



Religion-motivated Hate Crimes **European Muslims** **between** **Terrorist Attacks and Islamophobic Backlash**

As the new waves of refugees arrive in Europe and the North America - Muslims and Islam occupy even more attention in the minds of politicians, public opinion shapers and ordinary citizens. Muslim Communities are deeply worried about the rise of attacks against Muslim communities and the growth of islamophobic rhetoric in the public sphere. It is especially alarming that Muslim Communities are often left exposed to a powerful backlash - including various forms of violent hate crime - in the wake of terrorist attacks, such as the recent ones in Brussels, Paris and Istanbul.

We declare unambiguously that international developments, including acts of terror perpetrated by violent individuals or groups self-identifying in the most arbitrary way with Islam, can never justify attempts to incriminate the larger Muslim community in Europe. We also condemn all forms of discrimination against Muslims and endeavor to prevent and protect against attacks on Muslim communities across the OSCE region, whether on persons, places of worship or religious symbols. Therefore, Islamophobia is a received threat, not a perceived one.

There is no excuse or justification for intolerance and discrimination. This also applies to 'exceptional' measures implemented or proposed in response to perceived security threats and especially in the name of countering terrorism. Responses have to be compliant with Human Rights declaration and commitments made by OSCE Participating States. Instead we are witnessing the insidious normalisation of islamophobic arguments and stereotypes by mainstream politicians, media and public figures in everyday life. This is particularly alarming because such normalisation reaches out to a much larger audience, stigmatizing a significant part of the population and undermining social cohesion.

At the same time, groups that have themselves felt in the past or continue to experience the effects of discrimination and intolerance sometimes resort to arguments that are directed against Islam and Muslim communities. This comes at a time when Muslims are particularly vulnerable to hate-motivated attacks. It is especially concerning that Muslim communities are also accused in the media of contributing to the recently increasing anti-Semitism in Europe. EMISCO believes that such rhetorical diversions are counter-productive to the common struggle against all forms of intolerance and religion-motivated hate crimes.

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We call upon the OSCE Participating States to:

- Implement existing OSCE commitments related to monitoring hate crime and collecting relevant data on incidents targeting Muslim communities, ensuring that data is disaggregated to show specific bias motivations related to religion;
- Take steps to effectively address intolerance against Muslims in the OSCE area, especially in the West of Vienna, both in preventing and responding to incidents by implementing concrete measures in every level;
- Ensure that security measures are not directed at any specific ethnic, religious or cultural group, in their design, implementation or impact;

We call upon the ODIHR to:

- Facilitate open discussion and constructive dialogue among and between government officials, civil society, and religious or belief communities with the aim of implementing OSCE commitments on the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief;
- Foster broad civil society co-operations, and the sharing of best practices among stakeholders, on educational initiatives, as well as other measures to raise awareness of intolerance against Muslims.

EMISCO strongly believes that Islamophobia is not only a Muslim issue, but a shared human rights question relevant to all. Islamophobia is not unique; it is not more or less important than other forms of intolerance; but it has become a symbolic battleground of the fight against what the various European intergovernmental organisations confirm as increasingly worrying levels of intolerance and discrimination against particular minorities. **We therefore call upon the OSCE Ministerial Council to take active steps towards recognizing the term "Islamophobia" in the official documents as an established concept, defined as a form of discrimination and racism, as well as an `orchestrated fear` targeting individuals and communities based on their alleged adherence to the Islamic faith.**

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