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# EUROPEAN **ISLAMOPHOBIA** REPORT

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2016



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ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

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# THE STATE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ

This is the second edition of the annual *European Islamophobia Report (EIR)* which was presented for the first time in 2015. New countries are included in this year's *EIR*; while 25 countries were covered in 2015, the report for 2016 includes 27 country reports. *EIR 2016* is the result of 31 prominent scholars who specialise in different fields such as racism, gender and Islamophobia Studies. In the years to come we will attempt to include more countries in our report. Our final aim is to cover and monitor the developments of Islamophobia in all European countries.

Islamophobia has become a real danger to the foundations of democratic order and the values of the European Union. It has also become the main challenge to the social peace and coexistence of different cultures, religions and ethnicities in Europe. The country reports of *EIR 2016*, which cover almost all the European continent from Russia to Portugal and from Greece to Latvia, clearly show that the level of Islamophobia in fields such as education, employment, media, politics, the justice system and the Internet is on the rise. Since the publication of the last report there is little improvement. On the contrary, one can see from the country reports that the state of democracy and human rights in Europe is deteriorating. Islamophobia has become more real especially in the everyday lives of Muslims in Europe. It has surpassed the stage of being a rhetorical animosity and has become a physical animosity that Muslims feel in everyday life be it at school, the workplace, the mosque, transportation or simply on the street.

The refugee movement and the turmoil it has created in Europe, the unprecedented rise of far right parties all across the continent and the UK's Brexit decision, which took many by surprise, have revealed the importance and relevance of this report, which covers incidents and developments in 2016. The short-term political significance of Islamophobia is as much relevant as Islamophobia's structural dimension. As mentioned before, small successes can be witnessed in some European countries yet great challenges lie ahead for deepening the values of human rights and freedom of religion in Europe.

# The Rise of Islamophobia

As a survey conducted by the Chatham House Europe Programme shows, public opposition to any further migration from predominantly Muslim states is by no means confined to Trump’s administration (implementation of the ‘Muslim-Ban’). Respondents in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain and the UK were presented with the statement ‘All further migration from mainly Muslim countries should be stopped’. As the report reveals, the majorities in all but two of the ten states agreed to this statement, ranging from 71% in Poland, 65% in Austria, 53% in Germany and 51% in Italy to 47% in the United Kingdom and 41% in Spain. In no country did the percentage that disagreed surpass 32%.<sup>1</sup>

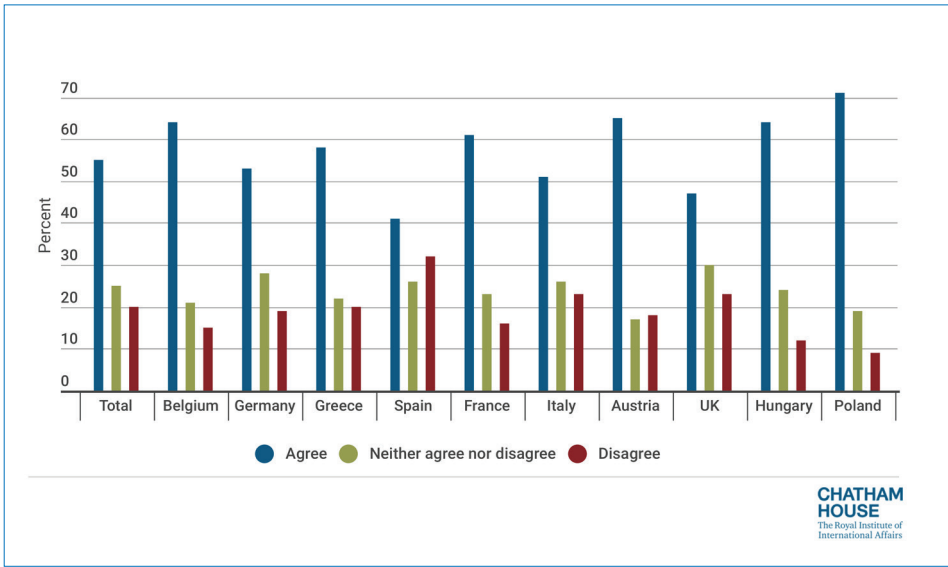


Figure 1: Public opposition to any further migration from predominantly Muslim states in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

The findings of this report go hand in hand with similar surveys on this topic. The Ipsos Perils of Perception Survey 2016 found that the current and the future Muslim population in Europe are enormously overestimated in most countries. Out of the list of all 20 countries where respondents overestimated the Muslim population by more than 10%, 12 are European, while the USA and Canada are among the remaining 8 countries. When asked “Now thinking about 2020, out of every 100 people, about how many do you think will be Muslim?”, the top 20 countries where proponents overestimated the Muslim population again were in majority European (11). The average guess in France is that 40% of

1. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/what-do-europeans-think-about-muslim-immigration#sthash.O6J7kQrj.dpuf>  
2. Chatham House, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/what-do-europeans-think-about-muslim-immigration>

the population will be Muslim in 2020 when the actual projection is 8.3%. Italy comes third with 26% overestimation, and Belgium and Germany fourth with 24% overestimation.<sup>3</sup>

Connecting this to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, we can suggest that this overestimation is connected to unfavourable views regarding Muslims. The report states,

“Opinions of Muslims vary considerably across Europe. Half or more in Hungary, Italy, Poland, Greece and Spain have a very or somewhat unfavorable view of Muslims. And in Italy (36%), Hungary (35%) and Greece (32%), roughly a third hold very unfavorable opinions. Majorities in the other nations surveyed express positive attitudes about Muslims. Nonetheless, at least a quarter in each country have negative views of Muslims.”<sup>4</sup>

These numbers are not shocking if we look at the incidents of Islamophobia and its pervasiveness in power structure across Europe. Muslims are seen as the enemy ‘within’. There is wide consent in Western societies to Muslims not being seen as equal citizens. Othering and differential treatment may also overlap with the dehumanization of Muslims. Thus, physical attacks and political restrictions can often be carried out and even defended in an atmosphere of wide distrust and enmity. Islamophobia is by no means confined to the working poor or the middle class, who have been misinformed about Islam and Muslims. It is especially true for the so-called educated elite. Discriminating policies like the ban of the hijab for certain professions, the ban of the niqab in public, bans of minarets and other laws restricting Muslim’s freedom of religion speak volumes. If politicians can take such decisions and the media, along with large parts of society, accept them, why should we wonder about the strong opposition to immigration of Muslim people in Europe?

Hence, these numbers reveal the necessity of the *EIR*, which looks at the challenge of Islamophobia from a qualitative and not a quantitative research perspective. Its aim is to document and analyse trends in the spread of Islamophobia in various European nation states. There cannot be a claim of full comprehensiveness, since European nation states by majority still lack data collection. Hence, a central recommendation of the *EIR* is that Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hate crime should be included as a category in European nation states’ statistics – a development that has not occurred as of yet. The *EIR*’s primary contribution is to reveal the tendencies of Islamophobia and to give representative examples of its overall unfolding in the investigated states.

3. <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/ipsos-mori-perils-of-perception-charts-2016.pdf>

4. <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/07/Pew-Research-Center-EU-Refugees-and-National-Identity-Report-FINAL-July-11-2016.pdf>

## Recognition of Islamophobia

There are various definitions of Islamophobia. However, the definition of Islamophobia used by the *EIR*, as defined by its editors, is as follows,

“When talking about Islamophobia, we mean anti-Muslim racism. As Anti-Semitism Studies has shown, the etymological components of a word do not necessarily point to its complete meaning, nor how it is used. Such is also the case with Islamophobia Studies. Islamophobia has become a well-known term used in academia as much as in the public sphere. Criticism of Muslims or of the Islamic religion is not necessarily Islamophobic. Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilising and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat – real or invented – and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/rights/definition of a constructed ‘we’. Islamophobia operates by constructing a static ‘Muslim’ identity, which is attributed in negative terms and generalised for all Muslims. At the same time, Islamophobic images are fluid and vary in different contexts, because Islamophobia tells us more about the Islamophobe than it tells us about the Muslims/Islam”.<sup>5</sup>

We think that with this definition, we clearly address many of the suspicions, which are put against the term as such. As a matter of fact, while supranational institutions such as the OSCE embrace the terminology Anti-Semitism, the OSCE still refuses to use Islamophobia, which we see as part of the problem. Again, we recommend that Islamophobia/anti-Muslim Racism or anti-Muslim hate crime should be included in the collection of “equality data” in all European states. Institutions such as the OSCE need to establish solid monitoring and recording mechanisms for discrimination, hate crime and hate speech towards Muslims. In order to have reliable data, it has to be segregated by bias/category and also segregated by gender. This is even more problematic in countries that do not allow collection of data on religion or race. This seemingly egalitarian approach in reality hides the discrimination of Muslims. Also, response mechanisms seem to be unclear and not adequately used. When there is an incident of discrimination/hate crime/hate speech, there are different response mechanisms available, yet, none of these are familiar to the vast majority of Muslim citizens of European countries. Thus, we recommend that response mechanisms should be made more available, accessible and clear. Last but not least, an empowerment of the Muslim community is needed to strengthen critical citizenship and help European states deepen their democracies.

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5. Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2015*, Istanbul, SETA, 2016, p.7.



## Policy Recommendations for European Countries

The authors of every respective national report have suggested specific recommendations regarding the country they have covered. The following list of recommendations serves to underscore some of these recommendations and to add some additional suggestions on the supranational level.

We think it is important for civil society to understand that Islamophobia is a problem of institutional racism. The illusion that Europe is a post-racial society prevents large parts of European societies from recognising the severe challenge of Islamophobia to local societies. The focus has to shift from Muslims' actions to those of European societies. Racism, including Islamophobia, tells us more about the racists than about their imagined scapegoat or their victims. Hence, Islamophobia reveals aspects of Europe and the internal problems European societies continue to face. A recognition and a critical consciousness of this societal disease is of utmost importance to be able to create more just societies in Europe. At the same time, Muslims must be allowed to enjoy their spaces of freedom like other dominant religious and political groups in European societies without being securitised or criminalised. The securitisation of Islam, especially policies countering violent extremism and their impact on the freedom of religion or belief for Muslims, and even freedom of movement or free assembly have to be challenged by all democratic forces in Europe. Communities must be consulted and human rights frameworks must be respected. National security is not among the criteria that should permit the limitation of freedom of religion or belief.

We especially urge politicians to speak out against Islamophobia as one of the most pressing forms of racism in our days. Europe needs more courageous politicians who do not only challenge the politics of right-wing populist parties, but also challenge institutionalised forms of racism targeting Muslims in the fields of employment, education, state bureaucracy, and media. We also call for journalists and editors to challenge Islamophobic reporting in their news media and give space to more balanced views. Generally, the issue of religious literacy is a huge problem that does not only concern media but also the police, prosecutors and civil servants. We see that people simply lack basic knowledge on Islam and Muslims' practices. We see a need for the introduction of more comparative religion courses, or religious teaching, in a formal and informal educational setting.

We see that Muslim women are among the most vulnerable direct victims of Islamophobia. ENAR has conducted a report on the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women and presented 37 recommendations, which we can only underscore given the findings of our report.<sup>6</sup> Women who are visibly Muslim are socially or socially ostracised in many places. The combination of internal community prob-

6. [http://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/forgottenwomenpublication\\_lr\\_final\\_with\\_latest\\_corrections.pdf](http://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/forgottenwomenpublication_lr_final_with_latest_corrections.pdf)

lems, discrimination (education and employment) and hate crimes against Muslim women (data shows that it is 70% more likely for a muslim woman to be attacked in the street) are leaving their horrible mark on Muslim women. Hence, the protection and the empowerment of Muslim women have to be on the central agenda of states and NGOs. The ruling of the European Court of Justice regarding Esmâ Bougnaoui's dismissal by a French company for wearing a hijab when dealing with clients as unlawful discrimination is an important step towards equality and an anti-discriminatory society.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the case of Belgian Samira Achbita vs. Belgium, where it was argued that a dismissal due to the headscarf would be permissible against the backdrop of a general prohibition of all outward signs of political, philosophical and religious beliefs exhibited by employees in the workplace, is worrying and challenges the reality of a diverse Europe.<sup>8</sup>

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7. [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/14/world/europe/france-head-scarf-court.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/14/world/europe/france-head-scarf-court.html?_r=0)

8. <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=179082&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=678370>

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**BELGIUM**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2016

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AMINA EASAT-DAAS



## The Author

**Amina Easat-Daas** earned her PhD from Aston University, Birmingham, UK. Her doctoral research focused on the nature of Muslim women's political participation in France and Belgium, with specific emphasis on the motivations, opportunities and barriers to their political careers. Amina is currently based at the University of Leeds and is working on a project in the department of sociology and social policy funded by the European Commission. The project aims to counter Islamophobia across Europe through the development of best practice. Amina's research interests include the study of 'European Islam', and also the study of the gendered nature of Islamophobia. She has given interviews related to her research on the BBC and has presented her work in the European Parliament. Some of Amina's forthcoming research publications include Easat-Daas, A. 2017, "Gender and Islamophobia in Belgium", in Awan, I. and Zempi, I. (eds) *Key Readings in Islamophobia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. E-mail: a.easat-daas@leeds.ac.uk

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## Executive Summary

As with previous years Islamophobia in Belgium has continued to grow throughout the country in 2016. The most notable peak in anti-Muslim hate arose in the weeks following the Brussels terror attacks at Zaventem Airport and Maalbeek metro station on 22 March, 2016. The climate of anti-Muslim prejudice and hate in the period after the attacks was fueled by political figures and the Belgian media alike; most notably flagrant claims of Muslims celebrating the attacks contributed to exacerbating Islamophobia.

Islamophobia continued to affect Muslims, presumed Muslims, those linked to Muslims and Muslim sites. However, Belgian Muslim women faced the bulk of Islamophobia throughout the country over the course of the year. This discrimination was present at numerous levels: Muslim women faced physical and verbal attacks, they were the subject of political scaremongering, they faced legal limitations on their dress, and even deprivation of their right to education and employment.

In spite of these worrying developments in 2016, Belgian NGOs maintain a strong counter-presence, and lead projects directly related to the inequalities and Islamophobic prejudices that have become apparent in Belgium in 2016.

## Synthèse

Le sommet le plus remarquable au niveau des crimes haineux s'est présenté dans les semaines à la suite des attentats terroristes à l'aéroport Zaventem et le métro Maelbeek, le 22 mars 2016. Le climat des préjugés et haine antimusulman, dans la période après les attentats, était alimenté par les personnalités politiques et les médias de la même manière; affirmations flagrantes que les Musulmans ont célébré les attentats a contribué à augmenter l'islamophobie. Les crimes haineux antimusulmans continuaient à affecter les Musulmans, ceux qui sont présumés d'être Musulman, ceux qui sont connectés aux Musulmans et les endroits Musulmans. Cependant, les femmes, Musulmanes, Belges rencontraient la plupart d'islamophobie à travers du pays au cours de l'année. Cette discrimination s'est présentée aux niveaux variés. Les Musulmanes font face aux attentats verbaux et physiques, elles étaient sujettes des alarmismes politiques et aux mesures législatives qui ont limité leurs droits vestimentaires et les ont privées de l'éducation et l'emploi. En dépit que ces développements souciaient, les ASBLs Belges maintiennent une contre-présence forte et amènent des projets directement liées aux inégalités et préjugés islamophobes qui sont devenus évidents en Belgique pendant 2016.

## Overzicht

Zoals de afgelopen jaren blijft islamofobie in België tijdens 2016 toenemen, net zoals in de andere landen in dit rapport. De hoogtepunt van de haatmisdrijven tegen moslims is in de nasleep van de Brusselse terreuraanslagen in de luchthaven en het metrostation Maalbeek op 22 maart 2016. De klimaat van moslimhaat en vooroordelen in de periode na de aanslagen was gevoed door politieke figuren en media; de meest flagrante uitspraken over moslims die de aanslagen vieten, verergerde het islamofobe klimaat. Islamofobie bleef moslims, zij die verbinden zijnaan moslims en hun vaste plekken, raken en bezighouden. De Belgische moslima's bleven echter het hardst getroffen door islamofobie in het hele land gedurende het jaar. Deze discriminatie manifesteerde zich op verschillende niveaus. Moslimvrouwen werden geconfronteerd met fysiek en verbaal geweld, ze waren het onderwerp van politieke paniekzaaiërij, zij worden geconfronteerd met wettelijke beperkingen op hun kleding en zelfs het ont-nemen van het recht op onderwijs en werkgelegenheid. Ondanks deze zorgwekkende ontwikkelingen in 2016, houden de Belgische middenveldorganisaties een sterke houding aan en leiden ze projecten die rechtstreeks verband houden met de ongelijkheid en islamofobe vooroordelen die in België scherp staan tijdens 2016.

## Introduction

At the heart of Europe, Belgium represents a culturally and ethnically diverse nation, which is recognised for its multicultural ideals. Belgian Muslims constitute an estimated 6% of the total national population;<sup>1</sup> this figure is estimated to be as high as 20% in the Brussels region,<sup>2</sup> rising to 40% in specific communes within the capital.<sup>3</sup> Following Christianity, Islam represents Belgium's second most popular religion. Under the constitutional framework of national religious recognition, Islam is recognised as an official Belgian religion and thus receives state funding, support for mosques, clergy, chaplains and religious education teachers in state schools.

Yet, Belgium is no stranger to Islamophobia. Like much of the rest of Europe and the West, over recent years the country has witnessed an exponential growth of anti-Muslim prejudice and hate crimes. This section of the report highlights significant Islamophobic events, their triggers and consequences in Belgium in 2016. Importantly this report also sheds light on some of the initiatives being undertaken in Belgium in the fight against Islamophobia, and the way in which these measures represent glimmers of hope in what is largely a bleak picture of Islamophobia in Belgium in the past year.

## Significant Incidents and Developments

Although Belgium is typically recognised for its multiculturalism and religious tolerance, 2016 marked a period of sustained growth of Islamophobia throughout the nation. Most notably, on 22 March 2016, Belgium witnessed the deadliest acts of terrorism it had ever faced, with Brussels Zaventem Airport and Maalbeek<sup>4</sup> metro station tragically being hit by terror attacks, perpetrated by five men with links to *DAESH*.<sup>5</sup> The attacks on the capital resulted in 35 fatalities (three of whom were the suicide bombers) and left over 300 injured. Naturally, Belgian Muslims too were among the dead and wounded.

In the period that followed, tensions between Muslims and wider society were stoked by the Belgian media, far right supporters, and influential - and somewhat irresponsible - politicians such as Belgian Interior Minister Jan Jambon of the New Flemish Alliance who alleged that Belgian Muslims had celebrated the terror attacks.

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1. Pew Forum, "Religious Composition by Country 2010-2050," *Pew Forum*, (April 2, 2015), retrieved January 26, 2017, from <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/2010/percent/all/>.

2. Jan Hertogen, "In België Wonen 628.751 Moslims," (September 12, 2008), retrieved January 26, 2017, from <http://www.indymedia.be/index.html%3Fq=node%252F29363.html>; Fatima Zibouh, "Muslim Political Participation in Belgium: An Exceptional Political Representation in Europe," Jorgen S Nielsen (ed.), *Muslim Political Participation in Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).

3. Vivek Chaudhary, "How Molenbeek Fought Back against Isis – with Football," *The Guardian*, 30.10.2016.

4. Maalbeek in Flemish, or Maelbeek in French.

5. *Daesh* – Islamic State of Syria and the Levant.



The tragic events caused a significant peak in anti-Muslim hate crimes: for example, the Belgian Counter-Islamophobia Collective (CCIB)<sup>6</sup> recorded 36 Islamophobic incidents in the month following the attacks. In spite of self-reporting biases, this still means that on average over one anti-Muslim hate crime took place each day in the period following the Brussels terror attacks. The extent of hate crimes was such that, Breuic de Meêus, CEO of the Brussels Intercommunal Transport Company (STIB),<sup>7</sup> came forward to speak out against the wave of violence against Muslims that had taken place in the capital city transport network during this period.

Consistently in Belgium, Muslims, those presumed to be Muslim or linked to Muslims and Muslim sites, continued to be targets of Islamophobic attacks. However, most remarkably in 2016, Muslim women, and especially those who visibly appear so, have been subject to rapidly increasing levels of Islamophobia across Belgium.

During the summer of 2016, Muslim women's dress was once again central to media and political debates. Evidence presented in this report demonstrates that Belgian Muslim women face prejudice and discrimination in education, employment and generally are more likely to be targets of anti-Muslim hate crimes. Thus, Belgian Muslim women are more likely to be victimised and face systematic exclusion in numerous fields in the country. This 'Othering' has negative consequences not only for Belgian Muslims themselves, but also deprives society of the contribution that these individuals may bring to the wider community. Also on a more sinister note, the exclusion and targeting of Belgian Muslims feeds into narratives exploited by so called 'Islamic' fundamentalists and the far right to continue to generate tensions throughout the country.

## Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

### Employment

Within the labour market, Belgian Muslim women have disproportionately felt the effects of Islamophobia in 2016. Based on the cases outlined in this report, it appears that Muslim women were more likely to face discrimination if they wear a headscarf. Statistical evidence indicates that 44% of employers said that the headscarf negatively impacted on candidate selection,<sup>8</sup> meaning that visibly Muslim women are more likely to face difficulty in searching for employment in Belgium.

Once Muslim women secure employment they continue to encounter obstacles. In May 2016, the case of Laila Afhim emerged in the Belgian press. The now 30-year-

6. CCIB – *Collective Contre L'Islamophobie de Belgique* (Belgian Counter-Islamophobia Collective)

7. STIB – *Société des Transports Intercommunaux de Bruxelles* (Brussels Intercommunal Transport Company)

8. Bouhlal Radouane, Enar Shadow Report 2011/2012 Belgium (Brussels: European Network Against Racism, 2013).

old woman had worked for the town of Huy since 2006 without issue. However, last year, Laila began to wear the headscarf. Months after this, the region officials rushed through a local bylaw to ban the presence of faith symbols from the workplace. Laila states “I had the impression the vote concerning this regulation was put in place more quickly than expected on the grounds of my situation”.<sup>9</sup>

Sadly, Laila’s experience is not an isolated case; 2016 was peppered with stories, rulings and debates surrounding the appropriateness of Muslim women’s dress in the Belgian workplace. This national discussion (and in some cases unfounded hysteria) has been framed in reference to Belgian principles of ‘neutrality’; a term which is becoming increasingly influenced by the French *laïcité*. In June 2016, the Belgian state appealed a previous decision to ban the headscarf in the workplace, made by the Court of Anvers. The court ruled in favour of Muslim women’s rights to wear the headscarf, stating that forbidding it would constitute discrimination.

Similarly, both the French and Belgian Supreme Courts took appeals, regarding the headscarf in the workplace, to the European Court of Justice in 2015.<sup>10</sup> In May and July 2016, both cases were presented and in each contrasting verdicts were reached, meaning that legally speaking, we are no closer to reaching a conclusion related to the permissibility of the headscarf.

In response to this ongoing saga, and in order to effectively address growing discrimination in the Belgian labour market, the CCIB launched their ‘Open Jobs Testing’ project in November 2016, which will be discussed in detail later in the report.

## Education

As with the field of employment, Muslim women and their dress were disproportionately affected by Islamophobia in Belgium in 2016. The prejudice was faced by Muslim women learners, Muslim women teachers and Muslim mothers involved in their young children’s schooling.

Unlike France where there is a blanket ban on headscarves in schools, typically the decision to ban or allow the headscarf lies with individual schools throughout Belgium. However, in 2013, the francophone Belgian region of Verviers issued a mandate prohibiting “ostentatious faith symbols” in schools.<sup>11</sup> Since its implementation, there has been continued debate across Belgium concerning headscarves in schools, which ultimately increases hostility and local tensions. In February 2016, Flanders officials debated a ban on teachers wearing the Islamic headscarf in schools - this is in spite of state provisions for faith teachers across the country.<sup>12</sup>

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9. Aurélie Bouchat, “Licenciée Par La Ville De Huy Pour Son Voile,” *La Meuse*, 06.05.2016.

10. For further details see: <http://www.eurel.info/spip.php?article2915&lang=fr>.

11. Verviers Conseil Communal, “Déclaration Politique Générale - Mandature Communale 2013-2018,” *verviers.be*, (not dated), retrieved January 26, 2016, from <http://www.verviers.be/dpg/dpg-a5-paslivret.pdf>.

12. Robyn Boyle, “Belgian Court Says Religion Teacher Can Wear Headscarf at School,” *The Bulletin*, 04.02.2016.

Muslim women learners were also affected by growing anti-headscarf sentiment in Belgium. In August 2016, two young women in Uccle were prevented from sitting exams for their access courses as they both wore the headscarf.<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, relevant officials allowed these women to take their tests, before declaring an official ban on the headscarf in access courses as of September 2016; the ban was subsequently overturned a fortnight later. The decision is especially pertinent since such 'social promotion' courses are intended to provide previously underqualified individuals with skills to better access the workforce. Prohibiting the presence of visibly Muslim women from partaking constitutes structural discrimination which consequently maintains the disempowerment of Muslim women and upholds societal inequalities. The case also clearly illustrates the inconsistent position of Belgian officials.

In October 2016, 28-year-old Yousra Dahri's application to the Brussels Arts Academy was rejected on the grounds of her headscarf; she was advised to remove the scarf in order to attend classes. Following this, the CCIB launched a case in her support.<sup>14</sup>

Like Yousra, Chaudhary Awais Tayeb was also denied the chance of studying a degree in petrochemical engineering on the grounds of the headscarf, since her headscarf was deemed to be unsafe. In response to this, Awais designed the non-flammable headscarf, which sold out almost immediately after it was launched in September 2016.<sup>15</sup>

Mothers who wear headscarves on the school-run also faced anti-Muslim hate, and this was borne out in two different ways; firstly, in September 2016, coverage of the experiences of Belgian Muslim women of Turkish heritage emerged. The three women were at their children's school in Bourg-Léopold, Limbourg, and Liège. Two of the women were attacked by an apparently hysterical man who began telling the women to remove their headscarves and that they must speak Dutch. In front of teachers, students and other parents, the man proceeded to spit at the women, grabbed one



Figure 1: Article taken from dhnet.be detailing the creation of the non-flammable headscarf

13.Thi Diem Quach, "Uccle: Obligée De Choisir Entre Son Voile Ou Son Examen De Passage," *RTBF.be*, (August 30, 2016), retrieved January 26, 2017, from [https://www.rtbf.be/info/belgique/detail\\_promotion-sociale-le-port-du-voile-ou-l-examen-de-passage?id=9391570](https://www.rtbf.be/info/belgique/detail_promotion-sociale-le-port-du-voile-ou-l-examen-de-passage?id=9391570).

14.Aline Jacobs/Charles Carpioux, "Refusée Par L'académie Des Arts De Bruxelles Parce Qu'elle Porte Le Foulard," *bx1.be*, 13.10.2016.

15.Maïli Bernaerts, "Un Jeune Molenbeekois Invente Le Hijab Ininflammable," *dhnet.be*, (September 13, 2016), retrieved January 26, 2017, from <http://www.dhnet.be/conso/consommation/un-jeune-molenbeekois-invente-le-hijab-ininflammable-57d6fc49357055f1ebe7b17e>.

by the throat, only to be stopped by a school employee.<sup>16</sup> The case represents not only a stark example of the sinister verbal and physical aggression brought about by Islamophobia in Belgium, but also the intersection of ethnic and religious prejudices and how these are borne out.

Similarly, in October 2016, senior councilwoman for education, Fouzia Hariche, commented that school volunteers are technically classed as school workers and therefore must abide by rules governing neutrality. Rulings passed earlier in 2016 preventing teachers from wearing the headscarf mean that henceforth Muslim mothers who wear the headscarf cannot participate in state schools as volunteers across Belgium. Again, these examples portray the ‘Othering’ and exclusion of visibly Muslim women in Belgium, and also the increasing amalgamation of Belgian neutrality with French *laïcité*.

## Politics

Whilst this year has been marked by numerous instances of Islamophobia in politics, represented in both policy and through the discourse presented by political officials, perhaps the most remarkable case is that of Jan Jambon and his comments in the period following the Brussels terror attacks of March 2016.

On 16 April, 2016, in an interview with *Standaard*, the Belgian Interior Minister Jan Jambon, asserted that “a significant part of the Muslim community [in Belgium] danced when the [Brussels] attacks were announced”<sup>17</sup>. Although a minority of public figures came out in support of the minister, Jambon’s comments largely sparked outrage among politicians, Muslims and civil society actors.

Although the minister subsequently issued an apology, Jambon’s unfounded remarks are not only Islamophobic in themselves, but they also serve to contribute to a climate of Islamophobia, to legitimise further hate speech, and to stoke intercommunity tensions at a time when the contrary is very much needed.

## Justice

During the course of the year, the Belgian judicial system took punitive measures against perpetrators of anti-Muslim hate crimes. Examples include Alain Binet who was found guilty of inciting hate online against Muslim Brussels MP Mahinur Ozdemir. In November 2015, Binet posted comments online. He was sentenced to a six-month suspended term in May 2016. Like other examples outlined in this section of the report, this case demonstrates the overlap of gender-based, ethnic and religious hate in Muslim women’s experiences of Islamophobia.

Similarly, in February 2016, the Brussels correctional court sentenced six far right activists to between 12 and 18-month suspended sentences and each was or-

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16.Sud Info, “Un Homme Agresse Deux Femmes Portant Le Foulard: “Retire Ce Chiffon De Ta Tête”,” *Sud Info*, (September 01, 2016), retrieved January 26, 2017, from <http://www.sudinfo.be/1658895/article/2016-09-01/un-homme-agresse-deux-femmes-portant-le-foulard-retire-ce-chiffon-de-ta-tete>.

17.Belga, “Pour Jan Jambon, Beaucoup De Musulmans «Ont Dansé» Après Les Attentats,” *Le Soir*, 17.04.2016.

dered to pay €1,200 fines for their involvement in the disruption caused by the far right presence at the Place du Luxembourg, Ixelles demonstration.

Finally, a 37-year-old first time offender was found guilty of attempted arson of the Al Ihsan Muslim Centre in Herstal, Liège, allegedly in revenge for having been hit by an object from the mosque. Initially the attacker tried to deny the offence until presented with CCTV footage. His actions highlight the way in which physical sites also bear the consequences of Islamophobia.

This brief snapshot of the way in which the Belgian judicial system deals with perpetrators of Islamophobia, be it lone actors or anti-Muslim groups, attacks on individuals or Muslim sites, highlights the potential of the Belgian legal system in overcoming Islamophobia. Notwithstanding, Belgian courts have also been complicit in passing measures that limit the freedoms of visibly Muslim women, which in turn contributes to Islamophobia in the country, thus demonstrating the somewhat confusing and paradoxical position occupied by the state.

## Civil Society and Political Initiatives Undertaken to Counter Islamophobia

The Brussels based group, *Bruxelloise et Voilée*<sup>18</sup> (B&V), was formed in March 2015 and is led by young Belgian Muslim women. Each month they release a two-minute video profiling a headscarf-wearing woman from the city of Brussels. These videos are often viewed over 4,000 times each. Speaking to this year's edition of the Belgian European Islamophobia Report, Bouchra Saadallah of B&V stated:

“The objective is to promote a multicultural society by fighting against discrimination and stereotypes, in particular against Muslim veiled women. It's both an artistic movement and a militant initiative that aims... to show our diverse identities by speaking about everything but the hijab.”<sup>19</sup>

B&V is not immune to Islamophobic hate crimes; given their social media presence the group regularly faces anti-Muslim ‘trolling’. For example, a commentator writes:

“The headscarf is the emblem of your submission. You know it. You should be ashamed for being apologists for your submission whilst other women are fighting diktats created and imposed by men in the name of a false God”.<sup>20</sup>

This type of cyber-hate feeds into narratives of visibly Muslim women as anti-feminist, and since feminism and gender equality are ideals that are held closely as West-

18. The French name *Bruxelloise et Voilée* means “Women from Brussels who were the headscarf”.

19. Taken from personal communication with the author.

20. Taken and translated from the French. « Le voile est l'emblème de votre soumission. Vous le savez. Vous devriez être honteuse de faire l'apologie de la soumission alors qu'il y a d'autres femmes qui combattent contre les diktats inventés et imposés par l'homme [sic] au nom d'un prétendu dieu... » Bruxelloise et Voilée, “Bruxelloise Et Voilée,” <https://www.facebook.com/BruxV/?fref=ts>.

ern values, Muslim women are constructed as ‘Others’ and foreign to national ideals, which in turn contributes to the legitimisation of attacking visibly Muslim women.

In light of the normalisation of such narratives and also given the highly gendered nature of Islamophobia in Belgium, the B&V initiative represents a means of combating stereotypes surrounding visibly Muslim Belgian women and as a result countering Islamophobia.

The Counter-Islamophobia collective in Belgium continues to be at the forefront in recording and reporting rates of Islamophobia, along with providing support and campaigning for the rights of those who suffer anti-muslim hatred in Belgium. Their ‘Open Schools4 Women’ and the ‘Open Jobs Testing’ campaigns are among their most noteworthy and original projects of 2016.

The ‘Open Schools 4 Women’ campaign led by the CCIB was launched in September 2016. The project has a strong social media presence, represented via the hashtag *#OpenSchools4Women* and the social media image shown in Figure 2 below.<sup>21</sup> Given the range of controversies related to Muslim women’s dress that surfaced throughout the year, the campaign seeks to encourage the inclusion of Muslim women who wear the headscarf in schools and create dialogue rather than the exclusion of these young women.<sup>22</sup>

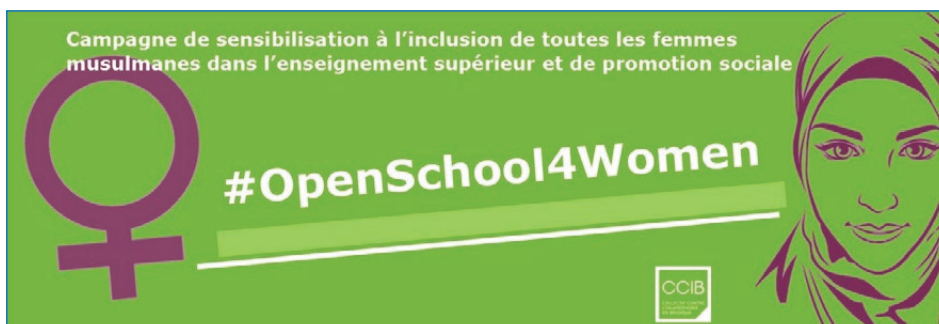


Figure 2: CCIB #OpenSchool4Women social media imagery. Tagline reads ‘Campaign to raise awareness for the inclusion of all women in higher education and access courses.’

Similarly, the ‘Open Job Testing’ project is backed by Brussels MP Didier Gosuin and was launched by CCIB on 28 October, 2016. Inspired by the significant adversities to access to the labour market (such as those highlighted by the ‘Forgotten Women’ project detailed below), the organisation aims to address the obstacles to employment faced by individuals when accessing the job market, compile statistical evidence pertaining to discrimination in the labour market, and ultimately create resources designed to overcome these barriers.<sup>23</sup>

21. CCIB, (2016) [https://twitter.com/CCIB\\_be/status/775570419160145921](https://twitter.com/CCIB_be/status/775570419160145921). Accessed 13.02.17

22. Belga, “Lancement D’une Campagne Contre Les Interdictions Du Voile Dans La Formation Pour Adultes,” *La Libre*, 12.09.16.

23. Vanessa L’Huillier, “Des Projets Contre La Discrimination À L’embauche,” *Le Soir*, 28.10.16.



The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) presented its work to combat growing anti-Muslim prejudice, in which ENAR policy officer, Julie Pascoët, spoke of the then-forthcoming ‘Forgotten Women’ report. The report was launched in the Belgian National Library on 26 May, 2016, and examines the gendered dimension of Islamophobia in the labour market in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK, and, finally, Belgium.

The report highlights statistical evidence to demonstrate the way in which Muslim women are disproportionately affected by Islamophobia in the workforce across Europe, and especially in Belgium. For example, the section pertaining to Belgium highlights that 44% of employers surveyed by Radouane<sup>24</sup> suggested that the headscarf negatively impacts candidate selection.

Similarly, it outlines a case whereby a Muslim woman, who wore the headscarf, was dismissed from her post following a period of maternity leave.<sup>25</sup> The case further highlights the role of gender discrimination in Muslim women’s experiences in the workplace. This, along with evidence linked to ethnic discrimination in employment in Belgium, sheds light on the intersection of the numerous features of Belgian Muslim women’s identities that contribute to the negative experiences that they face.

The statistical and experience-based examples in the report indicate that Muslim women are more likely to be excluded from the workforce and consequently face limited career progression and socio-professional exclusion. This systematic exclusion of Muslim women from the Belgian labour market also feeds into narratives of Muslim victimhood, which in turn may be exploited by a small minority and contribute to terror attacks and subsequent waves of Islamophobia throughout the country; this highlights the connected nature of terror, Islamophobia, populist discourses and Muslim victimhood.

In the face of growing Islamophobia, the scapegoating of Belgian Muslims, the implication of a very small number of Belgian Muslims in recent terror attacks, and the comparatively significant numbers of Belgian ‘jihadi’ fighters in Syria, the *Académie Jeunesse Molenbeek* (AJM)<sup>26</sup> presents a refreshing alternative.

Molenbeek has gained both local and international notoriety and has regrettably earned the labels of “Islamic State of Molenbeek” and “Europe’s Jihadi capital”, among others. The Brussels region of Molenbeek has an estimated 41% Muslim population, compared to 20% throughout Brussels or 6% nationally across Belgium.<sup>27</sup> The area suffers high rates of unemployment, lower educational attainment and poverty. Arguably, these factors contribute to the rise of the exclusion and ‘Oth-

24.Radouane, “Enar Shadow Report 2011/2012 Belgium.”

25.Elsa Mescoli, *Forgotten Women: The Impact of Islamophobia on Muslim Women in Belgium*, (Brussels: ENAR, 2016).

26.*Académie Jeunesse Molenbeek* – Molenbeek Youth Academy.

27.Chaudhary, “How Molenbeek Fought Back against Isis – with Football”; Hertogen, “In België Wonen 628.751 Moslims”; Zibouh, “Muslim Political Participation in Belgium: An Exceptional Political Representation in Europe.”

ering' of its population, and perhaps it is this that contributes, in part, to a very small but significant number of Molenbeekers pursuing extremism; of the 543 Belgians believed to be fighting in Syria, 47 were from Molenbeek. Alternatively, the perpetrators of the Brussels terror attacks, the Paris attacks and the Jewish Museum attacks are all said to have links with Molenbeek.

Based in the troubled Brussels region, the youth football academy AJM Under 12's team of rising stars are at the top of their game. The young Molenbeekers fought off competition from across Europe, including Real Madrid and Barcelona Under 12's, to become the league title holders. It is clear that these young stars and their successes are entirely contrary to the Molenbeek terrorist tag.

The club instils discipline and a sense of belonging in these young men. As the club's founder Omar Tizguine states:

"Our priority is not football but discipline and keeping children off the street. Many boys in Molenbeek are poorly educated and unemployed: they get into bad company and this makes them vulnerable. We make it clear that if you do not focus on school and don't behave in all areas of your life, you cannot be part of this club".<sup>28</sup>

Following the Paris terror attacks and as parents increasingly worry about their children falling prey to extremist rhetoric, the club has faced unprecedented demand by parents of young boys. The work of AJM is supported by Molenbeek Mayor Françoise Schepmans and receives partial financial support from the local authorities.

Based on the assumption that exclusion can, in very small numbers, lead to extremism, which in turn results in attacks that threaten the immediate well-being of society as a whole, and can also bring about increases in anti-Muslim prejudice and attacks, funding and morally supporting projects that are led by locals and importantly reflect the desires of the local population can, on the other hand, create feelings of inclusion and belonging. This sense of belonging should in theory remove the vulnerability of these young Muslim men, reduce attacks perpetrated in the name of fundamentalism and consequently improve the security of society and lessen Islamophobia.

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28. Chaudhary, "How Molenbeek Fought Back against Isis – with Football."



## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

To summarise and conclude, like in preceding years, 2016 in Belgium has been characterised by a growth in Islamophobia. In particular, anti-Muslim hate crimes peaked in the period after the Brussels terror attacks. Tensions during this time were further stoked by sensationalised and unfounded claims by political officials and media.

Notwithstanding, analysis has shown that through the course of the year, in the fields of employment and education, Islamophobia in Belgium is remarkably gendered, with Muslim women facing increased hostility in the fields of education and employment.

Based on these principal observations, the report makes the following recommendations:

- Continued efforts from politicians, media and policy makers to ensure that their work and remarks are not divisive or contribute to the legitimisation of Muslims in Belgium.
- Similarly, there should be continued support for Belgian NGOs that work to combat anti-Muslim hate and support victims of Islamophobia.
- Given the observed peaks in Islamophobia that become apparent in the periods after terror attacks, in addition to heightened national security, measures should also be implemented to protect the Belgian Muslim community.
- Based on the gendered dimension of Islamophobia in Belgium and the way in which controversies surrounding the headscarf have been used as tools to discriminate Muslim women in education and the workplace, there is a distinct need for increased legal clarity surrounding the headscarf. Furthermore, this should be informed by statistical and qualitative evidence.

## Chronology

### January

- 16 January: Mouvement Réformateur (MR) proposes a headscarf ban, echoing proposals led by Vlaams Belang (VB) in previous years.
- 23 January: Verviers authorities ban PEGIDA demonstration.

### February

- 7 February: Programme 'dimancheRTL' runs a poll which reveals that 80% of respondents do not have a problem with civil servants wearing the headscarf.
- 17 February: Brussels correctional court sentences six far right activists.

### March

- 2 March: Debate surrounding the implementation of secularism in Belgium. Risks compromising the right to wear religious attire, including the headscarf, are discussed and demonstrate the influence of French secularism on Belgium.
- 2 March: UNIA report published. Highlights of the report include the finding that 12% of respondents would be uncomfortable with a Muslim colleague.
- 8 March: CCIB launches report into the gendered dimension of Islamophobia in Belgium. Their evidence indicates that two-thirds of victims of Islamophobia in Belgium, who have come forward to the organisation, are women.
- 20 March: At a round table discussion, Yves Goldstein, president of PS in Scharbeek, states that his teacher friends have asserted that "90% of students aged between seventeen and eighteen years old consider the Paris terrorists to be heroes." Later, it emerges that his claims are largely unfounded and Mr Goldstein quickly backtracks in an attempt not to alienate Muslim supporters.
- 22 March: Brussels terror attacks at Zaventem Airport and Maalbeek metro station by extremists, killing 35 and wounding over 300.
- 22 March: Muslim associations across Belgium, including the Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique (EMB) and the League of Belgian Imams, issue official statements to condemn the terror attacks.
- 27 March: Far right supporters descended on Brussels terror attacks vigil, chanting "F\*\*\* IS", giving the Nazi salute, and generally disrupting the peaceful gathering.
- 27 March: Calls for peace from Muslim victims of Brussels terror attacks.
- 29 March: Two potential suspects of the Brussels terror attacks are identified on the grounds that they were praying and carrying backpacks. Later, it emerges that police suspicions were incorrect.
- 29 March: Francoise Schepmans (MR) issues an official ban prohibiting a far right protest due to be held at the Place Communale, Molenbeek.

### April

- 9 April: Muslim associations continue to join in commemoration gatherings for victims of Brussels terror attacks.

- 10 April: Belgian writer and staunch 'laïcist', Nadia Geerts, compares the headscarf to the Jewish yellow star.
- 15 April: Demonstration, by anti-Muslim group, PEGIDA, due to be held in Liege on 21 April, 2016, at the Place du Vingt Août is banned on the grounds of the protection of public order.
- 16 April: Interior Minister Jan Jambon sparks controversy with his allegations that Belgian Muslims had celebrated the recent terror attacks.
- 17 April: MPs Jean-Marc Nollet, Ahmed Laaouej and Emir Kir condemn Jambon's remarks. The latter two issue an open letter to Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel calling for the cautioning of Jan Jambon for his claims.
- 19 April: Federal Deputy Nahima Lanjri comes forward to condemn Jan Jambon, stating he must substantiate or apologise for his claims.
- 21 April: MP Siegfried Bracke states: "Personally, Jan Jambon was right to say what he did [about Belgian Muslims]".
- 24 April: Runner stopped from competing in the Anvers race by four police officers; he believes he was targeted due to his beard and Muslim appearance.
- 25 April: Jan Jambon applauded for defending Belgian Muslims in European Parliament. He rebuffed Dutch far right MEP, Vicky Maeijer, for arguing that Muslims are the root of terror. The action demonstrates contradictory stance by Jan Jambon.
- 27 April: CCIB publishes report and records 36 Islamophobic events in the month following Brussels terror attacks of 22 March.
- 29 April: Director of STIB Breiuc de Meeus speaks out against wave of hate crimes on public transport following the Brussels terror attacks.
- 29 April: Jan Jambon recognises the error of his comments and admits he could have used "better words".
- 30 April: Over 250 Muslim police officers publish an open letter addressed to Jan Jambon following his comments after the Brussels attacks, stating "It is difficult to be a Muslim in the Police Force, because our loyalties are continually being questioned... No, Mr Minister we did not dance on 22 March, we wept for our dead and wounded and some of us still continue to grieve". The letter continues to accuse Jan Jambon of ignoring the efforts of Belgian Muslims in the Police Force.

## May

- 4 May: Three pig heads left outside the future Malmedy mosque site.
- 5 May: Laila Afhim interviewed in the media regarding losing her job in Huy because of her headscarf.
- 6 May: Demonstration of approximately 30 people at the National Infantry Monument against the comments of Jan Jambon about Muslims following the Brussels terror attacks.

- 6 May: School in Molenbeek introduces vegetarian option for Muslim students; efforts met with Islamophobic backlash by online commentators.
- 12 May: Molenbeek Senior Councilwoman Sarah Turine receives death threats and mysterious white powder in anonymous letter, accusing her of being “the shame of the West”, and suggesting that the author should “eliminate” her. The letter carries images of crusaders, the Celtic cross and an obscene hand gesture with the word “Islam” written underneath it. (Figure 3)<sup>29</sup>
- 13 May: Opinion piece published in *rtbf.be* on three women wearing the headscarf and walking in Wavre who were stopped by a man who was staring at them and gestured a gun sign from inside his car.
- 14-15 May: Third Flemish Expo held in Flanders. Attended by around 40 members of VB carrying Islamophobic placards with the slogans “no mosque”, “no Islam”, “no headscarves”. Flemish Belgian Muslim woman, Zakia Belkhiri, posed in front of the protesters making the peace symbol. Photos quickly went viral internationally. However, she soon fell from grace as it was alleged she had previously tweeted anti-Semitic messages. (Figure 4)<sup>30</sup>
- 26 May: *Sud Presse* publishes statistics pertaining to Muslim populations across Belgium; ‘781 887 Musulmans vivent en Belgique’ - serious news or whipping up hysteria of a Muslim takeover?
- 26 May: ENAR “Forgotten Women” project launched at the national library.
- 30 May: Thibault de Montbinal cartoon published; the image reads: “Islamophobia is a concept used for shutting down all debate”. Such ‘non-arguments’, in fact, halt meaningful discussion of anti-Muslim prejudice. (Figure 5)<sup>31</sup>

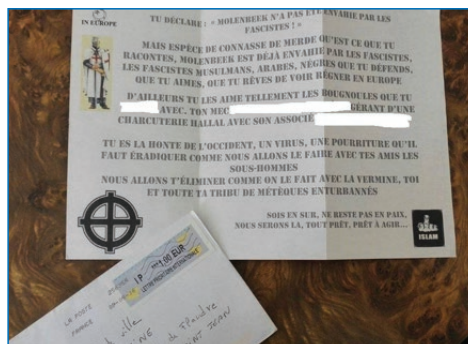


Figure 3: Image showing the anonymous threatening letter received by Sarah Turine



Figure 4: Image showing Zakia Belkhiri posing for a 'selfie' in front of a Vlaams Belang anti-Muslim protest.

29. Karim Fadoul, “Molenbeek: L’Échevine, Sarah Turine, menace de mort dans un courrier anonyme porte plainte.” *Rtbf.be* (12<sup>th</sup> May 2016), retrieved on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2017 from <http://www.vox.com/2016/5/17/11692306/muslim-selfies-islamophobia-protest-antwerp-belgium>.

30. Emily Crockett, “This Woman Brilliantly Countered an Anti-Muslim Protest – with Selfies.” (25<sup>th</sup> May 2016), retrieved on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2017 from <http://www.vox.com/2016/5/17/11692306/muslim-selfies-islamophobia-protest-antwerp-belgium>.

31. CCIB, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2016. Retrieved on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2017 from [https://twitter.com/CCIB\\_be/status/737298358457536512](https://twitter.com/CCIB_be/status/737298358457536512).

- 31 May: Alain Binet found guilty and received a six-month suspended sentence for inciting hatred against Brussels MP Mahinur Ozdemir on Facebook in November 2015.

## June

- 17 June: Islamophobic stickers found placed around Liege. The messages read “Stop Islamization– [www.villescontrelislamisation.fr](http://www.villescontrelislamisation.fr)” and “Yes to steeples, no to minarets.” Both carry images of mosques that have been crossed through. (Figure 6)<sup>32</sup>

## July

- 4 July: CCIB annual report launched detailing Islamophobia and the organisation’s activities in the previous year.
- 5 July: Liege announces that schools will no longer permit the headscarf from the start of the new academic year.
- 13 July: Advocate general of the European Court of Justice, Eleanor Sharpston, puts forward opinion on headscarves in private companies, stating “The workplace ruling that companies can force an employee to remove her headscarf during contact with clients represents an illicit and direct discrimination.” Ruling published in Belgian media amid the background of ongoing headscarf cases.
- 26 July: Reports emerge of Islamophobic petition posted throughout Anderlecht. The document is directed to “Belgians of Anderlecht and beyond” and states “We must stay vigilant and remark that as a result of matters, we are forced to become Islamo-



Figure 5: Image shared by CCIB. Reads “Islamophobia is a concept used for shutting down all debate.”



Figure 6: Image showing Islamophobic stickers placed around Liège.

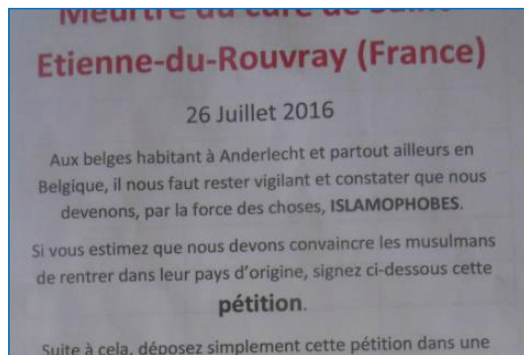


Figure 7: Image from Islamophobic petition circulated in Anderlecht.

32. CCIB, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2016. Retrieved on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2017 from [https://twitter.com/CCIB\\_be/status/743804467863232512](https://twitter.com/CCIB_be/status/743804467863232512).



phobes. If you think that we must convince Muslims to return to their countries of origin sign this petition below...We must safeguard our religion.” Whilst also being directly Islamophobic, this petition compounds ‘them’ and ‘us’ type views, and conflates racial and religious prejudices. (Figure 7)<sup>33</sup>

- 28 July: In the Brussels metro, a Muslim woman wearing the headscarf is physically attacked on her commute home.

## August

- 2 August: UNIA opens a dossier for Islamophobic hate messages following the death of an adolescent.
- 4 August: Le Soir publishes cartoon commentary on the changing nature of hate speech online, particularly relevant considering the large volume of everyday Islamophobia on the Internet. (Figure 8)<sup>34</sup>
- 17 August: Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (NVA)<sup>35</sup> Deputy Nadia Sminate calls for a ban on the burkini throughout Belgium, including beaches and swimming pools. She says “We must absolutely avoid that women walk around in burkinis in Flanders, not on the beaches or in swimming pools.”
- 17 August: Flanders Red Cross scandal breaks out: the organisation tweeted a call for a blood drive and received the reply “I would very much like to give blood, but not to Muslims, can you guarantee that?”
- 24 August: Theo Francken, minister for asylum and immigration, speaks out to oppose the burkini on the grounds of gender equality.
- 25 August: MR party in Anderlecht comes under fire as a result of a supporter sharing video calling for the murder of Muslims.
- 31 August: Two Muslim women were prohibited from sitting exams in Uccle on the grounds of their headscarves on 30 August, 2016. The decision was overturned by the *Institut d’enseignement de promotion sociale de la communauté Française* that allowed the women to sit their exams.



Figure 8: Figure showing the evolving nature of hate. Text reads before and after.

33. Belga, “La Police Enquête sur une Pétition Islamophobe à Anderlecht” *lesoir.be* (27<sup>th</sup> July 2016), retrieved 13<sup>th</sup> February 2017, from <http://www.lesoir.be/1277350/article/actualite/belgique/2016-07-27/police-enquete-sur-une-petition-islamophobe-anderlecht>.

34. CCIB, retrieved on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2017 from [https://twitter.com/CCIB\\_be/status/761221289126293504](https://twitter.com/CCIB_be/status/761221289126293504).

35. *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* – New Flemish Alliance.

## September

- 1 September: Bylaw comes into effect to forbid ostentatious faith symbols on access courses.
- 1 September: Belgian Muslim women, of Turkish origin, attacked at children's school in Bourg-Léopold, Limbourg, and Liège.
- 2 September: Francophone MP, Joelle Maison, spoke out on behalf of Muslim women who wear the headscarf. She argued "Forbidding the headscarf on access courses means to deprive women of the right to education" and stressed the need for blanket regulation rather than leaving the decision with individual schools.
- 10 September: *#openschool4women* campaign launched by CCIB that seeks to encourage the inclusion of women who wear the headscarf and promote dialogue, rather than exclusion.
- 13 September: Choudhry Awais Tayeb, a 19-year-old Molenbeek student, invents non-flammable headscarf for Muslim women who wish to pursue science careers. The hijab is sold out immediately. She came up with the idea after having been refused entry to study petrochemical engineering due to her headscarf not meeting health and safety standards.
- 16 September: Nadia Geerts publishes an open letter to Muslim women on her blog, criticising Muslim women who claim to be feminist and frames the headscarf as an affront to gender equality.

## October

- 4 October: Reaffirmation that mothers who wear the headscarf cannot participate as volunteers in schools. Senior Councilwoman for education, Fouzia Hariche, commented that as volunteers the women become classed as workers and therefore must abide by rules governing neutrality.
- 4 October: The Court of Liege announces that schools cannot ban the wearing of political, philosophical and faith symbols. Case brought by 16 headscarf-wearing students. Judge announced that the headscarf is not an obstacle to education.
- 11 October: *Parti Socialiste* (PS)<sup>36</sup> Deputy Deborah Gérardon comments on the headscarf in higher education: "Personally, [I think] religious beliefs are for the private domain. Sometimes neutrality must be imposed [by schools]."
- 13 October: Yousra Dahri's application rejected by the Brussels Arts Academy because of her headscarf.
- 17 October: In Herstal, Liège a mosque is attacked by a drunk 37-year-old male.

## November

- 8 November: CCIB project *#openjobtesting* is launched.
- 16 November: The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office

<sup>36</sup>. *Parti Socialiste* – Socialist Party (PS).

for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE – ODIHR) publishes a report detailing hate crimes internationally. The report includes an overview of SETA report on Islamophobia in Belgium in 2015.<sup>37</sup>

## December

- 1 December: The Union of Brussels Region Mosques and the Platform of Belgian Muslims issue a letter to Brussels political officials condemning the “abusive inspections” of Muslim sites of worship. Mosques in the capital report feeling unreasonably targeted and that such inspections contribute to the wider sentiment of hate experienced by Belgian Muslims.

## Acknowledgements

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37. The full report can be found here <http://hatecrime.osce.org/belgium>.



**T**his is the second issue of the annual *European Islamophobia Report (EIR)* which was presented for the first time in 2015. New countries are included in this year's *EIR*; while 25 countries were covered in 2015, the report for 2016 includes 27 country reports. *EIR 2016* is the result of 31 prominent scholars who specialise in different fields such as racism, gender and Islamophobia Studies.

Islamophobia has become a real danger to the foundations of democratic order and the values of the European Union. It has also become the main challenge to the social peace and coexistence of different cultures, religions and ethnicities in Europe. The country reports of *EIR 2016*, which cover almost all the European continent from Russia to Portugal and from Greece to Latvia, clearly show that the level of Islamophobia in fields such as education, employment, media, politics, the justice system and the Internet is on the rise. Since the publication of the last report there is little improvement. On the contrary, one can see from the country reports that the state of democracy and human rights in Europe is deteriorating. Islamophobia has become more real especially in the everyday lives of Muslims in Europe. It has surpassed the stage of being a rhetorical animosity and has become a physical animosity that Muslims feel in everyday life be it at school, the workplace, the mosque, transportation or simply on the street.

#### About SETA

Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) is a non-profit research institute based in Turkey dedicated to innovative studies on national, regional and international issues. SETA is the leading think tank in Turkey and has offices in Ankara, Istanbul, Washington D.C. and Cairo. The objective of SETA is to produce up-to-date and accurate knowledge and analyses in the fields of politics, economy, and society, and inform policy makers and the public on changing political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. Through research reports, publications, brain storming sessions, conferences and policy recommendations, SETA seeks to guide leaders in government, civil society, and business, and contributes to informed decision making mechanisms.



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