Counter-Islamophobia Kit

Workstream 2: Dominant Counter-Narratives to Islamophobia –

Czech Republic

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Countering Islamophobia through the Development of Best Practice in the use of Counter-Narratives in EU Member States.

CIK Project (Counter Islamophobia Kit)

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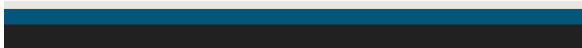
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Counter-Islamophobia Kit

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About the CIK Project

The *Countering Islamophobia through the Development of Best Practice in the use of Counter-Narratives in EU Member States* (Counter Islamophobia Kit, CIK) project addresses the need for a deeper understanding and awareness of the range and operation of counter-narratives to anti-Muslim hatred across the EU, and the extent to which these counter-narratives impact and engage with those hostile narratives. It is led by Professor Ian Law and a research team based at the Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, UK. This international project also includes research teams from the Islamic Human Rights Commission, based in London, and universities in Leeds, Athens, Liège, Budapest, Prague and Lisbon/Coimbra. This project runs from January 2017 - December 2018.

About the Paper

This paper is an output from the second workstream of the project which was concerned to describe and explain the discursive contents and forms that Muslim hatred takes in the eight states considered in the framework of this project: Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Portugal and United Kingdom. This output comprises eight papers on conditions in individual member states and a comparative overview paper containing Key Messages. In addition this phase also includes assessment of various legal and policy interventions through which the European human rights law apparatus has attempted to conceptually analyse and legally address the multi-faceted phenomenon of Islamophobia. The second workstream examines the operation of identified counter-narratives in a selected range of discursive environments and their impact and influence on public opinion and specific audiences including media and local decision-makers. The third workstream will be producing a transferable EU toolkit of best practice in the use of counter-narratives to anti-Muslim hatred. Finally, the key messages, findings and toolkits will be disseminated to policy makers, professionals and practitioners both across the EU and to member/regional audiences using a range of mediums and activities.

Contents

1. Introduction

Ghassan Hage (2015) calls for a consideration of new ways to tackle global configurations of racism, including Islamophobia. Doing so, he proposes revoking recent forms of anti-racism as the first analytical step and moving towards a new discursive framework through which racism can be efficiently challenged. Our report is intended to take a similar direction. Through critical reflection of recent anti-Islamophobic practice the report summarises new ways and strategies regarding how to effectively counter Islamophobic discourses and to foster a non-racist culture and environment.

The main aim of the report is to elaborate on the dominant Islamophobic narratives in the Czech Republic identified in the WS1 report (Čada, Frantová 2017) in order to effectively challenge them in public discourse. The report is focused on the description of the most prevalent and the most compelling counter-narratives, which can be categorised in terms of the six main functions of anti-racist discourse as defined by Hage (2015): (1) reducing the incidence of racist practices; (2) fostering a non-racist culture; (3) supporting the victims of racism; (4) empowering racialised subjects; (5) transforming racist relations into better relations; (6) creating a society in which race has no significance as a criterion of identification.

In his critique, Hage (2017) associates the predominant anti-racist forms of talk with scholastic tought (Bourdieu 2000: 49). "Scholastic here refers to a mode of thinking that deteched racism from its practical/usage context and conceives it as an academic exercise aimed at some kind of pure knowledge, a desire to classify for classification's sake." (Hage 2017: 6) He calls for leaving this position in favour of acceptance of emotional work, contradictions, inconsistencies and discrepancies. He recommends increased working with metaphors which embody practical orientation. In our report, we draw on Hage's central question regarding what it means to experience the world Islamophobically, and we look for counter narratives which reflect on Islamophobic experience and practice.

We do not focus on the general discussion of racism; rather we are interested in manifestations of Islamophobic rhetorics as a racialized discourse. Doing so, we depart from the Runnymede Trust Islamobphobia definition. The Runnymede Trust defines Islamophobia as the "unfounded prejudice and hostility"[1] and through the distinction of the *closed* and *open* views of Islam distinguishes it from the legitimate criticism of and disagreement with Islam (The Runnymede Trust 1997: 4). Islamophobic worldview (e.g. "closed views of Islam") comprises eight key features. It sees Islam as: (1) a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to new realities; (2) separate and other regarding its' aims and values; 3) inferior to the West – barbaric, irrational, primitive, sexist; (4) the enemy – violent, aggressive,

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[1] In its 20th-anniversary report, Runnymede recommends to tackle Islamophobia by shifting the focus from „unfounded hostility towards Islam" to the „practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities" and „exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs". It suggests to define Islamophobia as „anti-Muslim racism": „Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life." (Elahi, Khan 2017: 7).

threatening, supportive of terrorism, engaged in 'a clash of civilisations'[2]; (5) manipulative – as a political ideology, used for political or military advantage. It also (6) rejects criticisms of the West that are made by Islam; 7) defends discriminatory practices towards Muslims and 8) accepts Anti-muslim hostility as natural and 'normal' (The Runnymede Trust 1997: 5). As main aspects of Islamophobia are identified exclusion, violence, discrimination and prejudice (The Rudynnymede Trust 1997: 11). However, as Sayyid (2014) reminds us this definition convey the subtlety of its formulation and as such, Islamophobia emerged as an uncertain and unclear concept. Following his performative approach, we aim to "elucidate[ing] the kind of behaviours that can potentially be understood through deployment of the category [of Islamophobia]" (15).

The report provides a categorisation of current counter-narratives to Islamophobia and assesses their context. It also provides an evaluation of the application and operation of identified counter-narratives in a selected range of discursive environments and their impact and influence on public opinion and specific audiences including media and local decision-makers.

2. Methodology

We conducted 25 semi-structured qualitative interviews (see the table below for a broad categorisation of respondents)[3]. Interviews were conducted in Czech, recorded and partially transcribed (as dictated by their analysis). The average length of interviews was one hour. Of the interviews, one was conducted as a joint interview with two informants, whilst the remaining were one-to-one interviews. Interviews were conducted by Veronika Frantová, Karel Čada and a Sociology MA student, Dora Nováková.

	Interviewed persons
Journalists	5
Politicians/policymakers	2
Experts	4
Government initiatives representatives	2
NGOs' representatives	6
Volunteer initiatives representatives	3
Representatives of Muslims	3

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[2] See Huntington (1993).
[3] For detailed overview of informants please see Annex 1.

TOTAL	25

Interviews have a strandard structure, which included the following: (1) description of Islamphobia in the Czech Republic; (2) perception of the current situation; (3) dominant prejudices and steorotypes related to Islam and Muslims; (4) strategies regarding how to tackle Islamophobia; (5) assessment of the dominant Islamophobic narratives and their corresponding possible counter-narratives.

Within the Czech public debate, open attitudes towards Islam are particularly underrepresented; many of initiatives take place locally or have an elusive impact on the wider public. Organisations and individuals dealing with migration issues are strongly interlinked with those tackling Islamophobia. They very often cooperate, encounter each other on different occasions.

We initially selected respondents that continually try to influence public debate through the lens of an open view of Islam, and thus have the experience of communicating topics connected with Muslims and Islam with the lay public. Secondly, we employed a snowball sampling approach[4] via contact with our respondents. Within our target sample, the lowest response rate was encountetred among represenatitives of the Czech Muslim communities. Their reluctance can be attributed with stigmatisation and common exposure in public debate.

We also analysed Facebook pages run by the Czech Government's Hate Free Culture Campaign in which news on minorities, including Islam and Muslims, are posted to foster non-racist culture and prevent hate- speech. We also conducted participant observations on two debates on migration and Islam[5].

3. Perceptions of Islamophobia

Our respondents described current islamophobic narratives in accordance with the findings of the WS1 report; narratives of Muslims as terrorists, the 'slippery-slope narrative', framing Islam as agressive religion that oppresses women, threatens Western democracy and leads to the Islamisation of Europe, Islam as anachronistic religion and Muslims as unassimilable barbarians and sexual predators were typically discussed. According to majority of our respondents, these narratives are widely shared by the Czech general public.

To sum up, as the key possible resources of Islamophobic attitudes in Czech public space, respondents mentioned the failure of mainstream media. They claimed that media had represented the "migration crisis" by enhancing a fear of „hordes of incoming migrants". Media had referred on terrorist attacks on Western citizens or problems with integration of immigrants, on the other hand, media had largerly

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[4] The snowball sampling method allowed us to reach stakeholders who were not publicly visible but instead cooperated on more hidden levels of public affairs (e. g. representatives of NGOs working on specific internal projects). To avoid shortcomings of snowball data gathering (clustering only participants with a similar point of view), we paid particular attention to include those who represent diverse backgrounds (media, NGOs, politics etc.) and diverse part of the Czech Republic during the initial selection of respondents.

[5] *What do Czechs really think on migration? Presentation of the research findings*; 8th of September 2017 and *Islamophobia in the Czech Republic; 23rd of November 2017*.

ignored the real situation in Syria or other migrants' home countries or the obastacles refugees had to face on their journeys. This kind of agenda setting was bolstered by the growth of populism across the political spectrum. At the political agenda, the fight against Islamophobia seems not to be a first order issue and it is heavily neglected in manifestos of mainstream parties. Only some representatives of Green Party, TOP 09 and progressive part of Social Democrats occasionally problematised the hostile attitudes of Czech citizens (especially politicians) towards Muslim refugees. Hostility and unfounded fear of refugees have however never become the single issue of any political agenda. According to our respondents, Islamophobic stances are fostered by the perceived ethnic homogeneity of the Czech Republic and very restricted experiences of Czechs with different ethnics. This also relates to the specific feature of Czech attitudes toward Muslims that are often related not only to their religion but to their supposed ethnicity.

All the informants understand Czech Islamophobia as mainstream and they share the scepticism regarding the possibility of the conversion of Islamophobic discourses towards more open views about Islam. Counter-narratives should aim to de-normalise of Islamophobia,[6] and instead they should show that ordinary people are not Islamophobic. The Czech Government's Hate Free Culture initiative conducted a social experiment, in which it sent people posing as a Syrian refugee family onto the streets of several municipalities. Despite the strongly negative nature of Czech-language discussions about such people on the Internet, most of the residents of the towns the "test-family" met behaved toward them with empathy and solidarity[7].

Despite their own sceptical stances, our respondents however continually try to work against spreading manifestations of hatred and hate speech. On the other hand, our informants have often mentioned the problem of the localised efficacy of their campaigns and projects – this is to say that their work has geographic as well as social bubble limitations.

Respondents also emphasise changes in the environment (which is becoming more and more hostile toward Muslim men and women at the everyday level. In particular, Muslim women are very often the target of verbal abuse in public. Some respondents referred to case wherebysomeone had been trying to rip off a Muslim woman's veil or spitting on Muslim women in public space. These stories show that changes in discourse are reflected in changes in everyday behaviours; in sum hostile discourses produce hostile actions.

In the last election of October 2017, the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) party won eleven per cent of votes. The party accused Muslims of propagating terrorism and advocates "zero tolerance" approach towards accepting asylum-seekers. It also urged locals to stop buying kebabs and

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[6] In the similar vein, the Australian spontanues campaign „I'll ride with you" worked. Through this campaign, Australians refused the connection between Islam and the hostege crisis in Sydney in 2014. Australians used social media to show solidarity with the Muslim community and #illridewithyou had more then 100,000 mentions across Twitter and Facebook.

[7] https://www.hatefree.cz/blo/aktuality/1184-experiment-uprchlici

to harass Muslims by walking dogs and pigs near mosques. Their recent electoral gains mark the biggest success of an extreme right-wing and xenophobic party in the Czech Republic since 1990.

4. Main challenges in countering Islamophobia

Respondents referred to numerous challenges which they face in terms of communicating positive narratives regarding Islam and Muslims. These challenges transgress different narratives and represent the main obstacle while tackling Islamophobia. Firstly, Islamophobia is part of a general populist rhetoric. Secondly, Islamphobia stems from simplistic and stereotypical conceptions of Islam and Muslim societies. Thirdly, general patterns of Islamophobia cannot be changed without changes in self-perception of the Czechs ethnic majority themselves. Fourthly, it is necessary to foster an open dialogue about Islam and Muslim societies between all parties.

A. Islamophobia as a part of populist rhetorics

Islam serves as a scape-goat for general frustration of people who are dissatisfied with the economic and social situation. Scape-goating Islam goes hand in hand with distrust of Czech elites and intelectuals, including NGOs, media and the EU. Populist rhetoric, expressed by both nationalistic populist Tomio Okamura and technocratic populist Andrej Babiš, operates with simplified notion of people from which outsiders and elites are excluded and both categories (elites and those seemed unable to adapt) are presented as a danger to ordinary people (who are associated with fully employed middle-class families).

As a part of populist rhetorics, Islamophobia is strongly intertwined with the disrespect of elites or intellectuals, distrust to media and distrust of the EU and NGOs. This environment leads to the necessity of thinking through not only the counter-narratives, but also their form, possible channels of their promotion and identifying the publics that should be primarily addressed.

Discourses centred on the migration crisis significantly highlighted the way in which the Czech public trusts differing elements of civil society (CVVM 2017). Trust in civil society organisations remained stable until 2014 (around 40 per cent people trust them). In aftermath migration crisis, the trust has decreased significantly: from 48 % of those who trust in NGOs in March 2014 to 33 % in October 2017. Converesely, trust in the Czech police and army has simultaneously increased. Whereas in March 2014 50 % Czechs declared trust in the Czech police and 60 % trusted in Czech army, in October 2017 these numbers increased to 64 % of trust in police and 66 % in army (CVVM 2017).

Islamophobic narratives resonate with growing Euroscepticism and the anti-elitist discourse. Sociologists Ondrej Císař and Daniel Prokop (2017) associate the rise of populist discourses with increasing economic insecurities and social inequalities. "The issue of working poverty and cheap labour finds its way into the public discourse particularly slowly. Left-wing parties, from which we would expect the solution, were unable to deal with this. They are leaving room for right-wing radicals which might translate fears of dissatisfied parts of the population into the language of cultural threats," they argue.

According to our respondents, the construction of Islam as a scape-goat can be weakened by listening to deprived parts of the indigenous population and shifting the agenda setting to the real problems and sources of doubts and frustrations. Our respondents agreed on the necessity to draw lessons from populists: (1) to start to communicate directly with the public, (2) to demonstrate a willingness to listen to citizens' uncertainties and (3) to communicate possible solutions in a clear and understandable way. They see a need to communicate issues associated with migration or Islam locally and make use of the deliberative potential of local fora. A respondent representing an NGO working with migrants, described for instance, how she had given lectures to/spoken with seniors' and women' clubs on these issues.

Direct communication with the public represents a challenge especially for Czech NGOs which are not traditionally concerned with mobilising individuals, but are instead typically focused on developing capacities that would enable them to shape public debates and influence directly policy makers (Císař 2010: 740).

B. Stereotypical Constructions of Islam and Muslim societies

Dehumanisation is a significant part of all Islamophobic narratives in the Czech Republic. Islam is introduced to the Czech public through stereotypical images of terrorist, religion leaders or waves of migrants. To change such image, there is a need for normalization of Islam in the Czech Republic, to show everyday aspects of Islam and different stories of Muslim men and women. The media present Muslims in two extreme forms as either villains or victims. We also need a less dramatic, more secular or more everyday image of Islam: *"...to show (Muslims) in different light that would not emphasize their otherness. So, people will connect with somebody who makes good kebab or falafel, but not with so-called Islamic State. To build in a long-term perspective those associations that contain food, something nice, but not this feeling of danger."* (NGO representative)

"If you explain differences through banalities or little things it can be much more effective for everyday people." (Journalist)

However, those mundane images of Islam should not feed into alternative stereotypes, such as associations of Muslim only with ethnic food or music, as these images move Islam an dMuslims from restrictive construction to another. Respondents agreed on the need for a more diversified and fluid image of Islam, including its different forms and different lifestyles. In context of foreign news, media do not distinguish between different ethnic categories, such as Muslims from the Indian subcontinent in the UK, Turkish in Germany, North African in France or Syrians in refugee camps, but they rather refer about them in the generic term as Muslims. Counter narratives need to put emphasis on diversity of the Muslim world and Islam as a religious practice.

"People did not see the Syrians, for example, that they were like people who were fleeing from some real danger that they simply described them as mass, parcels, quotas or numbers, but they were not capable of imagining them as real human beings, who in their country worked as plumbers, for instance. They really see them only as the threat that has come to colonise us." (NGO representative)

Stories of young Muslims living in the Czech Republic have the potential to change this dominant image. In 2016, seventeen-year-old Eman Ghaleb, who goes to secondary school in Teplice, a North Bohemian town, got under pressure for wearing a headscarf. The school's principal has received dozens of emails calling for her expulsion for promoting Islam. The girl's classmates have put together a video campaign in her support: "We want to use this video to show that we students see things differently than those activists who are bombarding our director. We want to make it clear that we are in contact with Eman, that we know she's a Muslim, and that this doesn't bother us. We take her as she is and don't regard her as any kind of danger," her classmate said in Czech Radio.[8] This story proved that activism byMuslims as well as Czechs could give rise to and foster their self-esteem as well as mutual trust.

C. Self-perception of Czechs in public discourse

It is crucial to understand Islamophobia as a relational phenomenon and both sides (Muslims and Czechs) need to be included into counter-narratives accounts. Some respondents mentioned that the "We-Will-Manage" narrative (Angela Merkel's motto used to foster German citizens' pride on their ability to help asylum seekers and show their commitment to humanitarian principles) has yet to be influential in the Czech Republic. In this regard, our respondents evoke Czech openness to asylum seekers fleeing from Bosnia during the Yugoslavian wars in the 1990s, in particular, and their unproblematic integration into Czech society. In this context, migration experts reminded us of the tradition of state funded integration programmes as something that people could be proud of. It is necessary to strengthen trust in institutions and integration policies. Respondents also recalled hospitality as part of a positive Czech national myth.

Different examples of tackling Islamophobia through changes in self-perception could be acheieved by linking different manifestation of hate-speech together. The campaign "We're All In This Together" ("Jsme v tom společně") aimed to draw attention to the fact that such hateful commentaries are not just being posted about the members of minorities, but about many different kinds of people for different reasons. More than 40 public figures were involved in the campaign from across multiple areas of cultural and social life. They were photographed during their everyday lives. Their portraits were then accompanied by the hateful commentaries that those phtotgraphed had previously received by e-mail, or as commentaries beneath posts on Facebook or in online discussion forums.

"The aim of these photographs and videos is to point out that anyone may encounter hate in the online environment, and not just because of affiliation with an ethnic, religious or sexual group. Frequently people become a target of offensive commentaries because of their appearance, life experiences, opinions, profession, and for many other reasons," said Lukáš Houdek of the Czech Government's HateFree Culture campaign who also participated in our research.

D. Fostering an open discussion on Islam

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[8] http://www.radio.cz/en/section/curraffrs/school-pupils-back-muslim-classmate-targeted-over-headscarf

Respondents highlighted the need to differentiate between Islamophobia and critique of Islam. There is the need to strengthen the representation of voices which treat Islam as normal and natural part of democratic societies, including voices that represent fair critical comments on practices associated with Islam (in relation to ISIS issues or in concrete cases of encroaching of human rights or lawbreaking where the relation to Islamic religion is proven).

"Collective guilt is something that, in my opinion, we should work on. To show how collective guilt works, to what it leads, its practical dimensions within the frame of islamophobia." (NGO representative)

Debating critically means to bring different views on Islam and foster more plastic and nuanced view on Islam. In societies without a sizeable Muslim presence, such as the Czech Republic, Islam functions as an empty signifier that does not point to any actual object and has no agreed upon meaning. The vagueness of the definition of Islam allows populists to use it and mobilise different kinds of voters through employing it as part of their rhetorics. As Ruth Wodak (2015) points out that vagueness reinforces calculated ambivalence – the strategy of populist politicians to address multiple and contradictory audience via a single symbol with cleverly multi-layered message.

Keeping discussion complex might prevent against simplification of Islamophobic narratives – to show that there are internal political struggles within Muslim communities, political and social cleavages or different patterns of marginalisation. However, the complexity of content shloud be balanced by intelligibility and clarity in term of forms in order to present complex issues in attractive forms.

A respondent, representing a NGO, also mentioned that a symmetrical view on radicalisation might foster open discussion on Islam, stressing similiaratity of sources of radicalisation in Western countries and in Muslim societies. People's uncertainties and fear about future prospect and conditions of living, sense of marginalisation and socio-economic inequalities feed both Muslim terrorism and extreme right-wing extremism in Europe. Such symmetry might help us to see radicalisation as a much more social and economical problem than as being a cultural one.

5. Summary of key counter-narratives

In this part of the report, we summarise possible counter-narratives devided into five thematic groups related to different islamophobic topoi. For each of these themes we set specific goals that might weaken already existing stereotypes and identify counter narratives which could help to grasp these tasks. The following part provides a short description of each narrative, goals of counter-narratives and advice how to communicate them.

a) The anachronistic religion narrative/The barbarian narrative

Characterisation: This narrative replicates the same trope that Edward Said (1978) described as Orientalism in his seminal study. Islam is portrayed as instinctive and animalistic and Western culture is seen as secular, superior and progressive. These narratives emphasise on the different culture and mentality of the Muslims in contrast to modern and secular "Europe".

Goals:

- to introduce compatibility of Islam with modern societies;

- to emphasise the diversity of Islam and Arab culture;

- to draw attention to the changes of Islam over time;

- to break the perception of Islam as homogeneous religion.

How to do it:

- to tell a story of Muslim countries, such as Syria, as a modern and developed country;

- to introduce liberal Muslim initiatives (for example Seyran Ateş's Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque in Berlin) and democratic movements within Muslim societies;

- to put historical examples in their original context;

- to distinguish between Muslim movements that are certainly not democratic (do not deny them) and those that are fully compatible with democratic principles (for example Shura[9]);

- to open critical debate on Islam and emphasize its heterogeneity – including its risks (e.g. "yes, there are also those, among Muslims, that fight for ISIS");

- to show Muslims as ordinary people with their multiple roles and various identities (not only as 'Muslims', but parents, students, artists, doctors, etc.), not only as "victims" or "perpetrators";

- to show Muslims as ordinary people – with their positive and negative points.

In order to debunk the myth of uncivilised Islam, it is necessary to introduce Muslims who live modern lives and contribute to democratic debates. For example, Muslim intelectuals are completely neglected by Czech media. Another interesting example of Muslim intellectuals' counter-narrative might be Islamic feminisms which is far from the stereotypes of Islam and of feminism as a western movement.

However, the modern face of Islam may also be represented in a comparatively less intellectual way. A respondent mentioned, for example, his experience when he saw a *hijab* shop where teenagers could buy fashionable headscarves, describing it as revealatory moment as he realised that the object which he had associated with female oppression could be an expression of teenage identity. *Hijabs* were presented on London Fashion Week in 2016, shopping malls started to offer sporty hijabs and Dolce & Gabanna launched its *hijab* collection in 2016. Even though such penetration might be crtiticized as cultural appropriation, Muslim fashion counter-narrative opens floor for more entertaining and everyday face of Islam.

There are ways how to deconstruct shared perception of the omnipresence of Islam, i.e. that everything *"that the Muslim does is somehow attributed to Islam",* and also Islam as religion always functions as a main identity marker of Muslims. *"However, it (the behaviour of Muslims) is influenced*

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[9] Shura, „consultation", is a principle of decision-making employed in Muslim societies. See Al-Raysuni (2011).

by other factors too, and the form of Islam itself is influenced by the wider components of a culture - Islam in Malaysia is different from Islam in Senegal" (an expert on Islam). This argument might fund <u>a narrative of Islam's limits for Muslims in everyday life</u>, pointing out, that Islamophobic viewpoints tend to neglect other individual roles and identities in favour of Muslim identity.

In post-socialist states, such as the Czech Republic, it is possible to draw an analogy between national stereotypes of Islam and stereotypes of Western Europeans towards socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Periods of time, Western Europe overlooked diversity of its Eastern European counterparts in similar vein as we overlook the diversity of Islam nowadays. <u>The narrative of the analogy between Islam and post-socialist Europe</u> might raise an empathy and solidarity based upon experience with life on periphery.

b) The slippery-slope narrative/The failed multiculturalism narrative

Characterisation: The slippery-slope narrative is a future-oriented narrative. The Czech Republic does not face problems as other European states with a large Muslim minority (Germany, France, UK, Sweden or Denmark) so far, however, when Muslims come in higher numbers it will be too late to do anything.

Goal:

- to explain socio-historical causes of current social problems;

- to increase trust in migration policies;

- to explain causes of migration;

- to start nuanced discussion on integration of migrants.

How to do it:

- to compare different models of integration policy (France, UK, Netherlands, Germany, Scandinavian countries);

- to show everyday life in European Muslim neighbourhoods;

- to tell stories of successful integration of Muslims into the Czech society (for example the case of Bosnians in the 1990s).

The slippery-slope narrative is not novel in policy debates. The same arguments can be heard in discussions on euthanasia, IVF or same-sex marriages. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, for example, opponents to the introduction of civil divorce described it as the first step on a slippery slope to polygamy (Jones 2011). This argument relies on unfair and inaccurate reports, insecurities about the future and distrust to public institutions meaning that the debates draw a common line. Similar elements can be found in the Czech debate on Islam. This element should be put in context of <u>the counter narrative of logical fallacies of slippery-slope argumentation.</u>

The slippery-slope narrative turns from numerical racism (see Hage 2017) in which increasing numbers of migrants represent justifications of racist talk (a Turk on the street is refreshing, however, when the street is full of Turks it is turning into a Turkish street) to essential rascim in which one is allways too many. The slippery-slope narrative uses the numerical logic in justification of essential racism. One person today always means "too many" in future.

An increase in trust in institutions would weaken this narrative. People should be informed about examples of peaceful communities in Western cities. The counter-narrative of institutional security might be very efficient; however, it is in clash with predominant discourse of permanent institutional crisis (see Richards, Smith and Hay 2014).

In relation to this narrative, it seems that might be promising to replace vocabulary of cultural differences for vocabulary of conviviality (Gilroy 2004) based upon everyday encountering and pleasures of multiculturalism, thus emphasising similarities instead of differences. The counter-narrative of conviviality will be necessary to discover a new value in our ability to live with difference without becoming anxious, fearful, or violent. Stressing conviviality means to put emphasis on social identities producing solidarity based upon common biographical experience rather than to stress ethnic or religious differences.

A respondent, representing a NGO, sees a potential in coalition building with NGOs dealing with other thematic areas. It opens floor for inclusion of Muslims' images when we inform about seniors, teenagers' issues or parenting and show the Muslim presence as a normal part of our everyday life. She assumes that Islamophobic counter-narratives might work better when they are included and hidden in narratives on different issues in contrast to communicate them as a main message.

c) The narrative of Muslim women as oppressed/The sexual predator narrative

Characterisation: Alleged proof of Islam's anachronism is the treatment of women (a main object of this narrative) by Muslim men (a main subject of this narrative). The subordination and marginalisation of women cannot be ascribed to Islam as ideology but also to nature of Muslim men.

Goal:

- to emphasise the cultural and historical context and diversity;

- to include the perspectives of Muslim women.

How to do it:

- to show everyday life of Muslim women and Muslim household;

- to clarify the role of headscarves and clothes in Muslim societies and their meaning for Muslim women (including diversity of views and experiences);

- to put emphasis on different countries (Muslim female political leaders, liberal environment in some Muslim countries);

- to underline commonalities with a Western family life, including discussion on domestic violence, gender inequalities, labour division in family, care for children;

- to explain that Muslim women who wear headscarves might be victims of Czech oppression;

- to open the discussion on the perpetrators of abuse against women in the Czech Republic.

Oppression of women and women's liberation were probably the most contested issues among our respondents. On the one hand, they agreed on respect to cultural diversity, on the other hand significant number of them sees a lack of respect to women right in Muslim societites. *"It might be perhaps my stereotype that those Arabian cultures are more macho"* (NGO representative). Respondents expressed their insecurities about this topic and lack of information and insight.

The solution of this inner conflict and the way how to challenge this narrative might be giving a voice to Muslim women and let them explain and describe why they wear headscarves, how they see their position in the society or how they feel in public space. The complexity of the emerging current feminism and pluralism in the Muslim women's movement should be underlined.

The counter-narrative of separation of abuse of women and Islam represents another way in which this narrative might be questioned. This counter-narrative is based upon a basic assumption that sexual abuse, stoning, honour killings or seeing women only as sexualised objects has nothing to do with Islam as religion but rather with socio-economic consequences and problems in family life.

d) The violent religion narrative/The narrative of radicalization

Characterisation: Islam is perceived as predatory and militant. In contrast to the previous trope, Islam is the active subject of narratives. It works under the assumption of the hegemonic character of Islam as a political religion

Goal:

- to avoid collective guilt perception;

- to distinguish between terrorism as an extreme political act and Islam as religion and tradition;

- to not depreciate possible threat of terrorist attacks and inform about concrete defensive strategies;

- to develop debate on the nuanced causes of radicalization (e.g. social exclusion) and stress that successfull integration could help to avoid it.

How to do it:

- to introduce Muslims as victims of ISIS and fighters against ISIS;

- to compare recent terrorism with its previous wave of terrorism (German RAF, Basque ETA, Irish IRA);

- to compare religious element in recent terrorism with relation of IRA to Catholicism;

- to introduce terrorist attacks as resulting from frustration of individuals stemming from social exclusion and impossibility of self-realisation;

- to show life histories of terrorists and explain their motives of acts (looking for similarities between jihadists and extreme right-activists).

The security frame is probobably the most dominant one used by Czech media. This risk should be reflected and should not be underestimated; however, it is necessary to put an emphasis on three fatcs in particular: (1) Muslims are very often victims of terrorist attacks, (2) many terrorist attacks happen in Muslim countries and (3) Muslims fight against terrorism. The counter-narative of Muslims as victims of terror might raise solidarity with Muslims fighting against Islamic State and construct Muslims as at risk of facing terrorism.

In relation to radicalisation, we identified the counter-narrative of integration as a prevention of radicalisation. Some respondents put an emphasis on failure in integration as a source of radicalisation and they see possibilities of integration policies: *"To describe everyday problems of immigrants, how difficult is to find a job, how hard is to declare himself or herself as Muslim, how women in headscarves face verbal assaults on the street."* (NGO representative)

The last counter-narrative which we identified in interviews was the counter-narrative of socio-economic source of radicalisation. Behind every terrorist attack there is a biography, specific motives and personal history, including frustrations, disrespect and refusal by mainstream society. Reporting about these aspects of terrorism might weaken the direct association between Islam and terrorism and it might show how radicalization stems rather from socio-economic conditions than Islam as religion.

e) The Muslims as Gypsies narrative

Characterisation: In context of the recent migration crisis, speakers started to make analogy between the unsuccessful integration of Muslims in Western Europe and the unsuccessful integration of Roma in the Czech Republic. The both groups were portrayed as culturally distinct and unadaptable – even though the Roma have been living in the Czech Republic for decades.

Goal:

- to show Muslims as qualified workers;
- to show Muslisms as contribution to mainstream society;
- to show economic migration as normal.

How to do it:

- to tell a story how Muslims have participated in the growth and success of the economy, such as the Turkish Muslim community in Germany;
- to tell a story of Muslims as a part of mainstream European society.

There is a very strong counter-narrative of Turkish guest workers as a part of German economical recovery after the Second World War. It is a paradoxical situation in the Czech Republic where public

demands migrants' participation in labour market, however, asylum seekers are not allowed to work legally and they must liveoff social benefits while their application is processed.

Furthermore, the narrative of Muslim as Gypsies is in stark contrast to available data of socio-economic stratification of Muslim in the Czech society. Tha data indicates that Muslims living in the Czech Republic are more educated and more economicaly active than average. (Population and Housing Census 2011).

6. Who, whom and how: preffered forms, tools and channels of the counter-narratives dissemination

The messenger is as important as the message. People are more likely to accept a message if it is endorsed and effectively presented by someone trusted and seen as representing national values. When society is culturally devided it seems to be important to look for people who might be credible for both sides who can act as brokers. Brokers on the ideological Right have an important role to play in shaping the conversation.

In context of climate change, Pidgeon and Fischhof (2011) point out that people process information both analytically and experientially. People respond to what is personal. In this context, complex issues need to be translated to everyday discourse and to refer to personal experiences of ordinary people, including looking for analogies relevant for the day-to-day experience. In context of this contextualisation, there is also room for emotional management.

Due to the actual high level of normalisation of Islamophobia, respondents are sceptical of mass media campaigns. Subtler and especially face-to-face strategies are preferred. To minimise stereotypical and dehumanising depictions and perceptions of Muslims, however, also more wide-reaching activities e. g. bringing Muslims into media in nonstereotypical roles are needed.

Speaking about preferred forms of counternarratives our respondents made a wide range of recommendations, summarised as follows:

- To put counter narratives in context of current debates in Czech society:
    - in the Czech Republic, Islamophobia increased with "migration crisis" in 2015 – fear related to this new phenomenon should be dissolved by enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence of Czech public through stress on solidarity, conviviality and responsibility);
    - to allow Czechs express their fears, rather than minimising them listen to these and try to cope with their causes;
    - enhance trust in public institutions through step by step informing on asylum processes and explaining policies;
- Normalisation of Muslims:
    - to tell Muslims' personal stories (life stories of concrete individuals, their daily routines etc.);

- o do not aim only at the 'Islam and Muslims as refugees' theme, but also at the everydayness and different identities (related to job, family, leisure time etc.);
- To balance emotionaly loaded steoreotypical visualisation of Muslims:
  - o switching of perspectives: show similarities with depicting Slovaks as shepherds or those who mows grass fields; post-revolutionary signs in westerns states that invoked Czechs not to shoplift, etc.
  - o show Muslims in daily-routine situations;
- To encourage personal meetings and dialogue with Muslims and Czech majority (casual meetings, regional debates etc.):
  - o to take advantage of platforms, which have been already institutionalised, people have used to attend them and have perceived them as trustworthy;
- To encourage Muslims to participate in public space, so it becomes normal for the Czech public to see and accept them as a part of society;
  - o to include Muslim celebrities and persons whose stories challenge dominant stereotypes about Muslims (e. g. senator, surgeon, medical doctor, musician);
- To include Czech celebrities (e. g. sportsman, singer), "neutral" scholars and politicians to avoid accusations of biased claims (e. g. well-known statistician; politician from already established parties);
- To show personal experiences as well as national experiences of cooperation between Czechs and Muslims.

It is also crucial to address young generations, using adequate methods: short videos, face to face meetings and debates, sharing cultural backgrounds (habits, cuisine etc.).

The current Islamophobic environment cannot be changed without taking policy level in consideration. There are policy tools mentioned by our respondents which might aim at regulating hate speech and they have yet to be implemented in the Czech Republic. Our respondents refered to (1) a stricter ethical review of mainstream media; (2) an active fight against hate speech on social networks; (3) systematic unfolding of hoaxes; (3) media and civil education at schools and (4) enhancing community actions.

Communications will require sustained contributions from cross-disciplinary teams, working within an institutional framework that provides support for their eforts. Such teams would include, at minimum, migration and integration policy experts, experts on Islam and Muslim societies, social and communications specialists, or psychologists. These teams should be coordinated so that experts stay focused on their aspect of the communication process.

7. *Good practices and the examples of new strategies*

Several wide public campaigns have taken place at Czech Republic during the last three years (after the escallation of "Migration crisis"). Most of them have been focusing on refugees, migration and nonstereotypical depiction of Muslims and Islam. Following summary attempts to briefly introduce the most visible campaigns. On the other hand, as we have already stated above, the environment of Czech

public debate is strongly obstructed by the mistrust of NGOs and media regarding the way how the topic of Islam has been depicted. All the campaigns oriented to intensify tollerance and democratic visions of inclusion thus bear the risk of becoming understood as suspicious and threatenning for the "Czech nation".

Our respondents refered very contradictory about big public campaigns using nationwide media. On one hand, they can open the discussion, on the other hand they tend to raise panic reactions and they tend to raise accusation from wasting public money. For these reason, there is a trend to favour local and face-to-face action or guerrilla campaigns in mass media. A respondent, working for the government, listed couple of examples such as articles in women's magazines, non-stereotypical Muslims character in soap operas and presenting Muslim in context of different topics.

Our respondents refered to various examples of projects. The list does not aspire to be an exhaustive list but it gives an indication of the types of projects taking place in the Czech Republic.

Community actions (HateFre, Alfirdaus, InBáze)

The most often mentioned were the initiatives of HateFree Culture or Cultural Centre Alfirdaus aimed at the arranging of the joint meetings of the representatives of different cultures, conducted in very informal way – e. g. joint open breakfast in Prague mosque. This type of sessions is highly potential because its informal character enables balancing of the perspectives of participants at play and supports the activities of Muslim community. On the other hand, it could be assumed, that it addresses rather those with strongly open or on the contrary with strongly islamophobic stances, but not those who are not much engaged in the topic of Muslim integration in Czech Republic.

"Human Library" (Amnesty International)

"Human library" is a project conducted by the Czech Amnesty International. According to Amnesty International materials, the idea was first realised by the Danish initiative Stop the Violence, in 2000 in Roskilde. Its guide-lines are publicly available.[10] Under the slogan "Don't judge a book by its cover", "the Human Library is designed to build a positive framework for conversations that can challenge stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue.". It provides especially students from elementary schools and high schools for the opportunity to discuss with people from different social or cultural background that they otherwise would never met. Small groups of students could "loan a human" (migrant, refugee, human with other etnicity...) and listen to his/her life story. They can ask him/her and discuss all their questions in the protected setting of their class, getting support from this trained "Human book" volunteer as well as professional workers of the Amnesty International who provide the mediation, when needed.

This form of interaction was highly reputable among the informants because of its visible positive impact on students, which is for instance manifested by their positive responses at the end of these sessions or in changes in the way how they behave during the sessions – e. g. slightly shifting from offensive to more understanding questions. Although the costs of this method are high especially in

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[10] https://www.iuventa.sk/files/ziva%20kniznica_publikacia.pdf.

the column of human resources (trained volunteers, educated workers) and time costs (one session usually takes around 3 hours + the travel costs), its potential is of high account. It challenges the usual impossibility to personally meet Muslim citizens (because of their low percentage in Czech Republic) and thus enables students to get their own experience that is not mediated through the disputable channel of media and social networks.

Regional discussions, workshops and discussions for specific publics (Studentské hnutí za solidaritu, Člověk v tísni, HateFree Culture)

Discussions in regions and seminars and workshops for specific public (e.g. journalists or teachers) are also perceived as activities with high potential impact on the reception of Islam and Muslims. In this respect discussions organized by Člověk v tísni, HateFree Culture or Studentské hnutí za solidaritu were mentioned. Its potential lies in its regional character – discussions are held at schools or in different settings of small municipalities. The character of such sessions is slightly more formal, combining the format of lecture with following discussion, where the experts as well as people who represent the theme discussed (e. g. refugee, immigrant) are present. The possibility of open debate enables sharing of different perspectives and point of views.

Mass media

The only medium widely mentioned among the informants as the one that inform about Islam and Muslims in a non-steretypical way was the periodical Respekt. The work of public service media was also partially appreciated, however, strong insistence on its further development that would tend to give more balanced information, concentrate not only on the threats of Islamism and the migration crisis for Czech citizens but also provide the point of view of refugees, aiming at the problems and obstacles they have to face.

In 2015, Vojtěch Berger from the Czech Radio has been conducted project Destination: Germany aimed at the integration of refugees in Bavarian Hof[11]. The project was awarded with Czech-German Journalist Price 2015 on the Best Reportage. Contrary to already existing journalist works that were focussed on mapping of the migration routes (Gardien; or Respekt in Czech setting), he tried to describe the process of integration of several concrete refugees. During his one year long regular contact with them, he has been provided their contemporary life stories via website that comprehends the evolvement of their "new life" in Germany in wider context, illustrating their stories with photographs and videos. The effort to offer stories of concrete refugees enables to disrupt the dominant narrative of dehumanised hordes of immigrants.

Similar, and also awarded, project mentioned was the "Yusra swims for life", which was conducted by Magdalena Sodomková and Brit Jensen during 2016 in cooperation of Czech Radio and BBC[12] and deals with the eighteen old refugee Yusra and her journey from unknown refugee to her participation on Olympic Games.

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[11] https://interaktivni.rozhlas.cz/cil-nemecko/
[12] https://interaktivni.rozhlas.cz/yusra/

Public campaigns, informative websites

The project of Open Society Fund called "It is us"[13] works as a platform for sharing expertise and experiences about migration. It also provides information for the public and particularly to journalists. With the broadcast campaign, it has tried to influence public opinion on migration crisis by providing short videos with celebrities questioning people at the streets on their potential behaviour in the situation of being refugees. This imaginative changing of perspectives could help to grasp and understand the situation of Muslim refugees in more intense way. This kind of campaign was appreciated because of its concrete focus; on the other hand, its potential was questioned because of its emotive character.

The aim to provide neutral information on the migrants, Islam, Muslims and migration crisis is fulfilled by several organizations. Among the informants, HateFree Culture, *Člověk v tísni* or Amnesty International were mentioned most often. All of these provide information on their web sites aimed at journalists, teachers, students and wide public.[14]

8. Conclusion

Czech Islamophobia is considered mainstream and our respondents share the sceptical view regarding possible conversion of Islamophobic discourse towards a more open view of Islam. Counter-narratives should aim at de-normalisation of Islamophobia. De-normalisation of Islamophobia might be based upon positive examples of solidarity, changes in self-perception of Czech in public discourse and images and stories with victims of hate speech.

On the other hand, there is also room for normalisation of Islam through providing less dramatic and more banal image of Islam, including for example Muslim fashion and food associated with typically Muslim countries and cultures. The image needs to be also further diversified. Presenting Muslims in soap operas or interviewing Muslim as experts might also contribute to making Islam normal in the Czech Republic.

There is the need to strengthen the representation of voices treating Islam as normal and natural part of democratic societies. Debating critically means to bring different views on Islam and foster more plastic and nuanced view. Keeping discussion complex might prevent against simplification of Islamophobic narratives – to show that there are internal political struggles within Muslim communities, political and social cleavages or different patterns of marginalisation.

We identified numerous examples of counter narratives: (1) the Muslim intellectuals' counter-narrative; (2) the Muslim fashion counter-narrative; (3) the counter-narrative of Islam's limits in everyday life; (4) the counter-narrative of the analogy between Islam and post-socialist Europe; (5) the counter-narrative of logical fallacies of slippery-slope argumentation; (6) the counter-narrative of

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[13] http://jsmetomy.cz/
[14] HateFree Culture: https://www.hatefree.cz/myty-a-fakta/hejtomat/islam-se-bude-rozsirovat-na-uzemi-kam-nikdy-nepatril-za-chvilku-nam-tady-zavedou-pravo-sarija; Člověk v tísni: https://www.clovekvtisni.cz/en/what-we-do/migration-awareness; Amnesty International: https://www.amnesty.cz/vzdelavani.

institutional security; (7) the counter-narrative of conviviality; (8) the counter-narrative of separation of women abuse and Islam; (9) the counter-narative of Muslims as terrorists' victims; (10) the counter-narrative of integration as a prevention of radicalisation; (11) the counter-narrative of socio-economic sources of radicalisation; (12) counter-narrative of the positive economic contribution of Muslims.

It is crucial to consider different forms and different channels of dissemination of open view on Islam for different target groups (combination of rational arguments, emotional stories, celebrities, etc.). It seems to be important to look for people who might be credible for both sides, who can act as brokers and help to translate complex issues to everyday discourse and to refer to personal experiences of ordinary people.

Debating Islamophobia and migration might be better to keep separated. While in migration policies there are legitimate the co-existence or dialogue of different attitudes, opinions and discourses, in relation to Islamophobia, and hate speech in general, there could be a consensus what is acceptable and what is not acceptable to pronounce in public space. Counter-narratives are supposed to contribute to draw this line and create boundaries for deliberative and respectful public debates. However, we are witnessing reverse direction in the Czech public sphere. The boundaries are becoming less clear, becoming increasingly fluid and public space is fed by toxic narratives of hatred and suspicion.

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