

REPORT:

ISLAMOPHOBIA

IN SLOVAKIA

2019

by ISLAMIC FOUNDATION IN SLOVAKIA



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ISLAMONLINE.sk



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About Islamic Foundation in Slovakia

The Islamic Foundation in Slovakia is the most active organization representing the interests of the Muslim community in Slovakia nowadays, thus carrying out many different duties. It provides religious services for the Muslim community in Slovakia, supports their spiritual and community life and serves the role of an information center for Muslims visiting Slovakia. While working with the Muslim community the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia also fosters the relationships between the Muslim minority and the majority in Slovakia. It offers lectures in schools, universities and other public institutions and opens its prayer room to the public. The Islamic Foundation in Slovakia firmly believes in the importance of interfaith dialogue in the context of a diverse society. It participates in various inter-religious activities with Christian, Jewish and other religious leaders.

In order to foster friendly relationships with the majority in Slovakia, the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia has to fight various misconceptions and conspiracy theories about Islam, Muslims and nowadays especially migrants and refugees of muslim background. In order to do so, it monitors media, public statements, social networks and collects information about anti-Muslim bias, hate speech and attacks on Muslims. It is the only organization in Slovakia whose focus is solely on the sentiments against the adherents of Islam, rather than working on issues concerning other minorities. Thanks to its role within Muslim community, it is also able to collect data directly from local Muslims, who aren't always willing to talk about their experiences to public authorities or the media.

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Foreword

Ever since the outbreak of so called “migration crisis” in 2015 and 2016 large majority of islamophobic incidents is in one way or another related to migration. Many public figures often use the word “migrant” almost as a synonym to “Muslim”. Migrants – according to them – bring new culture, new religion and security risk. Therefore, this report focuses heavily on the discourse about migration, even when it is not directly apparent whether the statement should be flagged as islamophobic or xenophobic in general.

While islamophobic tendencies in Slovakia in 2019 were less frequent compared to the time when the migration crisis in Europe was at its peak, they were still more common than in the years prior to the crisis. Most common was once again anti-Muslim sentiment from politicians, usually related to migration to the western Europe. There were also a couple of physical and verbal attacks and some misinterpretations by media, but the intensity of those was comparable with previous years.

In recent years some of its representatives are joining new political projects aiming to gain dominance in upcoming general election in 2020. Slovak politics and society, just like in previous years, was in 2019 repeatedly balancing between populism and xenophobia on one side and, on the other, a pro-european orientation with the values of openness that come with it. The acceptance of Muslims in the country and the frequency of islamophobic acts in the upcoming years will likely depend on which of these two sides will prevail.

Executive summary

The majority of islamophobic incidents in 2019 were related to migration. The main source of islamophobia are hateful comments of politicians, especially as a part of their early campaign prior parliamentary election in 29th of February 2020.

The most active in spreading anti-Muslim sentiment were again members of far-right party LSNS. They began in early 2019 with anti-migration campaign, but it gained the highest intensity shortly before the end of the year. The party however received its biggest hit so far having one of their MPs found guilty of extremist speech by the supreme court, which caused him to lose his seat in National assembly. The statements were related to Roma minority. Other hateful comments against Muslims were coming mostly from small parties outside of parliament with one exception begin the campaign of leading political party Smer. This is a shift from previous years, when some anti-Muslim hate speech could be traced to almost every party with seats in National assembly.

We recorded three physical attacks on Muslims during the year. All three were rather light and no injury was caused. There was also one case of prosecution due to extremist motive for a man who attacked Muslims in kebab. This is the first time in Slovakia that someone was prosecuted on extremist motive for attacking Muslims.

In 2019 Czech republic began hearing with slovak convert to Islam who is accused with planning a terrorist attack. The case was reported by slovak media and some of them failed to differentiate between Islam as a religion and sources of radicalisation.

Muslims in Slovakia

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of Muslims in Slovakia because of the absence of serious statistics on this topic. According to our judgment the estimated number of Muslims to this day is approximately 5.000 people. Muslims in Slovakia differ on the ethnic basis with the relative majority of Arabs. Among other main ethnic groups of Muslims are Albanians, Turks, Bosnians or Afghans. In lower numbers there are Turks, Pakistanis, as well as Muslims from the former USSR and a couple of Slovak converts. There are slightly more males than females with the exception of converts, who are slightly dominated by women.

While it is important to avoid generalisation, economic and social status of some of the ethnic groups can be characterized as following: As for the Arabs, for the most part they are either students, university graduates or businessmen, while Albanians are working mostly in gastronomy and confectionery. Quite large portion of Afghans are doctors or engineers who graduated in universities in Slovakia. This is due to former bilateral treaty between Slovakia and Afghanistan that resulted in significant numbers of Afghan high school students coming to Slovakia in 80s of 20th century, who continued with their college studies and remained in Slovakia ever since. Especially in recent years there is also a growing group of Afghan refugees. Bosnians work often as traders and businessmen.

Muslims live in all parts of Slovakia but their main concentration is in the capital city of Bratislava, second largest community is in the second largest city of Kosice and smaller but noteworthy communities are in Nitra, Levice, Trnava, Martin, Zilina or Piestany. Due to Slovakia's government's position since the beginning of so called refugee crisis in 2015 the influx of refugees to Europe did not have any reasonable impact on the size and composition of Muslim community in the country.

Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

The interest of Slovak political figures, media and society in Islam and Muslims had its peak during the so called “refugee crisis” in 2015 and 2016. That was also the time when the cases of hate-speech against Muslims were most frequent. In the following years such cases were still present, but their frequency was decreasing.

In 2019 the topic of migration was not very important for slovak political discourse. It received some attention in campaigns of political parties prior the upcoming general election in 2020 though. It came mostly from far-right party LSNS and its partners, although some hints in this direction came also from governing party Smer.

Politics

“I want positive change that will strengthen our borders and protects us from dangerous immigrants.”

Promotional video of leading party Smer during campaign prior general election in 2020

In the election to National Assembly in March 2016 the far-right party LSNS won 14 seats in the Assembly. While in opposition, their MPs are often extremely outspoken in any topic related to Muslims, Islam and migration. Since 2016 their MPs claimed in the assembly for example, that “Islam has no place in Slovakia” (Natália Grausová, LSNS), “Islam is more than just a religion, it is cruel, disgusting and inhuman political system” (Milan Mazúrek, LSNS), every European, Christian or atheist, has to fear this satanic-pedophile creation of devil, which is the religion of Islam“ (Stanislav Mizík, LSNS) or that everything else, all of these idols, they are for Christians only daemons“ (Marián Kotleba, the head of LSNS).¹ Unsurprisingly LSNS was the most active political subject in 2019 again, when it comes to spreading hatred against Muslims. In January 2019 it launched online project called www.stratenaeuropa.sk (Lost Europe) featuring “documentary” that some of the party members shot in several areas western European cities characteristic with large portions of immigrant population. The website also links to other “alternative” Slovak online magazines, all of which were convicted of spreading fake news before. Party promoted the website also on several billboards around the country. On 29th of April 2019 the Supreme court delivered its verdict with regard the legitimacy of LSNS party. Prosecutor claimed that LS NS is spreading extremist ideology and should be dissolved. However the supreme court in its final verdict said that the proposed evidence isn’t sufficient for such a move.² However on 3rd of September 2019 supreme court confirmed the condemnation of LSNS’s MP Milan Mazúrek for his racist remarks

¹Facebook: IslamOnline.sk <https://www.facebook.com/IslamOnline.sk/videos/10154680749267629/> (accessed on 22/10/2017)

² Slovak Spectator: Court failed to dissolve far-right LSNS <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22109640/court-failed-to-dissolve-far-right-lsns.html> (accessed on 23/12/2019)

about gypsies on radio broadcast service.³ The verdict wasn't related to Islam, but it was so far the biggest blow to the party notoriously known for spreading hate speech about various minorities including Muslims. By the end of 2019 political parties in Slovakia began their campaigns prior the general election that will take place on 29th of February 2020. For the purpose of this report couple of billboards are worth mentioning. One of them reads "We wish you beautiful traditional Christmas, until European Union bans them"⁴ while the other one says "We will protect our women against the invasion of migrants, bullies and rapists!" Both statements are not mentioning Muslims or Islam directly, we can however mention them as an indirect references to Muslims, because fake news about EU banning Christmas are usually referring to the authorities not wanting to "offend Muslims" and by migrants who are targeting "European women" are also usually meant Muslims. For the same reason we include in this report also the following statements: In December 2019 the head of LSNS Marián Kotleba spoke on the meeting with supporters in the town of Vrábľe. Among other things he claimed that various West European cities banned Christmas tree in order not to "offend non-Christian citizens" and later said that his party won't allow "Slovakia to turn into multicultural piggery"⁵. Members of LSNS also went to United Kingdom and recorded suggestive video about local Muslim communities.

LSNS is entering election in cooperation with couple of smaller parties, whose members were given spots on candidate list of LSNS. One of them is called Direct Democracy (Priama demokracia, PD). It has a document on its website that among other things reads: "PD wants to stop Islamic invasion of Europe! Islam must never become even a tiny part of our culture."⁶

Another party whose selected members are on candidate list of LSNS is Party of Kuffa Brothers – Christian Democracy (Strana bratov Kuffovcov Kresťanská demokracia). Its website features article, where its members claim the need to protect Europe from "the spirit of islamisation of Europe", "crescents and minarets" or "Eurabia".

While in the past he was not very interested in the topic, former prime minister Robert Fico began to spread stereotypes and hate speech against Muslims around the so called migration crisis in early 2015. Over the course of the last three years, he said for example, that "we could hardly tolerate that 300-400 thousand Muslims would come here and start to build their mosques"⁷, "we are monitoring every single Muslim, who is currently present in the territory of Slovakia"⁸,

³ Slovak Spectator: Far-right MP Mazurek found guilty. He will lose his seat <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22203605/far-right-mp-mazurek-found-guilty-he-will-lose-his-seat.html> (accessed on 23/12/2019)

⁴ Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/radovan.vojencak/posts/2855835284449454> (accessed on 23/12/2019)

⁵ YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8gO_n-tUis&feature=emb_title (accessed on 23/12/2019)

⁶ Stranapriamademokracia.sk

https://www.stranapriamademokracia.sk/l/postoj-strany-pd-k-islam-u-a-migracii-islam-dobyva-europu/?fbclid=IwAR_2SexZxScSdemesa8V4K-KGkdP3SeW9tXIA385p1SblBDdifm61ncZdZB4 (accessed on 29/12/2019)

⁷ 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 on 1/3/2015)

⁸ TA3: Security of Slovakia: <http://www.ta3.com/clanok/1072856/bezpecnost-slovenska.html> (accessed on 27/01/2016)

“we have to prevent formation of a united Muslim community in Slovakia”⁹ or that “Islam has no place in Slovakia”¹⁰. Robert Fico resigned on the post of prime minister in 2018 after mass demonstrations in aftermath of the murder of journalist and his fiancée. During 2019 he was rather silent, when it came to mentioning Islam and Muslims. Several statements from his party came by the end of the year with the beginning of the campaign prior the general election in February 2020. As a part of the campaign Mr. Fico is putting out promotional videos listing achievements of his during previous years. Noteworthy are two videos so far: In the first one the voice with is saying: “While we were protecting Slovakia from immigrants, the opposition wasted no time and argued with each other”¹¹. The other video is made of different statements said by various unknown people. One woman of them is saying: “I want positive change.” And another couple finishes adds: “That will strengthen our borders and protects us from dangerous immigrants.”¹² As explained in foreword, we include those statements despite they are not mentioning Muslims or Islam directly because of the assumption they are referring to.

In 2019 presidential election took place in Slovakia. The president in Slovakia is directly elected by citizens in a two-stage election. During the last election two pro-european candidates won the first stage and moved to the second stage, where Ms. Čaputová backed by liberal parties Progressive Slovakia and Spolu won and became the first female president of Slovakia. While two most successful candidates in the first stage were pro-european, the third in a row with over 300.000 votes was independent candidate Štefan Harabin, whose campaign was full of populist statements, fake facts and hateful comments, however we did not record any specific comment against Islam or Muslims. After Mr. Harabin lost in presidential election, he decided to found a political party and compete in parliamentary election in 2020. As a part of his campaign he founded a website where he is asking people to answer yes/no to various questions. One of them reads: “Do you agree that Slovakia should support other religious or Muslim beliefs in the context of migration?” The question is followed by an explanation that mentions that Slovakia is christian country and members of other faith should live in countries of their origin.¹³

Some cases of anti-Muslim sentiment in politics in 2019 were recorded also on regional level. Major of Bratislava district Lamač Lukáš Baňacký responded to a hoax saying that a mosque is going to be build in Lamač. In his response he also said: “Anyone who knows me knows what my personal beliefs are, and so I didn’t even consider it necessary to stress that I would never allow such a thing [construction of a mosque].”¹⁴

⁹ Denník N: Fico pay for his words about Muslims to be seen

<https://dennikn.sk/340650/fico-plati-aby-slova-moslimoch-vidno/> (accessed on 27/01/2016)

¹⁰ Politico.eu: Robert Fico: ‘Islam has no place in Slovakia’

<http://www.politico.eu/article/robert-fico-islam-no-place-news-slovakia-muslim-refugee/> (accessed on 22/9/2016)

¹¹ Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/robertficosk/videos/2766299806769466/> (accessed on 26/12/2019)

¹² Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/robertficosk/videos/752466165233899> (accessed on 26/12/2019)

¹³ Stranavlast.sk

<https://stranavlast.sk/hlasovanie-buducnost-slovenska/?fbclid=IwAR3jBGgXBOFvD3fPOk6tdqzLD7GOecDmzYkQ5PnActHdv55HMgwnpFuLlgQ> (accessed on 29/12/2019)

¹⁴ Bratislavské noviny:

<https://www.bratislavskenoviny.sk/nasa-tema/57104-moslimska-mesita-v-lamaci-starosta-banacky-reaguje-na-informacie-o-jej-vystavbe> (accessed on 26/12/2019)

In december 2019 deputies of the town of Nové Zámky announced that they rejected the offer of Turkish Embassy in Slovakia to gift the city a traditional turkish fountain that was to be built in Majzonovo square in city center. The value of the gift including building costs was approximately 100.000 eur. The town of Nové Zámky was under the Ottoman rule in 1663–1685. Deputies claimed that the gift would not match with the local culture. One of the deputies also expressed fear that such gift cloud an extremist ideas in some people. As these reasons have some rational basis this move can not be clearly categorized as anti-Muslim sentiment, but we found it worth mentioning in this chapter.¹⁵

Legal System

“Registration confers the legal status necessary to perform economic functions such as opening a bank account or renting property, and civil functions such as presiding at burial ceremonies.”

U. S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report, Slovak Republic, 2017

According to Slovak legislation every religious community that wants to have same rights as now 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 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 the accordance with the islamic religious tradition.

The lack of registration is caused especially by – in comparison 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 passed novelization of the law that deals with the requirements for state registration of the religious communities. Before this novelization it was sufficient to provide signatures of 20 thousand sympathizers, 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 were 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 did not mention

¹⁵ Dnes 24:

<https://novezamky.dnes24.sk/nove-zamky-neprijmu-dar-od-turecka-fontana-v-meste-bola-zamietnuta-foto-348772>
(accessed on 27/12/2019)

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.

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.¹⁶ The head of one of the governing parties at that time Slovak National Party (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 after that Muslims in turbans will run around in there, so this is something that SNS disagrees with.“ 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.”¹⁷ In January 2016 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 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.“¹⁸ 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 21st of August 2016. Here he claimed that the fact that London elected its first Muslim mayor 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.¹⁹ His statements illustrate that anti-Muslim sentiment could indeed have been responsible for the proposal of the amendment.

As if the law wasn’t strict already, in November 2016 an amendment passed in the National Assembly lifting the quota from 20.000 to 50.000 signature. Head of SNS Andrej Danko announced in 2015 that should his party be part of the government, he will propose this change. His argument was that the number of Muslims is growing and even mentioned that there could be as much as 20.000 of them (we are not aware of any estimate even coming close to this number and Danko didn’t quote any source of this information). The law according to him should help to prevent „islamization“ of Slovakia.²⁰ His party did well in election in 2016 and formed government

¹⁶Government parties opposed to small churches

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

¹⁷SME: They want to stop small churches <http://www.sme.sk/c/3129969/chcu-zastavit-male-cirkvi.html> (accessed 22/9/2016)

¹⁸RTVS: O 5 minute 12 <http://www.rtv.slovensko.sk/televizia/archiv/10013/84336> (accessed 22/9/2016)

¹⁹Webnoviny.sk: Podmanický: Muslim politicians can gain access to weapons

<http://www.webnoviny.sk/slovensko/clanok/1094876-podmanickymoslimski-politici-sa-mozu-dostat-k-zbranim/> (accessed 22/9/2016)

²⁰ISLAMONLINE.sk: Keď ešte Danko nebol vo vláde, prezradil pravý dôvod, prečo chce SNS sprísniť registráciu cirkví

with two other parties. Danko did actually propose the amendment together with few other MPs and the law was passed by vote.²¹ The president of Slovak republic Andrej Kiska rejected to sign the amendment, what forced National Assembly to vote on it once again. The definitive vote happened in early 2017 and the amendment was approved once again.

It is also worth noting that on 22th of November 2016 member of Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia and member of parliament Stanislav Mizík proposed an additional amendment to increase the threshold for state recognition of religious communities from 20.000 to 250.000 signatures. The proposal argued²² that this would be „an effective tool to prevent the infiltration of non-Christian religious organizations and other sects into Slovak society in near future.“ The amendment did not pass the parliament.

The current registration law is repeatedly mentioned in the International Religious Freedom Report conducted annually by U. S. Department of State.²³ 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. “A group without the 50,000 adult adherents required to obtain status as an official religious group may seek registration as a civic association, which provides the legal status necessary to carry out activities such as operating a bank account or entering into a contract,” states in Slovak Republic 2017 International Religious Freedom Report by U. S. Department of State.²⁴ “In doing so, however, the group may not call itself a church or identify itself officially as a religious group, since the law governing registration of citizen associations specifically excludes religious groups from obtaining this status,” the report continues.

Physical and Verbal attacks

The 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 Slovak authorities We are however aware of several physical attacks targeting Muslim individuals.

<http://www.islamonline.sk/2016/09/sns-vravi-ze-sprisenie-registracie-ma-zabranit-spekulantom-nie-je-to-cela-pravda/> (15/12/2016)

²¹ New York Times: A Blow-Slovak Muslims Critical of New Church Law

http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2016/12/02/world/europe/ap-eu-rel-slovakia-islam.html?_r=0 (accessed on 15/12/2016). Independent: Slovakia bars Islam from becoming state religion by tightening church laws

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/slovakia-bars-islam-state-religion-tightening-church-laws-robert-fico-a7449646.html> (accessed on 15/12/2016). Reuters: Slovakia toughens church registration rules to bar Islam

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-slovakia-religion-islam-idUSKBN13P20C> (accessed on 15/12/2016)

²²NR SR: Amendment 7 0273 http://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=schodze%2Fnpredn_detail&cid=2358 (accessed on 26/04/2017)

²³United States Department of State: International Religious Freedom Report for 2013 – Slovak Republic <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/222479.pdf> (accessed on 30/3/2015)

²⁴United States Department of State: International Religious Freedom Report for 2017 – Slovak Republic <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281202.pdf> (accessed on 25/11/2018)

On 19th of February 2019 TV Markiza ran story about the struggles of mixed married couple – Muslim from Tunisia and Slovak lady, in an apartment building in Bratislava. They have an ongoing conflict with a neighbour who has repeated racist remarks about the husband.²⁵

In June 2019 blogger Monika Nagyova wrote about a dinner she spent with a Turkish family in Slovakia.²⁶ Turkish lady in that family told her, how she was attacked by an unknown man. He began to strangle her with her hijab, while she was holding her 6-month old baby in her arms. People standing around were in shock but in a moment the man stopped and left. Coincidentally the next day another man stood in front of her in the street and told her a vulgar word. The woman is not wearing hijab in Slovakia ever since.

In July 2019 for the first time in Slovakia the prosecutor filed an accusation for attempted murder based on extremist motive.²⁷ It concerns a man who attacked a kebab in a bistro and stabbed a hard worker in the face with a knife. In December 2018 accused Michael D. entered the premises of the kebab bistro in Banská Bystrica, where the Turkish national flag was located. In addition to the guests, there were three Turkish and Albanian nationals in the bistro, who were of Muslim religion. The accused was under the influence of alcohol, behaved noisily and aggressively, slammed his hands into the facility and shouted threats against Muslims.

On 19th of December 2019 a Syrian student was riding a bus from his university. He was on a phone with his mother. He greeted her with words “as-salamu alaykum”. Upon hearing this a man standing next to him pushed the students with both hands. Surprised student tried to defend himself when the man pushed him again and then left the bus on the next stop. Other people in the bus did not react. The man informed Islamic Foundation in Slovakia about his experience.²⁸

INS was also informed about another incident in Trnava that took place sometime during the year. In the local shopping mall MAX an unknown man came to a Muslim woman and told her: „Put it [her head scarf] down you muslim b*tch, you are in Slovakia, we don't want your religion here and we are a Christian country.“ After a short argument the man left. Other people were observing the situation but nobody intervened.²⁹

Anti-Muslim sentiment on internet and in media

In 2019 Czech Republic began hearing with Slovak convert to Islam who is accused with planning a terrorist attack in Czech Republic. The hearing was covered by most of Slovak media

²⁵ TV Markiza:

https://www.tvnoviny.sk/domace/1955370_rasizmus-a-xenofobia-neobchadza-ani-slovensko-manzelia-nam-porozpravi-o-svojej-skusenosti# (accessed on 20/12/2019)

²⁶ SME Blog: <https://nagyova.blog.sme.sk/c/511174/moslimka-v-bratislave-von-idem-radsej-bez-satky.html> (accessed on 29/12/2019)

²⁷ Denník N: <https://dennikn.sk/minuta/1518909/> (accessed on 29/12/2019)

²⁸ Facebook/IslamOnline.sk: <https://www.facebook.com/IslamOnline.sk/posts/10157765456842629> (accessed on 29/12/2019)

²⁹ Facebook/IslamOnline.sk: https://www.facebook.com/IslamOnline.sk/posts/10157765456842629?comment_id=10157765678102629 (accessed on 29/12/2019)

outlets and even some of the mainstream ones were not free of biased reporting. The best example is the only slovak private tv channel focusing only on news, TA3. The headline of their article about the case stated: “Slovak man is charged with planning terrorist attack. He was influenced by Islam”.³⁰ What they were trying to say was there the man might have been influenced by certain radical islamic preacher, but the headline suggests that it might have been the religion of Islam, not its misinterpretation that lead the man to planning the deed.

In February 2019 a news came that company Novofruct SK in the city of Nové Zámky will be producing baby food with halal certificate for european market. Alternative media and their readers cyberbullied company for this decision.³¹

In June 2019 the official Facebook account of the Police of Slovak republic reported that certain man was taking pictures of foreigners with darker skin (presumably Afghans) sitting around a public lake in Bratislava. He than shared the picture on Facebook and warned people from them. The police said it began investigation against the man on the basis of spreading false alarm.³²

Public attitude towards Muslims

There was only one poll collecting data on the attitude towards Muslims in 2019. Institute for Public Affairs (IVO) contracted Focus Agency to conduct a survey among young people from 15 to 19 years of age. People were asked about their attitude towards minorities, equality, politics and their future. The one question relevant to this report is: Who would bother you as a neighbour? The first were political extremists, second were members of Roma minority and third were Muslims, where 59% of people would be bothered by having them as their neighbours.

³⁰ TA3

<https://www.ta3.com/clanok/1146889/slovaka-sudia-za-planovanie-teroristickeho-utoku-ovplyvnil-ho-islam.html> (accessed on 29/12/2019)

³¹ Facebook https://www.facebook.com/IslamOnline.sk/posts/10156985134577629?_tn_=-R (accessed on 29/12/2019)

³² Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/hoaxPZ/photos/a.317666309061243/463189117842294/> (accessed on 29/12/2019)

Graf 3: „Predstavte si, že by sa do Vášho susedstva nastáhovala osoba, resp. osoby patriace do nasledujúcich skupín. Prekážali by vám v susedstve, alebo nie?“ (% odpovedí „prekážali by mi“)



While this is a high number, it is actually less than in 2017 when as much as 67% of people from 18 to 24 years of age answered that they would be bothered by the same thing.

Tabuľka 4: „Predstavte si, že by sa do Vášho susedstva nastáhovala osoba, resp. osoby patriace do nasledujúcich skupín. Prekážali by vám v susedstve, alebo nie?“ (% odpovedí „prekážali by mi“)

	15-19 roční (2019)	18-24 roční (2017)
Ľudia inej farby pleti*	14	40/40
Židia	17	35
Ľudia inej sexuálnej orientácie**	28	43/51/40
Cudzinci z okolitých krajín zamestnaní na Slovensku (napr. Srbi, Rumuni, Ukrajinci)	28	---
Dlhodobo nezamestnaní ľudia	32	18
Utečenci z krajín zasiahnutých vojnou a hladom***	45	54
Moslimovia	59	67
Rómovia	61	80
Politickí extrémisti	75	79

IVO published the results in June 2019.³³

Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

In order to counter islamophobia in Slovakia members of civil society not only react on cases that already happened but also offer their own constructive narrative of how the coexistence with Muslims may look like.

Interfaith project that aims among other things to counter islamophobia and bias against other religions was an ongoing activity throughout the year 2019. Over the course of the year Muslim imam, Jewish rabbi and Christian priest visited 10 high schools around the country and discuss with students about the tolerance among religions. Another similar activity aimed at teachers in particular began in October 2018 and continued in April 2019. It was a workshop aimed to educate teachers how to approach interfaith and intercultural education in their schools and with their students. Religious leaders of all three abrahamic faiths also discussed with the public 8 times during the year in various cities, once directly in the Islamic Foundation's islamic center Córdoba.

Positive effect on the perception of Islam and Muslims could have also festive dinner during the most of fasting Ramadan. Muslims shared their dinner with personalities from various files of public life including jewish, catholic and protestant religious leaders. Each of them had a speech where they spoke about their attitude to Muslim community or multireligious environment.” Among other guests were the ambassadors of USA, Ireland or Indonesia or the chargé d'affaires of Canada.³⁴

³³ IVO http://www.ivo.sk/buxus/docs//publikacie/subory/Obcianske_spolunazivanie_ocami_tinedzerov_2019.pdf (accessed on 29/12/2019)

³⁴ ISLAMONLINE.sk <http://www.islamonline.sk/2019/06/treti-rocnik-slavnostnej-ramadanskej-vecere-v-bratislave-prilakal-aj-nove-tvare/> (accessed on 30/12/2019)

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

During the last year we saw decrease in the frequency of anti-Muslim hate speech from politicians. Unlike in 2018, when almost all of the parties in National Assembly had someone speaking out against Islam or Muslims, in 2019 the statements came mostly from LS NS and parties outside of National Assembly with the only exception being the leading party Smer-SD, but even in its case Islam nor Muslims weren't mentioned directly, but rather the party used phrases like "dangerous migrants". It is also worth noting that no new law that could be connected to Islam or Muslims was proposed in the National Assembly in 2019, unlike in previous two years.

Most of the cases where we could see connection to Islam or Muslims came from campaigns prior the general election in 2020. Therefore we expect the frequency of those statements to increase in early 2020. From the point of anti-Muslim sentiment, the upcoming election will be very important. New political structures emerged in last two years that aim to score well in the election according to the polls. These new parties build on the disappointment with coalition and opposition parties from last couple of years. Their main figures have no past of anti-Muslim hate speech, but on the contrary there are members who stood up in defence of Muslims before. Should they be successful in forming the government, it is reasonable to expect that anti-Muslim hate speech would stop coming from the governing political representatives and that no other anti-Muslim legislation would be approved.

On the other hand though, there is also no reason to expect any improvement in the current state of things, especially when it comes to the legal discrimination of Muslims. No party running for elections mentioned any plan to lose the restrictive legislation, nor they publicized any intention to open this topic in future.

For the time being the most successful ways of combating islamophobia are local activities, such as Islamic Foundation's islamic center Cordoba that serves as an information hub for Muslim and non-Muslims, offer lectures and excursions for students and others interested in learning more about Muslims living in the country with them. Very effective are also ongoing interfaith activities, especially the project called "Imam, Rabbi and Priest Meet Together", where the spiritual leaders of three abrahamic religions meet in schools or public spaces and discuss with students or with public about tolerance and mutual understanding.

Worth mentioning is also the annual festive dinner – *iftar* – that Islamic Foundation in Slovakia holds once a year during the month of Ramadan. After the day of fasting Muslims break their fast with representatives of various religions and public figures from different areas of political and social life giving the proof of coexistence based on mutual benefit to all.

Chronology

Chronological list of all cases of hate speech against Islam and Muslims and all verbal and physical attacks in 2019.

- **28/01/2019:** Slovak private new tv channel TA3 published an article with the headline: “Slovak man is charged with planning terrorist attack. He was influenced by Islam”.
- **26/02/2019:** So-called “alternative media” and their readers cyberbullied company Novofruct SK for decision to produce baby food with halal certificate for european market.
- **January 2019:** LSNS creates website www.stratenaeuropa.sk (Lost Europe) showing their new suggestive video shot in several areas western european cities characteristic with large portions of immigrant population.
- **28/04/2019:** Supreme court failed to dissolve far-right LSNS party. In its final verdict it said that the proposed evidence isn't sufficient for such a move.
- **17/06/2019:** Article was published with story of a Muslim woman in Slovakia who had her hijab removed and was strangled by unknown man.
- **24/06/2019:** the official Facebook account of the Police of Slovak republic reported that certain man was taking pictures of foreigners with darker skin (presumably Afghans) sitting around a public lake in Bratislava and began investigation against him due to spreading false alarm.
- **04/07/2019:** For the first time in Slovakia the prosecutor filed an accusation for attempted murder based on extremist motive. It concerns a man who attacked a kebab in a bistro and stabbed a hard worker in the face with a knife.
- **03/09/2019:** Supreme court confirmed the condemnation of LSNS's MP Milan Mazúrek for his racist remarks about gypsies on radio broadcast service. He was removed from the position of MP and fined.
- **23/10/2019:** Hoax appeared that claimed planned construction of mosque in Bratislava district Lamač. Its major responded: “Anyone who knows me knows what my personal beliefs are, and so I didn't even consider it necessary to stress that I would never allow such a thing [construction of a mosque].”
- **17/12/2019:** The recording was published featuring LSNS Marián Kotleba speaking on the meeting with supporters in the town of Vráble. Among other things he claimed that various west european cities banned Christmas tree in order not to “offend non-christian citizens” and later said that he his party won't allow “Slovakia to turn into multicultural piggery.”
- **19/12/2019:** A syrian student was riding a bus from his university. A man standing next to him pushed the students with both hands. Surprised student tried to defend himself when the man pushed him again and than left the bus on the next stop.

- **December 2019:** LSNS began election campaign with billboards that read “We wish you beautiful traditional Christmas, until European Union bans them” pr “We will protect our women against the invasion of migrants, bullies and rapists!”
- **December 2019:** Also as a part of election campaign LSNS published a suggestive video about local Muslim communities in United Kingdom.
- **December 2019:** Leading party Smer-SD as a part of early election campaign published couple of videos with claims such as “While we were protecting Slovakia from immigrants, the opposition wasted no time and argued with each other” or “I want positive change that will strengthen our borders and protects us from dangerous immigrants.”
- **December 2019:** Party Vlasť is asking readers on its website prior the election in 2020: “Do you agree that Slovakia should support other religious or Muslim beliefs in the context of migration?”
- **December 2019:** Party Direct Democracy (Priama demokracia, PD) running for election in 2020 has a document on its website that among other things reads: “PD wants to stop Islamic invasion of Europe! Islam must never become even a tiny part of our culture.”
- **December 2019:** Party of Kuffa Brothers – Christian Democracy (Strana bratov Kuffovcov Kresťanská demokracia) has a website that features article, where its members claims the need to protect Europe from “the spirit of islamisation of Europe”, “crescents and minarets” or “Eurabia”.
- **Sometime in 2019:** An unknown man in the shopping mall MAX in the city of Trnava came to a Muslim woman and told her: „Put it [her head scarf] down you muslim b*tch, you are in Slovakia, we don't want your religion here and we are a christian country.“