

CEE ACTIVITIES OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD: CZECH REPUBLIC, POLAND, SERBIA

National Security Programme



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INTRODUCTION

The presence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has for a long time remained an understudied issue due to a lack of available open data. The combination of the group's secretive mode of operation and the attention of governments and media focusing on the more immediate threat of terrorism have resulted in very limited coverage of this topic, whether in English or in the native languages of these countries. GLOBSEC with the Counter Extremism Project (CEP) have decided to contribute to the wider research on this topic, which so far has dissected the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood in other regions, predominantly in the West, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), as well as Southeast Asia.¹ With its focus on the CEE region, this project aims to support a wider understanding of the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood.

In the previous report, *CEE activities of the Muslim Brotherhood: Mapping the Ikhwan's presence in the region*, the authors presented the cases of five countries in the CEE region, each representing a different landscape in which the movement could operate. This report will focus on three of the selected countries, namely Czech Republic, Poland, and Serbia. The first country represents a case with no autochthonous Muslim population, meaning its Muslim minority is composed purely of expatriates, later generations of expats, and converts. Poland, on the other hand, has an autochthonous population of Tatars, which are seemingly in competition with a much larger community of expatriate and convert communities. The third country, Serbia, also has an autochthonous community, divided between Bosniaks in the Raška administrative region (also called Sandžak region) and Albanians in the Preševo Valley. However, unlike Poland, this community is larger than the expatriate and convert communities, who mostly live in Belgrade.

Despite the differences in demographics, there are many commonalities found in the three countries in relation to revivalist movements² such as the Muslim Brotherhood. All studied countries face a combination of factors that have resulted in a slowdown of activity

of Muslim religious organisations. These factors are both internal as well as external and are - to a large extent - mutual, although there are a few specific conditions within each of the three countries at the centre of this study. All in all, this report will present the challenges that individuals who are alleged to have links to the Muslim Brotherhood have been facing and what adjustments they have had to make in order to continue their activities despite the apparent downward trend of revivalist movements in all three countries.

Methodology & Data collection

The research for this report is based on the methodology developed in the first report for this project.³ Essentially, each country studied for this report represents a different environment with observable specific dynamics between autochthonous, expatriate, or convert communities, and their integration into society. Assuming that revivalist movements are present in these expatriate and convert communities, the research team narrowed its focus to entities that fulfil these criteria and to those that have been at some point branded as revivalist by an interviewee or existing literature. The information and data gathered for this report was then analysed and the specific entity was classified as belonging into one of three categories: Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups, Muslim Brotherhood-inspired groups, or "grey-area" groups.

The data presented in this report was compiled from interviews with four groups of individuals—experts from academia, government officials, members of Muslim communities, and voices in opposition to the studied groups.⁴ In addition to the interviews, the research team used primary sources such as the groups' official websites, publications, press releases, letters, and other material they published. The team also relied on secondary sources, including academic literature, news articles, and other websites.

In general, the team conducted structured interviews guided by the methodology laid out in the first

report of this project. During these interviews, issues such as various religious, social, and even political activities, as well as links to groups or individuals abroad and financing were addressed. This structure was utilised as a general guide and a reference point during all interviews. In most cases, the interviews subsequently also moved into a less structured dialogue, as the majority of the interviewees initially were reluctant to respond when queried about Islamist activism/revivalism/potential of Muslim Brotherhood presence in their countries. At the same time, most interviewees did not hesitate discussing the Muslim presence in other countries analysed for this project, its organisational emanations, their activities, and intra-communal cooperation and/or rivalries. In some cases, the net result of the interview was a multi-faceted commentary of a given interviewee concerning a potential or actual Islamist/revivalist presence. Some of this information was included in this report.

One issue that became clear during the research is the Muslim Brotherhood's strong presence in the European Islamic arena. It became quite visible while studying older entities—such as the Muslim Students Association and the Muslim League in Poland or General Union of Muslim Students in the

Czech Republic—that several became members of Muslim Brotherhood pan-European organisations such as the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe. Because these organisations have managed to bring in individuals and other organisations from all corners of Europe (even those who might not subscribe to the Islamist thought). This was due to their size and access to the European forum, which was important for entities in the CEE region after decades of isolation. Therefore, it is difficult to label them all as linked to the Islamist movement. Of course, the fact remains that the Muslim Brotherhood dominates these institutions; however, using formal membership as the sole indicator for the first category proved not to be sufficient. To avoid inaccuracies and possible "guilt by association", the research team followed up such connections and supplement them with cross-investigations of other activities, including publications, da'wa, and others. Furthermore, the definition of the first category ("Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups") was broadened by stipulating that the membership must be active and present on more levels, such as participating in events organised by the Muslim Brotherhood pan-European organisations, hosting them, continuously publishing their output, etc.



1 The movement has been linked to political parties both in Indonesia and Malaysia, for example. For further information see: Dominik M. Müller, *Islam, Politics and Youth in Malaysia: The Pop-Islamist Reinvention of PAS*. Routledge, 2014, and Woodward, Mark, Ali Amin, Inayah Rohmaniyah, and Chris Lundry, *Getting culture: a new path for Indonesia's Islamist Justice and Prosperity party?*, *Contemporary Islam* 7.

2 This term was chosen for this report as it best describes the motivation of the movement and has been established in various forms in the works of John O. Voll, Shireen T. Hunter, Ira M. Lapidus, and Egdūnas Račius, some of whom directly connect the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Revivalism. The term (Islamic) Revivalism is used in this study to refer to movements that strive to institute a holistic Islamic system which would govern both the public and private life of citizens.

3 See GLOBSEC, *CEE Activities of the Muslim Brotherhood: Mapping the Ikhwan's Presence in the Region* <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CEE-Activities-of-the-Muslim-Brotherhood-Mapping-the-Ikhwan's-Presence-in-the-Region-1.pdf>

4 The majority, with very few exceptions, asked the research team not to use their names in the report.

THE PAST

The communist regimes in the CEE *de facto* blocked the entry of Islamist actors to the region, including revivalist ideologies. Whether a country was a satellite state like Czechoslovakia or Poland, or the peculiar entity that was Yugoslavia, religion in general was not compatible with communist ideology. Although it is important to emphasise that the situation differed based on the specific religion and time period. Generally, it can be concluded that although Islam did not have free space for revivalism, it was cultivated or in some other ways developed. The atheist policies of communist countries along with other factors such as the modernisation of societies meant that even the autochthonous Muslim population was becoming more atheistic.⁵ Likewise, foreigners who were allowed entry were mostly from secular states. There were, however, limited developments towards revivalism, such as building a mosque in Gdansk for the Tatar community in the 1980s⁶ or even pockets of individuals in Czechoslovakia influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood in Pakistan, all of whom were monitored by the secret services.⁷

After the communist regimes fell and borders opened to all international actors, the situation changed for religious groups. While the Czech Republic and Poland saw more freedom of expression of religion, the situation in the Balkans became more complicated with rising ethnic conflicts, of which religion was an inseparable part, culminating in the Balkan Wars. This allowed revivalist groups to enter the scene in the CEE and influence relationships between groups and transform identities of certain groups, such as Bosnian Muslims for instance.⁸ The 1990s was a time of transition to democracy for all the mentioned countries and at the same time, the early Islamic communities started to set up their organisations, usually focused on students. Below is a brief overview of the historical development of the Muslim organisations selected for this research and the connections they developed in the past.

Institutions in focus

Islamic institutions in the Czech Republic were established in 1934, nearly two decades after the independence of Czechoslovakia.⁹ There are a number of current entities active in the country.

However, only few are of interest for this research. To identify those groups which have less relevance, it was necessary to focus on those organisations with membership in Muslim Brotherhood European bodies and ones that have a track record of activism. The main one is the Islamic Foundation in Prague (*Islámská nadace v Praze* or INP), which was set up so that Muslims in Prague would have a representative legal body that could ensure the community could buy a space for a prayer room or a mosque. In the 1990s, it acquired one such place from the General Union of Muslim Students (*Všeobecný Svaz Muslimských Studentů a Mládeže* or VSSMS), an older body and a member of FEMYSO, which organises Muslim students around the country, usually foreigners, and facilitated space for prayers in student dormitories. The INP is now a member of the Headquarters of Muslim Communities (*Ústředí Muslimských Obcí* or UMO), which also includes the INP, the Islamic Foundation in Brno, the Czech Republic's second-largest city, hence there will be references to these institutions as well. Besides these two, there is the Muslim Union founded by Mohamed Abbas, a Sudanese-born businessman who had been instrumental for the VSSMS at its beginnings. Since there is no autochthonous Muslim population in the Czech Republic, all these institutions cater mostly to Muslims of immigrant background and a few converts.

The ethnic division between the autochthonous Tatars and immigrant Muslims in Poland has resulted in two competing entities. The Tatars are organised around the Muslim Religious Association (*Muzułmański Związek Religijny w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* or MZR), whose establishment of the Muftiate dates back to 1925,¹⁰ while Muslims of immigrant background established the Muslim League (*Liga Muzułmańska w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* or LM) in 2004. The League is effectively a splinter of the MZR. Its emergence was the culmination of “the parting of ways”, in the words of one MZR activist, between the Polish Tatars and the new arrivals from the Arab World. These two communities first came together in the late 1980s, as the latter group helped revive Islam in Poland and connect its members to counterparts in, for example, Western Europe or in the Middle East. Throughout the 1990s, however, the

two effectively went their separate ways because the Tatars, in the words of League activists, “would not move on their way of doing things—the customs, traditions, many rooted in the Polish, predominantly, Christian reality. For you this could be small things but for Arabs this was key—wrong recitation of the Holy Qur’an by the imam who would not speak Arabic anyway [...]. It was not dogmatic, [...] but practical. Both communities had their own needs and maybe needed their [own] ways to cater to them?”¹¹

As time went by, the League, led by Arab immigrants to Poland, to some extent reaped the benefits from the nascent “Polish Islam” being refashioned, not in the mould of Islam known by the autochthonous population, but by the sheer force of numbers, that of mostly Arabic Muslim arrivals to Poland.¹² This caused some resentment amongst the MZR members and initiated a decade-plus rivalry between the two organisations. Only in recent years this conflict has become less explicit, as the two organisations suffer from their own internal problems¹³ and to some extent, rhetorically closed ranks after 2015 amid the storm of negative sentiment towards Muslim migrants and Islam in Europe¹⁴.

In Serbia, the context is different due to the existence of two separate Islamic communities, a phenomenon raised in various written works, as well as in the interviews conducted. The one established earlier in the 1990s is the Islamic Community in Serbia (*Islamska Zajednica u Srbiji* or IZuS), with its headquarters in Novi Pazar and subject to the Reis-ul-Ulema in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The origins of the community date to the 1990s conflict, primarily in Bosnia but also in the wider Western Balkans, which served as a guiding light for Muslim’s “spiritual salvation”¹⁵. The other, with a similar name, is the Belgrade-based Islamic Community of Serbia (*Islamska Zajednica Srbije* or IZS), established in 2007, and was initially headed by Belgrade mufti Hamdija Jusufspahić, whose prominence dates to Tito’s Yugoslav times. With the establishment of Adem Zilkić as Reis-ul-Ulema, the IZS became prominent for proclaiming the independence of Serb Muslims. The two Muslim communities have been at odds since the very beginning due to, as one interviewee described it, differences in their identity politics.¹⁶ It appears that while IZS is more interested in catering to the wider Muslim population in Serbia and advocating for the independence of Serb Muslims, IZuS has stronger ties to the Bosniak ethnic identity.

Country	Name of organisation (English)	Name of organization (original language)	Acronym	Establishment date	Membership background
Czech Republic	Centre of Muslim Communities (umbrella org. for INP and INB)	Ústředí Muslimských Obcí	UMO	1991	Expatriates; Converts
	General Union of Muslim Students	Všeobecný Svaz Muslimských Studentů a Mládeže	VSMS	1991	
	Islamic Foundation in Prague	Islámská nadace v Praze	INP	1993	
	Islamic Foundation in Brno	Islámská nadace v Brne	INB	1994	
	Muslim Union	Muslimská unie	MU	2000	
Poland	Muslim Religious Association in the Republic of Poland	Muzułmański Związek Religijny w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej	MZR	1925	Autochthonous Tatars
	Muslim League in the Republic of Poland	Liga Muzułmańska w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej	LM	2001	Expatriates
Serbia	Islamic Community of Serbia	Islamska Zajednica Srbije	IZS	2007	Autochthonous Muslims, mainly Bosniaks
	Islamic Community in Serbia	Islamska Zajednica u Srbiji	IZuS	1993 as Mashihat in Sandžak; 2007 as Meshihat of the Islamic Community	Autochthonous Muslims; Expats

11 Interview with a member of the Muslim League in Poland, July 2020.

12 R. Strykowski, “Integracja społeczna i gospodarcza imigrantów wyznania muzułmańskiego w Polsce. Raport z Badania”, Warszawa: Fundacja “Ocalenie”, 2012, 59.

13 K. Pedziwiatr, Wpływ imigrantów arabskich na rozwój i aktualny charakter islamu w Polsce

14 See, e.g., E. Bayrakli, F. Hafez, The state of islamophobia in Europe. European islamophobia report 2016, http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Introduction_2016.pdf. Quoted in B. Rogowska.

15 Biser Banchev, *The Muslim Communities in Serbia: Between Integration & Radicalization*, in “Balkan Islam: A Barrier or a Bridge for Radicalization”, (Sofia 2018), 87.

16 Serbia Expert Interview 1, Belgrade August 2020.

5 Egdūnas Račius, *Muslims in Eastern Europe*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, 51.

6 *Ibid.*, 311.

7 Miroslav Mareš, “Terorismus v ČR. Vol. 100. Centrum strategických studií”, 2005, 274.

8 Bosniak (bhs: Bošnjak/Bošnjakinja/Bošnjaci) is an ethnic category tied to the Bosnian Muslim population, used instead of the term Muslim (Georgy Lederer, *Contemporary Islam in Europe*, 1999, 13).

9 Veronika Jelínková, “Muslimská menšina a její politická participace v ČR”, 2016, 25.

10 Egdūnas Račius, *Muslims in Eastern Europe*, 309.

Formal connections

According to the methodology that the research team developed in the previous publication mapping the presence of CEE groups with possible connections to the Muslim Brotherhood, the first category of groups denotes organisations that are openly part of the Brotherhood's networks through their involvement as members, associates, affiliates, or in any other relationships with these federations. The research team concluded that by formal affiliations to these federations (listed in Box 1), the representatives of these groups demonstrated publicly their intent to belong to the circle of revivalists. Such organisations are termed Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups. However, upon completing the investigation of

the three studied countries, the research team concluded that there were no such groups that meet this definition fully. The team found groups that were members of the above-mentioned Muslim Brotherhood-related organisations. However, the decision to join these organisations were made by leaders decades ago. Therefore, the research team concluded that affiliation alone, in particular when the decision had been made by previous leaders, is insufficient to categorise a given group as currently Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated. This choice is further supported by the interviewed experts from academia who pointed out that many of these groups are inactive either in membership or in any Islamist activity, such as proselytisation.

1. Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (FIOE)
2. European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR)
3. The Europe Trust
4. European Institute for Human Science (EIHS)
5. The Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO)
6. European Forum of Muslim Women (EFOMW)
7. World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY)
8. European Assembly of Muslim Imams
9. The Federation of European Arab-Islamic Schools (also European Union of Arabic Islamic Schools and Association of Muslim Schools in Europe)

Box 1¹⁷

The Czech Republic has one institution that is a member of a federation laid out in Box 1. The General Union of Muslim Students (VSMS), a member of FEMYSO. The VSMS was one of the first institutions for Muslims in the Czech Republic after its country's independence in 1993. It was set up by Mohamed Abbas, who later left and created the Muslim Union, which he registered in FIOE.¹⁸ Whereas in the past VSMS published videos and short movies of what it is like to be a Muslim in the Czech Republic, the image nowadays looks slightly bleaker. Currently, it is looking more inwards and still organises multiple-day congresses for the Muslim community in the country. The congress in 2019 was the last one,

since in 2020 the congress had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, externally very few online output has been seen since around 2016. When their past action is contrasted with their current activity, a trend begins to emerge.

A self-confessed "critic of Islamism" stressed in his interview that the main Islamist actor in Poland is the League and that the proof for this could be found in its roots and organisational structure plus its links to like-minded entities involved in other forms of Islamist activity.¹⁹ As was shown, the League partly emerged as a student organisation, the Muslims Students Association (*Stowarzyszenie Studentów*

Muzułmańskich w Polsce or SSM), founded a decade earlier, and currently a member of FEMYSO.²⁰ Its original members, mostly students from the Middle East who arrived in Poland in the 1980s and the 1990s and opted to stay in the country. These subsequently organised also other entities, including: the Muslim Association for Cultural Formation (*Muzułmańskie Stowarzyszenie Kształtowania Kulturalnego* or MSKK), and finally, between 2001 and 2004, the League itself. The interviewed academics stress that SSM is mostly dormant and does not involve itself in any controversial activity nor facilitates intra-communal da'wa nor invites members to take up Islamist ideology. There is also another factor to consider. The League's prominent members studied at the *Institut Européen Des Sciences Humaines* in France and, interestingly, some senior members are affiliated with MZR.

Surging activity

The other two group types (or categories) were defined by the authors in the previous report as reliant on determining their connections to the Muslim Brotherhood through their activities rather than formal membership. These organisations are termed Muslim Brotherhood-inspired groups and "grey-area" groups. The activities of these groups have been traced on multiple levels. They were chosen according to various types of activities the Muslim Brotherhood has been known to perform across religious, social, and political spheres.

On its official website, the Islamic Foundation in Prague expressed its support for the FIOE's statement of 22 July 2016 concerning the terrorist attack in Munich²¹, which on its own does not carry significant weight in connecting it to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, when presented in combination with its wide range of dissemination activities, a fuller picture emerges. For instance, the foundation published a video on combating islamophobia by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)—a US-based organisation that Lorenzo Vidino tied to the Muslim Brotherhood²². In

its online library, it has links to two books through QR codes, one published by WAMY titled *Muslim-Christian Dialogues* and the other written by a controversial preacher banned in multiple countries, Bilal Philips, titled *The purpose of creation*.²³ Furthermore, there was a direct accusation made about the foundation's connection to the Muslim Brotherhood by Seyran Ateş, a German Muslim feminist lawyer. She conducted research that was shared with journalists. However, one news portal she shared it with marked it as unsubstantiated.²⁴ The Czech internal intelligence service has also mentioned that there is no threat to the country from the foundation and a review of their annual reports do not mention the movement at all. Its "sister" organisation, the Islamic Foundation in Brno, still hands out a magazine called *Al-Islam*, published by its Slovakia-based branch. The magazine is seen as controversial. For instance, the front page of one edition featured an article by Soumaya Ghannoushi²⁵ defending Ennahda in Tunisia and AKP in Turkey as democratic Islamic parties, as opposed to non-modernist Wahhabis or ISIS. Furthermore, the article mentions how western media outlets are generalising and using reductionism when addressing them, claiming these media are oblivious to the socio-political context in which these parties adapt to local conditions, especially where they are persecuted. The head representative of the Headquarters of Muslim Communities (UMO), and simultaneously the Islamic Foundation in Brno, intended to send a letter in 2001 to Yousuf Qaradawi to connect the Brno Muslims to Palestinians so they could send money to Palestine. When confronted about this by media 11 years later in 2012, the representative said that Qaradawi is a "wise person" with whom he wants to be in touch, but that "Zionists" want him to cut his ties to him. He stressed that as a result of this the representative would be left to rely on people who "aren't sensible"²⁶. The last connection is that the student organisation, VSMS, was present at the FIOE congress in 2009.²⁷

The above-mentioned Muslim Union, founded by a key person in the Czech branch of the Third World Relief Agency²⁸, used to run the website

17 The list of bodies has been compiled based on a literature review that comprised the works of Steven Merley, "The Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe", 2008, Aje Carlbon, "Islamic activism in a multicultural context: ideological continuity or change", (2018) and Guido Steinberg, "The Muslim Brotherhood in Germany", in *The Muslim Brotherhood*, 149-160. (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010).

18 Steven Merley, "The Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe", 2008. Available at: <https://www.globalmwwatch.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/The-Federation-of-Islamic-Organizations-in-Europe.pdf> [Accessed 15 May 2020].

19 While interviewed, Wojcik referenced the work of Krzysztof Izak who referred to the League as an organisation "under strong ideological influence of the Muslim Brotherhood", and a member of FIOE. Allegedly the League aims to foster Islamist socio-political change under the cover of ecumenical outreach and involvement in cross-religious dialogue. See: K. Izak, "Zagrozenie terroryzmem i ekstremizmem w Europie na podstawie wybranych przykladów. Terazniejszosc, prognoza ewolucji i kierunki rozwoju", *Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego* 5/11. Warszawa: Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego, 2011, 122

20 See: <https://femyso.org/profiles/muslim-students-society-of-poland/>

21 See: <https://islam.cz/2016/07/23/federace-islamskych-organizaci-v-evrope-fioe-durazne-odsuzuje-kriminalni-utok-v-mnichove/>

22 The Muslim Brotherhood in the West. Characteristics, Aims and Policy Considerations. Testimony presented before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Subcommittee on Terrorism, HUMINT, Analysis, and Counterintelligence on April 13, 2011. (Testimony of Lorenzo Vidino). <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e4bd/68c658b54cf69631f4547d524420489d818e.pdf>

23 See Bilal Philip's profile on the Counter Extremism Project website <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/bilal-philips>

24 See <https://hlidacipes.org/muslimske-bratrstvo-pusobi-uz-i-cesku-tvrdi-imamka-nemecka-jeji-dukazy-jsou-slabe/>

25 Soumaya Ghannoushi is the daughter of Rached Ghannouchi, the co-founder and leader of the Ennahda Movement, which was a Tunisian Muslim Brotherhood-inspired movement at the time of the publication of the article in *Al-Islam*. For the movement's departure from proselytisation, see <https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/09/05/ennahda-s-uneasy-exit-from-political-islam-pub-79789>

26 Lhořan Lukáš, "Předseda Islámské nadace v Brně se hlásí k Jusufu Qaradawimu". YouTube video: 04.02.2012, 2:53. August 31, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LD-NVQalXDB>.

27 Czech Interview 2, July 2020.

28 TWRA was a Czech branch of an institution with the same name based in Vienna. It was flagged by the CIA as an active NGO in 1990s containing "Islamic radicals tied to terrorist groups" and according to the BIS (Czech intelligence agency) it was financing terrorism. However, already in 1998-99, the group seems to have been stagnating. See <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/1995-11-22A.pdf> and <https://www.bis.cz/public/site/bis.cz/content/vyrocní-zpráva-o-cinnosti-za-rok-1998-a-1999.pdf>

Muslimské Listy which also has a Facebook page that uses the “R4bia” symbol as its profile image. This symbol was used during the Egyptian protests during the Arab Spring and has been adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood and also by Turkish President Recep Erdoğan²⁹. Mohamed Abbas’ own personal Facebook page commemorated Morsi after his death with a multitude of posts³⁰. Furthermore, Abbas’ personal page and the page of the Muslim Union display a number of pictures of people converting to Islam, although not many seem to be from the Czech Republic and the images’ authenticity has been questioned³¹. Nevertheless, the basic intent of showing a successful conversion can be interpreted as an indication of support for the idea of active proselytisation. On the other hand, it cannot be regarded as a sufficiently determining factor to label Abbas and the Muslim Union as a Muslim Brotherhood-inspired group because of the number of conspiracy theories that he is well-known for thanks to his media appearances³². One interviewed academic expert added that some media prefer inviting Abbas to appear because of his carelessly formulated opinions, which play into their hands by portraying Muslims in a negative light.³³

In Poland, somewhat similar activities have been noted, although to a lesser extent. Theoretically, supporting former President Morsi, the former leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, could indicate at least affinity with the movement on behalf of the League. This assertion, however, was quickly discounted, even by MZR activists and the academics who pointed out to the research team that as much as the League was actively involved on behalf of defending the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt, its Tatar competitor drew closer to Turkey, for example, cooperating closely on a variety of Diyanet-sponsored projects.³⁴ This cooperation was enacted despite the fact that the country has been labelled as developing into a “regional hub” for the Muslim Brotherhood in exile³⁵. Consequently,

all contacts interviewed on this subject agreed that such links are not necessarily the result of MZR or the League’s ideological affiliations but because of their pragmatism and need to secure funds for a relatively impoverished and, from a global point of view, marginal Muslim community in Poland. Some of the interviewed League activists were quick to point out the hypocrisy of accusations of being a front for “Islamic radicals” when it was Wahhabi Saudi Arabia that sponsored the Warsaw Islamic Centre, an MZR-affiliated cultural and prayer centre in Poland.

Further in the past, the Polish student Muslim organisation the SSM invited Islamist figures associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, including Faysal Mawlawi or the FIOE’s Ahmed al Rawi, to Poland³⁶. Moreover, it has also published books of authors at the center of the ideological thinking of the Muslim Brotherhood, such as for example Sayid Qutb³⁷ and was reported to have been under the “strong ideological influence of the Muslim Brothers”³⁸.

In Serbia, contrastingly, there are virtually no signs of reported activities that can be connected to the Muslim Brotherhood. These findings are in line with expert’s claims that the Muslim Brotherhood is not very prominent in Serbia. According to the same expert, the Muslim Brotherhood and its presence in Serbia are not a significant topic of discussion in public political discourse or academic circles³⁹. For example, unlike in the Czech Republic, there has been no signs of disseminating activities that demonstrate sympathies towards the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideology or affiliated persons. An investigation into academic and media reports demonstrated that possible Muslim Brotherhood ties with actors in Serbia were always made via Bosnia and Herzegovina. Namely, these links were reported on the basis of the personal and professional connections of various actors, including the Islamic Community in Serbia’s (IZuS) former Mufti

Muamer Zukorlić, with the former Bosnian Reisu-ul-Ulema Mustafa Cerić, who appears to have ties to Muslim Brotherhood members across Europe and beyond.⁴⁰ However, expert interviewed for this report in Serbia all suggested that these ties are largely unsubstantiated, as Cerić has a reputation as a “political chameleon”. According to one expert, “Cerić is everywhere and good with everyone — and is fantastic at being ambivalent”, which leaves reported ties solely on a speculative level.^{41,42} These allegations will further be discussed in a subsequent report focused on Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia.

Another avenue analysed for this report was through a Kosovo NGO called the Association for Culture and Education, or AKEA. It is an organisation with suspected Muslim Brotherhood ties⁴³. In particular, AKEA was shut down in 2014 by Kosovo’s Special Prosecutor’s Office as one of 64 “suspicious organisations”.⁴⁴ According to news reports from

2014, AKEA, with its headquarters in Pristina, was close to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and also enjoyed the support of Turkish President Erdoğan via the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, or TİKA⁴⁵. Upon investigation of the organisation’s potential ties to actors in Serbia, a Facebook post by former *Islamska Zajednica u Srbiji*’s leader Muamer Zukorlić dating back to 23 August 2013⁴⁶ highlighted that a book fair organised by AKEA in Prizren carried his autobiography, which was coincidentally a bestseller. The news was published on the Sandžak Press web portal, which more than once published news about AKEA’s activities, such as “Ramadan Nights” and the annual “Dokufest” in Prizren⁴⁷. However, as no other information was found to substantiate these suspected ties, the evidence of connections of actors in Serbia to the Muslim Brotherhood does not pass the threshold of being anything more than circumstantial.



29 See Dawn Perlmutter, “A New Muslim Brotherhood Symbol: R4BIA”. Middle East Forum: 09.11.2013, August 31, 2020, <https://www.meforum.org/3608/r4bia-muslim-brotherhood>.

30 See <https://www.facebook.com/mohamed.abbas.90/posts/2233938540055328>; <https://www.facebook.com/mohamed.abbas.90/posts/2233937603388755>; <https://www.facebook.com/mohamed.abbas.90/posts/2233935656722283>; <https://www.facebook.com/mohamed.abbas.90/posts/2233544890094693>; <https://www.facebook.com/mohamed.abbas.90/posts/2233354713447044>

31 See <https://www.facebook.com/muslimskaunie/posts/2920157998007187>; <https://www.facebook.com/muslimskaunie/posts/2907347709288216>; <https://www.facebook.com/muslimskaunie/posts/2885766451446342>; <https://www.facebook.com/muslimskaunie/posts/2885766211446366>; <https://www.facebook.com/muslimskaunie/posts/2885764674779853>; <https://www.facebook.com/muslimskaunie/posts/2885764464779874>; <https://www.facebook.com/muslimskaunie/posts/2885763144780006>; <https://www.facebook.com/muslimskaunie/posts/2885763831446604>; <https://www.facebook.com/muslimskaunie/posts/2783284408361214>

32 See <https://www.blesk.cz/clanek/zpravy-politika/295464/sef-ceskych-muslimu-terory-v-usa-a-parizi-mohou-byt-hry-tajnych-sluzeb.html>

33 Czech Interview 2, July 2020.

34 See e.g.: <http://mzr.pl/nowy-przedstawiciel-diyanetu-w-polsce/>.

35 See e.g.: <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2013/10/14/Turkey-s-relationship-with-the-Muslim-Brotherhood>.

36 See: https://euroislam.pl/wladze-gdanska-wspolpracuja-z-fundamentalistami-islamskimi/?fb_comment_id=1108649659187680_1110598638992782&print=print.

37 See: P. S. Slusarczyk, “Religia i polityka w pismach fundamentalistów muzułmańskich wydanych w języku polskim. Przykład Sajda Kutba”, [in:] S. Dudra et al. (eds.), *Polityczne uwarunkowania religii. Religijne uwarunkowania polityki*, Zielona Góra: Uniwersytet Zielonogorski, 2017, 273-87.

38 Krzysztof Izak, “Zagrożenie terroryzmem i ekstremizmem w Europie na podstawie wybranych przykładów. Teraźniejszość, prognoza ewolucji i kierunki rozwoju”, *Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego* 5 (3) 2011, 122. <https://www.abw.gov.pl/pl/pb/w/publikacje/przeglad-bezpieczenstw-6/772,Przegląd-Bezpieczenstwa-Wewnetrznego-nr-5-3-2011.html>.

39 Serbia Expert Interview 1, Belgrade August 2020; Serbia Expert Interview 2, Belgrade August 2020; Serbia Expert Interview 3, August 2020.

40 This concern arises from Cerić’s connections to the European Council for Fatwa and Research, an organization affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. The Council is headed by the global leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Yusuf al-Qaradawi.

41 Serbia Expert Interview 1, Belgrade August 2020.

42 See: Deutchewelle, “Mustafa Cerić: Od pohvala do osuda: 16.11. 2012”, August 31, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/bs/dr-mustafa-ceric-od-pohvala-do-osuda/a-16384747>.

43 Serbia Expert Interview 1, Belgrade August 2020.

44 See: Balkan portal, “Na Kosovo zatvorena AKEA Muslimanske braće: 23.09.2014”, August 31, 2020, <https://www.balkanplus.net/na-kosovu-zatvorena-akea-muslimanske-brace/>; RTS, “Zatvorena organizacija bliska Muslimanskoj braći: 23.09.2014”, August 31, 2020, <https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/135/hronika/1704262/zatvorena-organizacija-bliska-muslimanskoj-braci.html>;

45 RTS, “Zatvorena organizacija bliska Muslimanskoj Braći: 23.09.2014”. August 31, 2020, <https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/135/hronika/1704262/zatvorena-organizacija-bliska-muslimanskoj-braci.html>.

46 See: <https://www.facebook.com/MuamerZukorlic/posts/10151573583896697/>.

47 See, e.g., <https://sandzakpress.net/akea-ramazanske-noci-u-prizrenu/> or <https://sandzakpress.net/turisticka-ponuda-prizrena-sve-bolja/>

THE BREAKING POINT

Following the terrorist attacks in Europe between 2015 and 2016, immigrants were labelled as a security threat by Czech, Polish, and Serbian politicians, often depicting this heterogeneous group with a broad brush as Muslims, regardless of their actual faith. Consequently, a significant number of Czech, Polish, and Serbian citizens adopted far-right political narratives that had penetrated the wider discourse. As such, xenophobic nationalism accompanied by Islamophobia flourished across the political discussions in these countries.

In the past, even high-level officials in the Czech Republic publicly expressed negative attitudes towards Muslim immigrants. During the peak of the so-called “refugee crisis” (2015) and extremist jihadist terrorist activity in Europe (2015-2016), the prime minister rejected refugee quotas and demanded EU borders be closed to prevent Muslim refugees from entering Europe⁴⁸. The Czech president also made statements critical towards Muslims. Such rhetoric, which could be characterized as Islamophobic, included referring to Muslim refugees as “criminals”,⁴⁹ “a tsunami which will kill me”⁵⁰, and “Islamists who are coming to subjugate Europe”⁵¹. Other officials spread narratives that could be interpreted as Islamophobic, including the head of the Foreign Affairs Department, who described Muslim refugees as “dangerous foreign blood”⁵². Such comments moved the discourse into the sphere of securitisation of immigrants of Muslim background, meaning the creation of a narrative in the political sphere of an “existential threat” that would require immediate attention and additional measures to counter this new threat⁵³.

The atmosphere in the Czech Republic became even more inhospitable to Muslims after the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance demanded that Czech law be changed to stop the spread of Islamophobia and for racism to be prosecuted. This demand was rejected by the Czech Justice Ministry^{54,55}. This has allowed anti-Muslim sentiment to spread across Czech society, with a number of anti-Islam demonstrations taking place in Prague.⁵⁶ It is important to highlight, however, that there were also gatherings that welcomed refugees, which clashed with the anti-immigration crowd⁵⁷. A situation in which there is a lack of support from the state in curbing sentiments against a particular religious minority creates a complex problem for that particular group regardless of their ideology (Islamist or not), resulting in indirectly constraining the expression of individual and collective identity.

Added to the rhetoric and demonstrations was the police intervention in the Islamic Centre (a now-closed prayer room that used to be administered by the Islamic Foundation in Prague) right before the start of Friday prayers on 25 April, 2014⁵⁸. According to an expert interviewed for this report, this action deteriorated the relationships between this Muslim community and the state to an extent that fewer practising Muslims now go to prayers for security reasons⁵⁹, in effect making the communities even less organised and concentrated. This presents another challenge to any Muslim Brotherhood-linked organisation attempting to present itself as representative of the entire Muslim community, since the number of practising group members is now lower.

In the case of Poland, the 2015 parliamentary elections mark a turning point and the beginning of an escalation towards increasing anti-Muslim rhetoric. Prior to the 2015 national elections, Poland pledged to accept 7000 refugees as part of the European relocation plan⁶⁰. However, this approach was overturned after the elections, which saw a change of government in Warsaw⁶¹. The so-called European “migration crisis” and the election campaign in Poland largely overlapped and prompted a string of right-wing publications to describe the arriving refugees as “invading ... hostile strangers”⁶², rapists, or murderers⁶³. In the aftermath of the Paris (2015) and Brussels (2016) terrorist attacks, the Polish government saw “no possibility for the migrants to arrive in Poland at the current time [i.e. March 2016]”. This statement was supported by assertions that the government could not determine with certainty whether terrorists or ISIS fighters were amongst the migrants⁶⁴. Similar to the situation in the Czech Republic, Poland also saw several protests against refugees, including public statements which could be considered hate speech towards Muslims⁶⁵.

Furthermore, the government enacted structural changes. For example, it dissolved the Council Against Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia, the only state body that was working on tackling discrimination.⁶⁶ It was argued that it was a “non-functioning body” and its tasks could be replaced by other existing institutions⁶⁷.

In Serbia, Islamophobia expresses itself in different forms. While some academic literature on Islamophobia in Serbia suggests that it differs from the phenomenon visible in Western Europe, the reality is more complex. This differentiation can be seen in the Islamophobia directed towards the autochthonous Muslim population as compared to Islamophobia directed towards newly arrived

migrants, which is similar to Islamophobia observable in the rest of Europe.

Islamophobia towards the autochthonous Muslim population in Serbia stems from multidimensional historical factors that have shaped the region and country itself. Thus the relation of the non-Muslim population towards Islam is directly tied to historical developments and conflicts between inhabiting groups. In particular, the heritage of Ottoman Empire rule is a principal factor in shaping Islamophobia in Serbia⁶⁸ and has evolved into hatred for a particular ethnic group. Previous research showed that only 8% of Serbs stated that they feel an affinity for Bosniaks while only 2% felt close to Albanians⁶⁹. While the findings of the study show a significant degree of social distance, an expert has confirmed that it is largely respectful⁷⁰. A noteworthy factor contributing to the social distance is the geographical locations of the populations, given the isolated autochthonous Muslim populations in the Preševo Valley and Raška region⁷¹. As a result, Muslims in Serbia occupy less favourable positions in the infrastructure and organisations⁷².

While Serbian politicians rarely demonstrate explicit Islamophobic sentiment⁷³, commemorations of war events, such as expulsions of populations, genocide, and war crimes from the 1990s, are still very present in the political arena. To illustrate this, Patrijarh Irinej, the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, joined the recurrent anti-Muslim statements when he publicly stated that in his view “the Serbian people rightfully say that *poturice*⁷⁴ are worse than the Turks”⁷⁵. Simultaneously, given the “spectacular” nature of terrorist activity in the world, media outlets and politicians have contributed to an increase in Islamophobia via securitisation of Islam in Serbia. For example, since the rise of Slobodan Milošević the historical region of Sandžak has been portrayed as a dangerous place, a centre of radical Islam in Serbia.

48 Jan Culik, “Why Is the Czech Republic So Hostile to Muslims and Refugees?: 09.02.2017”, EuropeNow, August 31, 2020, <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2017/02/09/why-is-the-czech-republic-so-hostile-to-muslims-and-refugees/>.

49 Britské listy, “Czech President Miloš Zeman Sings the National Anthem with a Proponent of Concentration Camps and Gas Chambers for Muslims: 17. 11. 2015”, Britské listy, August 31, 2020, <http://blisty.cz/art/79892.html>.

50 Aubrey Allegretti, “Czech President Miloš Zeman Says Refugees Are Like A ‘Tsunami That Will Kill Him’: 1. 09. 2015”, Huffington Post, August 31, 2020, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/09/01/eu-migrant-crisis-refugees-tsunami-czech_n_8069350.html.

51 Britské listy, “Czech President Miloš Zeman: The Immigrants Are Islamists. They Are Trying to Subjugate Europe: 5. 11. 2015”, Britské listy, August 31, 2020, <http://blisty.cz/art/79737.html>.

52 Britské listy, “Head of President Zeman’s Foreign Department Compares the Refugees to ‘Dangerous Alien Blood’: 25. 10. 2015”, Britské listy, August 31, 2020, <http://blisty.cz/art/79568.html>.

53 For more on securitisation, see Buzan, Barry, and Ole Waever. *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; Fox, Jonathan, and Yasemin Akbaba. *Securitization of Islam and religious discrimination: Religious minorities in Western democracies, 1990 – 2008*. Comparative European Politics 13 (2), 2015: 175 – 197; or Jocelyne Cesari. *Why the West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

54 Culik, “Why Is the Czech Republic So Hostile to Muslims and Refugees?”

55 Čeněk Třeček and Michal Hron, “Tady Platí Právo, Ne Šarial Stovky Lidí Demonstrovali v Praze Proti Islámu: 16.01.2015”, iDNES.cz, August 31, 2020, https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/demonstrace-proti-islam-u-praha_A150116_145143_domaci_hro.

56 Kubištová, P., Hendrych, L., and Josef Kopecký, “My Jsme Tady Doma, Skandovali Demonstranti Proti Islámu před Hradem: 06.02. 2016”, iDNES.cz, August 31, 2020, https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/demonstrace-kvuli-imigraci-v-praze_A160206_124807_domaci_pku.

57 Simao, “ONLINE Protesty Proti Uprchlíkům v Praze: Ozvala Se i Střelba a Dělobuchy: 06.02.2016”, Blesk.cz, August 31, 2020, <https://www.blesk.cz/clanek/zpravy-politika/372221/online-protesty-proti-uprchlikum-v-praze-ozvala-se-i-strelba-a-delobuchy.html>.

58 Jiří Štátný and Jakub Pokorný, “Policie vysvětlila ministrově zásah v mešitě. Přišla už před modlitbou: 06.05.2014”, iDNES.cz/Zpravodajstv, August 31, 2020, https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/cerna-kronika/zasah-v-mesite-byl-v-poradku-ministr-ma-prvni-zpravu_A140506_144114_krimi_js.

59 Czech Interview 3, 2020.

60 Kasia Narkowicz, “Refugees Not Welcome Here’: State, Church and Civil Society Responses to the Refugee Crisis in Poland”, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 31, no. 4, (2018): 357-373, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-018-9287-9_366.

61 Aleks Szczerbiak, “How Is the European Migration Crisis Affecting Polish Politics?: 14.07.2017”, EUROPP, August 31, 2020, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/07/06/european-migration-crisis-affecting-polish-politics/>.

62 Marcin Kotras, “Dyskurs o imigrantach. Strategie Argumentacyjne w Polskich Tygodnikach Opinii”, *Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis. Folia Sociologica*, (2016): 59-80, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.18778/0208-600X.59.04>.

63 Narkowicz, “Refugees Not Welcome Here”, 369.

64 See: <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/polityka/artykuly/516410.beata-szydlo-rzad-pis-uchodzczy-imigranci-stanowisko-zamachy-bruksela-belgia.html>.

65 Nigdy Więcej, 2016.

66 Kasia Narkowicz, “Re-emerging racisms: understanding hate in Poland”. *Discover Society*, 2016, 33, <http://discoversociety.org/2016/06/01/re-emerging-racisms-understanding-hate-in-poland/>.

67 Kaczmarczyk, Wojciech. “Odpowiedź na interpelację nr 3009”. June 30, 2016. Retrieved August 31, 2020, from <http://www.sejm.gov.pl/sejm8.nsf/InterpelacjaTresc.xsp?key=17098A7D>.

68 Ivan Ejub Kostić, “Etno-nacionalna politika i islamofobija u Srbiji: 24.05.2018”, Preporod.com, August 31, 2020, <https://www.preporod.com/index.php/misljenja/item/9670-etno-nacionalna-politika-i-islamofobija-u-srbiji>.

69 DEMOSTAT Research and Media Centre, “Serbian Citizens’ Awareness of Wars in ‘90s, War Crimes, and War Crime Trials: 2017”, August 31, 2020 <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Public-opinion-research-War-crimes-trials-Demostat.pdf>.

70 Serbia Expert Interview 2, Belgrade August 2020.

71 Serbia Expert Interview 2, Belgrade August 2020.

72 Ivan Ejub Kostić, “Islamophobia in Serbia: National Report 2019” in Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez (eds), *European Islamophobia Report*, (Ankara: 2020), 701.

73 There has been one incident recorded recently—Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic called Kosovo Albanian representatives “forest people”.

74 Derogatory term denoting southern Slavs who have converted to/accepted Islam as their religion.

75 Al Jazeera Balkans, “Irinej poručio Đukanoviću: Ni Turci, ni komunisti nisu atakovali na imovinu crkve: 15.06.2019”, August 31, 2020, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/irinej-porucio-djukanovicu-ni-turci-ni-komunisti-nisu-atakovali-na-imovinu-crkve>.

Such stereotypes persist until today⁷⁶. According to the president of the Sandžak Committee for Human Rights, Islamophobia has mostly been spread by media, namely tabloid newspapers like the *Informer*, *Alo*, *Kurir*, *Telegraf* and *Pravda*—daily news outlets known for giving considerable space to right-wing extremist views⁷⁷.

With a greater influx of migrants from the Middle East and the African continent, new anti-Muslim sentiments arose that differ from those directed towards the domestic Muslim population as they lack an ethno-nationalist component and are rather tied to the fear of the unknown. As one expert described it, this is because the non-Muslim majority in Serbia is “used to the type of Islam practiced in Serbia”⁷⁸.

Media outlets have played a significant role in fostering these negative sentiments, as sensationalist news titles suggesting, among other things, that foreign Muslim men are coming to “our country from afar to cover our women” became the norm in the mid-2010s⁷⁹. According to a media analysis in 2016, such coverage lacked professional and critical standards and contributed to the securitisation of migrants through rumoured connections to various terrorist organisations, heavily focusing on petty criminal activity and even presenting them as health risks⁸⁰. For example, some of the headlines were: “Albanians and Wahhabis in Preševo: They take asylum-seekers to the mosque and recruit them for radical Islam!” (“Albanci i vehabije u Preševu”, 2015) or “They rob monasteries, break things and attack us: This is how Serbs complain about the asylum-seekers!” (“Pljačkaju manastire”, 2015)⁸¹

Yet, it is important to note that the securitisation of the issue was also brought about by government policies. Since 2016, Minister of Interior Nebojša Stefanović has on more than one occasion stated that “we will not allow migrants to endanger the safety of citizens”⁸². More recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government ordered military presence around three migration centres in the municipality of Šid. At that time, Minister of Defence Aleksandar Vulin stated that the army’s presence at the migrant camps in Šid did not mean that big

problems are expected or that someone would use force but that it helps “citizens feel better, calmer and safer” and “not to allow any migrants who are possibly out of the camps to cause any problems”⁸³. These negative sentiments portraying migrants as a security threat, closely intertwined with anti-Muslim opinions, also were visible in the March 2020 anti-migrant rallies in which Serbian right-wingers held aloft a banner saying “Terrorists not welcome!” in front of the parliament building⁸⁴.

The securitisation of Muslims in the height of the so called “refugee crisis” in Europe meant that instead of focusing on the multitude of issues attached to policymaking, such as handling legal and irregular migration and processing refugees from the humanitarian crisis as the fallout of long-lasting wars in Europe’s neighbourhood, the narratives of populist and far-right actors resonated with a vocal group of individuals. They were used as a pretext to encourage Islamophobia or *Muslimophobia* that gained strength after 2015 in all countries at the centre of this study. Some member states of the Visegrád Four⁸⁵ such as Hungary and Slovakia expanded the powers of the security forces right after the Paris attacks and they “[tied] the threat of terrorism to migration from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries immersed in conflicts”⁸⁶. Media saturated with disinformation and an environment harder to navigate also played an important role in influencing popular opinion⁸⁷. Altogether, this facilitated a very challenging space for all groups that fell in the “other” category as opposed to the majority to express their individual and group identity. At the same time, the increasing polarisation of society, which could be a potential vulnerability to be exploited by other actors⁸⁸, could ironically weaken the security of a given country.

Reactions to new hardships

As an increasingly more difficult situation began to take hold in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Serbia, the reactions of the groups studied for this report varied. Against the backdrop of the devastating jihadist attacks in European cities in

2015, the Islamic Foundation in Prague decided to be proactive at first and visit schools to talk about Islam as a peaceful religion, as well as inviting the public into the mosques⁸⁹. Together with its sister organisation in Brno, the INP vigorously attempted to publicly condemn the actions of the terrorists and decouple the link between Islam and terrorism by saying the two have nothing in common and that terrorism affects everyone regardless of their religion⁹⁰. A similar approach was adopted by the Islamic Community of Serbia, which established and supported anti-extremism projects in the country⁹¹. Such actions should not be confused with proselytisation, as the purpose was to distance the wider Muslim communities from terrorism, rather than invite others into the religion.

The representative of the Centre of Muslim Communities, which unites the aforementioned foundations in Prague, Brno, and other smaller towns, also mentioned the fearful reactions of their members after seeing the president on stage with a representative of the Block against Muslims.⁹² Moreover, there have been several incidents, such as damaging a mosque with anti-Muslim graffiti, breaking windows, or leaving a pig’s head in front of it⁹³. In the same article, the representative also emphasised that he was growing tired of trying to persuade Czech society to accept him and Muslim believers. However, despite this statement in 2015 he currently remains in his leadership position. The Islamic Foundation in Prague also needed to take action when their members became controversial. First, one member, a self-proclaimed imam, was arrested for facilitating travel for foreign terrorist fighters to Syria⁹⁴, and after the attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, another member and the chair of the foundation made a controversial statement in media that Muslims should arm themselves, after which he was fired⁹⁵. What used to be the most active part of the Muslim communities, the Islamic Foundation in Prague, has in recent years taken down many publications, such as the online magazine *Hlas*, or other material from its websites and has severely

limited its online publication activity, reflecting the developments further. Upon visiting the INP, the administrator mentioned that in his view, Islamophobia is not a problem of people not being informed, but rather of politicians summing up their reaction to current events⁹⁶.

Similarly, in Poland, the League activists interviewed for this report confirmed in part the experts’ view on the organisation as being less present in the public sphere, and seemingly less active. In their view, this could be the result of the exhaustion of its members after 2015 when “the whole community found itself under siege. This ISIS thing, we were slurred with it. And yes, one of our activists, a member [Jakub Jakus] even went to Syria to fight, which did not help.⁹⁷ We were scared, we all had our online ‘fans’, ‘haters’, ‘stalkers’, our premises were picketed”. Such conditions hardly prepositioned the organisation towards more activism, as seemingly “our each and every media appearance led to more of the same, a truly vicious circle”. In response and in order to control the messaging coming out of the League, the organisation centralised its operations and banned invitations to guest speakers not approved nor vetted by the leadership, and stopped the practice of even offering to put up travelling guests in its mosques or prayer homes for the night. At the same time, the issue of vetting applicants came back on the agenda of the League’s board as the organisation debated the best possible way of ensuring the Jakus case would not repeat itself. The discourse professed by the League, in the eyes of some members, “drifted leftwards—more to do with equality, became anti-imperialist in a sense, more progressive”⁹⁸.

Finally, the League’s decreased activism could also be the result of the financial tribulations of the organisation. Here, it seems, is where the relatively short-lived political activism of its members had drastic consequences, as the organisation is still in the red over its biggest structural achievement, the construction of its Centre of Islamic Culture in

76 Bojan Perović, “Islamophobia and Media Representation of Refugees in Serbia”, (Marmara Journal of Communication: 2016), 18

77 Bojan Perović, “Islamophobia and Media Representation of Refugees in Serbia”, 18.

78 Serbia Expert Interview 2, Belgrade August 2020.

79 Serbian Expert Interview 1, Belgrade August 2020.

80 Bojan Perović, “Islamophobia and Media Representation”, 2016.

81 Other such headlines included: “Not only rumours: Among migrants there are terrorists” (“Nisu samo glassine”, 2015); “What is happening: Migrants brought disease to Serbia, all are hiding identities and raise 400,000 euros daily” (“Šta se to dešava migranti”, 2015), “More refugees: Migrants will soon Islamize Serbia!” (“Sve više izbeglica”, 2015) For more, see Bojan Perović, “Islamophobia and Media Representation of Refugees in Serbia”, 26-27.

82 See: <https://www.alo.rs/vesti/aktuelno/necemo-dozvoliti-da-migranti-ugrozavaju-bezbednost-gradana/69326/vest>

83 See: <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a600486/Vulin-Vojaska-obebedjuje-kamp-da-migranti-ne-bi-pravili-probleme.html>

84 See: <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/protest-zbog-migranata-i-izbeglica-ispred-vlade-srbije/>

85 The member states of the Visegrád Four are the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia.

86 See: Kalan, Dariusz and Rękawek, Kacper. “Counterterrorism Fever in the V4 and Guidance for Poland”. (2016).

87 See: GLOBSEC Vulnerability Index: Subversive Russian Influence in Central Europe, 2017, 26. https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/GLOBSEC_Vulnerability_Index.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1kSxwUWhCgK8xhibqQa5z_-PlsU3B8JRqISQ0EcEPsBTSvANDq1sq2ZLU

88 Ibid.

89 Czech interview 2, July 2020.

90 CTK, iDNES. “S islámem to nemá nic společného, odsoudili ostře útok českých muslimov: 07.01.2015, August 27, 2020”, https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/odsouzeni-utoku-v-parizi-ceskymi-muslimy.A150107_182554_domaci_neh and Josef Kopecký. *Jakékoli Násilí a Teror Odsuzujeme, Říká Lídr Českých Muslimů Alrawi: 09.01.2015*. iDNES.cz, August 31, 2020, https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/jakekoli-nasili-a-terror-odsuzujeme-rika-lidr-ceskych-muslimu-alrawi.A150109_114408_domaci_kop.

91 Ognjen Zorić and Amela Bajrović, “Srbija i ekstremizam: Upitni efekti prevencije: May 2016”, Slobodna Evropa, August 31, 2020, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-i-ekstremizam-upitni-efekti-prevencije/27759122.html>.

92 Michaela Těšínská and Milan Rokos. “Čeští muslimové mají strach, děsí je veřejné projevy nesnášenlivosti: 13 December 2015”, August 27, 2020, https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/cesti-muslimove-maji-strach.A151212_182434_in_domov_ELE.

93 IslamOnline.sk. “Pred vchod do brnenskej mešity položili bravčovú hlavu: 27.11.2016”, August 27, 2020, <https://www.islamonline.sk/2016/11/pred-vchod-do-brnenskej-mešity-polozili-bravcovu-hlavu/>

94 Jiří Novák. “Islámská nadace se distancuje od Shehadeha. Nebyl pražským imámem, píše: 25.01.2015”, August 27, 2020, https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/islamska-nadace-samer-shehadeh-distancovani-terorismus.A180125_061750_domaci_jn

95 Eva Zdařilová, “Leonid Kušnarenko, který vyzval muslimy k ozbrojení, končí. Ustředí muslimských obcí mu zrušilo členství: 25.03.2019”, August 27, 2020, <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/domaci/leonid-kusnarenko-konci-ustredi-muslimskych-obci-mu-zrusilo-clenstvi>

96 Czech interview 4, August 2020.

97 See: <https://lody.wyborcza.pl/lody/7,44788,21991933,strach-stal-sie-permanentna-emocja-terrorysty-osiagneli-swoj.html?disableRedirects=true>

98 It has to be noted that such an approach draws heavy criticism from the self-confessed “critics of Islamism” group of interviewees, who see it as a deliberate attempt to mask the League’s “true intentions”.

Warsaw, which opened in 2015, and the closure of its publication, *As Salam*.

Similar to the situation in the Czech Republic, there have been some recorded incidents of desecration of mosques in Serbia. Furthermore the *Islamic Community in Serbia* reported that they received threatening letters. Following such an incident in 2019, the Meshihat of the Islamic Community in Serbia expressed concern and strongly condemned the act, which “was not characteristic of these areas, even in the 1990s, coloured by hatred and intolerance towards Bosniaks and Muslims”⁹⁹. Despite some incidents including the burning and vandalism of mosques in Belgrade and Niš in 2004 by right-wing nationalists in response to the burning of Orthodox churches and monasteries in Kosovo, no other such incidents have been recorded in recent years, fostering an overall peaceful environment¹⁰⁰. The Islamic Community of Serbia and the Islamic Community in Serbia continue to publicly advocate against the rise of Islamophobia in Serbia, both in relation to autochthonous Muslims and migrants, and in Europe and globally. Following the Christchurch shootings, both IZuS and IZS published statements and spoke to media about the surge of anti-Muslim sentiments, calling for tolerance and justice¹⁰¹. As mentioned before, in response to the negative sentiments, which have grown due to the number of people from Serbia, particularly Sandžak, travelling to Syria and Iraq to become foreign fighters, *Islamska Zajednica u Srbiji* opted to tackle the issue head on. With these events harming the perception of all Muslims in Serbia, IZuS established and supported programmes, some in cooperation with NGOs, to conduct anti-extremism and security trainings for impressionable youth¹⁰².

Other actors

Although it seems that the institutions analysed for this report have a large enough membership to afford the running and maintenance of their premises, expanding or building new places of worship without financing from external sources seems impossible. Since the number of members who could contribute is not large, as most Muslims, particularly in the Czech Republic and Poland, remain unaffiliated to any officially established organisations, other actors are needed to provide the resources for any projects

more ambitious than maintaining the status quo. It should be noted, however, that the information on funding is hardly comprehensive as it is not public in many cases but rather has been compiled from available open-source information. According to an expert interviewee, UMO in the Czech Republic does not publish its annual financial report despite it being an obligation by law and at the same time they manage to organise summer schools and invite lecturers from the Arab world¹⁰³.

The official website shown in Arabic of the Islamic Foundations in Brno, for instance, mentions that it was founded with the contribution of persons from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but the founding of this entity dates back to the 1990s¹⁰⁴. The UAE has been also active in the smaller town of Teplice, whose Muslim minority is also to some extent organised under the UMO and they mostly come from Gulf countries to this spa town for leisure. A private investor from Dubai has tried for years to build a mosque via various interlocutors, but ultimately failed¹⁰⁵. There is also a visible Turkish minority in the Czech Republic, however, they mostly belong to the Gülen movement, according to the experts interviewed for this study.

The Muslim League in Poland enjoyed a wide range of donors from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), grouped in the Ambassadorial Council of the Muslim Countries, an informal body of high-level diplomats accredited to Poland, which acted as a link between the Polish Muslims and the donors from the MENA region. However, when it enthusiastically welcomed the 2011 Arab Spring and picketed the Egyptian embassy in the aftermath of Egyptian President Morsi’s ouster in 2013, it suffered from a financial backlash from some of its donors, especially those coming from the countries that declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organisation, i.e., Saudi Arabia and the UAE¹⁰⁶.

Similar to the situation in the Czech Republic and Poland, apparent financial hardship within the Islamic Communities in Serbia was observed. Despite not having the opportunity to converse with the members of the administration of either Islamic community, an investigation into public addresses, press releases, and similar accounts has shown that the members of *Islamska Zajednica u Srbiji*

highlight a lack of financial stability and prosperity. Former Mufti Zukorlić highlighted that the primary source of income for the administration of IZuS is sadaqah (charitable donations), which undermines the community’s progress¹⁰⁷. This issue has been brought to light multiple times before, as Insajder’s research shows that only 2% of the budget for religious communities is shared between *Islamska Zajednica Srbije* and *Islamska Zajednica u Srbiji*¹⁰⁸.

On the wider question of Turkish state influence (not Sufism) in Serbia, one interviewee stated that “we [Serbia] has been waiting for the pledged Turkish money for a long time”¹⁰⁹. This answer was prompted by questions regarding Turkey’s involvement in the attempted reconciliation of the two Islamic Communities in Serbia, which, as suggested by the same interviewee and supported by another, has been a failure since reconciliation is a “tricky political question”, referring to the larger Sandžak issue¹¹⁰. However, the involvement of the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, a visit by Erdoğan, and the tri-lateral Serbia-BiH-Turkey meeting in Belgrade in October 2019, demonstrate that Turkey seeks to establish itself as the dominant player in the Balkans. By spreading its influence in this way, Turkey is attempting to “close the door” to other Islamic players in the region, mainly by employing a rather paternalistic approach and “seeking to become the alpha and omega in the Balkans”¹¹¹.

According to an interview with an expert, the influence of both Gulf countries—the UAE and Saudi Arabia—as well as Turkey are present in Serbia and the wider Western Balkans¹¹². Turkey’s influence is spread through institutionalised and legal channels which can systematise the Turkish presence in the Balkans and result in a more difficult expulsion of their influence if deemed necessary at any point. In addition, he also suggested that Turkey is the more “palatable” influence in Serbia and the Balkans as their presence is more familiar than that of the Gulf states¹¹³.

On a larger scale, the interviews conducted for this report as well as the available literature suggest

that the Muslim Brotherhood is not very prominent in Serbia¹¹⁴. To add, the Muslim Brotherhood and its presence in the region are not a topic of discussion to a large extent in the public political discourse or academic circles. One expert explained the lack of Muslim Brotherhood presence in Serbia by the increased presence of the Gulf states and actors in the country, which would be a significant deterrent for the Muslim Brotherhood, as “they don’t really mix”¹¹⁵. Nevertheless, the expert also suggested that while it is difficult to establish a solid link between an Islamic community as a whole or larger Islamic movements to the Muslim Brotherhood, it is important to note that such movements are largely decentralised, which would allow for discrepancies on a micro level. For example, different *jamaats*¹¹⁶ could function differently and have stronger ties with other organisations depending on their members and leadership. Due to the presence of Gulf actors, either through government channels or non-governmental organisations, Serbia has placed a stronger focus on (neo-) fundamentalist movements, such as Salafist and Wahhabi currents, and on extremist jihadists, as events and discussions connected to these particular movements have been perceived as more relevant and/or potentially a more significant threat to Serbia’s security.

According to research from 2018, it is suspected that there are around 7000 people who can be classified as Islamist extremists, a number slightly higher than the number of right-wing extremists in Serbia¹¹⁷. The phenomena of Islamist extremism became prominent around the beginning of the conflict in Syria, as some Muslims from the Balkans, and specifically Serbia, travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight alongside various terrorist groups such as ISIL and Al-Nusra¹¹⁸.

In 2006 and 2007, 12 Salafis from Novi Pazar were convicted of crimes related to terrorism, namely for planning terrorist acts on the territory of Serbia, inducing an assassination attempt of the Mufti¹¹⁹. Since 2010, the Salafis in Sandžak have become more active and organised, including a greater

99 See: <http://ba.n1info.com/Regija/a317937/Prijetece-pismo-Islamskoj-zajednici-u-Srbiji.html>

100 Jelena Đukić Pejić, “Kako je muslimanima u današnjoj Srbiji :27.03. 2018”, Deutchewelle, August 31, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/bs/kako-je-muslimanima-u-današnjoj-srbiji/a-43141903>

101 See: <https://www.fokus.ba/vijesti/globus/celni-ljudi-muslimana-u-srbiji-nakon-napada-u-novom-zelandu-terorizam-je-zlo/1403935/>

102 Ognjen Zorić and Amela Bajrović, “Srbija i ekstremizam: Upitni efekti prevencije: May 2016, Slobodna Evropa”, August 31, 2020, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-i-ekstremizam-upitni-efekti-prevencije/27759122.html>.

103 Czech Interview 3, August 2020.

104 دنوڤر ڊنيڊم يف يم السالال فقولو ائي مچ ڇ نڇ ڏڊن (n.d.), August 28, 2020, from <http://brno.muslim.cz/arabic/about.htm>

105 Veronika Jelínková, “Muslimská menšina a její politická participace v ČR”, 2016, 33-34.

106 See: Pedziwiatr, Wpływ imigrantów arabskich.

107 See: <https://mesihat.org/2019/10/10/islamskoj-zajednici-nema-napretka-dok-je-sadaka-glavni-prihod-finansiranja-administracije/>

108 Insajder, “Srpska pravoslavna crkva - dobija iz budžeta, a neće da plaća porez: 12.01.2017”, insajder.net, August 31, 2020, <https://insajder.net/sr/sajt/tema/2719/>.

109 Serbian Expert Interview 1, Belgrade August 2020.

110 Serbian Expert Interview 1, Belgrade August 2020; Serbian Expert Interview 2, Belgrade August 2020.

111 Serbian Expert Interview 1, Belgrade August 2020; Serbian Expert Interview 2, Belgrade August 2020.

112 Serbian Expert Interview 3, Belgrade August 2020.

113 Serbian Expert Interview 3, Belgrade August 2020.

114 Serbia Expert Interview 1, Belgrade August 2020; Serbia Expert Interview 2, Belgrade August 2020; Serbia Expert Interview 3, August 2020.

115 Serbia Expert Interview 1, Belgrade August 2020.

116 Jamaats (SRB: džemat) are the basic organisational units of the Islamic community and, as a rule, they are made up of at least 100 Muslim households living in one area, with the exception of the Majlis in the area of the Belgrade-Novı Sad Muftiate, which have a smaller number of households. [See: <https://mesihat.org/hijerarhija/dzemat/>]

117 Edina Bećirević, “Salafism Vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims”, Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 2016, 36-37.

118 Danijela Luković, “Za ISIS ratuje 49 osoba iz Srbije, Blic: 27.07.2017”, Blic, August 31, 2020, <https://goo.gl/u6mHq3>.

119 Predrag Petrović and Isidora Stakić, “Extremism Research Forum - Serbia Report”, May 2018, 10.

influx of finances as well¹²⁰. A factor contributing to the rise of Salafism is also the split among the Islamic communities in Serbia that occurred in 2007 and which gave way to external fundamentalist influences solidifying their presence in Sandžak¹²¹. The 2018 Extremism Report highlights accounts from Muslim interviewees, stating their concern with the difference in habits and circles between the majority of Muslims and the Salafis, with the latter portrayed as tending to be aggressive, assertive, and exhibiting predatory behaviour on the most vulnerable¹²². While the majority of the population does not perceive Salafism as a threat, they are concerned that a member of that group might turn violent¹²³. The same report highlights that Sandžak Salafis gather in *masjids* outside the *Islamska Zajednica u Srbiji*, with testimony that IZuS perhaps approves or even organises Salafi *masjids*¹²⁴. According to both the Salafis and followers of Hanafi Madhab in Serbia, the Furkan and Al-Tawhid *masjids* in Novi Pazar present gathering places for Takfiris, who count 100 members. The Takfiris are seen as violent, including by Salafis and Wahhabis, and have threatened other members of the Muslim communities¹²⁵.

Contrary to research on the dissemination of Muslim Brotherhood ideology, other groups are present online, thus reaching a wider audience. Several Facebook pages and websites are known to propagate Takfiri ideology, enticing discrimination towards others—particularly the general Muslim population in Serbia that follow Hanafi Islam¹²⁶. As one expert noted, Islamic proselytisation is occurring to a higher degree within Islamic communities, with significant focus placed on engaging in behaviours and adapting existing belief systems to become “a better Muslim”¹²⁷.

Another expert made an observation that the most prominent change in Islamisation can be observed among Muslim members of the Roma community in Belgrade, particularly in Zemun polje, Novi Sad, and Smederevo¹²⁸. Such accounts have also been a topic of discussion in Serbian media, as there have been records of Roma who have either converted to Islam or have taken up a different form of the religion, for example, wearing short trousers and growing long beards¹²⁹. Academic reports also claim that there

has been a trend of militant Salafi ideas spreading to Muslim members of Roma communities. There have also been recorded cases of Orthodox Christian Roma converting to Islam under the auspice of Salafi imams. Salafi Roma are largely peaceful, although 11 Roma became foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, according to media reports¹³⁰.

In summary, the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood in the way that it expresses itself in organisations in Western Europe is virtually non-existent but, on the other hand, there is an increase in other actors interested in Serbia. Organisations in both the Czech Republic and Poland receive attention and funding from investors from the Arabian Peninsula. All three countries at the centre of this report remain focused on the threat of extremist jihadist terrorism and the issue of groups advocating political Islam is reduced as a result, as experts interviewed for this study explained during their interviews. However, intelligence agencies did not comment when asked about this issue. This would leave any Muslim Brotherhood-linked organisation relatively free to conduct their usual activities. However, currently there is a significant amount of internal competition in the region and the organisations studied for this report appear to have exhausted their resources and energy in battles against the noticeable anti-Muslim sentiment among the various discussed groups.



THE PRESENT

In 2020, a snapshot of the organisations analysed for this report offers a contrast to their image 10-15 years ago. Having to fight hard to shake off the connection to terrorism and illegal migration has exhausted and demoralised their leadership. Funding is still hard to come by, which severely limits the scale of their activities today. Deflecting never-ending suspicions of links to terrorists and internal vetting of their members has transformed the entities into very quiet groups, especially when compared to a few years back. This is a common trait for all the studied groups regardless of the country because their members mostly have a foreign background. Obviously, the autochthonous communities in Poland and Serbia do not face such pressure from the state and public.

When analysing the relationship of the communities at the centre of this report with their respective state institutions, a certain level of distrust is observable. There are a few exceptions, such as INP’s access to Remand Prison Praha–Ruzyně sending prisoners articles, books, and even opening a prayer room, or public hospitals that pay converts to help explain how to take care of Muslim patients from the Arab world in a culturally sensitive manner¹³¹. In general, though, these activities are now limited to defensive reactions. According to an expert, the leaders remain demoralised because they do not have the resources to present a peaceful image of Islam¹³². The expert adds: “local politicians are wary of including Muslims in law-making” in the current “anti-Muslim mood”, so it is impossible to talk of any access to the government, to influence policies. Additionally, local governments are unable to handle topics related to Muslims, even in the case of the Teplice mosque, which initially received a positive approach from the mayor, who tried to calm the situation down, but ended up turning sides and blocking the proposal after a petition¹³³. Ever since the 2004 denial of the second level of registration of a religious body (that would grant them rights such as teaching Islam in schools or facilitating weddings) by the Ministry of Culture, the relationship with the state has been complicated¹³⁴. The police intervention before Friday prayers on the premises of the INP in 2014 has significantly worsened the relationship¹³⁵.

According to some MZR interviewees, the League has effectively “grown old” — individuals who formed SSM were students in the late 1980s and the early 1990s but today all have families and jobs, and to a large extent have moved on with their lives. They might still lead the organisation, but at the cost of it not being the most agile or energetic, and thus, largely failing in its outreach mission. A 2017 doctoral thesis on the influence of Islamic converts on their local communities provides intriguing evidence about the League’s aforementioned “resting on its laurels”¹³⁶. The organisation allegedly refused to support a local chapter led by a female convert who was able to draw large crowds to events organised by the League on “controversial” topics, such as Muslim feminism. This initiative was apparently critically received by the League’s top brass (mostly of Arabic origin) which preferred more theoretical or Arab-centric topics. At the same time, the League failed to find a position as imam for a Polish convert who underwent thorough theological studies in Saudi Arabia and passed the necessary qualifications for imams working for the League’s chapters, despite the fact that several positions were apparently available at the time. These two isolated events do not constitute a full-blown trend but nonetheless poignantly depict an organisation that, in these two cases, actually missed out on significant opportunities to spread its brand and also to reach out to native Polish and non-Muslim audiences. Such an approach would hardly be characteristic of an activist and a full-blown revivalist Islamist structure in any country.

The available academic literature further emphasizes that the League used to have a more activist profile. However, since the construction of its Muslim Cultural Centre in Warsaw in 2015, it exists as a “company or an association of friends who focus mostly on themselves” and not, e.g., on any da’wa work, which would be the staple of any Muslim Brotherhood front anywhere. Some stressed it is a “marginal” body that had its heyday around 2005-2006 when it organised meetings, symposia, and published frequently. It was highlighted to the research team during the interviews for this study that such activities have

120 Fahrudin Kladničaniin, “Vehabije u sajber prostoru Srbije in Jelinčić, J & Ilić, S. (eds.) Politički ekstremizam u cyber prostoru Srbije”. Zrenjanin: Centar za razvoj civilnog društva, 2013, 129-130.

121 Valery Perry, “Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe: A Survey of Regional Issues, Initiatives and Opportunities”. Sarajevo: Regional Cooperation Council, 2016, 48.

122 Petrović and Stakić, “Extremism Research Forum - Serbia Report”, 14.

123 *Ibid.*

124 *Ibid.*, 13.

125 *Ibid.*

126 Fahrudin Kladničaniin, “Vehabije u sajber prostoru Srbije”, 129-130.

127 Serbia Expert Interview 1, Belgrade August 2020.

128 Serbia Expert Interview 2, Belgrade August 2020.

129 See: <https://www.rtvbn.com/373810/Srbija-Za-prelazak-na-islam-nude-500-evra%3E>

130 Petrović and Stakić, “Extremism Research Forum - Serbia Report”, 32.

131 Czech Interview 3, August 2020.

132 *Ibid.*

133 Veronika Jelínková. “Muslimská menšina a její politická participace v ČR”, 34.

134 *Ibid.*, 46.

135 Česká Televize. “Policie zatýkala v Islámské nadaci kvůli rasistické knize: 25.04.2014”, August 28, 2020, <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/domaci/1036827-policie-zatykala-v-islamske-nadaci-kvuli-rasisticke-knize>.

136 See: B. Rogowska, “Wpływ Polaków nawróconych na islam na społeczności lokalne w Polsce”, Lodz: Uniwersytet Lodzki, 2017, 159-60, <http://dspace.uni.lodz.pl:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11089/25290/doktoratBlankaRogowska.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

diminished considerably¹³⁷. This was also, in the view of some of the experts interviewed for this research, caused by the difficult conditions which any activist Muslim entity encounters when attempting to work in Poland. According to this notion, Islam is so controversial in the country and the society so unaccustomed to it and unaccommodating of its external manifestations that any activity such as recruiting members into the ranks of a global and Islamist entity like the Muslim Brotherhood will immediately raise suspicions and turn out to be counterproductive to that very organisation and its cause. To quote one of the experts, “the field is so surveilled in Poland that the country becomes no place for any clandestine activity by Muslims”.

This is quite in contrast with Serbia where the two Islamic communities have good relations with the current government. Two experts interviewed for this report stated that “their relationship [ICs and governments] has never been better”¹³⁸. Upon further analysis, it becomes clear that their relationship is mainly maintained on a ceremonial level, particularly in relation to *Islamska Zajednica Srbije*. To illustrate this, in 2018, in commemoration of *Islamska Zajednica Srbije*'s 150th anniversary, the Serbian government returned the Bajrakli mosque¹³⁹ to the IZS's Riyaset¹⁴⁰. Yet, no information about current or past projects between the government, via the Directorate for Cooperation with Churches

and Religious Communities in the Ministry of Justice, and Islamic Communities was found¹⁴¹.

Both Islamic communities are officially very moderate in their public discourse, and neither has shown a practice of proselytization in their discourse¹⁴². As outlined above, proselytisation, if existing, is oriented within the Islamic communities, rather than outwards¹⁴³. It is important to note that while this is true for the administrative bodies and representatives of the Islamic communities in Serbia, it might not hold for the rhetoric of smaller fractions within these groups, as they could largely differ, with some being more drastic.¹⁴⁴

It seems, therefore, that the goals of the organisations studied for this report are primarily focused on organising Muslims and speaking on their behalf. They have a track record of advocating for Muslims' rights and trying to build more spaces for mosques or other places to practise those rights. Added to that is the effort to create more infrastructure to live a full life, such as a network of halal shops, funeral services, etc. According an expert interviewed for this study, in the Czech Republic, the institutions there have a long-term goal of establishing more respectable relations with the Czech state, in addition to improving the connections of Muslims to the wider Czech society¹⁴⁵.

KEY FINDINGS

In all three countries, the organisations analysed for this report, despite demonstrating similar activities to those of the Muslim Brotherhood, cannot be confirmed as having significant links to the movement. Due to developments in recent years, in particular the growing securitisation of Muslims in response to the terrorist attacks in Europe, and increasing anti-Muslim sentiment as a reaction to the so called “refugee crisis”, as well as the mutually reinforcing connections between both developments, the Czech and Polish groups studied for this report have decreased their activities and started looking gradually more inwards. On the other hand, Serbian groups have maintained good relationships with the government. However, these connections are mostly superficial and due to the fact that these groups represent traditional Islam in the country and are therefore treated differently than groups established by foreigners. Therefore, according to the methodology developed for this project, these groups are categorised as “grey-area” groups. This categorization is based on the fact that there is some evidence and indications that these groups could belong to the sphere of influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, but these indications are judged as ultimately not sufficient and inconclusive by the research team.

The main findings of this report can be summarised in the following manner:

1. Formal connections to the Muslim Brotherhood-run organisations in Europe and even beyond were found in the early stages of the development of the organizations analysed for this report. However, currently these appear to be inoperative. In the case of Serbia, there might be a possible Muslim Brotherhood tie facilitated via Bosnia and Herzegovina. This needs to be confirmed in the next report, which will focus – among others also on that country.
2. There has not been any detected da'wa activity noted towards non-Muslims. However, there has been a development in Serbia that points at intracommunal proselytisation. This effort is, however, not tied to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood but to the more assertive and even more extremist Takfiris. Also relevant might be online posts of images of successful conversions in one Czech case, although the origin of these images is dubious. Finally, all publication activities have decreased dramatically.
3. The groups surely try to advocate for Muslims and to a certain degree compete to represent this minority in their respective countries. However, these relationships with government institutions in the Czech Republic and Poland are gloomy at the moment and have been since the so called “refugee crisis” of 2015. In Serbia, while the relationship with the government is perceived as good, it appears to be largely of a ceremonial character and does not offer any meaningful practical advantages for the groups studied for this report.
4. The current aim for the communities in all three countries is to improve the position and perception of Muslims, and further advance their financial backings to continue with the operation of their mosques and centres.
5. According to one expert interviewed on the situation in the Czech Republic, one trace of Muslim Brotherhood influence was visible during the Egyptian Revolution. At that time Muslims from Prague and Brno were among members of the Brotherhood. However, this was not a well-functioning group, as an internal split occurred since some were supporting the then Minister of Defence Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and others joined the protests against el-Sisi after the military coup. Currently, in the Czech Republic, these individuals have no time or energy, “suffering from cabin fever” because there are simply too few of them and the movement was not going anywhere by meeting the same people again and again. They belong to the younger generation, and have a very different demeanour from the old leaders, who preferred waiting the situation out. This inevitably frustrated the younger activists during the revolution and resulted in them setting up their own small groups apart from the Muslim Brotherhood.

In conclusion, the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Serbia can be characterized as currently dormant and the majority of the organisations studied for this report are only “shadows” of their former selves.

137 For an outlook similar to this and a discussion about the League's profound internal crisis, see: K. Pedziwiatr, “Wpływ imigrantów arabskich na rozwój i aktualny charakter islamu w Polsce, W: Nalborczyk”, A., Swiat, M. (forthcoming) Islam a Polacy, Wyd, Dialog, Warszawa.

138 Serbia Expert Interview 2, Belgrade August 2020.

139 The Bajrakli mosque is the only mosque left in Belgrade out of 273 that had been present during Ottoman rule. The mosque suffered damage in 2004 when it was set on fire following Kosovo-related protests in front of it. It has since been restored.

140 See: <http://www.mod.gov.rs/lat/12451/obelezeno-150-godina-islamske-zajednice-srbije-12451>; <https://www.aa.com.tr/ba/kultura-i-umjetnost/nasufovic-vlada-srbije-vratila-vlasnistvo-nad-bajrakli-dzamijom-islamskoj-zajednici/1123261>

141 The “Programmes and Projects” information tab on the Directorate's website shows no information on any current or past projects. Two experts interviewed for this report also noted that they do not recall any specific programmes or projects the government had collaborated on with the communities.

142 Serbia Expert Interview 1, Belgrade August 2020.

143 See page 28 of this report.

144 Serbia Expert Interview 1, Belgrade August 2020.

145 Czech Interview 3, August 2020.



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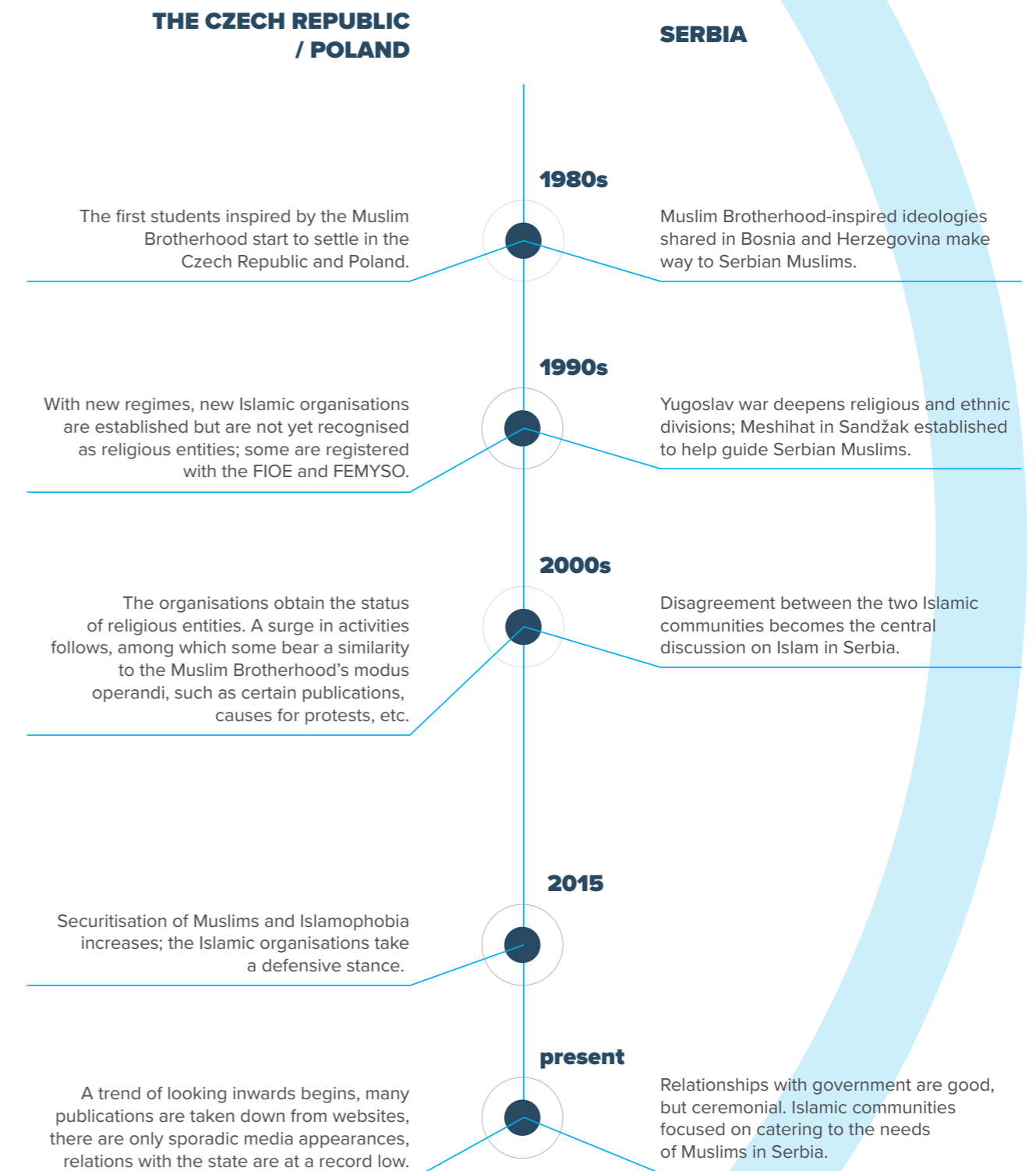
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Annex 1

The approximate timeline of the evolution of Islamic organisations in Central and Eastern Europe. The points in time presented here are only of an orientational character and intended to describe an era rather than precise dates of events.





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