

Documentation of the International Online Conference: „Anti-Muslim Racism in Europe: Social Effects and Actions to Counter it“

Anti-Muslim racism has become increasingly prominent in European public spheres in recent years. Racist and antisemitic attacks, the increasing strengthening of right-wing populist movements and the current social crises negatively influence the sense of security and sense of belonging of (Muslim) minorities across Europe. On 23rd November 2022, the international conference: “Anti-Muslim Racism in Europe: Social Effects and Actions to Counter it” took place to further investigate these phenomena. The event was organized by La Red – Vernetzung und Integration e. V. as part of the project: “Open mind – (working) Transnationally and Cross-Community against Islamophobia and Muslimophobia”.

Welcoming

The conference was opened by the **Special Representative on Antisemitic, Anti-Muslim and other forms of Religious Intolerance and Hate Crimes, Dr. Daniel Höltgen**. Dr. Höltgen emphasized the importance of tackling the issues of open racism, hate speech and discrimination online. He highlighted that working on anti-Muslim racism is a precondition for a diverse and stable society. Furthermore, he criticized the popular misconception that Muslim communities oppose so-called “European values”. Dr. Höltgen pointed to the importance in working with Muslim communities and have them participate in societies by collaborating with Muslim activists and representatives.

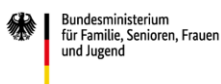
Keynote: I Report - Racism directed against the Muslim community is widespread:
Why a standardized reporting tool is needed

Hanna Attar (CLAIM) gave an input on anti-Muslim racism in Germany and on the possibilities of monitoring anti-Muslim crimes. She emphasized that anti-Muslim racism has many forms, and that anti-Muslim racism is particularly prevalent where there is little contact between Muslims and non-Muslims. Hanna Attar stated that racism is not often recognized as a problem when directed at Muslim, Roma and Sinti people. Thus, anti-Muslim racism in Germany is an underreported phenomenon. Counselling is often the last resort for people who experience racism. There is a lack of knowledge on counselling options or the nature of racism that they are facing. Moreover, affected people have a feeling of powerlessness in the system, thus they only share their experiences of racism with their personal network. There is also a big resentment of the idea of being victimized and being reduced to an unequal part of society. Therefore, people affected by racism often develop their own strategies to combat that experience, instead of using counselling services.

Panel I: Inventory of the impact of anti-Muslim racism in the social context

During the first panel, **Aïcha Bounaga (Collectif contre l'islamophobie en Europe)**, **Sabrina Saoudi (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights)**, **Sedra Arab (Dokustelle Österreich)** and **Prof. Karen Phalet (Social Psychologist and Professor of Social and Cultural Psychology)** discussed the

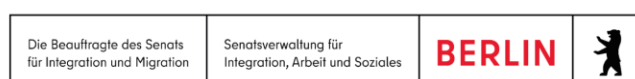
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psychological consequences for those who experience racism, the connection of gender and racism and the feeling of security of minorities in Europe.

The aspect of gendered experiences of racism was a central topic of the discussion. This is evident, for example, when it comes to dealing with Muslim women's clothing. Especially teenagers and young women are being criticized by other people (e.g. in schools), not only because of wearing a headscarf, but also because of wearing an outfit which is perceived as too modest (e.g. long skirts). While Muslim men and women are both exposed to racism, the types of discrimination are different. Women are generally discriminated due to the way they choose to cover their bodies and their models of behaviour towards men, while men are judged for their ideas. Men are perceived as political actors, while women are seen as victims and tools of Islamism without own ideas and agencies. This narrative reduces Muslim women to their bodies. The implications of this rhetoric are very deep from a feminist perspective, making women focus on their bodies and sexuality.

The panellists also highlighted the responsibility of European states to protect the security of minorities. People with migration background are disproportionately targeted by surveillance and security checking policies that are focused on racial profiling, framed by the *counter-terrorism* narrative. The collecting of data on hate crimes was named as a crucial step for securing the Muslim citizens' feeling of security. Thus, there is a great need for cooperation between local governments and Muslim communities.

Panel II: social initiatives against anti-Muslim racism in Europe

The second part of the conference was dedicated to various dimensions and expressions of anti-Muslim racism in different European states. Numerous examples of social actions from areas of civic education, empowerment work, civil society and counselling work were discussed.

Dr. Karol Wilczyński (Educator, Journalist and Communication Strategist) stated that despite the large Muslim community in **Poland**, the Polish history is entangled with anti-Muslim racism. Through the Polish history, a Catholic-coloured narrative of the *Muslim other* has been established. This narrative strongly influences the discourse on migration in Poland, as the situation of the refugees at the Belarusian-Polish border shows.

According to **Lucija Mulalić (Centre for Peace Studies)** the situation in **Croatia** is very similar to the one in Poland. The Muslim community is very large and is recognized as a religious community. The debate on Muslims has an ethnic connotation. For example, a country-specific stereotype is that Muslims who are born in Croatia or who have a long migration history are well integrated in the society, while recently immigrated Muslims are presumed to be "different" to the Croatian-Catholic culture.

As a country-specific topic related to anti-Muslim racism in the **UK Iman Atta (Tell Mama)** named the anti-grooming scandals (e.g. grooming perpetrators are from Muslim background). This narrative is extremely supported by the British media and is used by the far right in the political-public debate on

Muslims. Social media play an important role in this context since they cross borders and encourage the spread of anti-Muslim narratives around the world.

In the case of **Germany, Elisabeth Walser (CLAIM)** gave the example of the criminalization of Muslims as a country-specific topic. Gentrification and organized crime are portrayed as characteristics of Muslim communities by the media and the political discourse. As a result, the police behaviour towards Muslims and migrants is often problematic, resulting for example in racial profiling. A second aspect is the so-called “war on terror”, which leads to slander and delegitimization of (Muslim) organizations that work on anti-Muslim racism. In addition, the phenomenon of guilt by association regarding Muslim organizations leads to an increasing loss of solidarity with these organizations and is a powerful tool to silence Muslim organizations.

The panellists also discussed the role of civic education in fighting anti-Muslim racism. They pointed to the importance of integrating knowledge concerning Islam, Muslims and anti-Muslim racism in the syllabus of schools. Moreover, there is a need for civic education not only for pupils and students, but also for teachers, since teachers are a large perpetrator group in many reports on anti-Muslim racism. In this regard, the importance of encounter and dialogue between people with different backgrounds was also highlighted. Further, there is a need to discuss how one can tackle institutional racism. Dialogue and communication can help on an individual level, but the combatting of institutional racism requires other strategies on a governmental level.

Summary and Outlook

Different perspectives, such as the in-depth discussions in small working groups, made clear that anti-Muslim racism takes place on different levels and thus require different strategies. There is a need for networking and sharing experiences and strategies on anti-Muslim racism in an individual’s everyday life but also on a community and state level. When fighting anti-Muslim racism, one should not solely focus on one country, but address anti-Muslim racism as a Europe-wide phenomenon, especially in the digital age and in times of international crises.

We, the “open mind“-project team, would like to thank the panellists and all participants for the exciting and valuable exchange of experiences and perspectives during the conference. For comments and questions, please feel free to contact Emilia Fabiańczyk (fabianczyk@la-red.eu) or Sophie Bärtelein (baertlein@la-red.eu).

Anti-Muslim racism in Europe: social effects and actions to counter it - overview of speakers

OPEN MIND NOV 09, 2022 03:25PM UTC

open mind – Transnational und communityübergreifend gegen Islam- und Muslimfeindlichkeit / Open mind - Transnational and cross-community against Islamophobia and Muslimophobia (Emilia Fabiańczyk, Sophie Bärtlein)

Open mind considers the fight against anti-Muslim racism as a transnational issue that should not be thought of only in the German context. Together with various actors, open mind works to raise awareness in an international context and to counter anti-Muslim racism on a Europe-wide level.

Open mind aims to strengthen the social participation of minorities, combined with the empowerment of people affected by anti-Muslim racism.

Open mind works with a multi-level approach in order to counter the diversity of anti-Muslim racism with diverse intervention models. Through various formats such as social media campaigns, artistic workshops, lectures or participatory research projects, youth and young adults aged 18-27 deal with the issue of anti-Muslim racism.

In addition, open mind pursues the networking of political, civil society and state actors as well as multipliers who are active in the field at local and transnational level. In different dialogue formats, opportunities and challenges of the work as well as already tested strategies against anti-Muslim racism are discussed and reflected on and further developed with regard to their possible impact on local coexistence.

<https://la-red.eu/portfolio/open-mind/>.

Tanja Berg, Moderator

Political scientist, Minor – Projektkontor für Bildung und Forschung gGmbH.

Dr. Daniel Höltgen

Special Representative on antisemitic, Anti-Muslim and other forms of religious intolerance and hate crimes.

Dr. Daniel Höltgen (55) is the Director of Communications at the Council of Europe since 2010. In addition, he was appointed to the newly created position of Special Representative of the Secretary General on antisemitic, anti-Muslim and other forms of religious intolerance and hate crimes in November 2020. He previously worked in senior positions for the German government and the European Commission. Daniel is British and German and has a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge and holds a diploma from the Catholic School of journalism in Munich. Daniel believes that interfaith and inter-community dialogue can make an important contribution to promoting mutual respect and combating intolerance in our societies. The work of grassroots initiatives and NGOs, in particular with young people, plays an important part in that dialogue.

Hanna Attar, CLAIM - Allianz gegen Islam- und Muslimfeindlichkeit

Hanna Attar studied Islamic Studies and Religions, Dialogue and Education in Hamburg. From 2015 to 2019, she managed the project „Nicht in meinem Namen! Gemeinsam gegen Diskriminierung, antimuslimischen Rassismus“. At CLAIM, she is responsible for the project *I Report*. In addition, she is responsible for online communication. From next year onwards she will mainly be responsible for reaching out to affected people, i.e. how can stakeholders (incl. counselling centres) reach affected people and what do they need in order to be cared for in a trustworthy way.

Through nation-wide networking, CLAIM works to strengthen civil-society actors. Through information exchange and preventative advocacy, CLAIM counteracts Islamophobic activities that endanger the common good of the people in Germany and across Europe.

CLAIM puts effective structures in place that promote professional exchange and cooperation in Germany and across Europe, and support organisations and projects to further build their capacity along these areas.

Through joint campaigns, CLAIM creates nationwide and pan-European visibility of Islamophobic, anti-Muslim and racist tendencies and their negative impacts. E.g. CLAIM coordinates the Anti-Muslim Racism Day every 1 July.

<https://www.claim-allianz.de/>.

Sedra Arab, Dokustelle Österreich / Dokustelle Austria

Sedra Arab is a Social Worker.

At the Dokustelle she is responsible for Empowerment and Outreach Workgroup.

Dokustelle Austria is a Documentation-Centre on Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism.

Since 2015, the Documentation-Centre has produced the annual Anti-Muslim Racism Report, based on systematically recorded cases from the previous year. The number of cases is made up of reports from victims or witnesses as well as cases recorded through media monitoring. With the presentation of the case figures, analyses and contributions by experts, the Anti-Muslim Racism Reports of the Documentation Centre Austria contribute to making anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia in Austria more visible.

<https://dokustelle.at/>.

Sabrina Saoudi, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Sabrina Saoudi has over 15 years of experience on human rights, international policy and advocacy, and international community development. She has led successful management and implementation programs, strategic planning, and grants management in senior leadership roles at national, European and international levels. Since 2021, Sabrina has served as the Adviser on combating intolerance against Muslims in the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), working on hate crimes, social cohesion, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and civilian protection.

She has extensive European and international experience in developing strategic partnerships with civil society organisations, institutions and Governments and leading multi-country programmes with a focus on the Europe, Central Asia, Middle East and Africa. She has held advisory roles with multi-lateral institutions. As former acting Director of Strategic Partnerships and EU liaison at the first EU-Mediterranean Foundation for dialogue, Sabrina has been actively advocating for bridging the gap between civil society and Governments. She was nominated to the 5+5 countries task-force to create structures for dialogue among the EU, Civil Society and Governments following the Summit of the Two Shores.

With the European Parliament, she has been involved in developing global European policies on democracy support. Sabrina began her career as legal protection officer in the French National Court of Asylum where she developed an expertise on migration and asylum policies. She has been the Court's focal point on the geopolitical and human rights developments in the Muslim world.

<https://www.osce.org/odihhr>.

Aïcha Bounaga, Collectif contre l'islamophobie en Europe (CCIE)

The Collective for Countering Islamophobia in Europe is a non-profit organization founded in Belgium on November 1, 2020. It aims at acting against rejection, hatred and discrimination against people and institutions due to their real or supposed belonging to the Muslim faith.

<https://ccieurope.org/en/>.

Prof. Karen Phalet

Prof. Karen Phalet is a social and cultural psychologist based at KU Leuven, BE and was 2021-22 visiting fellow at DeZIM-Institut, Berlin. She has published extensively on religious diversity, discrimination and belonging, articulating comparative perspectives from Muslim youth and communities in European societies. Her research is motivated by the urgent need to document and address persistent and pervasive inequities ('Muslim penalties') on attainment, belonging and voice for Muslims across Europe. She published her research in international sociology, social psychology, migration and ethnic and racial studies journals. Contact: karen.phalet@kuleuven.be.

Iman Atta, Tell MAMA

Iman Atta is the director of Tell MAMA.

TELL MAMA is a ngo which supports victims of anti-Muslim hate and is a public service which also measures and monitors anti-Muslim incidents.

<https://tellmamauk.org/>.

Lucija Mulalić, Centar za mirovne studije / Centre for Peace Studies

Lucija Mulalić is a political scientist and journalist.

Centre for Peace Studies (Croatian abbreviation: CMS; English abbreviation: CPS) is a non-governmental and non-profit organization promoting non-violence and social change through education, research and activism. CPS grew out of various forms of direct peace-building in western Slavonia (Volunteers' Project Pakrac, 1993-1997). It was founded in 1996 in Pakrac and formally registered in Zagreb the following year. CPS operates through three compatible programs: Asylum, Integration and Human Security, Peace Education and Non-violence Affirmation, and Combating Inequalities. In our work in all programs we combine several approaches - research, education, public actions, and work on public policies, advocacy and public campaigns.

<https://www.cms.hr/en>.

Dr. Karol Wilczyński

Educator, Journalist and Communication Strategist. He provides global education, media and social media training. Wilczyński supports victims of Islamophobia and works on combating Islamophobia in social and media spaces. He deals with communication strategies of social and fundraising campaigns in cooperation with numerous Non Governmental and Political Organizations. For the past 8 years he has been involved in work with people on the move and forced migration. As a journalist he visited various places experiencing forced migration: including Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, Turkey, Belarus and camps in EU. He wrote a doctoral dissertation on Arabic philosophy and bridges Greek and Arab cultures in the Middle Ages as part of the Artes Liberales Academy, Warsaw. He studied at the University of Rochester and Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich as a visiting scholar. Currently he lectures on Migration, Islamophobia and Politics of Fear at the Jagiellonian University.

Elisabeth Walser, CLAIM - Allianz gegen Islam- und Muslimfeindlichkeit

Elisabeth Walser is responsible for the community-based monitoring project. She studied social anthropology with a focus on critical race theory, queer feminist theories and decolonial theories at the University of Sussex. Before joining CLAIM, she steered the work of Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit und

Antimuslimischer Rassismus Österreich. She was particularly concerned with making institutional racism visible and strengthening civil society alliances. Prior to that, she conducted a traineeship as research assistant at the European Network Against Racism, during which she supported the implementation of a study on racist police brutality.

For several years Elisabeth Walser has been active in anti-racist and feminist groups.

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