Counter-Islamophobia Kit

Key National Messages – Czech Republic (English)

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CIK Project (Counter Islamophobia Kit)

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Counter-Islamophobia Kit

CERS

Centre for Ethnicity & Racism Studies

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 third workstream of the project which was centred on describe the key national messages pertaining to Islamophobia and countering-Islamophobia in each context considered in the framework of this project: Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Portugal and United Kingdom. The key national messages, findings and toolkit, the Counter-Islamophobia Kit (CIK) 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.

Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies, 2018.

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Executive Summary: Czech Islamophobia without Muslims

The number of Muslims in the Czech Republic is smaller than in any other nation in the EU. In the first decade after the fall of communism, Islam did not play an important role in public discourse. The early years of the new millennium changed the dominant media framing and gave raise to increasing reporting on Islam, due to terrorist attacks, as a security threat. 75% of Czechs consider Arabs as unfriendly, and 84% think that Islam is incompatible with Czech culture.

1. Most dominant narratives of Muslim hatred

We distinguish (1) Islamophobic and (2) 'Muslimophobic' narratives. We define Islamophobia as hostility towards practices and tenets of Islam and inimical to Islam as a religion. In case of 'Muslimophobia', the hatred is targeted towards Muslims as people arguing that Muslims are incapable of adapting to Western societies. The most common narratives are those describing Muslims as a security risk and Islam as a danger to democratic societies.

2. Main challenges in countering Islamophobia

There are numerous challenges in terms of communicating positive narratives regarding Islam and Muslims: Islamophobia is part of a general populist rhetoric; it stems from simplistic and stereotypical conceptions of Islam and Muslim societies; general patterns of Islamophobia cannot be changed without changes in self-perception of the Czechs ethnic majority themselves; it is necessary to foster an open dialogue about Islam and Muslim societies between all parties.

3. Key counter-narratives to Muslim hatred

We identified numerous examples of counter narratives, related to (1) Muslim intellectuals'; (2) Muslim fashion; (3) Islam's limits in everyday life; (4) the analogy between Islam and post-socialist Europe; (5) the logical fallacies of slippery-slope argumentation; (6) the institutional security; (7) conviviality; (8) the separation of women abuse and Islam; (9) Muslims as terrorists' victims; (10) integration as a prevention of radicalisation; (11) the socio-economic sources of radicalisation; (12) and lastly, the positive economic contribution of Muslims.

4. Strategies of counter-narrative dissemination

There is the need to strengthen the representation of voices treating Islam as normal and natural part of democratic societies. Critically debating means to bring different views on Islam and foster a more plastic and nuanced picture of it. It is crucial to consider various forms and different channels of dissemination of the open view on Islam for different target groups (combination of rational arguments, emotional stories, celebrities, etc.).

1. Czech Islamophobia without Muslims

The Czech Republic has some of the highest numbers of atheists in Europe, according to the census, only 20.8% of Czechs declared religious affiliation[1]. The number of Muslims is smaller than in any other nation in the EU, and the Muslims account for only less than 1% (3358) of the total population. However, experts consider these numbers unreliable and estimate that real number of Muslims living in the Czech Republic is close to 22 000 (see Topinka 2016)[2]. Understanding the history of different migration waves can explain the presence of Muslims. The first wave, in the 1960s and 1980s, was made up of people from communist countries within the international scholarship agreement. The second wave, in the 1990s, was marked by labour migration from North Africa and asylum seekers fleeing from Bosnia during the Yugoslavian wars. The third wave of migrants has been made up of tourists coming to the Czech bath resorts. In contrast to the previous waves, tourists are temporary and seasonal migrants, with no intention to enter the Czech labour market. However, media report their plans to buy properties, build residential zones, mostly for recreational purposes.

In the first decade after the fall of communism, Islam did not play an important role in public discourse (Čermáková, Janků, Linhartová 2016)[3]. The Czech media occasionally referred to spa resorts guests or Muslim asylum seekers. Islam was mentioned in the foreign news concerning the Middle East or Yugoslavian wars. The first years of the new millennium changed the dominant frame and gave rise to a new style of reporting on Islam. Because of terrorist attacks (New York in 2001, Madrid in 2004, London in 2005), Czech media describe Islam as a security threat (Křížková 2007)[4]. Whereas in 1994 and 1996, 33% of the Czech population worried that migrants would introduce a new religion to the Czech Republic, ten years later (in 2004), 56% Czechs shared this kind of fear (GAC 2004)[5].

Together with Roma, the Czech public perceives Arabs as the most unfriendly ethnic group. In Czech discourse, 'Arabs' are associated with both newcomers and people with a migrant background living in the Czech Republic and serve as synonyms for Muslims. 75% of Czechs consider Arabs as unfriendly (CVVM 2017)[6], and 84 % of Czechs consider Islam to be incompatible with Czech culture (Glopolis 2017)[7]. The authors of this report attribute this

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[1] Public Census 2011. [Online]. [Accessed 28 April 2018]. Available from: https://vdb.czso.cz/vdbvo2/faces/en/index.jsf?page=vystup-objekt&pvokc=&katalog=30628&pvo=ZVCR037&z=T#w=

[2] Topinka, D. ed. 2016. *Muslimové v Česku. Etablování muslimů a Islámu na veřejnosti.* Brno: Barrister & Principal.

[3] Čermáková, E., Janků, T., Linhartová, L. 2016. Polistopadový islám: muslimové v České republice. In: Topinka, D. ed. *Muslimové v Česku. Etablování muslimů a Islámu na veřejnosti.* Brno: Barrister & Principal, pp.23-35.

[4] Křížková, M. 2007. Neviditelná menšina. Analýza mediálního obrazu českých muslimů. In Burgetová, E., Černá, M. eds. Cizinci, našinci a media: mediální analýzy. Praha: Multikulturní centrum Praha, pp. 48-53.

[5] GAC. 2004. *Analýza postavení cizinců dlouhodobě žijících v ČR a návrh optimalizačních kroků*, Praha: Ministerstvo vnitra ČR.

[6] CVVM. 2017. Postoje české veřejnosti k cizincům – březen 2017. [Online]. [Accessed 20 April 2017]. Available from: http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a7697/f3/ov170426.pdf

[7] Glopolis 2017. *Proč uprchlíci jitří naše emoce? Narativy související s migrací a uprchlictvím v české společnosti a nahlédnutí za ně.* Praha: Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

attitude to the power of hate narratives, a lack of direct experience in integrating migrants into society, and a lack of information. For example, there are virtually no migrants' zones in the Czech Republic, and alleged reports on this subject (especially in France) are very often the subject of misinformation.

For a long time, Islamophobia was not the issue of concern for the police. However, the discourse changed with so-called migration crisis. Islam has been serving as a symbol for a significant number of images (and fears) associated with the refugee/migrant other (Glopolis 2017). For the first time, the Security Information Service mentioned Islamophobia as a problem in 2014 (Security Information Service 2015)[8].

Even though anti-immigration rhetoric increased significantly and anti-Islam and anti-immigration stances were the primary topics for all right-wing extremist groups, the police did not report any severe attacks related to this matter (Security Information Service 2015)[9]. Even though several offences occurred - for example, right-wing extremists poured pig blood on a halal shop, and there are several proofs that especially Muslim women, wearing scarves in public places, experience verbal and physical attacks, - the main arena for the Czech Islamophobic discourse is the Internet. Although various Islamophobic, xenophobic and nationalistic initiatives, parties and groups failed to form a coalition before elections, there is increasing penetration of Islamophobic agenda into mainstream politics.

2. Most dominant narratives of Muslim hatred

We distinguish (1) Islamophobic and (2) 'Muslimophobic' narratives. We define Islamophobia as hostility towards practices and tenets of Islam and inimical to Islam as a religion. *"Muslims may be nice, one may like talking to them, but as a part of the collective, they behave as they do. Thus, according to Islam."* (The Czech women anti-Islamist initiative "Angry Mothers/Naštvané matky"[10]). In case of 'Muslimophobia', the hostility is targeted towards Muslims as incapable of adapting to Western societies. "In this sense, 'Muslimophobia' overlaps with both the racism that links biology with cultural characteristics and the racism in which cultural and behavioural traits or dress of lifestyle habits become essentialised and racialised" (Cheng 2015: 6)[11]. Consequently, people with Arab or Turkish origin may be called 'Muslim', even if they are not. Religion, in this case, is linked to physical appearance or ethnicity as an identity marker.

We introduce six main Islamophobic frames, with their specific narratives:
1. Islamophobic frames: (A) Islam as an anachronistic/uncivilised culture. Islam is portrayed as instinctive and animalistic and Western culture is seen as secular, superior and progressive

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[8] Security Information Service. 2011. Annual Report of the Security Information Service for 2010. [Online]. [Accessed 20 April 2017]. Available from: https://www.bis.cz/vyrocni-zpravaEN2b2d.html?ArticleID=27

[9] Security Information Service. 2015. *Annual Report of the Security Information Service for 2014.* [Online]. [Accessed 20 April 2017]. Available from: https://www.bis.cz/vyrocni-zpravaEN6c8d.html?ArticleID=1096

[10] http://www.nastvanematky.cz/individualismus-vs-kolektivismus-aneb-hazeni-muslimu-do-jednoho-pytle

[11] Cheng, J. E. 2015. Islamophobia, Muslimophobia or racism? Parliamentary discourses on Islam and Muslims in debates on the minaret ban in Switzerland. *Discourse & Society*. 1, pp.1-25.

(see Said 1978)[12]. These narratives emphasise the different culture and mentality of the Muslims and "Europeans". It ignores the fact that Muslims might also be Europeans and it mixes up religious and supra-national affiliation.

(B) Islam as an expansive violent religion. Islam is perceived as predatory and militant. In contrast to the previous narratives, Islam is the active subject. It works under the assumption of the hegemonic character of Islam as a political religion.

(C) Islam as a homogeneous antidemocratic religion. Islam competes with democratic principles of Western societies. The Czech Republic does not need to worry since there are only a few of Muslims, however, if Muslims' numbers increase, they will abolish democratic constitution in favour of Sharia.

2. 'Muslimophobic' frames: (A) Muslims as terrorists. Muslims are perceived as actual or potential terrorists. Muslims, or a significant share of them, are coming to Islamise us. Muslims are identified with young men prone to radicalisation.

(B) Muslims as Gypsies. The analogy between the unsuccessful integration of Muslims in Western Europe and the unsuccessful integration of Roma in the Czech Republic is made. Muslim refugees, who symbolise all refugees coming to Europe, are portrayed as lazy, crafty, unwilling to work, representing high fertility and high criminality, abusive of the generous social system and, above all, ungrateful; they make no effort to adapt, despite being repeatedly offered a helping hand. They come mainly to take advantage of welfare payments.

(C) Muslims as sexual predators. The subordination and marginalisation of women cannot be ascribed to Islam as an ideology but also to nature of Muslim men. Muslim men are thought to be incapable of adopting the European approach to women, while the risk of immigrants from Africa is seen in their heightened sexuality based on the notion of barbarianism and backwardness rendering them incapable of controlling themselves.

The most common narratives are those describing Muslims as a security risk and Islam as a danger to democratic societies. The security narratives are heavily supported by media referring to Islam and Muslims in context of terrorism and radicalism. Security narratives are reinforced by orientalising narratives stressing anachronism of Islam and the narratives portraying Muslims' inability to integrate.

3. Main challenges in countering Islamophobia

There are numerous challenges regarding communicating positive narratives of Islam and Muslims. These challenges transgress different narratives and represent the primary obstacle while tackling Islamophobia. (A) Islamophobia is part of general populist rhetoric. As a part of populist rhetoric, 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 audiences that should be primarily addressed.

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[12] Said, E. W. 1978. *Orientalism.* London: Penguin.

(B) Islamophobia stems from simplistic and stereotypical conceptions of Islam and Muslim societies. Dehumanisation is a significant part of all Islamophobic narratives in the Czech Republic. The media present Muslims in two extreme forms as either villains or victims. Islam is introduced to the Czech public through stereotypical images of terrorist, religious leaders or waves of migrants. There is a need for normalisation of Islam in the Czech Republic to change such image, to show everyday aspects of Islam and different stories of Muslim men and women.

(C) General patterns of Islamophobia cannot be changed without changes in self-perception of the Czechs ethnic majority themselves. It is crucial to understand Islamophobia as a relational phenomenon, and both sides (Muslims and Czechs) need to be included in counter-narratives accounts. We should evoke Czech openness to asylum seekers fleeing from Bosnia during the Yugoslavian wars in the 1990s, and their unproblematic integration into Czech society. In this context, there is 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. Hospitality should also be recalled as part of a big Czech national myth.

(D) It is needed to foster an open dialogue about Islam and Muslim societies between all parties. 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 connection to Islamic religion is proven).

4. Key Counter-Narratives to Muslim hatred

We identified numerous examples of counter narratives related to different Islamophobic topoi: (1) the Muslim intellectuals' counter-narrative: to introduce Muslims who live modern lives and contribute to democratic debates, including Islamic feminisms; (2) the Muslim fashion counter-narrative: to open floor for more entertaining and everyday face of Islam; (3) the counter-narrative of Islam's limits in everyday life: 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 primary identity marker of Muslims, pointing out, that Islamophobic viewpoints tend to neglect other individual roles and identities in favour of Muslim identity; (4) the counter-narrative of the analogy between Islam and post-socialist Europe: to draw a paralell between Czech national stereotypes of Islam and stereotypes of Western Europeans towards socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, because this analogy might raise an empathy and solidarity based upon experience with life on periphery; (5) the counter-narrative of logical fallacies of slippery-slope argumentation: to draw a common line with public debates based on similar types of inaccurate arguments: e. g. as in 19th and early 20th centuries opponents to the introduction of civil divorce described it as the first step on a slippery slope to polygamy (Jones 2011)[13]; (6) the counter-narrative of

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[13] Jones, T. W. 2011. 'The Missionaries' Position: Polygamy and divorce in the Anglican Communion, 1888-1988,' Journal of Religious History, 2011, 35(3): 393-408.

institutional security: to enhance trust in institutions, e. g. by informing about examples of peaceful communities in Western cities; (7) the counter-narrative of conviviality: to put emphasis on social identities producing solidarity based upon common biographical experience rather than to stress ethnic or religious differences; (8) the counter-narrative of separation of women abuse and Islam: to give a voice to Muslim women, underline the emerging of current feminism and pluralism in the Muslim women's movement; (9) the counter-narative of Muslims as terrorists' victims: to raise solidarity with Muslims fighting against Islamic State and explain that Muslims are also at risk of facing terrorism; (10) the counter-narrative of integration as a prevention of radicalisation: to put an emphasis on failure in integration as a source of radicalisation, to stress possibilities of integration policies and describe everyday problems of immigrants; (11) the counter-narrative of socio-economic sources of radicalisation: to explain that behind every terrorist attack there is an individual biography of the terrorist, specific motives and personal history, including frustrations, disrespect and refusal by mainstream society; (12) counter-narrative of the positive economic contribution of Muslims: e. g. counter-narrative of Turkish guest workers as a part of German economical recovery after the Second World War.

For the description of each counter-narrative, its specific goals and advice and how to communicate them, please see WS2 Report, parts no. 5-7 (Čada, Frantová 2018)[14].

5. Strategies of Counter-Narrative Dissemination

Counter-narratives should aim at de-normalisation of Islamophobia which might be based upon positive examples of solidarity, changes in self-perception of Czechs in public discourse and images and stories with victims of hate speech. There is also room for normalisation of Islam through providing a 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 Muslims 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. Critically debating means to bring different views on Islam and foster a more flexible and nuanced picture of it. Keeping discussion complex – to show that there are internal political struggles within Muslim communities, political and social cleavages or different patterns of marginalisation - might prevent against simplification of Islamophobic narratives.

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. There is 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 deliver possible solutions in a clear and understandable way.

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[14] Čada, K. Frantová V. 2017. Workstream 2: Report on Counter-narratives to Muslim hatred: Czech Republic. Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies, University of Leeds.

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 essential 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. Young generations should be addressed by 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 considering policy level. There are policy tools which might aim at regulating hate speech, and they have yet to be implemented in the Czech Republic: (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 civic education at schools and (4) enhancing community actions. Debating Islamophobia and migration might be best done separately. In respect of migration policies where there may be legitimate concerns, the coexistence or dialogue of different attitudes, opinions and discourses concerning Islamophobia, and hate speech in general embeds conflict. There could be a consensus reached about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable to pronounce in public space. Counter-narratives can contribute to help draw this line and create boundaries for deliberative and respectful public debates.

About the Research
This National Report comprises findings from two previous phases of inquiry: WS1 carried out from January until June 2017 and WS2 organised from July until December 2017.

The WS1 report aims to describe and explain the discursive content and forms of Muslim hatred in the Czech Republic. Alongside the elaboration of findings of the existing researches on the Islamophobia (literature review and data reports related to the anti-Muslim hate), we have conducted (1) discursive analysis (for the period 01/2015 – 01/2016) of online blogs and Facebook pages of initiatives overtly attacking Muslims or Islam: Martin Konvička's (IVČRN, BlocAgainst Islam) blog – 41 articles; Petr Hampl's (Bloc Against Islam) web page – 88 items, Tomio Okamura's (SPD) web page – 186 items; (2) discursive analysis of 65 television political debates aimed at general public focusing on migration and minorities, particularly with respect to the so-called migration crisis (for the period of 11/2015 – 06/2016): *Máte slovo* ("You Have the Floor") (ČT 1), *Partie* ("Political Game") (Prima) and *Střepiny* ("Fragments") (TV NOVA).

The WS2 report elaborates on dominant Islamophobic narratives in the Czech Republic identified in the WS 1 report to challenge them in public discourse. It provides a categorisation of current counter-narratives to Muslim hatred and assesses their context. Through critical reflection of recent anti-Islamophobic practice, the report summarises new ways and strategies regarding how to effectively counter Islamophobic discourses and foster a non-racist culture and environment.
We have conducted 25 semi-standardised expert interviews (with politicians/policymakers, experts, NGOs and volunteer representatives, journalists, government initiatives representatives and representatives of Muslims). The average length of interviews was one hour. 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 via contact with our respondents. We have also conducted participant observations on two debates on migration and Islam[15]and analysed Facebook pages run by the Czech Governmental Hate Free Culture Campaign in which news on minorities, including Islam and Muslims, are posted to foster non-racist culture and prevent hate- or dangerous speech.

For additional information, please see WS1 and WS2 reports at project web pages https://cik.leeds.ac.uk/publications/ or do not hesitate to contact us: karel.cada@fsv.cuni.cz, v.frantova@centrum.cz.

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