jazyk-zjemnil/> (19/09/2015)

<sup>21</sup> Press conference of R. Fico and R. Kaliňák regarding obligatory quotas: <http://www.ta3.com/clanok/1069232/tb-r-fica-a-r-kalinaka-k-povinnym-kvotam.html> (19/09/2015)

<sup>22</sup> TA3: Security of Slovakia: <http://www.ta3.com/clanok/1072856/bezpecnost-slovenska.html> (27/01/2016)



same day<sup>23</sup>. To clarify his statement, Mr. Fico said for media on the next day after observing a minute's silence outside his country's French embassy that with the exception of Breivik „virtually every time there has been a terrorist attack [in Europe] representatives of the Muslims were responsible.“<sup>24</sup> The statement about Most of the terrorists being Muslims was repeated by Slovakian Minister of Interior Róbert Kaliňák the following Saturday in debate on Slovak national radio.<sup>25</sup> In a statement for media, prime minister said on 12th of December that „we won't drag any Muslims to Slovakia“.<sup>26</sup>

Head of opposition party SaS and currently member of European Parliament Richard Sulík wrote blogpost joining the debate on the several hundreds of immigrants that could have been accepted by Slovakia. This was a part of EU's plan to redistribute the rising wave of immigrants among EU member states. As this step was widely opposed by majority of Slovak citizens, most of the political elite rejected the idea as well. Sulík in his blogpost went as far as pointing out the cultural differences between European and Muslim culture (most of the immigrants were coming from Muslim majority countries) suggesting that their religious affiliation as any connection with their ability to integrate and thus he is against the settlement of those refugees in Slovakia simply because they are Muslims. He wrote: „Muslims do not share the same values as Christians, which I say while myself being atheist... Than the question is why those refugees who are Muslims do not run to Saudi Arabia instead.“<sup>27</sup>

## 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.

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<sup>23</sup> ISLAMONLINE.sk: The announcement of Islamic Foundation with regard to the shocking statement of Slovakian PM about monitoring „every single Muslim“ <http://www.islamonline.sk/2015/11/stanovisko-islamskej-nadacie-na-slovensku-k-sokujucemu-vyroku-predsedu-vlady-o-monitorovani-vsetkych-slovenskych-muslimov/> (27/01/2016)

<sup>24</sup> The Independent: 'We are monitoring every Muslim' after Paris attacks, claims Slovakian PM <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/we-are-monitoring-every-muslim-after-paris-attacks-claims-slovakian-pm-a6737851.html> (27/01/2016)

<sup>25</sup> RTVS: Saturday's dialogues <http://www.rtvs.sk/radio/archiv/1134/332988> (27/01/2016)

<sup>26</sup> TERAZ: Multifunctional playground refinanced from the state budget <http://www.teraz.sk/regiony/hajske-multifunkcne-ihrisko-fico/171036-clanok.html> (27/01/2016)

<sup>27</sup> Richard Sulík: Seven NO to redistribution of refugees <https://dennikn.sk/blog/sedem-krat-nie-k-uteceneckym-kvotam/> (accessed 4/6/2015)

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.<sup>28</sup> Various individuals created weblogs dedicated to spreading hatred about Islam and Muslims.<sup>29</sup> Anti-muslim hate speech is increasingly popular topic of several „alternative“ news sites that spread hoaxes and conspiracy theories on Slovak internet.<sup>30</sup>

It is worth to mention the whole wave of comments and online hatred towards Muslims after the Paris attacks in January 2015. Slovak Muslim convert and college teacher commented the attacks in media explaining the islamic position (condemnation) of those. Someone in comments below the article announced that this Muslim's ID should be removed and he shall be shoot immediately.<sup>31</sup>

Last dimension of islamophobia on internet that we should highlight in this paper are emails sent to the official email address of Islamic Foundation in Slovakia. Typical emails promoted exclusion of Muslims from Slovakia or even vulgar statements. Some of them were taken public on Facebook page IslamOnline.sk<sup>32</sup> for readers to see and give them an opportunity to comment on them.

## Anti-muslim rallies

Slovakia experienced its first massive demonstration against so called „islamization of Europe“ on 20th of June 2015. The protest in Bratislava was organized by an extremist outfit called Stop the Islamization of Europe and ended with more than 100 arrests. Several protesters attacked one Arab family near the train station. Estimates about the participation vary but all sources agree that there was several thousands of protesters.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For examples of some of those pages and groups see attachment no. 1.

<sup>29</sup> See attachment no. 2, where we include some those that were active to the recent time.

<sup>30</sup> For examples see attachment no. 3

<sup>31</sup> Slovak Muslims are afraid. The effects of attacks in Paris were reflected in here too <http://www.islamonline.sk/2015/01/takto-na-slovensku-po-parizi-utocili-na-muslimov-zakazovali-mesity-aj-prepichovali-gumy/> (accessed 1/3/2015)

<sup>32</sup> For example: <http://www.facebook.com/IslamOnline.sk/posts/10150591977897629> (accessed 19/08/2013) or: <https://www.facebook.com/IslamOnline.sk/posts/10152600910342629> (accessed on 06/09/2014).

<sup>33</sup> New York Times: Fissures in E.U. Deepen From Strain of Migrant Influx and Greek Debt [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/world/europe/fissures-in-eu-deepen-from-strain-of-migrant-influx-and-greek-debt.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/world/europe/fissures-in-eu-deepen-from-strain-of-migrant-influx-and-greek-debt.html?_r=0) (27/01/2015)

After several minor gatherings in other Slovak cities new riot in Bratislava took place on 12th of September 2015. This was much smaller with participation up to 1000 protesters, perhaps even less.<sup>34</sup>

## 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 past<sup>35</sup>) 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 projects<sup>36</sup> 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.

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.

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<sup>34</sup> Aktualne.sk: Call for humanity overshadowed the extremists, Kotleba did not come to march <http://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/303973/v-bratislave-dnes-budu-protestovat-proti-islamizacii-aj-vyzyvat-k-ludskosti/> (27/01/2015)

<sup>35</sup> 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)

<sup>36</sup> Website [www.IslamWeb.sk](http://www.IslamWeb.sk), Facebook page [Faebook.com/IslamOnline.sk](https://www.facebook.com/IslamOnline.sk), Twitter channel @IslamOnline.sk and YouTube channel [YouTube.com/IslamOnlineSk](https://www.youtube.com/IslamOnlineSk)

# Attachments

## Attachment no. 1

- <http://www.facebook.com/SlovakDefenceLeague>
- <https://www.facebook.com/Islam-na-Slovensku-nehceme-714160371981651/?fref=ts>
- <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 no. 2

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

## Attachment no. 3

- <http://medzicas.sk>
- <http://www.konzervativnyvyber.sk>
- <http://www.hlavnespravy.sk>
- <http://www.parlamentnelisty.sk>