

# Counter-Islamophobia Kit

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## **Counter-Islamophobia Kit**

**Briefing Paper and Toolkit of Counter-Narratives to Islamophobia**

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**CIK Project (Counter Islamophobia Kit)**

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Counter-Islamophobia Kit

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## **About the Paper**

This paper provides an overall briefing on this project, which was concerned to describe and explain the discursive contents and forms that both Muslim hatred and counter-narratives to Muslim hatred take in the eight states examined in this project: Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Portugal and United Kingdom.

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## Summary

This briefing has been prepared to report on the European Commission, Directorate-General Justice and Consumers funded action grant project *Countering Islamophobia Through the Development of Best Practice in the use of Counter-Narratives in EU Member States* (Counter Islamophobia Kit, CIK) JUST/2015/RRAC/AG/BEST/8910 Work on this project took place between January 2017 to December 2018. The paper has been prepared by the Action Leadership Team, Professors Ian Law and S. Sayyid and Dr Amina Easat-Daas based at the Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, UK.

The overall aim of this Action is to compare the operation of counter-narratives to Islamophobia in eight European Union member states (Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Portugal and United Kingdom) in order to examine their use and effectiveness in terms of providing alternatives to prevailing narratives of Islamophobia. This addresses the need for a deeper understanding and awareness of the range and operation of counter-narratives to Islamophobia across the EU, and the lack of a systematic categorisation and ranking of these two types of narratives across Europe.

In particular the paper examines:

- The main types and content of **dominant narratives of Islamophobia**
- The main types and content of **counter-narratives to Islamophobia**
- The main **legal and policy interventions** through which the European human rights law apparatus has attempted to conceptually analyse and legally address Islamophobia.

A full set of 16 country reports, 2 comparative reports, 1 legal and policy report and 8 Key National Messages reports are all available on the Action website: [www.cik.leeds.ac.uk](http://www.cik.leeds.ac.uk). The new data set on which this Action is based comprises fieldwork with 272 politicians and policy-makers, NGOs and activists, and media, arts and academic professionals and textual data from political, policy, media and NGO discourse, and digital data from social media platforms.

The project identified the ten dominant Islamophobic narratives across these contexts (Mescoli 2017a.) These narratives were found to fix Muslims collectively as in descending order of prevalence, a threat to security, unassimilable, a demographic threat, as posing the threat of 'Islamisation' threat, a threat to local, national and European identity, responsible for women's oppression, essentially different and violent, incomplete citizens and a risk to the majority, and as inherently homophobic. A worsening environment of Islamophobia was identified with respect to media content, political discourse and experiences of discrimination indicating the new and increasingly acceptable hostility against Muslims in many spheres of everyday life.

The project has also identified the ten dominant counter-narratives to Islamophobia (Law, Easat-Daas and Sayyid 2018). These in descending order of prevalence challenged constructions of Muslim 'threat', challenged exclusionary national projects, emphasised cultural compatibility and conviviality, elaborated Muslim plurality, challenged narratives of sexism, sought to build inclusive futures and deracialise the state, argued for Muslim normalisation, humanity and the creation of Muslim space(s), and challenged distorted representations of Muslims in the media and elsewhere.

In addition, this project examined 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 (Trispiotis 2017). This phenomenon has proved challenging for European human rights law, whose current responses oscillate

between framing it as a problem of disproportionate restrictions on Muslims' right to manifest their religion and framing it as a problem of religious and intersectional discrimination, without, however, a particular doctrinal or normative direction showing how those distinct forms of legal action connect both with themselves and with the underlying concept of Islamophobia. The current lack of engagement of the ECtHR with the relevant data prevents its case law from informing, and perhaps acting as, a source of effective counter-narratives of Islamophobia.

## 1. Introduction

The proliferation of complex and dynamic prevailing Islamophobic narratives has been confirmed across Europe (ECRI 2014, ENAR 2015, IHRC 2016). The most recent study carried out by the IHRC (2016), in the UK, enables data comparison between 2010 and 2014, using a qualitative and quantitative data set of 1,800 cases. During this period, recorded experience of physical assault increased from 13.9% to 17.8% and reported incidence of verbal abuse rose from 39.8% to 66%. A worsening environment of Islamophobia was identified with respect to media content, political discourse and experiences of discrimination indicating the new and increasingly acceptable hostility against Muslims in many spheres of everyday life. This pattern was also confirmed in recent research by Sian, Law and Sayyid (2013) for the UK and in comparator countries including Denmark, Germany, Italy, France and Portugal (TOLERACE 2013). IHRC data sets and analytical reporting on the UK, France, Germany, Canada and the USA, utilising their innovative Domination Hate Model of Intercultural Relations which conceptualises Muslim hate crime within a context of interlocking hate environments, will provide an important resource available to this Action. A key finding is that anti-Muslim hate crime arises from a 'point of belief or instigation from an authoritative voice' (IHRC 2016, p. 6). But, there is a lack of systematic categorisation and assessment of counter-narratives which are urgently needed to be effectively constructed and deployed to reduce such forms of racialised discourse. The failure to adequately analyse the hostile narratives of 'authoritative voices' and challenge these through the use of persuasive counter-narratives is also evident. How to effectively construct, articulate and deploy such counter-narratives is controversial and lacks a robust evidence base. Within this deteriorating environment differences between member states in terms of the level of political, media and organisational mobilisation of hostile narratives, national events and circumstances and historic national patterns of hostility and Islamophobia is evident. The pattern of counter-narratives utilised has also differed and this Action provides an opportunity to make a cross-national assessment of their use and value.

Most studies of Muslim hatred in Europe recommend the development of counter-narratives but very little research has been carried out on their nature, implementation and effectiveness. Knowledge about the deployment of both hostile narratives and counter-narratives by governments, news media and NGOs in terms of their impact on Muslim hatred lags well behind the development of positive interventions (FRA 2006, ECRI 2014, ENAR 2015, IHRC 2016). In-depth research has not been undertaken in EU member states and this Action provides a first opportunity to collect systematic evidence, carry out categorical and discursive analysis and assess best practice in the operation of counter-narratives available to challenge Muslim hatred.

This project examines the transferability of best practice in the use of counter-narratives to Islamophobia across Europe. It aims to enrich and complement work undertaken by other EU-funded research projects, such as *Religare* (EU Commission, 2010-2013) and *GrassRootsMobilise* (ERC, 2013-2018). More specifically, whilst EU human rights law is already being used to inform counter-narratives to Islamophobia in various EU states and to varying degrees, studying 8 different jurisdictions will provide valuable insights into how effective those procedures prove in practice. Thus, whereas this Action aims to raise awareness about the rights deriving from EU law, it also intends to elaborate and disseminate the best human rights practices to counter discrimination and address the EU-wide challenge of equal social inclusion of religious minorities.

The Council of Europe, in its Resolutions 2076 on 'Freedom of religion and living together in a democratic society' (2015) and 1743 on 'Islam, Islamism and Islamophobia' (2010), has repeatedly signalled the growing importance of fighting against religious stereotyping and Islamophobia in order to foster equal inclusion of Muslims, safeguard freedom of religion and freedom of expression, and combat 'disguised discrimination against minority religions'

(2015). Moreover, the Council of Europe has specifically urged States to 'reject political statements that stir up fear and hatred of Muslims and Islam' while complying with freedom of expression under Article 10 ECHR (2010). A rigorous transnational study of the development and varied instantiations of such 'political statements' will illuminate the reasons for and ways of rejecting them while respecting fundamental rights. Moreover, given the EU emphasis on intersectionality that the Race and Employment Equality Directives exemplify, an intersectional cross-jurisdictional study of Islamophobia is crucial to tailor practical and effective human rights mechanisms as an antidote to the spread of religious hatred; as protective mechanisms for vulnerable minorities; and as potential indicators of covert forms of discrimination.

This project's aims are as follows:

- Categorise prevailing current Islamophobic narratives, identify their key elements and interlocking contextual environments employing the Domination Hate Model of Intercultural Relations (Islamic Human Rights Commission 2016),
- Categorise current counter-narratives to Islamophobia and assess their changing dynamics and context,
- Examine 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,
- Produce 1 transferable EU toolkit of best practice in the use of counter-narratives to Islamophobia and specific key messages for eight member states,
- Disseminate the key messages, findings and toolkits to policy makers, professionals and practitioners both across the EU and to member/regional audiences using a range of mediums and activities,
- Facilitate a process of knowledge exchange and a pathway to impact for toolkit utilisation.

The Action's main workstreams are as follows:

Workstream 1 Categorising Dominant Islamophobic Narratives will describe and explain the discursive content and forms that Islamophobia takes through a review of the literature and available data relating to Islamophobia and identification of prevailing narratives in political and media discourse, and more widely in social media contexts to produce a research report on each national case study.

Workstream 2 Categorising and Evaluating Counter-Narratives to Islamophobia will produce a categorical account of counter-narratives to Muslim hatred deployed in political and media discourse, and more widely in social media contexts, together with other official and non-official sources for each national case study.

Workstream 3 Developing an EU Counter-Narrative Toolkit

Cross-national learning will inform the development of a toolkit of counter-narratives for use across EU member states, and elsewhere, and in addition a summary of Key National Messages will be produced.

Workstream 4 PR, Dissemination, Knowledge Exchange and Impact. The Toolkit, Key messages and associated outputs 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.

This project utilises a multi-method strategy. It operationalises the Domination Hate Model of Intercultural Relations (IHRC 2016) which conceptualises Islamophobia as the product of a series of interconnected and interlocking environments and most effectively captures the multi-dimensional complexity of these narratives. Categorising current counter-narratives to Islamophobia and assessing their changing dynamics and context will employ an interactive, relational methodology (Dikötter 2008, Goldberg 2009). This investigative strategy understands the construction of counter-narratives in specific national or local contexts as the



active product of interactions between internal and external counter-narratives. Counterposing a relational methodological approach, to understanding racist and counter-racist narratives, to a comparative approach, and using the former, this project examines the ways in which counter-narratives in one situation are necessarily dependant on and related to counter-narratives elsewhere, thereby avoiding methodological nationalism. The development of an EU Counter-Narrative Toolkit in Workstream 3, utilising cross-national learning, draws on toolkit methodologies developed in previous projects concerned with countering racialisation and developing racism reduction agendas (Turney, Law and Phillips 2002, Law 2010).

## 2. Dominant Narratives of Islamophobia

This project has been centrally informed by two key approaches to understanding Islamophobia. Firstly, Sayyid's (2014) account argues that Islamophobia can be understood as more than simply an expression of hatred or fear, Islamophobia needs to be understood as an undermining of the ability of Muslims as Muslims, to project themselves into the future, and as a form of racism. By using such an approach this reading of Islamophobia's focus is on the performative functions of Islamophobia that cause the curtailment of Muslims' ability to articulate themselves as Muslims / citizens and as Muslim citizens. Sayyid's focus on the performance of Islamophobia covers six practices: (i) attacks on persons perceived to be Muslim; (ii) attacks on properties considered to be Muslim in nature; (iii) acts of intimidation e.g. marches through Muslim areas, anti-Muslim advertising campaigns etc.; (iv) acts in an institutional setting be they forms of harassment, discrimination or another; (v) incidents in which there is a sustained and systematic elaboration of comments in the public domain that disparage Muslims and/or Islam e.g. publishing the Qur'an with Muhammad listed as the author or recycling medieval Christian polemics as the "truth" about Islam or reading specific crimes as being motivated by Islam or Muslim culture. These five clusters tend to be carried out by individuals or organizations (private or public). The state may facilitate them through benign neglect or refusal to provide adequate safeguards, or to challenge such actions, but it is not actively or openly involved in the perpetuation of these incidents. However, Sayyid's also describes practices is actively tied to enactment by the State. This can include surveillance, differential treatment by the police, Islamophobia in the criminal justice system, and any act or policy that can be seen as targeting in sole or large part that part of the population which is identified as Muslim (Merali 2017a). Secondly, the project also operationalises the Domination Hate Model of Intercultural Relations (IHRC 2016) which conceptualises Islamophobia as the product of a series of interconnected and interlocking environments and most effectively captures the multi-dimensional complexity of these narratives.

The project identified the ten dominant Islamophobic narratives across the eight national contexts, based on research carried out between January and June 2017 which comprised fieldwork with 272 politicians and policy-makers, NGOs and activists, and media, arts and academic professionals and textual data from political, policy, media and NGO discourse, and digital data from social media platforms (Mescoli 2017a).

### Box 1. The ten dominant Islamophobic narratives

**These narratives were found to fix Muslims collectively as in descending order of prevalence, a threat to security, unassimilable, a demographic threat, an Islamisation threat, a threat to local, national and European identity, responsible for excessive women's oppression, essentially different and violent, incomplete citizens and a risk to the majority, and essentially homophobic. A worsening environment of Islamophobia was identified with respect to media content, political discourse and experiences of discrimination indicating the new and increasingly acceptable hostility against Muslims in many spheres of everyday life.**

Their impact has been described mainly at the political and media levels, because the focus of the analysis within the framework of this project is discourse, attested as particularly significant within these two domains. However, these narratives also strongly affect everyday life of Muslims in the considered states, and this has been shown through some concrete examples, ranging from proven accounts of discrimination in the work domain, within the schooling system and in the housing market (leading to progressive ghettoization and alleged auto-segregation in the three domains), to repeated attacks to mosques, micro aggressions, insults, threats, acts of intimidation and direct verbal or physical violence in public space,

targeting Muslim women in particular.

## **Box 2. Islamophobia in Eastern Europe, an overview of types identified in the Czech Republic and Hungary**

### **Czech Republic** (Čada and Frantova 2017)

We have identified 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 (see Said 1978)<sup>1</sup>. 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. Islamophobic 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.

(D) 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 orientalisng narratives stressing anachronism of Islam and the narratives portraying Muslims’ inability to integrate.

### **Hungary** (Vidra 2017)

We conducted a frame analysis of political and media narratives. The study had the aim of revealing the main narratives on Islamophobia in Hungary. In the analysis, we distinguished two major frames, both concerned with security from different aspects: (1) security/securitization (physical security) linked to illegal migration, economic migration, terrorism, and (2) symbolic security linked to securing/defending/protecting national, European, and Christian identity. The main components of the physical security frame (1) make fewer and less direct references to Islam. In certain political communications (such as the government anti-immigrant campaigns) there is no direct mention of Islam or Muslims neither is there in most political speeches. In the media, however, the link between Islamic terrorism and physical security is made explicit. It could be argued that the (partially) coded political language is supported by a non-coded media narrative making sure that the decoding of the message will not be too complicated for the target audience, the population at large. The symbolic security frame (2) has explicit anti-Muslim components both in the media and

<sup>1</sup> Said, E. W. 1978. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin.

the political narratives. The main arguments concern the essentialization of Islam: radically different, refusing our cultural norms, aggressive, and incapable of integration. Given these cultural interpretations of Islam, migration is seen as Islamisation of Europe which constitutes a threat to European civilization and Christianity and eventually to our identity.

*Methodological note- Ranking Dominant Narratives of Islamophobia*

The comparison between the eight lists of the most relevant narratives of Muslim hatred identified in each considered state and ranked in qualitative terms by estimating and considering their relative strength, recurrence and impact, has been methodologically organised as follows. First, each narrative has been attributed a score on the basis of its position in the list. Then, through cross-checking the eight lists, narratives based on the same contents have been brought together permitting to define for each theme (that we may call “umbrella narrative”) an overall score. We will see that some narratives which were separated in country reports can here be part of one thematic narrative. On the basis of this analysis, the considered umbrella narratives have been ordered in descending rank and presented in the table below.

**Table 1. Ten Dominant Narratives of Islamophobia and examples**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Umbrella Narrative</b>	<b>Case study examples</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Threat to security</b>	Radicalisation of Muslims (BE) Muslims as problems: anti-radicalisation and anti-terrorism policies (BE) Muslims use public funding to promote Islamic fundamentalism (PT) Muslims will provide the manpower for and organise terrorist attacks in Greece (GR) Muslims and extremism (UK) Muslims as a security threat (UK) Muslims as terrorists (CR) Muslims and terrorism (HU) Muslims as a security threat (FR) Link between Islam and Islamic fundamentalism (FR) Muslims as terrorist sympathisers (FR) Muslim suburban youths resorting to radical forms of Islamism or to violence (FR) Islamic terrorism (DE)
<b>2</b>	<b>Unassimilable</b>	Non-integrated character or unwilling to integrate (DE) Muslims are unassimilable (PT) Muslims as an unassimilable community, the social and cultural cohesion in Greece (GR) Muslims as an unassimilable community, the social and cultural cohesion of Europe (GR), Disloyalty and a threat to internal democracy (UK) Muslims as the vanguards of multiculturalism (UK) Failed multiculturalism narrative (CR) Muslims unwilling or unable to integrate into French society (FR) Muslim suburban youths as social and economic outcasts (FR)
<b>3</b>	<b>Demographic threat and proselytization</b> (denouncing the alleged increase of the number of Muslim individuals in European countries and the supposed consequent spread of Islamic religion at	Invasion of Muslims and Islamisation of the country (DE) Brussels is turning into a Muslim city (BE) Islam is a proselyte religion, which aims to ‘invade our territory’ and take over ‘our way of life’ (PT) Muslims serve as the blind instruments of Turkish expansionist views on Greece by settling on the Aegean Islands (GR) Muslims will deliberately try to de-Christianise Greece and turn it into an Islamic country (GR) Immigration and the demographic threat (UK) The narrative of organised invasion (CR) Conspiracy theory: Migration leading to Islamization of

	the expense of the state, different moral identity)	Europe (HU) Migration leading to Islamisation of Europe (HU)
4	<b>Theocracy</b> (the supposed prevalence of the exclusive reference to religious norms and values made by Muslims when dealing with societal matters)	Islamic parallel societies (DE) Islam does not rely on democracy and the rule of law, but on the rule of God and is prone to autocracy (PT) Muslims incompatibility rests on the rejection of the secular state (GR) Islamic practices need to be secularised to be accepted in Western societies (BE) Muslim women's dress is incompatible with Western values and local rules (BE) Muslim in need of integration (assimilation) (UK) The anachronistic religion narrative (CR) Religious symbols as an underhanded attempt on secularism (FR)
5	<b>Threat to identity</b>	Islam threatens local traditions (BE) Muslim presence will inevitably (and not as a part of a pre-constructed plan) lead to the loss or corruption of Greek national identity (GR) Muslims serve as the instruments of leftist attacks to Greek cultural and national foundations (GR) Islamisation as destruction of our culture (HU) Islam is a threat to European Christian civilisation (HU) Islam is a threat to national and Christian identity (HU) Islam as a threat to French national identity (FR)
6	<b>Gender inequality</b> (discourses aimed at essentialising and demonising gender differences as well as the characteristics attributed to Muslim women and men.)	Gender inequality in Muslim communities (DE) Islamic religion legitimates extreme forms of gendered oppression (BE) Islam and Muslims are sexist, disproportionately to that observed in the West (PT) Muslim misogyny and perversion and the oppressed Muslim woman (UK) Muslims as segregationists (UK) The gendered oppression narrative (CR) Deviant sexuality (DE) The 'sexual predators' narrative (CR) Women as oppressed victims (FR)
7	<b>Ontological diversity</b> (Muslims and Islam as essentially and irremediably different from non-Muslim population and the associated moral landscape)	Ontological distinct from non-Muslim nationals / population (DE) Islam does not allow freedom of speech (PT) Islam does not allow modern science with it, as Western civilisation does (hence, Muslims are not led by rational decision-making) (PT) Muslims will help diffuse a culture of disrespect towards human rights (GR) Islam as a contrary to 'Britishness' / 'Fundamental British Values' (UK) Muslims as subhuman and unable to socialise to 'human' norms (UK) The barbarian narrative (Muslims as a natural hazard, as parasites) (CR) Muslims as Gypsies (CR) Islam as an alien religion/culture for Hungarians (HU)
8	<b>Innate violence</b>	Innate sense of violence (DE) Islam advocates violence, Muslims are prone to violence (PT)

		Islam as an expansive violent religion (CR)
<b>9</b>	<b>Incomplete citizenship</b>	Mosques do not have their place in the local context (BE) Muslims should not come to and become visible in Hungary (HU) Muslims illegitimate and not fully French (FR) Islamic belonging is a prior identity marker (BE)
<b>10.</b>	<b>Homophobia</b>	Muslim homophobia (DE) Islam equates with bigotry and thus intolerant towards homosexuals (PT)

(Source: Mescoli 2017a)

### 3. Dominant Counter-Narratives to Islamophobia

Counter-narratives are oppositional to dominant narratives, and they have a long tradition within critical race theory (Picower and Kohli 2017, Soloranzo and Yosso 2002).

They can be used to expose, critically analyse and reject dominant narratives and they can be used to give voice to marginalised and silenced groups. But, they do not always need to be a direct response to dominant narratives, as responding and reacting to a dominant account or set of opinions allows that account to frame and contain the discourse. Listening to and sharing views and experiences from, in this case Muslim groups, can be the beginning of creating a new narrative.

The total data set for this Workstream comprises primarily of fieldwork carried out with 278 respondents between April and November 2017 to ascertain the nature and form of counter-narratives to Islamophobia and their content, deployment and significance. These respondents included politicians and policy-makers, lawyers, NGOs and activists, and media, arts and academic professionals from a wide-range of organisational and geographical locations across the chosen EU member states. Respondents were chosen to ensure coverage of the diversity of practices and different perspectives and experiences of work in this field. In addition, in order to document counter-narratives textual data was collated from political, policy, media and NGO discourse, and digital data from social media platforms. Details of national fieldwork and textual data collection are given in the respective reports for each country context (see <https://cik.leeds.ac.uk/publications>). The Hungarian report, for example, used frame analysis of 92 items from news portals and political party publications in addition to respondent interviews. This multi-method approach to data collection was then followed by discourse analysis and triangulation of data sets to produce a categorical specification and ranking of these narratives based on evaluation of strength, significance and impact. Distilling the key messages, this report then examines the extent to which these narratives do or do not effectively engage with the key narratives of Islamophobia previously identified. This report presents, in table 2 below, a new conceptualisation of counter-narratives which categorises and synthesises the case study data, reflecting, through a quantitative and qualitative assessment, the most significant narratives which have been identified and which are discussed in detail in the next section. This synthesis derives from a multi-method analysis of the frequency, international spread, quantitative ranking and qualitative significance of counter-narratives founded on project data generated in this workstream. The fieldwork on which this report is based provides a wealth of rich critical analysis, qualitative comment and exemplars, which show the strength, creativity and innovation evident across Europe in the operation of counter-narratives to Islamophobia

**Table 2. Ten Dominant Counter-Narratives to Islamophobia**

<b>1</b>	<b>Challenging and contextualising constructions of Muslim ‘threat’</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Building inclusive nations: challenging exclusive and discriminatory national projects</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Cultural compatibility and conviviality: challenging the narrative separation of cultural and ethnic groups</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Elaborating plurality: challenging narratives of Muslim singularity</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Challenging narratives of sexism</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Building inclusive futures</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Deracialising the state: challenging institutional narratives</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Emphasising humanity and Muslim normalisation: challenging narratives of division</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Creating Muslim space(s)</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Challenging distorted representation: verity and voice</b>

(Source: Law, Easat-Daas and Sayyid 2018)



In Eastern Europe, despite the relatively recent upsurge in Islamophobia similar patterns of counter-narratives were in evidence, emphasising for example, the challenge to notions of the Muslim 'threat, challenges to exclusionary national projects and cultural compatibility and conviviality. All the case studies effectively identified the value of counter-narratives. For example, in Greece, Chatzipanagiotou and Zarikos (2017, p. 22) highlighted their value because they challenge myths and misinformation, they promote critical reflection on social phenomena, they enrich open dialogue about intersecting multiple identities and they mobilise a community of care.

Prior to engagement with the content of counter-narratives to Islamophobia, a series of key messages were identified which are of fundamental importance in thinking through the nature of the challenges that we face in addressing Islamophobia across Europe. The depth, dynamics and wide impact of Islamophobia undermine 'the very egalitarian claims that form the basis of democratic identity and call into question the self-perception of the state as liberal' (Merali 2017, p.4). The UK report identified four overarching meta-narratives that emerged as necessary to elaborate in challenging of narratives of anti-Islamophobia, these include the normalisation of Islamophobia, the need for spaces where Muslims can reclaim control of their narrative(s), countering the obsession of law and policy with markers of 'Muslimness' and accountability for state and institutional racism (Merali 2017, p.5). A cautionary note was sounded in the operation of current counter-narratives, here the dangers of 'reproducing the cycle of demonisation by trying to respond to Islamophobic tropes by 'proving' otherwise' were emphasised, for example in responding actively to demands for condemnation of acts of political violence.

The major issue overall was identified as the failure of the state to act, hence counter-narratives were primarily located in civil society, and often identified as being too small-scale. For example, the lack of a 'clear and univocal state positioning' was highlighted in Belgium (Mescoli 2017b, p.51). Many counter-narratives were 'conventional' in the sense of seeking to correct biased, inaccurate representation of Muslims to demystify perceptions and knowledge about Islam and Muslims (Maeso 2017, p.1). The Portuguese report in noting this also identified that there were more powerful political strategies at work in counter-narratives that sought to challenge Islamophobia as a 'relationship of domination' (Sayyid 2014, p.22), for example in education and history teaching, reconstructing the Portuguese nation-state and *Reconquista* narratives that construct Muslims as the 'historical enemy'. Significant, mainstream and wide-ranging state action to promote counter-narratives, pursue deracialisation and decolonial strategies and build an inclusive future was therefore unquestionably necessary as the actor generating counter-narratives is key in determining their effectiveness, as the Greek report confirmed (Chatzipanagiotou and Zarikos 2017, p. 20).

This challenge was starkly shown in the Hungarian case where government narratives are uniformly Islamophobic and anti-immigrant, and all counter-narrative activity is being enacted elsewhere; in opposition political parties, the media and by human rights NGOs and other civil society organisations and groups. The increasingly deep embedding of Islamophobia in populist rhetoric was highlighted in the Czech case (Čada and Frantová 2017, p.5) resonating with Euroscepticism, anti-elitist discourses and discourses on the migration crisis, and operationalising counter-narratives was often a defensive political project in this deteriorating social climate. The slippery interconnected nature of debates over the Muslim presence and other groups, for example Jews and Catholics, and other issues such as migration and national belonging together with the emerging, often state-driven, regime of truth problematising these communities provided immense barriers to successful counter narrative implementation. The French report (Bila 2017, p.23) identified that the counter-narratives that had most impact were those that 'fostered dialogue, appealed to emotions and humanised the abstract principle of equality', together with a balance between focusing on empowering Muslim communities and influencing the general public. In Belgium, the tension between



messages about normalising the Muslim presence and those concerned with making claims for rights and visibility was noted but combinations of these messages were seen as effective and operable (Mescoli 2017b, p.52).

*Pre-condition to counter-narratives: calling out Islamophobia: challenging narratives of denial*

A vital first step identified here, in the face of the normalisation of Islamophobia across Europe, is the task of securing a position that makes this and all forms of racism unacceptable (Merali 2017).

This has also been a first key objective for this project in documenting the contemporary trends, evidence and debates across our eight EU member state contexts and providing an account of the unjustifiable forms it takes and how it is to be understood, which is not rehearsed in this report. Making Islamophobia visible was seen as a necessary pre-condition to 'telling a different story and offering a different view of Muslim life', and the report on Germany explored this in particular detail (Aguilar 2017). The work required 'to make Islamophobia visible' was identified in this case as involving three forms of discourse; academic work to produce knowledge regarding the nature and extent of Islamophobia, Muslim activists utilising social media as a channel to raise awareness regarding the realities of living under Islamophobia and lastly, data collection including new German federal systems of hate crime recording and NGO activity collecting and publishing statistics about the extent of Islamophobic incidents in the country. The German report highlights the significance of academic research conducted by Yasemin Shooman and Iman Attia on anti-Muslim racism on blogs and websites (e.g. Attia and Shooman 2010, Shooman 2014), and also Anna Esther Younes' work, in the wider European Islamophobia Report (2016), bringing the realities of Islamophobia into focus. This type of work is essential in providing a set of conceptual tools and evidences about the operation and deployment of Islamophobia. Many other examples are provided across other national contexts and the work of, the non-academic partner on this project, the Islamic Human Rights Commission is highly commended see for example Ameli and Merali 2015.

Social media, in particular Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and Instagram, have increasingly become highly useful instruments to make the realities and experiences of Islamophobia visible, as well as operating to promote dominant Islamophobic narratives as discussed in previous country reports. The Twitter hash tag campaign, *#Campusrassismus*, (campus racism) was one such example. Emine Aslan, a scholar and activist explained its purpose as 'using your own voice to create your own narrative'. This, when the campaign quickly became a national trending topic which was picked up in national media, such as the weekly nationwide *Die Zeit* (Gertsbauer 2015). Aslan attributes the success of the campaign to the networking and alliances behind it, with organisations such as Initiative Black People in Germany (*Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland Bund e.V.*), Copwatch Frankfurt, and SchauHin. SchauHin started in 2013 as a collective of Black and People of Colour, Muslims and Jews, to share their experiences of everyday racism. As a member of the collective explained: "by showing thousands of experiences of daily racism you show that there is a structural problem, you can't talk about this on an individual level unless you highlight that there is structural racism behind this that enables it. So that's exactly what happened by having thousands of people tweeting about this, sharing their experiences, no one could say that thousands of people are hypersensitive, but it was obvious it was just screaming into your face". Further to this, Emine Aslan commented that "SchauHin was a good tool for non-Muslim communities to get in touch with the realities of Muslims, as well as non-black Muslims to get in touch with lived experiences of black people in Germany" In addition SchauHin organised storytelling salons about racism and belonging in different cities These examples, in building networks of solidarity and making racism visible have contributed to the objective of making linkages

between Islamophobia and other forms of racism and making these discourses collectively unacceptable.

In relation to data, the category of 'hostility towards Islam' has only very recently, since 2017, been included in the system of hate crime recording in Germany. In the absence of state action, Inssan and its Network against discrimination and Islamophobia have been, since 2002 and 2010 respectively, collecting this data and publicising it. Public use of this data is vitally important due to constant allegations of denial that this form of racism does not exist or that it is highly exaggerated. Building a core political, media and populist value that Islamophobia is to be exposed, denigrated, dismantled and de-normalised is essential.

### *Counter-narrative 1. Challenging and contextualising constructions of Muslim 'threat'.*

This issue is the most significant challenge facing those wishing to de-normalise Islamophobia, as Merali argues 'securitisation haunts every discourse regarding Muslims (2017, p.25), and this was uniformly confirmed by respondents across all the case study contexts.

As regards the response of Muslim communities to terrorist attacks and the reactive narrative of Muslim condemnation, the French report clearly identified the ambiguities at work here (Bila 2017, p.10-11). On the one hand, many faith-based organisations and imams<sup>2</sup> would systematically condemn all terrorist attacks and on many occasions appeal to Muslims to "distance themselves from the terrorist ideology" (Le Monde 2015, in Bila 2017, p.11) by taking part in protest marches and gatherings, online petitions and campaigns. On the other hand, organisations like the *Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en France* (CCIF) refused to be coerced into denouncing acts of terrorism for which they did not feel any responsibility: "Muslims must not play the Islamophobic game which involves identifying them as culprits and ideal suspects, pushing them constantly to justify themselves for actions of third parties" (CCIF 2014). Calling for unity and promotion of narratives of solidarity and social cohesion, for example after the Paris attacks, was also strongly made by French respondents.

Rejecting the sweeping associations of Islam and Muslims with violence and terrorism were consistently demonstrated and elaborated by many respondents, for example in Greece (Chatzipanagiotou and Zarikos 2017). Whereas in Hungary, the use of such an 'anti-terrorism frame', differentiating between radical and non-radical Islam and emphasising that the majority of Muslims are not terrorists and that many of them are victims of that terrorism, was strongly in evidence amongst opposition political parties, and in the media but not amongst respondents from Muslim and community organisations who emphasised narratives of peaceful cohabitation of cultures and religions; a 'tolerance frame' (Vidra 2017, p.21).

The counter-narrative that 'Muslims are not dangerous for local society' was made in many different ways across our case study contexts. For example, through 'shedding light on Islamic belonging and on Muslims' different ways of living their faith, ways that change over one's lifetime' (Mescoli 2017b, p.34). Many of the other forms of counter-narratives discussed below are intimately interconnected with responding to this dominant narrative of Muslim dangerousness. Here there is a key tension between counter-narratives that emphasise moral and ethical values, such as humanity, plurality and cultural compatibility, and those which emphasise state action and fundamental changes to law and policy. The former were more prevalent across our case study contexts, but they can be both be clearly linked where recognition of the 'Muslim *ummah's*<sup>3</sup> humanity' can lead to challenging the dehumanising institutional discursive construction of Muslims as dangerousness, barbarian and violent (Merali 2017, p.9).

Counter-narratives were also seen as necessarily involving a challenge to the ways in which counter-terrorism measures criminalise Muslims and thereby participate in the construction of a 'society of suspicion', the ways in which the use of exceptional policing powers, contributed to erosion of civil liberties of all citizens and the ways in which heavy-handed policing of Muslim populations plays into the hands of those who promote the victim-agenda to drive Muslims further towards extremism and terrorism (Bila 2017). In the UK, oppositional narratives calling for at the very least a review of the Prevent policy and its introduction into law since early 2016, to a call for the repealing of all anti-terrorism laws, driven by the persistence of civil society actors and NGOs, academics, dissenting politicians and lawyers and students' groups e.g. Students Not Suspects campaign (NUS, 2015 onwards), the wider operation of anti-racist campaigns by the National Union of Students Black Students Campaign (NUS 2017), which

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<sup>2</sup> Muslim faith leaders

<sup>3</sup> *Ummah* stems from the Prophetic teachings and denotes a unified Muslim body.

includes shared work on Prevent related matters (see for example the Preventing Prevent Handbook, NUS Black Students, 2017) particularly during the academic years 2015 – 2017, the operation of organisations like PreventWatch, IHRC, CAMPACC, SACC, Cage and MEND (Merali 2017 p.26). A key objective here, as Max Hill QC put it, is breaking the cycle of literal, legal and conceptual expulsion of Muslims from the nation.

### **Box 3. Selected examples from Key National Messages**

#### **France** (Bila 2017)

Discursive association of Islam and terrorism fuels the idea that Muslims challenge domestic security and represent a potential terrorism threat. The logic, which considers that French Muslims are answerable for the acts of other Muslims, including those abroad, makes the whole Muslim population guilty by association. Compelling Muslims to publicly condemn terrorism and distance themselves from extremist ideology after each new terrorist attack even reinforces this thinking. In the current context when the populations who feel targeted by the counter-terrorist measures need to be reassured it is advisable to deploy strong and inclusive political narratives and avoid inflammatory language which pits communities against each other. Political discourses should therefore clearly distinguish between Islam and Islamism and avoid linking domestic Islam-related issues with international politics.

#### **Belgium** (Mescoli 2017b)

A counter-discourse on Muslims as not dangerous for the local society – even when they are deep believers – emerges to counteract the discourse on the radicalisation of Muslims. It sheds light on Muslims' ways of living their faith that are contextually situated *in* Belgium and shape an Islam *of* Belgium. The participation of Muslims in de-radicalisation (or the prevention of the radicalisation) of Muslim youth also consists of contributing to social inclusion in more general terms against the stigmatisation of Muslim youth and exclusion from the local society, that is seen as a lever of violent action. Against a discourse on Islam and Muslims as problems for Western societies, Muslims also position themselves as partners for solutions, as “positive opportunities” to fight against terrorism.

#### **Greece** (Chatzipanagiotou and Zarikos 2017)

The key message to be addressed to diverse audiences in Greece is to resist and question sweeping associations of Islam with violence and terrorism, scrutinising and challenging their justificatory basis, and to understand how/that terrorism is socially constructed, rather than religiously ordained. Central to this Islamophobic narrative, both domestically and internationally, is the association of Muslims with terrorism in light of the rise of ISIS extremism. In the Greek context, the refugee crisis became a central element of this narrative and led to the depiction of Muslim refugees as potential terrorists. Far from being perceived as an exception, this portrayal constitutes the norm. Fact-based and data-driven approaches, for instance that, since 2001, jihad has attracted only one in 100.000 Muslims, and that, consequently, “over a billion Muslims around the world reject hate speech” (Demertzis, N., 2016), are key to demonstrating that the great majority of Muslims reject extremism and live by moderate versions of Islam. Muslim voices preaching that Islam is a religion of peace (Fotopoulos, N., 2015) are important sources of counter-narratives and play a significant role in the effective communication of this key message to national audiences in Greece.

#### **UK** (Merali 2017)

Securitisation haunts every discourse regarding Muslims. Denied acceptance and thus the rights and assumed dignity of citizenship, Muslims are not considered to be British (Merali, 2017a). This perverse logic followed through sees them projected as living or existing not in Britain but in ‘Islam’ or ‘Islamism whatever that may be’ (François, 2015) in a public discourse that allows them to be excluded from equal citizenship in the wider public psyche. Opposition to the tropes of the narratives that undergird the securitisation of Muslims, and the exceptional praxis of law and state against them has been framed largely by civil society calling for at the

very least a review of the Prevent policy and its introduction into law since early 2016, to an all-out call for the repealing of ALL anti-terrorism laws. Qureshi (2017) believes one effective counter narrative to the securitisation discourse can be found in the approach taken by Marc Sageman who uses Bayesian probability analysis to make an assessment about what the actual threat is that is posed to non-Muslims by Muslims in the Western world. "According to him, it ultimately boils down to one Muslim per million per year. That is the threat that is posed to the Western World...That's what we should be saying. All of this exceptional policy, this securitisation, exists despite the fact that 999,999 Muslims out of one million pose no threat at all to the West," says Qureshi. The call for a review of Prevent being taken up in some political circles is an achievement, however what is more significant is that the new independent reviewer of the anti-terrorism laws, Max Hill QC, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, has spoken of the ideal scenario where there would be no anti-terrorism laws, and crimes of political violence would be prosecuted using the existing gamut of criminal law, confirming that in this instance a counter-narrative to (Islamophobic) securitisation that was much maligned when expressed by Muslims and civil society alliances has found mainstream acceptance.

**Hungary** (Vidra 2017)

The *anti-terrorism frame*'s most important issue is to differentiate between radical and non-radical Islam and emphasise that the majority of Muslims are not terrorists but many of them are rather victims of that terrorism. It equally points out that it is the second or third generation socially excluded Muslim youth who easily fall prey of radicalised groups while the stigmatising anti-Islamist rhetoric and the conflation of radical and non-radical Muslims may contribute to their radicalisation. The anti-terrorism frame's government critique concerns the state's incapacity of implementing substantive anti-terrorism measures and its controversial deed of accusing asylum seekers of terrorist acts. The anti-terrorism frame is the most dominant frame in the rhetoric of the opposition political parties, which is constructed very much the same way as the media frame, containing a few additional components such as the assertion that hate campaigns that conflate (Muslim) migrants with terrorists is a security risk for the country. Hungary should instead work together for a real solution with its European allies. In the interviews, the anti-terrorism frame was mentioned in relation to how Muslim individuals are associated with terrorism in their everyday interpersonal interactions as a result of the hate campaigns and the hostile environment.

## *Counter-narrative 2: Building inclusive nations: challenging exclusive and discriminatory national projects*

This counter-narrative includes arguments with three specific threads covering broader reconstruction of narratives of the nation, exposing and challenging forms of racial and religious discrimination in substantive contexts and actions to improve the safety and security of Muslim communities.

Firstly, it was identified that a cultural shift in understanding who is part of the nation, and how national histories have been intimately intertwined with Muslims and Islamic cultures over centuries was seen as vital in challenging the political construction of exclusive national projects. For example, in Portugal challenging the narratives about Portuguese national identity, the centrality of the *Reconquista* narrative that constructs a boundary between barbarism (Islam, 'Muslimness') and civilisation (Christianity) through education and history teaching was noted. Here, challenging the historical account of the relationship between Portuguese colonialism, the process of nation-making and Islam, that is, the ideology of 'benign colonialism' and 'integration'. Making broader connections between colonialism and Islamophobia was necessary as countering Islamophobia could be usefully tied to anti-colonial struggle and the fight against contemporary imperialistic wars. Further, narratives that involved acknowledging Islamophobia as a form of violence that is relational to both recent and colonial history and current events in various Westernised settings was highlighted. Lastly, challenging claims about the Islamisation of Europe was identified and this point is dealt with in more detail below in the context of the counter-narrative arguing for cultural compatibility and the operation of conviviality.

Secondly, there were many examples of ways in which exclusionary and discriminatory policies and practices were being documented and refuted. For example, documenting cases and evidence, for example the work of European Parliament Socialist and Democrats Working Group on Extremism, Populism, Nationalism and Xenophobia, and 'mapping Islamophobia', for example the *Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique* CCIB, Belgium and making the realities of Islamophobia visible using academic research, social media and data collection as noted above. Uncovering institutionalised forms of Islamophobia and its relation to institutional racism (such as Muslims' everyday interactions with social servants, practitioners or social assistants, which show a pattern of interpreting situations and Muslim families that are dehumanising), and the complicity and responsibility of political parties, from the right and the left in its silencing was identified as a general strategy. More specific responses included opposing the excesses of counter-terrorism legislation as counter-terrorism measures adopted by the state criminalise Muslims and thereby participate in the construction of a 'society of suspicion', challenging the government's use of exceptional policing powers on the pretext of the fight against terrorism prevention which contributed to the erosion of civil liberties for all citizens. Desecuritisation of the refugee crisis was called for in the Hungarian and Czech cases. The use of law and strategic litigation was discussed in detail e.g. in the UK report and also in France (example of CCIF) as legal action strengthens Muslim voices in the face of Islamophobia fed by political populism, hate speech and media hype, and also mediatisation of relevant court cases was seen as helpful overall, dependant on dominant media frames of meaning.

Thirdly, as regards improving the safety and security of Muslim communities' narratives included arguing for mobilisation of support for Muslim communities e.g. *Lallab* activities and *Stop au cyberharcèlement Islamophobe* online site, tackling the immediate threat to Muslim women in street and other public spaces and challenging the excessive investigation and differential treatment of Muslim charities. (See section 4 for a more detailed discussion of legal interventions).



#### **Box 4. Acknowledging structural issues and racism, a UK example (Merali 2017)**

Islamophobia needs to be seen as part of the wider crisis of institutional racism in British society. Whilst the UK has been celebrated (or demonised) for its equalities culture in the past, that culture has found itself under attack as a result of unbridled Islamophobic narratives normalising racism in society once more. As the McPherson inquiry report (1999) phrased 'institutional racism' moves beyond the accumulation of the prejudices of individuals, the 'bad apples' seeing racism as structural, 'institutional racism'. This manifests in a variety of ways, but notably with regard to taking action for redress against injustice or simply accessing the structures and rules of the state, the following issues are hugely restricted for Muslims:

- (i) Accessing justice
- (ii) Immigration rules
- (iii) Accumulation of debt around (i) and (ii)
- (iv) The roll out of functions of the state to the private sector
- (v) How hate crimes are recorded, investigated and prosecuted.

Economic and other barriers to the justice and legal system such as the withdrawal of legal aid need to be removed. Police officers must receive better training in how to deal with race and/or Islamophobically motivated offences. There needs to be serious revision of the epistemologies of anti-racism and equalities within institutions to prevent Islamophobic discourse from becoming mainstream and accepted practice, such as in the requirements imposed by the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 for public sector employees to refer anyone they suspect of extremism to the police. The setting up of more community initiatives and the community and independent funding of civil society organisations providing advocacy services and legal support for individuals needing support is an increasingly needed support strategy.

### *Counter-narrative 3: Cultural compatibility and conviviality: challenging the narrative separation of cultural and ethnic groups*

Laying out arguments which challenge the essentialised separation of Muslim groups and narratives of the threatening Islamisation of Europe involve assertions of the cultural compatibility of Islam with European democracy and citizenship and acknowledgment of the contribution of Islam to European civilization e.g. *Expo-Islam* (Belgium), and demonstrable arguments about the mixed nature of Muslim and non-Muslim everyday lives. Our case studies identified many ways in which this counter-narrative could be elaborated through, for example, emphasising conviviality and the importance and depth of Muslim and non-Muslim relaxed friendships, pleasantries and interactions e.g. *Salaam-Shalom* (Germany) and in general emphasising the heterogeneity of Muslim communities, and promoting visibility and recognition of their everyday lives as showing conviviality and tolerance. Empirical sources could be used, including data on education and labour market activity to challenge construction of Muslims as ‘Gypsies’ (Czech Republic, Hungary) and assertions that they are irrefutably culturally distinct and unadaptable. In Germany the work of *Religionsmonitor* was noted which challenges construction of Islam as an obstacle to inclusion in German society and in Greece promotion of the awareness of positive interactions in housing and education and peaceful flourishing of multi-culture were detailed.

#### **Box 5. Conviviality, a German example** (Aguilar 2017)

Conviviality as a counter narrative to Islamophobia has been used as a direct challenge to some of the most dominant Islamophobic narratives such as the idea of the parallel society or the allegation of an inherently anti-Semitic character in Muslims. The initiative *Salaam-Shalom* was founded in 2013 by a group of Jews and Muslims in the district of Neukölln, one of those neighborhoods constructed as a parallel society in Berlin, as a counter reaction to the accusation of “Muslim anti-Semitism”, one of his founders, Armin Langer, described to me the motivations behind the initiative,

“In the summer of 2013, there was a very vivid public discussion in the German public media whether Jews should avoid Neukölln. This particular neighborhood in Berlin, Neukölln, is often described in right-wing media outlets as a Muslim neighbourhood, as a place where the integration has failed, etc. ... Amid these discussions the anti-Semitism’s officer of the Jewish community in Berlin say that Jews should avoid Neukölln because of the Muslims that live in here, and I am Jewish and many of friends who live here are also Jewish, some of them are even religious Jews, or observant Jews, which means you can recognized them on the street, many of them are Israelis, which means they speak Hebrew on the street, and even if we have experiences with anti-Semitism we don’t make more experiences here regarding anti-Semitism that in other neighborhoods of the town, and also if you checked out the statistics of the police , there are less anti-Semitic hate crimes committed here than in other neighbourhoods like Mitte or Charlottenburg”.

It is precisely against this background that the initiative emerged to counter these discourses, which are not restricted to Neukölln, and gained more prominence in the context of the so-called refugee crisis and the discussion in the media about “imported anti-Semitism” from the



refugees.<sup>4</sup> Langer considered that the success of the initiative and the echo has stirred resides in the simplicity of its message,<sup>5</sup>

“The idea of the group is pretty simple, we just present cases where Jews and Muslims do get along, because in this part of the Islamophobia narrative is that Muslims would all be anti-Semites, inherently anti-Semitic and homophobic, and we just present case where Muslims and Jews do get along, and we do that in the form of public events, podium discussions, or workshops, or flash mobs, we also do a lot of online campaigns on Facebook specially, but not only in Facebook.”

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<sup>4</sup> “In the summer of 2015, 800, 000 thousand refugees came to Germany, almost all of them from Muslims countries, and again, we had this whole discussion on anti-Semitism and imported anti-Semitism, etc. And then we invited journalist to our homes, the homes of Jews and refuges which were living together, I was one of the Jewish members who were living together back then with Muslim refugees, but we had another Jewish members who were like this, and then we just told our stories, how our everyday lives looks like as a Jew and Arab Muslim refugee living together, and for example I always told the media that my only problem with my flat mate, is that he keeps snoring, he snores pretty loud, and another member, she was a female member, that was an extra point, because we not only speak about anti-Semitism regarding Muslims, but also about sexism and homophobia, and she for example told all the media representatives that her biggest issue with two refugees, who she just welcomed in her flat was that they did not do the dishes, and that’s it, why they would had any conflicts just because one is Jew and the two others are Muslims or Arab, or Syrian, it does not make any sense. That’s how we tried to counter these narratives” (Interview with Armin Langer).

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Bax commenting on the initiative Salaam-Shalom and the positive reactions of the media towards it, told me, “to show normality, there was, and still is, this image in many heads that Jews and Muslims cannot live together, so an initiative that says no, we can be friends was news because it was against the stereotype, the stereotype was still there but of course it was a really important initiative because it was opposed to the popular narrative”

#### *Counter-narrative 4: Elaborating plurality: challenging narratives of Muslim singularity*

The power of arguments which emphasis Muslim plurality and heterogeneity were highly effective in challenging simplistic monolithic narratives of anti-Islamophobia. This involves diversifying the understanding of what, who and how is a Muslim, and the acceptance of plurality within a plural understanding of the nation, challenging the myth of Muslim communalism and homogeneity, and in particular monolithic accounts of Muslim women's lives. Here, counter-speech was elaborated through for example the use of personal journeys and career paths and other life course narratives. Unlocking the potential for and sharing experience of Muslim women as entrepreneurs e.g. *Akhawate Business* was one example given from the Belgian case. This overlaps with counter-narratives of Islamicate feminisms discussed in the next section.

#### **Box 6. Challenging the monolithic view of Muslims**

##### **Greece** (Chatzipanagiotou and Zarikos 2017)

Islamophobia is the belief that the very presence of Muslim communities constitutes a serious danger for the West. The underlying premise of every Islamophobic narrative is the monolithic depiction of Islam and Muslims, a depiction that comes in many shapes depending on the political/ideological beliefs of Islamophobes. In response to this underlying premise, every counter-narrative is aiming at fighting monolithic perceptions of Islam. In this light, the counter-narrative stressing intersectionality is of paramount importance albeit marginal in its presence in the public sphere. Kontomichali highlights that Greeks need to realise the intersecting multiple identities of Muslim refugees who arrived in Greece after 2015, primarily the religious, gender and refugee identity, stressing that some of the refugees were cast out because of their sexual orientation. (Kontomichali, *ibid*). The realisation and designation of multiple identities can address and remedy Islamophobia, while pointing at a pathway for integration in the wider civil society through targeted affiliation with its diverse branches. Representing SolidarityNow, Dr. Kontomichali is running the Safe Refugee program, a specialised assistance program of SolidarityNow for LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers. As part of this program, LGBTI refugees are linked with humanitarian organisations as well as local LGBTI communities.

##### **France** (Bila 2017)

Muslims are not a monolith but an ethnically and religiously diverse population and this should be reflected not only in political rhetoric but also at the policy level. The public discourse on Muslim women, nevertheless, seems to be dominated by the representations of the latter produced by external observers rather than themselves: "Today we keep talking about Muslim women rather than letting them speak for themselves. Media prefer giving the floor to the so-called experts – usually white men in their 60s – who speak for Muslim women and tell them how they should dress and live" (Zouak 2017). Appropriation of their narrative by their critics led to framing of Muslim women as a homogenised group and participated in the construction of a hegemonic discourse pointing to their systematic oppression: "We confiscate the words of these women and believe they cannot make their own choices. If a woman converted to Islam, we believe she did so because of a man. Muslim women are not a monolith. The reasons for wearing a headscarf are multiple and different for each one of them. There is no global project of Islamisation, there are only individuals" (De Féo 2017). The Muslim feminist initiative *Lallab* strives to reverse the trend by providing Muslim women with online and offline platforms that allow them to develop a positive self-image and become "active agents in their own lives" (Trabelsi 2017).

### Counter-narrative 5: Challenging narratives of sexism

Narratives of sexism amongst Muslim communities can be countered by articulating that Muslim women's lives show a plurality of positionings and experiences and by establishing that patriarchy and sexism is not specific to Islam. This involves breaking the chain of meaning between the projection of the self-image of the West/Europe as the land of women's rights and the construction of notions of a civilised West versus a barbarian Muslim Other. Contrary to the dominant representation of Muslim women as the paradigmatic example of gender oppression ('the *hijab* issue' is recurrent), instead of merely emphasising that there is an emergent "Arab feminism", it is crucial to show that there is a long history of Muslim women in political and cultural spheres. It is also important to promote knowledge of Muslim feminists and how issues regarding women, gender, and Islam are discussed and narrated by women themselves. Here asserting that Muslim women are in control of their own lives and that we should stop speaking on their behalf and rather amplify their voices so others can hear and understand them was key. Developing positive and diverse narratives on and by Muslim women in safe spaces was exemplified by the work of *Lallab* and *Vie feminine/CCIB* workshops.

#### Belgium Key National Message

Islamic feminism and Muslim women's diverse stories need acknowledgement to reverse the gender-based Islamophobic narratives targeting religious dress

The idea that there is not a debate about gender roles or about the leading role of women in religious, social and political affairs in Muslim communities can then be challenged. Demonstrating that feminism can be Islamic was highlighted, for example in feminist re-reading of sacred texts (Djelloui and Hamidi) and the work of the Centre for Women's Studies in Islam (CERFI, ULB). Articulating intersectional Islamicate feminism and including queer Muslims as partners in this process were also discussed as important parts of this counter-narrative. Also building linkages with the wider fight against sexism and patriarchy was seen as vital e.g. European Network Against Racism (ENAR) Forgotten Women project, Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA.be), Women's March in Frankfurt (January 2017).

### Box 7. Selected examples from National reports

#### France (Bila 2017)

While Muslim women, especially if they wear a headscarf, bear the brunt of Islamophobia<sup>6</sup>, protection of women's rights is often used as a justification of anti-Muslim narratives which frame Muslim women as oppressed by the so-called Islamic traditions. It should be reminded that patriarchy is structural to our society and is not specific to Islam. Policy-makers need to emphasize that all women should be able to enjoy their rights including those wearing the *hijab*. In order to break down negative stereotyping of Muslim women, measures should be adopted to facilitate their interaction with larger public. Actions by local governmental and non-governmental actors can be particularly useful in increasing dialogue and bridging the gap between Muslim women and communities on the local level. Focus groups and other forms of community dialogue can provide a means of identifying and mediating the challenges that these women sustain. It is also important to embed the struggle against Islamophobia into the fight against sexism and discrimination against women.

#### Germany (Aguilar 2017)

Counter-narratives to Islamophobia have appeared also in order to cope with and undo the effects of Islamophobia in Muslim subjectivities. Against this affects and effects, safe places as locations of empowerment are as well of paramount importance as mediums to counter

<sup>6</sup> ENAR. 2009. *Forgotten Women: the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women*. [Online]. [Accessed on 20 March 2018]. Available from: <http://www.enar-eu.org/>; CCIF. Collectif contre l'Islamophobie en France. 2016. *Rapport Annuel*. [Online]. [Accessed on 20 March 2018]. Available from: <http://www.islamophobie.net/>

another effect of Islamophobia, its acceptance as normality. Processes of empowerment have been key in trying not only to heal the pernicious effects of being constantly and unequivocally deemed a problem, but also as places harboring political and artistic engagement. In this context, different forms of political engagement have surfaced either focusing on intersectional forms of Islamic feminism, or as platforms fostering the engagement of young Muslims in politics. These counter-narratives not only directly challenge dominant Islamophobic tropes such as the constructed incompatibility of Islam and democracy or the alleged oppression of Muslim women, but also serve to strengthen Muslim subjectivities as political agents creating their own narratives whereby they define themselves as Muslims in their own terms.

### Counter-narrative 6: Building inclusive futures

The construction of new political horizons and political projects, and forward-looking, future-orientated narratives which go beyond the constraints of oppositional countering interventions was a strong narrative theme. This involves building a national, international and global vision of open, inclusive multiple modernities society based on trust and cooperation. In doing so the task of provide complex, valid explanations for key issues including radicalisation, terrorism, the migrant crisis, the refugee crisis, and other national crises which were powerful enough to be able to be practically adequate in shaping individual world views were seen as intrinsic to mobilise popular support for such a goal. Emphasising the location of Muslims as citizens with equal rights and associated narratives of solidarity and unity were articulated, for example *Nous sommes (aussi) la nation* – We are (also) the nation (CCIF, France) and the use of humour and story-telling techniques (CCIF, *Les indivisibles*). Promotion of active political engagement and mobilisation of Muslims was also associated with this goal e.g. the *Parti des indigènes de la République* (PIR), or the *Coordination contre le racisme et l'islamophobie* (CRI), and increasing Muslim participation in the academy, and other institutions, services and professions. Giving greater public visibility to Muslim contributions to society was also articulated. This was exemplified in the *Muslims in Europe- Untold Success Stories* project (European Parliament Socialists and Democrats Working Group on Extremism, Populism, Nationalism and Xenophobia), and also the professional expertise and contribution of Muslims was shown in the work of *ABPM* (Belgian association of Muslim professionals). Muslims were narrated as resources for socio-economic and cultural development e.g. in the *Couscous and Falafel Stories* (ABPM, Belgium). Inter-faith and outreach work, awareness raising events e.g. IHRC were noted and also the wider public engagement work of the *Hate Free Culture* campaign in the Czech Republic and also *Alfiradus* and *InBáze* promotion of Muslim and non-Muslim dialogue. Build alliances was another key strategy here in moving forward, here the work of the *Young Muslims as partners, for dialogue and cooperation against discrimination* (Germany) was highlighted and more generally moves to engage anti-racist movements and the anti-racist political agenda with the struggle against Islamophobia were seen as an integral part of the process of building inclusive futures.

#### Box 8. Selected examples from National reports

##### UK (Merali 2017)

The UK's culture of equalities was hitherto much celebrated in civil society within and outside the UK as one of the most progressive. However, the rise of an anti-multiculturalist narrative and the rise of a nativist discourse have increasingly rendered this history as inimical to British values and a threat to the internal democracy of the UK (Merali, 2017a). In this scenario, Muslims are posited as the vanguards of multiculturalism, who are simultaneously seen to be promoting a segregationist agenda (and therefore are in need of assimilation / integration) but also as entryists whose civic participation is construed as seeking to advance an 'Islamist', 'privileging', 'extremist', 'segregationist' cause. Many laws and policies still in existence need bolstering in the legal culture but also the popular imagination. This includes rules regarding employment discrimination (Ahmed, 2017), existing equalities cultures established in education (Choudhury, 2017), the setting up of parliamentary and ministerial oversight committees for controversial or contested regulations or pressing social issues. This refocus on equalities is a way to cut through demonising narratives such as the pushback from managers at universities, albeit a brief moment, against Prevent on the basis of the equalities impact of these policies.

Current equality laws presided over by Equality and Human Rights Commission suffers from systemic problems associated with "a simplification of equality laws and the joining up of the distinct equality strands (which) enables Britain to construct itself as a progressive, 'post-racial' liberal society, thus racism becomes invisible and is instead understood as a human rights issue. That is the bringing together of all groups and dispensing with single issue bodies

such as the CRE, sustains and strengthens the notion that ‘we are all the same’ and as such reinforces the discourse of colour blindness, universalism and unification which masks the persistence of structural inequalities that remain embedded within contemporary Britain. [Sayyid et al 2013]”. The implication, therefore, is that the equalities law enforcement needs to be overhauled to take account of the diversity and particularity of racialized/minoritized experiences.

#### **Belgium (Mescoli 2017)**

*Muslims are full Belgian citizens and autonomous subjects claiming the respect of major rights.* Messages diffused on the Internet and in other media that contain elements inciting discrimination, hatred or violence are predominant<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, narratives of hatred are spread using mockery in different forms. Often law does not prosecute authors in the name of the freedom of thought and of its implementation within media domain (press in particular). Well-known cases such as the publication of cartoons representing the prophet Mohammed in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten in 2005 and in the French journal Charlie Hebdo (several issues from 2006 to 2015) marks crucial points in this process giving legitimacy to further similar actions occurring also in Belgium. Mocking narratives targeting Muslims spread in particular in Flanders, where for example some cartoons published in 2015 at school re-entry showed racist depictions of Muslim children. These images contribute to feed a broader process of criminalisation of Muslim people: “Muslim youth are locked into a cycle of discrimination and criminalisation which is not only a major injustice in itself, but [...] heightens already widespread perceptions of insecurity among the population at large”<sup>8</sup>.

Hate speech and crimes against Muslims diffused through the internet also instigate attacks on mosques. Conflicts around mosques also arise as individual and collective protests against the construction of new mosques or against the use of these worship sites<sup>9</sup>. These events demonstrate that in spite of formal integration among the officially recognized worships in Belgium and in spite of “forms of ‘citizenisation’ of Muslims”, Islam itself is not yet “citizenise[d]”<sup>10</sup>. Still imperfect forms of citizenship afforded to Muslims – in particular if they have a migrant background – seem to legitimate the insurgence of narrative of hatred against them and their worship sites.

In response to the dehumanisation of Muslims through mocking narratives, a discourse on Muslims as autonomous subjects is developed. This discourse shapes as set of practices to empower Muslims and to give them the opportunity of having voice in the concerned debates. For example, during processes of mediation of controverted issues and experiences it is fundamental to gather “around the table” all the parties involved to try to explain each one’s intentions and emotions and to get awareness about them. Another way of giving voice to Muslims in one of the social spheres where this dehumanisation mostly occurs (media) consists of developing faith-based journalism or other forms of community media, also including some private initiatives set through social media to exchange experiences, initiatives and ideas to empower Muslim women, for instance. Countering the dehumanisation of Muslims also means targeting cyber-hate, reporting systematically any message of hatred encountered in the net.

<sup>7</sup> Centre Interfédéral pour l’égalité des chances (UNIA). 2015. *Le travail du centre exprimé en chiffres pour l’année 2014*. Brussels: UNIA, p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Fekete, L. 2004. Anti-Muslim racism and the European security state. *Race & Class*. **46**(1), pp. 3-29, p. 12. Also see Zemni, S. 2011.

<sup>9</sup> See Dassetto, F. and Ralet, O. 2010. Mosques and minarets: tension, assertion and negotiation. Some Belgian cases. In: Allievi, S. ed. *Mosques in Europe. Why a solution has become a problem*. London: Alliance Publishing Trust, pp. 53-88. UNIA also published a recent report directed by Corinne Torrekens on the establishment of the mosque of Fléron-Retinne (see [https://www.unia.be/files/Documenten/Publicaties\\_docs/FR - Intro-rapport-ccl\\_Compil%C3%A9\\_DEF\\_\(2\).pdf](https://www.unia.be/files/Documenten/Publicaties_docs/FR_-_Intro-rapport-ccl_Compil%C3%A9_DEF_(2).pdf), accessed 26 February 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Allievi, S. 2009. *Conflicts over Mosques in Europe: Policy Issues and Trends*. London: Alliance Publishing Trust, p. 89.

The discriminating consideration of Muslims' citizenship as incomplete is addressed through recalling the civic rights that lay behind Muslims' claims, thus prioritizing right over culture instead of the reverse. Such perspective, while starting from religiously based demands as pretexts for further reflection, makes it possible to free these demands from their religious character and to focus on them as general (and major) claims. The tool of the "greatest common denominator"<sup>11</sup>, inspired by the recommendations of the Council of Europe<sup>12</sup> and applied by Unia, among others<sup>13</sup>, goes in this precise direction. Generally speaking, valuing difference and developing a diversity strategy is fundamental.

Besides this route, the prioritization of rights over culture may also go through reinforcing the application of existing rights against discrimination and establishing standard legal procedures based on the recognition of individuals' rights and on the example of concrete cases. This also presupposes the enabling of local police to record Islamophobic acts.

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<sup>11</sup> Bouzar D. and Bouzar L. 2009. *Allah a-t-il sa place dans l'entreprise ?* Paris: Albin Michel; Bouzar D. and Bouzar L. 2010. *La République ou la burqa, les services publics face à l'islam manipulé.* Paris: Albin Michel.

<sup>12</sup> *Institutional accommodation and the citizen: legal and political interaction in a pluralist society*, Trends in social cohesion, No. 21, Council of Europe Publishing, 2009, available online from [http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/Trends/Trends-21\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/Trends/Trends-21_en.pdf), accessed 5 October 2017.

<sup>13</sup> The Brussels Centre for Intercultural Action (CBAI) had an active role in the formulation and adoption of this methodology in Belgium (see Bouzar, D. and Denies, N. 2014. *Diversité convictionnelle: comment l'appréhender? Comment la gérer?* Louvain La Neuve: Academia L'Harmattan).



### *Counter-narrative 7: Deracialising the state: challenging institutional narratives*

Deracialisation is understood here as the act of dissolving the categories of 'race' and their mobilisations. This is a process whereby the focus of action is on facilitating the recession of racial categorisation and practices. This connects counter-narratives to Islamophobia with a wider political project of dismantling other forms of racialised discourse, racialised institutions and racialised political projects. More specifically here this work involves decentring conversations on Islam and Muslims from current institutionalised narratives, and the humanisation of the Muslim subject in political and media discourse and also in policy and even law, together with an understanding of the way race is invoked, for example in the positionality of lawmakers (UK). For governments and state institutions, acknowledgement of Islamophobia as a symptom of deeper, national, structural issues and inadequate state responses to racism then necessitates serious revision of epistemologies of anti-racism and equalities. This was also seen to necessitate removing hierarchies of racism and acknowledging Islamophobia as a form of racism. Globalising the challenge to Islamophobia was imperative here given the relational, cross-national character of anti-Muslim narratives. New state acknowledgement of institutional Islamophobia and associated programmes of action was argued for (see UK report for detailed agenda). Through active engagement and political action Muslims can collectively and effectively pressure governments to challenge Islamophobia, although frequently the experience of interaction with state agencies is one of marginalisation. Challenging misinterpretations of secularism and *laïcité* was articulated e.g. in the work of *Contra-attaque(s)* as the notion of *laïcité*, which ensures the freedom of conscience and guarantees the free exercise of worship, is constantly 'hijacked' to exclude Muslims. Countering how the self-image of the Portuguese state as a secular state silences the unequal power relations between the state and different religious institutions and, more specifically, the privileges granted to the Catholic Church was also elaborated. The principle of secularism and religious freedom is mobilised to make an apology for Western modernity as the only political horizon and hence challenging political rhetoric of benign state administration was narrated. In response claims for parity between minoritised and /or religious communities were made. In the Greek case, promoting Conservative anti-nationalist narratives and Christian ecumenical ideals such as peace, hospitality and care towards the vulnerable, especially towards refugees was also utilised. Challenging respective government stances and rhetoric on the refugee crisis, and associated anti-Islam campaigns, and associated violations of international law and critique of the state's incapacity of implementing substantive anti-terrorism measures and its controversial deed of accusing asylum seekers of terrorist acts was articulated in Hungary. Promoting narratives of institutional security and increasing trust were deployed to counter narratives of insecurity.

#### **Box 9. Selected examples from National reports**

##### **UK (Merali 2107)**

The rise of the idea of Britishness (Merali, 2017a, and Ameli and Merali, 2015) and the narrative of Islam as a counter to 'Britishness' and 'Fundamental British Values' (FBV) has narrowed the conversation around what is the nation. Both 'identities' are homogenized in a false manner, creating a fictitious dichotomy between British and Muslim, both imaginings of which are projected AT Muslims. With Muslims considered beyond the pale the expectations of Muslims from the government, media and wider society is beset with a conditionality not expected from any other citizen, be they from a minoritized community or the majority community. An effective counter-narrative needs to address this failure to include Muslims whether as individuals or groups within the story of the (one) nation. This extends not just to understanding the diversity of Muslims, but also in naming the problems Muslims face and also the problems of society in general. The idea of who or what is a Muslim and the problems society faces are not so easily collapsible as the current narratives of Islamophobia claim, and recognising this in the production of public discourse is a first step. As Arun Kundnani says: "...what's important [is] to have alongside that some more radical counter-narratives that in



the end... will be necessary to really get to the root of this issue. Those ultimately take us to questions of empire and the economic system that we live under... that's one of the roots by which the discussion about Islamophobia connects over to issues of both class and issues of foreign policy and makes it part of the conversation that is ultimately a deeper crisis in British society. That part of the conversation is often neglected because it feels like it's starting to sound conspiratorial or it feels like it's starting to sound like the usual accusation of being apologist or terrorist. But I think it's a necessary part of the conversation."

**Hungary** (Vidra 2017)

The *migration and refugee policy frame*, its main message in the media and political texts is that refugee and migration policies are two different things that are deliberately confused by the government allowing for blaming refugees for illegally entering the country as economic migrants. This terminology blurring is one of the main strategies of the anti-migrant, anti-Islam government rhetoric that is being reinforced by the Russian information war launched at the outset of the refugee crisis in Eastern Europe. The disentanglement of the two policies highlight how Hungary by the way of its handling of refugees and migrants breaks international laws while it also points to the need of a real migration policy. The migration and refugee policy frame in the interviews has similar content to how it is constructed in the media and political texts. However, here we get insight into how the hate campaigns impact negatively the life of Muslim individuals.

**Portugal** (Ramos 2018)

*Contesting power relations: historical narratives, legal and political arrangements*

This strand was supported by some of our interlocutors that understand Islamophobia as a relation of domination. Firstly, for instance, they question the historical narratives that have shaped the Portuguese nation and state formation. More specifically, they challenge and problematise the so-called *Reconquista* as being the pivotal event that created Portuguese nationhood and identity, disseminated by textbooks, in class-teaching and in social imagination. In this regard, they highlight in what way this narrative helped to project historically the Muslims as violent, "invader", "foreign" and "enemy", and hence reinforcing the binary notions of "civilisation" (Portuguese and Christian) and "barbarism" (Moors and Islam). The interviewees also articulated this first point with the topic of colonialism and its legacies in the structuration of the colonial and post-colonial Portuguese society and institutions. Moreover, in the point of view of some of them colonialism played a vital role in the process of hierarchisation of racialised populations, religion and class. Following this assumption, it is advocated that there is an intrinsic relationship between Islamophobia and colonialism. Yet, it is also argued that countering a certain kind of discourse, practices and policies that support and structure contemporary wars (e.g. the so-called "war on terror") are a way to tackle Islamophobia. The second point emphasised by the interviewees pertains to legal arrangements established between the Portuguese state and religious institutions. In this context, the Concordat revised and ratified in 2014, is seen not only as an instrument that increases the privileges granted to the Catholic Church, but also as a legal apparatus that reproduces the unequal power relations between the Portuguese State and the different religious institutions. Moreover, according to them it is important to note that legal arrangements, like the Concordat, reveal the contradictions and the limits of secularism and religious freedom. Regarding the third point the interlocutors pinpointed other institutionalised forms of Islamophobia that are silenced and downplayed, for instance, at the workplace and in education. Alongside, they also argued that the institutional Islamophobia finds a strong expression in counter-terrorism policies and measures. Here, they stressed the discourse on the "radicalization" of Muslims as another way of legitimising the racialization and surveillance of Muslim communities.

### *Counter-narrative 8: Emphasising humanity and Muslim normalisation: challenging narratives of division*

The call for the recognition of the common humanity of Muslims and the normalization of the Muslim presence in European societies was reputedly voiced by our respondents. The simple call for common human unity was seen as an essential challenge to narratives of division, stigmatisation and racialised domination. Dilemmas of humanising Muslims and celebrity 'Muslimness' were posed in the UK report with the challenge that, 'if you need me to prove my humanity, I'm not the one who's not human'.

Our fieldwork identified a multiplicity of creative ways in which this objective could be narrated, represented and promoted and some selected examples are given below. Promoting narratives and learning about the ordinariness of Muslim lives e.g. *Human Library* (Czech Republic) was one good example. The Czech report emphasised the value of narrating ordinariness, hence talking about Muslims as ordinary people with their multiple roles and identities and this then connects directly with the notion of Muslim plurality discussed above. In France, examples included the collective *Nous Sommes Unis* (We stand together) and the eponymous social media campaign and the work of *Etudiants musulmans de France* (EMF) and *Coexister*, a youth organisation promoting interfaith understanding, in media-savvy awareness-raising campaigns to promote a message of solidarity and social cohesion. Bechrouri (2017) stated, "we must continue to develop narratives based on statistics and rational arguments... but the narrative should also emphasise that we are not divided, that we live and work together on a daily basis. It has to speak directly to people, to non-Muslims". In Greece, empathy-evoking stories, particularly of refugees, that prompt the identification of the target audience with Muslims experiencing discrimination, exclusion, and hatred, and sometimes even inspire active intervention and advocacy on the part of citizens were discussed and here the aim of this counter-narrative is, in the words of one respondent, for "people [...] to understand that they [the refugees, Muslims] are human as well. Human like us". Promoting a 'patriotism of solidarity' towards refugees (Archbishop Ieronymos, Greece) and promoting notions of shared humanity e.g. *#Stop Mind Borders* were key elements also in this counter-narrative. This required acknowledgement of the sensibilities of fellow human beings living away from their homeland, and Muslim citizens generally. The Hungarian case study highlighted the significance of a humanitarian frame (HF) of meaning, which was identified as the most dominant frame in media coverage. This 'emphasises that refugees or migrants are human beings, individuals with a human face and that many of the asylum seekers are actually fleeing from civil war and more specifically, the ISIS. HF also puts emphasis on how asylum seekers are received in Hungary, what difficulties they encounter upon arriving in the country and how badly they are treated by the authorities' (Vidra 2017, p.5). Countering de-humanisation of Muslims also ties in closely with strategies of empowerment and creation of space for Muslim voices and narratives discussed in the next section.

#### **Box 10. Selected examples from National reports**

##### **Hungary** (Vidra 2017)

The *humanitarian frame* in the media sees the individual human being behind the politicised refugee and migrant, who actually tries to save his life and flee from civil wars and ISIS and who only finds himself abused by authorities when arriving in a safe country. They might come from countries labelled as 'safe' by government politicians, the frame shows how unsafe these countries are in reality. While doing so, the humanitarian frame always highlights the negative aspects of government policies and its xenophobic features concerning the refugee crisis. In the meanwhile, the humanitarian frame also speaks about the human weaknesses of refugees thus avoid picturing them only as a homogenous vulnerable group. While the humanitarian frame is the most dominant frame in the analysed news portal, this is the least frequently used one in the democratic opposition political parties' rhetoric.

**UK (Merali 2017)**

Muslims find themselves continuously having to defend themselves against the pathologised narratives constructed of them as extremists, traitors, different and outsiders. Simply reproducing cultural forms in order to provide counter-narratives to the problems caused by that perpetuate the problem. Counter-narratives need therefore to reset the parameters of the conversations about Islam and Muslims whether this is in academia or in policy-making. The national conversation and the national story needs to recognise Muslims' humanity and independent agency and include Muslims regardless and without conditions. Muslims being seen to interact with other issues, not just Muslim ones, is a way that the media and political realms can send messages to wider society about the place of Muslims in the UK, where "... Muslim commentators in the media are seen to be addressing other intelligent and resourceful issues not just religious ones ,.. that is surely one of the things that would make a difference. This [Muslims] is a set of resources, identities, convictions that can contribute to a general civil discourse, not just one about religion, but about justice, poverty, the environment etc." (Williams, 2017)

**Greece (Chatzipanagiotou and Zarikos 2017)**

Bring forward and critically reflect on the essence of human rights and the value of shared humanity as key elements of European heritage and identity and, in this light, refrain from stereotyping and demonstrate how/that Muslims are not monolithic, but rather incorporate intersecting multiple identities, in response to the perception of Muslims as a threat to or at odds with the European political and cultural heritage, including human rights and the secular state.

### Counter-narrative 9: Building Muslim space(s) and autonomy

To row back against the all-encroaching and dominating power of Islamophobia movement-building, building spaces for Muslims to take narrative control and developing and asserting Muslim autonomy and subjectivity in all its diversity was seen as an essential counter-strategy. This involves in building political space through alliances and solidarities, as well as the creation of arts spaces, alternative media and alternative forms of narration and representation across a wide range of spheres. Examples in the UK include *The Muslim Vibe*, in the UK, (a media hub that straddles news and cultural stories for Muslims), the Saqi gallery and publishing house, with Kube publishing, IHRC Gallery and Bookshop, Algorithm, Amrit publishers, Turath, Islamic Texts Society and other publishing houses and galleries. The use of arts and creative expression e.g. *Um'artist* was also highlighted in the German report. Creating physical and conceptual spaces as a retreat from unsafe, hostile environments to facilitate Muslim narratives of being was also exemplified in empowerment workshops e.g. *Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland*, *LesMigras* and *JugendtheaterBüro Berlin*, empowering through legal knowledge e.g. *Hear Me Out! For Democracy and Diversity!*, the use of online platforms and social media e.g. *Melting Book*, *W(e) Talk*. Lastly, the Greek report provide a detailed account of the case of the struggle for a Mosque in Athens and the creation of religious spaces for Muslims in the capital of Greece. A warning note was also sounded that Muslim spaces are under severe pressure and subject to security praxis (UK).

#### **Box 11. Recapturing and creating further space for Muslim narratives of being, a UK message (Merali 2017)**

There exists a need for movement building which includes creating spaces for those marginalised to be able to not only speak freely but to take control of their own narrative and participate in movement building on the terms set by those narratives. In lieu of a sympathetic state that encourages/protects the spaces needed, this role must fall onto nascent movements. This is not something that can be adequately fulfilled by the workings of individual or small groups of civil society organisations. Likewise, the proliferation of alternative and semi-alternative media provides a basis for creating narratives and spaces for existing or marginalised narratives of being. The above again rely on civil society to take the burden for what should be the normative and transformative project of the state and the meta-narrative of accountability remains. The liberalism of the state has been undermined by its commitment to the Prevent programme and its failure to tackle Islamophobia and other forms of racism, and its undermining of the institutions and culture that hitherto provided some protection from and sent a normative signal about racism at the individual and structural level. The wider question of whether the abuses of minority rights, as well as the structural and individual violations of civil and political rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights by the praxis and increasingly the overt ideology of the state (under successive governments) cannot be solved within civil society.

#### **Box 12. Art and creative expression, a German message (Aguilar 2017)**

Due to the pervasive nature of Islamophobia and its dehumanising effects on Muslims, spaces for Muslims where they can empower, politically engage, and develop artistic expressions, among other activities, should be funded and fostered. Arts can be a powerful medium to create empathy, understanding, and humanise Muslims through bringing forth their lived experiences.

### *Counter-narrative 10: Challenging distorted representation: verism and voice*

Challenging racialised negative attribution and negative representation of Muslims may be made in relation to the 'real' through examination of mimetic, or imitative, accuracy. The value of such verism or 'progressive realism', which can be used effectively to 'unmask and combat hegemonic representations' was a key theme here. There are many examples of passionate protest over distorted representation, based on these claims for progressive realism, e.g. Pakistanis in Bradford over their portrayal as the emerging 'Muslim underclass' in a sensationalist BBC *Panorama* documentary and wider criticism from Muslim groups over Islamophobia in the British media. But an 'obsession with realism' which assumes that the 'real' and the 'truth' about a community are easily accessible, unproblematic and pre-existing is problematic and may clash with the narration of plurality. Professionals in the media, in education and state institutions, lack knowledge and culture about Islam so address this lack was important. Educational tools and promotion of public knowledge of Islam were also used to refute framing of Islam as a religion of violence. One such initiative, *Parle-moi d'Islam* (Talk to me about Islam) produced educational videos and articles broadcast on YouTube and other social media networks. Accuracy in, agitation for, and sanction for failure in, delivering accurate representation, was not solely media representation. The UK report detailed a set of key claims: 'expanding coverage of Muslim community affairs and of race and Islamophobia problems through permanent assignment of reporters familiar with the issues around these affairs, and through establishment of more and better links with the Muslim community. The Muslim community is a diverse one, and the media needs to engage with that diversity and not promote or rely on sensationalist or apologetic voices that simply help propagate deeply held negative ideas. Integrating Muslims and Muslim activities into all aspects of coverage and content, including newspaper articles and television programming was a central mainstreaming goal. The news media must publish newspapers and produce programmes that recognise the existence and activities of Muslims as a group within the community and as a part of the larger community and also recruit more Muslims into journalism and broadcasting and promote those who are qualified to positions of significant responsibility. Accelerating efforts to ensure accurate and responsible reporting of news concerning Muslims and all minorities through adoption by all news gathering organisations of stringent internal staff guidelines, but also as part of a more accurate representation of so-called 'foreign affairs'. Lastly, cooperating in the establishment of and promotion of any existing privately organised and funded independent institute(s) to train and educate journalists in Muslim affairs, recruit and train more Muslim journalists, develop methods for improving police-press relations, review coverage of Muslim related issues, and support continuing research in these fields were all relevant here' (Merali 2017, p.65.) Our case studies documented claims for extending the range of Muslim figures, intellectuals, experts and particularly women in these categories in the commentariat. Promoting debate and public awareness was also noted e.g. *CRI* (*Coordination contre le Racisme et l'Islamophobie*) (France, *Respekt, Člověk v tísní* (Czech Republic), *Destination: Germany* journalism project. Various examples of media interventions included AWSA.be photo exhibitions e.g. on Belgian Arab feminist, "*Verviers: Terre d'eau au-delà du terreau*" film depicting multi-culture as opposed to radicalization in Verviers. Use new representations of Muslim fashion was noted as a valuable narrative. Telling a different story; creative resistance e.g. through comics was exemplified in the work by Tuffix (Soufeina Hamed) and 'reversing the stereotype' in photo work by Feriel Bendjama, also publicising photo contests e.g. *Islam in Germany*. Exposing how hate campaigns impact widely on the lives of Muslim individuals, families and communities was also discussed. The work of the European Federation of Journalists in 'deontology', monitoring and promoting avoidance of discrimination in media coverage, and the *Media Against Hate Campaign* was highly valued. The call to de-religionise media discourse was noted here (Daniel Bax, Germany). Also, the Twitter hash tag campaign, *#Campusracismus*, (campus racism) and networking and alliances with organizations such as Initiative Black People in Germany (*Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland Bund e.V.*), Copwatch Frankfurt, and SchauHin were also recommended as examples of good practice. Other interventions included developing



community media e.g. Arabel.fm and working as a ‘trusted flagger’ of anti-Muslim hate on social media platforms e.g. UNIA, Belgium and INACH (International Network Against Cyber Hate).

## Box 12. Selected examples from National reports

### France (Bila 2017)

Encourage media to adopt a more nuanced approach to Islam-related issues to avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes. Media portray Muslims as a homogenous group whose religious and cultural traditions compromise *laïcité* and republican values. There is a need to move beyond the cliché about incompatibility of Islam and democracy and increase intercultural awareness by engaging in a fact-based public debate on Islam. “Split loyalties” of French Muslims came to the forefront of media and political narrative with the emergence of Daesh and a new threat of terrorism. Muslims are once again represented as a seemingly dangerous out-group and treated with suspicion. Biased reporting that promotes the idea that Muslims are disloyal citizens who try to subvert the national unity and the secular republican ideal /French culture is threatened by the invasion of other cultures (Islam, Roma, multiculturalism, etc.) reinforces the feeling sense of insecurity. Such fears seem to flourish in the context of distrust in political elites and democratic structures and involve excessive coverage of mundane facts and false smears. We have recently witnessed an outbreak of fake scandals involving burkini-clad women, rumours of cafés occupied by Muslims and forbidden to women and anecdotal evidence about migrants sexually harassing women in Paris neighbourhood of La Chapelle-Pajol<sup>14</sup>. Publishing and relaying sensational and misleading information that vilify Muslims encourage anti-Muslim sentiment and marginalisation of Muslim communities.

### Czech Republic (Cada and Frantova 2017)

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.

### UK (Merali 2017)

Whilst disproportionately affecting Muslims, the operation of mainstream media is deeply problematized in the wider UK culture, as the Leveson Inquiry (2012) bears testament to, the business of which remains unfinished with calls for an urgent review circulating at the time of writing (Hacked Off, 2017). The media in particular is acknowledged as underpinning, reinforcing, (re)producing and normalizing anti-Muslim political and public discourse. Tackling this falls broadly into the categories of:

(i) Civil society initiatives and responses; successes and critiques thereof;

The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) is ineffective in challenging misrepresentation of individual Muslims. The scope of IPSO is still limited to redress against named individuals rather than issues of demonization and racist narratives that target communities, groups or organizations. Without a longer term strategy initiatives that sought to use IPSO and other regulatory mechanisms are at risk of reinforcing a problematic narrative (Narkowicz, 2017) that existing mechanisms were adequate and that Muslims were unable or unwilling to use these to make reasonable claims.

(ii) Mainstream and Alternative Media initiatives, media (self)regulation, reform and cultural transformation; However civil society practice cannot fix the power imbalance between parties.

<sup>14</sup> See De Cock, L. & Meyran, R. eds. 2017. *Paniques identitaires. Identité(s) et idéologie(s) au prisme des sciences sociales*. Bellecombe-en-Bauges: Le Croquant.

This requires an expansion of coverage of Muslim community affairs and of race and Islamophobia problems through permanent assignment of reporters familiar with the issues around these affairs, and through establishment of more and better links with the Muslim community. The Muslim community is a diverse one, and the media needs to engage with that diversity and not promote or rely on sensationalist or apologetic voices that simply help propagate deeply held negative ideas. It requires the integration of Muslims and Muslim activities into all aspects of coverage and content, including newspaper articles and television programming. The news media must publish newspapers and produce programmes that recognise the existence and activities of Muslims as a group within the community and as a part of the larger community. The media must recruit more Muslims into journalism and broadcasting and promote those who are qualified to positions of significant responsibility. And the industry should support education initiatives for senior mainstream media personnel around issues of Islamophobia and how to avoid it.'

(iii) State re-evaluation of media monopolies and laws regulating hate speech. With media self-regulation having been proven to be worryingly ineffective it falls on the state to enact anti-hate speech legislation to criminalise Islamophobia and other forms of hate expression in the media. Whilst issues like the 'glorification of terrorism' and 'incitement to religious and racial hatred' are covered in parts of the anti-terrorism and existing criminal law, their extend seems to be heavily biased towards prosecuting Muslims and racialized groups. There is an argument that such laws must either be used against non-racialized perpetrators including those given a media platform e.g. Katie Hopkins whose columns and social media comments have been heavily criticized for demonizing Muslims, migrants and other minorities. Whilst curtailing speech is always a controversial demand, the current situation where the speech of Muslims is criminalized but that of those who call for a 'final solution' against Muslims is not, cannot be allowed to continue. Either there is consistent application of these laws, or their total repeal or a total review to make effective the boundaries that have always existed regarding what is and is not hate speech and can and cannot be allowed. The monopolisation of media ownership also needs tackling. The government must take steps to resist the trend towards consolidation in the media industry, both for reasons of free speech and because minority groups do not have the financial clout to buy into conglomerates and are therefore at risk of further exclusion.

#### **Portugal (Ramos 2018)**

##### *Countering negative and untruthful representations of Islam and Muslims*

This strand was supported by a part of our interviewees that perceived Islamophobia as individual prejudice and a consequence of ignorance and misinformation on Muslims and Islamic history, culture and theology. In this sense, some of them suggested a recommendations in order to challenge and demystify social bias and stereotypes on Muslims and Islam. Hence, for instance, some defended more knowledge of Islamic tradition and Quran as a way to correct negative views on Muslims. Moreover, they indicated that it is necessary to include approaches that emphasise the different ways of interpreting Quran and living Islam. They also recommend the creation of public mechanisms that promote exchange between civil society and Islamic communities as a way to give more visibility to Muslim activities and everyday life. These proposals were presented as a way to countering the negative representations of Muslims as violent, intolerant, "fanatics", irrational, "inassimilability" and a "threat" to "social cohesion". Another recommendation in order to counteract what they consider to be the paucity of knowledge on religious diversity, Islamic tradition and the lack of visibility and recognition of Muslim culture in the public sphere concerns the creation and implementation of specific programs. Those are aimed at training media and education professionals, as well as state institutions' professionals. They also suggested the implementation of different approaches to tackle and challenge the negative and predominant representations surrounding Muslims and Islam in what concerns the gender issue. In this sense, they argued that it is necessary to promote more knowledge on the history and frame of Muslim women in the political and cultural domains regarding Islamic tradition. In addition, some of them stressed that more knowledge of Muslim feminists' work and the mobilisation of debates on the gender roles in Islam could be foster in order to challenge the depiction of Muslim woman as submissive and oppressed.

#### **4. Applying the Counter-Islamophobia Toolkit**

The purpose of this section of the action is to present the counter-Islamophobia toolkit, or Counter-Islamophobia Kit (CIK). The CIK draws and builds upon the detailed understandings of the dominant Islamophobic narratives identified within the scope of this work and also combines these with the analyses of the dominant counter-Islamophobic narratives detailed above. The CIK differs from the aforementioned dominant Islamophobic and dominant counter-Islamophobia narratives identified in that the toolkit seeks to go beyond and develop the presentation of the two ranked lists, and ultimately aims to create an actionable, workable and accessible toolkit.

The CIK is primarily aimed at, but not limited to, application by policy makers, professionals and practitioners across the EU. In spite of the broad range of this target audience, the CIK is intended to be utilisable across levels by a variety of experts and practitioners.

At its base the CIK must be preceded by two essential elements, firstly there must be some degree of consensus surrounding the **definition of Islamophobia**. This definition must be the normatively accepted understanding of Islamophobia, within the given context. It must speak to contextual legal and policy measures. Furthermore, it must be one that goes beyond oversimplified narratives of hatred of Muslims, to encompass the subtle nuances and finer complexities of Islamophobia, including reference to embedded legal, structural and institutional discrimination of Muslims and those presumed to be Muslim. In order to ground the CIK in relation to theoretical work in the field, we recommend the practical application of Sayyid's 2014 work 'A Measure of Islamophobia' – in which the racialised elements of Islamophobia are highlighted and a typology of Islamophobic manifestation ranging from the manifestations of violence against presumed Muslims, Muslim sites and intimidation of perceived Muslims, to institutional mistreatment of Muslims and also systematic disparagement of Islam and/or Muslims in the public domain (Sayyid, 2014)

In addition, the basis of the CIK is also predicated by the need for systematic and structured recording and **documentation of Islamophobia**. The reports detailed in within this project highlight various examples of this (see [www.cik.leeds.ac.uk/publications](http://www.cik.leeds.ac.uk/publications)). However, in particular documentation of Islamophobic incidences, policies and legal measures must overcome current potential shortcomings that exist within contexts. For example, we recognise that given specificities, such as issues pertaining to limited and discrete categories for the official police recording of Islamophobic incidents, or the lack of recognition of religious hate crimes as an official recording category, or even the difficulties related to highlighting more nuanced, intersectional manifestations of Islamophobia, that it may be difficult to create entirely comprehensive records of Islamophobic events, policies, media and beyond, it is imperative that attempts be made to empirically document the nature of and trends in Islamophobia. One such noteworthy example of this can be seen in the annually published European Islamophobia Report (Bayrakli and Hafez 2016: 2017: 2018) as cited within the German edition of the dominant counter-narratives to Islamophobia report (Hernández Aguilar 2018) and as previously written for by members of the CIK project team. The European Islamophobia Report documents Islamophobia within the fields of politics, the justice system, employment, education, media, physical/verbal attacks, online, central national figures in Islamophobia and finally current counter-Islamophobia organisations and activities. The report is published on a yearly basis since 2015. Although the European Islamophobia report lacks strict cross-case standardisation, the report represents a necessary step towards documenting Islamophobia in a systematic manner. Similarly, based in the USA the Islamophobia Research and Documentation project (see <https://irdproject.com/>). The two aforementioned projects represent differing means of documenting Islamophobia, with the European Islamophobia Report representing a comparatively more empirical recording approach, whilst the Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project documents Islamophobia with a comparatively more academic and analytically-based approach.



Notwithstanding, both endeavours represent one of many projects in action centred on the documentation of Islamophobia. Such measures allow for a detailed and evidence-based understanding of the state of Islamophobia, which subsequently legitimates the urgency behind the work of those engaged in counter-Islamophobia work.

The main body of the Counter-Islamophobia can be characterised as being primarily based on two dominant actions, firstly and based on the findings of Workstream 1, the toolkit identifies dominant Islamophobic narratives or myths that require **deconstruction**. The CIK is then subsequently based on the **reconstruction** of normative narratives surrounding Islam and Muslims and thus normalising their presence in diverse fields. The reconstructive action of the CIK fills the potential void created by the deconstruction of dominant Islamophobic narratives. In addition, the dual approach prevents the CIK, and those applying it, from falling into the trap of reactionary-type counter-Islamophobia narratives, which in themselves risk the reproduction of Islamophobic myths (as discussed in Merali 2018).

In sum, the dominant Islamophobic narratives identified in Workstream 1 constitute the narratives in need of deconstruction, whilst those pertaining to dominant counter-Islamophobia strategies as identified in Workstream 2 represent identified means of reconstructing normative narratives surrounding Islam and Muslims. The third stand of the Counter-Islamophobia Kit highlights **identified strategies** in operation across the eight national case studies examined within the project. Although these dominant narratives, counter-narratives and possible strategies do not, and arguably cannot represent an entirely comprehensive list of Islamophobia and its manifestations, the three primary actions of the CIK remain pertinent. Overleaf is the visual representation of the Counter-Islamophobia Kit.

## Counter-Islamophobia Kit

DEFINING & DOCUMENTING ISLAMOPHOBIA		STRATEGIES
<b>DECONSTRUCTION</b>	<b>RECONSTRUCTION</b>	
Dominant Islamophobic Narratives (based on Mescoli 2017a)	Dominant Counter-Islamophobia Narratives (based on Law, Easat-Daas and Sayyid 2018)	Effective Counter-Islamophobia Strategies (Taken from Workstream 2 reports <a href="http://cik.leeds.ac.uk/publications">cik.leeds.ac.uk/publications</a> )
1. Islam and Muslims represent a <b>threat to security</b>	1. <b>Challenging</b> and contextualising constructions of <b>'Muslim threat'</b>	Problematising securitisation narratives via NGOs, media and academic discourse
2. Islam and Muslims <b>cannot be assimilated</b> into the imagined nation	2. Building inclusive nations: <b>Challenging exclusive and discriminatory national projects</b>	Challenging normative Islamophobic attitudes via re-education Challenging the media reproduction of Islamophobic narratives
3. Islam and Muslims constitute a <b>demographic threat</b> and pose the risk of <b>proseletysation</b> of the native population	3. Emphasising cultural compatibility and conviviality: <b>Challenging the narrative of separation</b> of cultural and ethnic groups	Championing inter-community work, such as the <i>Salam-Shalom</i> initiative in Germany
4. Islam is based on <b>theocracy</b> and Muslims follow this blindly and seek to install this in the given context (see also discussion regarding 'entryism' in Meralli 2017)	4. Elaborating plurality: <b>Challenging narratives of Muslim singularity</b>	Normalising Muslim political engagement via specific examples and highlighting diversity between Muslims
5. Islam and Muslims pose a <b>threat to the imagined national identity</b>	5. <b>Building inclusive futures</b>	Challenging exclusion of Muslims from education
6. Islam and Muslims promote and practice <b>gender inequality</b>	6. <b>Challenging narratives of sexism</b>	Championing Muslim feminist initiatives, such as <i>Lallab</i> in France
7. Islam and Muslims are <b>essentially and inherently different to the national norm</b> – Ontological diversity	7. Deracialising the state: <b>Challenging Institutional Narratives</b>	Normalising Muslims as part of society and pursuing legal measures to counter institutionalised Islamophobia
8. Islam and Muslims are <b>inherently violent</b>	8. Emphasising humanity and normalisation of Muslims: <b>Challenging narratives of division</b>	Highlighting Muslim non-violence
9. Islam and Muslims are <b>incomplete citizens</b> – religious identity precedes national belonging	9. <b>Creating Muslim spaces</b>	Normalising Muslim spaces in the local and national community.
10. Islam and Muslims are inherently <b>homophobic/illiberal</b>	10. Challenging distorted representations: <b>Verity and voice</b>	Promoting arts-based counter-Islamophobia work by Muslims → Comic art, film

Rather than being viewed as a comprehensive linear formulation the visual depiction above serves to emphasise the importance of the deconstruction of Islamophobic narratives and the reconstruction of normative narratives surrounding Islam and Muslims and also highlights some of the effective means observed through the course of this project.

Simply challenging dominant Islamophobic narratives alone falls into the trap of both becoming purely reactive means of countering Islamophobia and thus consequently reproducing Islamophobic narratives, but also deconstruction alone creates a void that may subsequently be re-filled by further dominant Islamophobic trends.

Furthermore, as observed in particular during Workstream 2 of this project (in which dominant counter-narratives to Islamophobia were analysed and documented following extensive field work), Muslim verism, veracity and voice are central derived from organic movements are central to the authenticity and legitimacy of much counter-Islamophobia work. Put alternatively, counter-Islamophobia initiatives should not speak for Islam and Muslims, rather should foreground the plethora of their voice, actions and experiences.

Additionally, whilst the themes presented in the CIK are not exhaustive, the formulation of the CIK was based on detailed analysis of Islamophobic narratives and counter-narratives to Islamophobia in eight geographically and normatively differing case studies, the convergence in narratives that emerged in both Workstream 1 and 2 highlights the legitimacy of the CIK across all EU member states.

## 5. Legal and Policy Interventions (Trispiotis 2017)

There are 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. Islamophobia has proved challenging for European human rights law, whose current responses oscillate between framing it as a problem of disproportionate restrictions on Muslims' right to manifest their religion and framing it as a problem of religious and intersectional discrimination, without, however, a particular doctrinal or normative direction showing how those distinct forms of legal action connect both with themselves and with the underlying concept of Islamophobia. There is consensus that Muslims often experience various forms of discrimination and social exclusion, in the workplace, education and housing, whereas they also suffer from prejudice and negative stereotypes. It is difficult – and incompatible with the existing European legal framework – to attribute those instances of discrimination exclusively to religion, as Muslims are discriminated on multiple bases, including religion, race, language, gender and ethnic origin. Moreover, discrimination against Muslims can be attributed not only to Islamophobia, but also to racism, sexism and xenophobia, which are mutually reinforcing and in many cases take place in a general social environment of hostility towards migrants and ethno-cultural minorities. Nevertheless, the current lack of clarity in European human rights law about which legal measures, including positive measures, can effectively counter Islamophobia, combined with some other shortcomings discussed below, can arguably hinder the potential of human rights law as a source of effective counter-narratives of Islamophobia.

This section highlights three distinct challenges in the current European legal framework. Firstly, a notable problem is that the European Court of Human Rights (hereinafter ECtHR) does not engage directly with Islamophobia, which is expressly referred to in only three cases to date. This lack of direct engagement is problematic both because it could prevent mobilisation against this form of injustice (Sayyid, 2014: 14) and because it weakens judicial scrutiny by limiting the scope of the contextual analysis that courts have to undertake in cases involving limitations on anti-discrimination and human rights principles.

Secondly, there is limited engagement of European human rights law with the best legal practices to counter Islamophobia in individual EU Member States. As a result, the forms that both judicial intervention and legal measures, including positive measures, could take in order to effectively counter Islamophobia remain unclear. A connected point, specifically on a judicial level, is that the lack of direct engagement with the concept of Islamophobia is complemented by the tendency of the ECtHR to show deference in cases involving issues where there is no established consensus between the members of the Council of Europe. Allowing wide margin of appreciation in cases involving, for instance, state prohibitions on the wearing of headscarves or full-face veils in public exacerbates the problem of existing and strong hierarchies that forge Islamophobia and social exclusion of Muslim communities. This lack of effective legal response to the various deployments of Islamophobia can have a particularly negative impact on the possibility of strategic litigation on a European level as well.

Finally, it is notable that legal research on Islamophobia is surprisingly limited. The existing European legal scholarship analyses Islamophobia almost exclusively in relation to three distinct considerations: antiterrorism laws; blasphemous and/or religiously offensive expression; and the wearing of religious symbols (primarily headscarves and full-face veils) in public. All these are potentially useful proxies for the legal analysis of the concept of Islamophobia. However, combined with the

'disconnect' between law and sociological data on Muslim communities, the existing focus of the legal scholarship provides a limited understanding of Muslim identity. Islamophobia is used restrictively in ways that hinders the ability of Muslims to 'elaborate their sense' of what it means to be a Muslim in different countries, contexts and age groups (Hamid, 2016: 11; Sayyid, 2014: 14; *mutatis mutandis* Klug, 2013). Moreover, the three prime lenses of antiterrorism, blasphemy and religious symbols provide limited opportunities of legal engagement with the potential 'racialisation' processes surrounding and shaping Islamophobia (Meer and Modood, 2011). In addition, they provide a restrictive understanding of the range of valuable opportunities that everyone should be able to access and enjoy without being subject to wrongful religious and intersectional discrimination.

There are notable exceptions to the analytical limitations of the European legal scholarship and the 'disconnect' between European human rights law and Islamophobia; those exceptions come mainly from the work of the Council of Europe and NGOs. Through a significant number of non-binding Resolutions and Recommendations, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (hereinafter PACE) has attempted – to a large extent, successfully – to spell out, analyse and, importantly, amalgamate different cultural, historical and socioeconomic elements that constitute Islamophobia. There is a striking contrast between the nuance and complexity of those soft-law instruments and the case law of the ECtHR, where there is almost complete lack of references to Islamophobia and no distinctive legal response to the phenomenon. The slow pace of cross-fertilisation between the two could be explained through the mainly policy-oriented language of the Council of Europe and the ensuing limited guidance for the interpretation of the ECHR.

Cases on the wearing of religious symbols, including headscarves and full-face veils, are indicative of the limited engagement of the ECtHR with the concept of Islamophobia. Contrary to the increasingly vocal suggestions of the Council of Europe and different NGOs, the case law of the ECtHR has not engaged with Islamophobia as a key contextual point in cases involving complaints of illegitimate limitations on freedom of religion and/or unlawful religious discrimination. It is precisely because the questions of what Islamophobia actually means and which forms of differential treatment give rise to wrongful discrimination are interpretive questions (Sayyid, 2014: 20) that lack of engagement with Islamophobia can impoverish the ECtHR's contextual analysis of the facts of each case. If the available research shows that Islamophobia might be present in the context of a case, then the risk of unlawful discrimination is higher. This analytical framework can also bring forward, again as part of the necessary contextual analysis, the level of risk of intersectional discrimination (Solanke, 2009). Ultimately it will be for courts, such as the ECtHR, to determine whether a specific limitation constitutes unlawful religious discrimination, but that judgment cannot be reached without recourse to a systematic contextual analysis that takes into account the heterogeneity and socio-historical particularities of each individual case.

It is therefore unsurprising that the rigidity of the ECtHR's proportionality test, which shifts the burden of proof away from the state and onto the applicants who should then prove that the restrictions against their right to freedom of religion are disproportionate, has been repeatedly criticised (Berry, 2013). That critique is also associated with concerns about the procedural justice of the approach of the ECtHR (Chaib, 2013). More specifically, the permissible limitations on the right to freedom of religion have often been construed in a manner that permits restrictions against the right to freedom of religion of Muslim groups because of the worries, fears, and ideologies of the majority (Trispiotis, 2016; Hatzis, 2009). By contrast, the UN HRC has been praised for following a more sensitive interpretation of freedom of religion, which looks more

suitable to protect equal access of Muslim groups and individuals to a wide array of opportunities (Gilbert, 2002). Its stricter scrutiny along with the fact that the UN HRC, contrary to the ECtHR, does not allow margin of appreciation to the respondent states, entail that if states wish to introduce limitations on freedom of religion in compliance with Article 18 ICCPR, they should ensure that those should be absolutely necessary to achieve the legitimate aim sought, even in cases of limitations supported by arguments of public order and public safety (Berry, 2012).

The contrast between the approaches followed by the ECtHR and the UN HRC could provide, by analogy, valuable insights on how evidence of Islamophobia can be used as a key contextual point in cases involving limitations on the right to freedom of religion and/or unlawful religious discrimination. More specifically, the approach of the UN HRC in cases on the wearing of headscarves in public provides better protection as it is more capable of blocking impermissible reasons, such as those related to Islamophobia, from justifying limitations on human rights. Recall that the focus of the HRC is not on whether an individual's interest to cover her head according to her religion is more 'weighty' compared to the state interest to protect public order or public safety. Rather, the investigation focuses on whether the state distribution of burdens shows equal respect for the religious commitments of the applicant in the circumstances of the case. Perhaps that different focus can also explain why the HRC has placed significant emphasis on the questionable efficacy of certain measures highlighting, for instance, that bareheaded identity photographs have often failed to avert the risk of fraud or falsification of residence permits (*Ranjit Singh v France*, para 8.4).

All in all, rigorous judicial examination of the reasons behind limitations on freedom of religion or on equal access to employment, housing, health, education and other valuable opportunities, is key to counter Islamophobia. That remains the case even if those reasons cite public order and public safety. Such judicial examination can be neither rigorous nor systematic without using social science research, including data from individual EU Member States, to determine the context for the facts of each case. If data show that Islamophobia is a key contextual point, then *strict scrutiny* is required by the ECtHR in order to ascertain whether the justification behind limitations on the rights of Muslim individuals has been corrupted by stereotypes and other impermissible majoritarian preferences about how others should live, what they should wear, and how they should behave in public. It is regrettable then that, contrary to the suggestions of the Council of Europe, the ECtHR has evaded strict scrutiny of most public order justifications, despite the danger that states can manipulate security to legitimise almost all actions taken in its name, simply by citing a need for the action to protect national security. Refraining from meaningful scrutiny of public order reasons incurs the risk to miss significant opportunities to track and block Islamophobic reasons from grounding state limitations on the right to freedom of religion or belief and the right to access a wide array of valuable opportunities on an equal basis regardless of religion. The current lack of engagement of the ECtHR with the relevant data prevents its case law from informing, and perhaps acting as, a source of effective counter-narratives of Islamophobia.



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