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Street-level and government-level Islamophobia in the Visegrád Four countries

FARID HAFEZ

ABSTRACT Islamophobic mobilization has become a crucial aspect of right-wing populist mobilization. Hafez's article focuses on the case of the Visegrád Four countries: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. Based on reportedly widespread hostility against Muslims among the population in this region, one would assume a large potential for street-level activism analogous to the German Pegida. Yet, attempts to organize grassroots Islamophobic movements have not been particularly successful in the Visegrád Four. Using social movement theory, Hafez explains this by the fact that the issue of Muslim migration has been appropriated by the ruling parties, leaving little opportunity for independent grassroots mobilization.

KEYWORDS Counter-Jihad movement, Czech Republic, Hungary, Islamophobia, Pegida, Poland, right-wing populism, Slovakia

This article aims to provide insight into the role of Islamophobic mobilization as an important aspect of contemporary populism. Today, Islamophobic populism plays a vital role in the ideology of right-wing parties as well as social movements in Western Europe.¹ Perhaps the most familiar case is that of the German *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Pegida, Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West). Indeed, Pegida has maintained close contacts with similar movements outside Germany, and even attempted to establish local chapters, although with varying degrees of success.² The question arises as to why attempts to mobilize the street in the style of Pegida have been comparatively unsuccessful in the Visegrád Four (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary). This is especially puzzling since anti-Muslim sentiment seems to run high in most of these countries. My main argument here is that this is because mainstream political parties have co-opted the issue so effectively that popular mobilization is not required.

- 1 Farid Hafez, 'Shifting borders: Islamophobia as common ground for building pan-European right-wing unity', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 48, no. 5, 2014, 479–99.
- 2 Lars Erik Berntzen and Manès Weisskircher, 'Anti-Islamic PEGIDA beyond Germany: explaining differences in mobilisation', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 37, no. 6, 2016, 556–73.

In this context, I have examined elsewhere Pegida's outreach in Austria,³ while Lars Erik Berntzen and Manès Weisskircher have looked at the cases of Austria, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.⁴ I used Pegida in Germany as a shadow case to argue that the dominant position of the Austrian right-wing Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ, Freedom Party of Austria), as an established party with a clear Islamophobic agenda, explained Pegida's failure to mobilize protesters on the streets. I claimed that Pegida lacked human resources, that it could bring no additional ideological value and that the FPÖ was already seen as 'Pegida in parliament'.⁵ Berntzen and Weisskircher, on the other hand, suggested that Pegida was more successful in Germany because it paid more attention to online activism. In this study, I will incorporate the theoretical approaches of both studies, looking at both the available windows of opportunity and online activism to explain the success or failure of street-level Islamophobic movements in the Visegrád Four countries.

This study contributes to often-neglected research on Islamophobia in Central and Eastern Europe. As Kasia Narkowicz and Konrad Pędziwiatr point out in their study of debates about mosques in Poland, the body of literature focusing on debates concerning of Islam and Muslims as well as Islamophobia has almost solely focused on Western European countries.⁶ This is particularly the case regarding the role of grassroots anti-Muslim mobilization by right-wing populists.

In the next section, I will briefly outline the theory, methods and data used for this investigation. In the third section, I will offer an overview of the spread of anti-Muslim attitudes in the Visegrád Four. The last two sections deal with online and offline Islamophobic activism, and the role of Islamophobic populism *vis-à-vis* special political parties, respectively. In the conclusion, I will offer some insights into the mobilization of anti-Muslim protest in the Visegrád Four countries, with some comparison to Western Europe.

Theory, methods and data

The research design is a comparative study of online and offline movements that mobilize around Islamophobia, structured by social movement theory. Within the latter, the theory of political opportunity assumes that institutions have an impact on the capacities of social movements: both how they engage in collective action and how successful they are in achieving their aims.⁷ It

3 Farid Hafez, 'Pegida in parliament? Explaining the failure of Pegida in Austria', *German Politics and Society*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2016, 101–18.

4 Berntzen and Weisskircher, 'Anti-Islamic PEGIDA beyond Germany'.

5 Hafez, 'Pegida in parliament?', 113–14.

6 Kasia Narkowicz and Konrad Pędziwiatr, 'From unproblematic to contentious: mosques in Poland', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2017, 441–57.

7 David S. Meyer and Debra C. Minkoff, 'Conceptualizing political opportunity', *Social Forces*, vol. 82, no. 4, 2004, 1457–92 (1457).

suggests that 'exogenous factors enhance or inhibit prospects for mobilization, for particular sorts of claims to be advanced rather than others, for particular strategies of influence to be exercised'.⁸ The challenge is to explain which specific 'aspects of the external world affect the development of social movements and how this development is affected'.⁹ Political windows of opportunity embrace all of the aspects of the political environment that facilitate or make it difficult for an Islamophobic social movement to mobilize its constituency in pursuit of its goals. I focus on Islamophobic populists' ability to take collective action in countries where Islamophobic populism plays a central role in party politics.

To repeat, the thesis here is that the strong representation of populism in parliament reduces the potential for street protest. To assess Islamophobic activism, I will primarily rely on findings presented in the 2015 and 2016 editions of the annual *European Islamophobia Report* (covering twenty-seven countries),¹⁰ as well as 2015 data provided by the British-based non-governmental organization (NGO) Hope Not Hate, which monitors the Counter-Jihad movement in Europe, a self-given name for a global network that aims to counter the 'Islamization' of the West. For any necessary further details, I conducted expert interviews with the authors of these reports. In addition, I considered Islamophobic and Pegida activism online in the Visegrád Four to assess the relationship between online and offline activism, something that is seen as crucial by Berntzen and Weisskircher.¹¹

Widespread Islamophobic attitudes

Although Muslims in the Visegrád Four form tiny minorities, Islamophobic attitudes there are among the most virulent of all the European countries, which only confirms the long-established notion that racism is a projection of the dominant society's own fears and wishes.¹² In Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, the Muslim community does not exceed an estimated 0.1 per cent, and in Slovakia Muslims comprise only 0.2 per cent of the total population.¹³ At the same time, according to a Pew Research Center study published in July 2016, the most negative views of Muslims can be found in

8 Ibid., 1457–8. See also Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970*, 2nd edn (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1999).

9 Meyer and Minkoff, 'Conceptualizing political opportunity', 1459.

10 Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez (eds), *European Islamophobia Report 2015* (Istanbul: SETA 2016); Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez (eds), *European Islamophobia Report 2016* (Istanbul: SETA 2017).

11 Berntzen and Weisskircher, 'Anti-Islamic PEGIDA beyond Germany'.

12 Hafez, 'Shifting borders', 480.

13 Pew Research Center, 'Religious composition by country, 2010–2015', 2 April 2015, available on the *Pew Research Center* website at www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/2010/percent/all (viewed 8 August 2018).

Eastern and Southern European countries. The highest number of unfavourable attitudes can be found in Hungary (72 per cent of respondents), followed by Italy and Poland with 66 and 69 per cent, respectively; 37 per cent of Hungarians and 35 per cent of Poles (only Italy with 46 per cent showed more) believe that Muslims are favourably inclined towards extremist groups. Negative views of Muslims in both countries even surpassed those of Roma (72 per cent versus 64 per cent in Hungary and 66 per cent versus 47 per cent in Poland),¹⁴ while older data on Poland reveal the opposite.¹⁵

As another survey shows, public opposition to any further migration from predominantly Muslim states is also widespread in European countries. Together with Belgium, Hungary rated second highest in support of stopping immigration from such countries, with 64 per cent of respondents. The highest was Poland with 71 per cent.¹⁶ There were no data on Slovakia and the Czech Republic in this survey, but the World Values Survey reveals that rejection of Muslims was also widespread in those two countries. In fact, both countries ranked as the highest in their anti-Muslim attitudes. In the Czech Republic 45.5 per cent and in Slovakia 68.4 per cent of respondents stated that they would most dislike having Muslims as neighbours (compared to 25.7 per cent in Poland).¹⁷ In the Czech Republic, Muslims (identified as 'Arabs') were the second least-liked group after the Roma minority.¹⁸ To conclude, the data revealed a high potential for the emergence of anti-Muslim social movement organizations.

Online and offline Islamophobic activism in the Visegrád Four countries

As shown in previous studies, online Islamophobic activism precedes street activism.¹⁹ While far-right patrols in Hungary have traditionally focused on

14 Richard Wike, Bruce Stokes and Katie Simmons, 'Europeans fear wave of refugees will mean more terrorism, fewer jobs', 11 July 2016, available on the *Pew Research Center* website at <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/07/11/europeans-fear-wave-of-refugees-will-mean-more-terrorism-fewer-jobs> (viewed 31 October 2018).

15 Narkowicz and Pędziwiatr, 'From unproblematic to contentious', 452.

16 Matthew Goodwin, Thomas Raines and David Cuts, 'What do Europeans think about Muslim immigration?', 7 February 2017, available on the *Chatham House* website at www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/what-do-europeans-think-about-muslim-immigration (viewed 7 February 2017).

17 Vlado Miheljak, 'Slovenia in Central Europe: merely meteorological or a value kinship?', in Dieter Fuchs, Hans-Dieter Klingemann and Jan Zielonka (eds), *Democracy and Political Culture in Eastern Europe* (New York and London: Routledge 2006), 119–47 (139).

18 Donatella Bonansinga, 'The role of public discourse in threat framing: the case of Islamophobia in Czech Republic', *International Journal of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 8, no. 8, 2015, 107–18 (111).

19 Berntzen and Weisskircher, 'Anti-Islamic PEGIDA beyond Germany'.

the so-called 'Gypsy problem',²⁰ they have recently deployed Islamophobic discourses. Nonetheless, street rallies against the construction of mosques or any similar demonstrations with a potential for violence have not been recorded.

In Poland, the Counter-Jihad movement has a longer tradition. Since 2004, the association Europa Przyszłości (Europe of the Future), with its online portal *euroislam.pl*, has been the most vocal Islamophobic online organization, with 17,000 *Facebook* followers and *euroislam.pl* attracting 100,000 visitors per month in 2016.²¹ In 2010, this group demonstrated in front of the construction site of a mosque in Ochota in Warsaw with 150 in attendance. It displayed posters modelled on the Swiss campaigns against minarets.²² Plans to build a second Warsaw mosque in Włochy did not meet with demonstrations by the Europe of the Future Association (which argued that the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Włochy was peaceful and not radicalized),²³ but by Poland's Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS, Law and Justice Party). While the mosque in Włochy was never constructed, the one in Ochota was eventually opened shortly before Ramadan in 2015. Following its opening there were several attacks on this mosque as well as on others, in smaller villages, constructed hundreds of years earlier by the native Tatar community.²⁴ The leader of Europe of the Future referred to the success of PiS in 2016: 'What we have been saying about Muslims and Islam for a long time became part of the mainstream. Our views are the views of most people in Poland and many politicians.'²⁵ Online activism is quite extensive in Poland, and there are many websites dedicated to spreading stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. There are online groups like *Nie dla Islamizacji Europy* (No to the Islamization of Europe), with 348,000 *Facebook* followers in January 2017,²⁶ and *Stop Islamizacji Europy* (Stop the Islamization of Europe) with 64,000 followers.²⁷ The Europe of the Future Association translated the German Pegida's key ideas into Polish and defended the movement against accusations of racism.²⁸ When Pegida started to disintegrate in January 2015, after a

20 Manuel Mireanu, 'The spectacle of security in the case of Hungarian far-right paramilitary groups', *Fascism*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2013, 68–93.

21 Pędziwiatr, 'Islamophobia in Poland', 431.

22 Narkowicz and Pędziwiatr, 'From unproblematic to contentious', 447–8.

23 *Ibid.*, 450.

24 *Ibid.*, 451–2.

25 Quoted in Konrad Pędziwiatr, 'Islamophobia in Poland: national report 2016', in Bayraklı and Hafez (eds), *European Islamophobia Report 2016*, 411–42 (423–4).

26 Anna Pielak and Anna Łukjanowicz, 'Islamophobia in Poland: national report 2017', in Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez (eds), *European Islamophobia Report 2017* (Istanbul: SETA 2018), 463–82 (476).

27 *Ibid.*

28 'Oto, czego chce PEGIDA', 31 December 2014, available on *euroislam.pl* at <https://euroislam.pl/oto-czego-chce-pegida>; Piotr Ślusarczyk, 'PEGIDA to nie są faszyci', 22 December 2014, available on *euroislam.pl* at <https://euroislam.pl/pegida-to-nie-sa-faszyci> (both viewed 8 August 2018).

photograph of its leader with a Hitler-style moustache went viral in the media, the group tried to downplay the affair.²⁹ Pegida's ideas have also been actively promoted by the Polska Liga Obrony (Polish Defense League) and others.

In the Czech Republic, Islam was contested in a public space for the first time when the construction of a mosque in Hradec Králové was met with petitions, street demonstrations, public hearings and even vandalism against Muslim properties, which resulted in preventing the mosque's construction.³⁰ Although smaller groups consisting of only a couple of dozen members, like the České hnutí za národní jednotu (Czech Movement for National Unity), have been successful in mobilizing several hundreds of people against the construction of the first mosque in Brno, they have demonstrated no staying power.³¹ Smaller Islamophobic groups from the conservative and extreme right launched the website *eurabia.cz* and the online collective *Islam v České republice nechceme* (We Don't Want Islam in the Czech Republic). The latter's Facebook page recorded more than 100,000 followers in 2015.³² In 2012, a vocal activist founded the Czech Defence League, clearly inspired by the English Defence League. A militant, racist and especially Islamophobic news outlet, *White Media*, which expressed sympathy for Anders Breivik, organized not only Czech but also Slovak activists.³³ In 2016, around fifty people (including neo-Nazis) vocally opposed the vice-mayor in Brno for his support for Muslims and other minorities.³⁴ In 2016, the Iniciativa Martina Konvičky (Martin Konvička Initiative) organized several street spectacles, including a burning of the Qur'an in front of the mosque, alongside people drinking beer and eating pork goulash, and promenading women dressed in bathing suits.³⁵ The Czech branch of Pegida's Facebook site (10,600 likes) is also actively posting about events throughout the country but has never organized street events. But, again, the outspoken Czech president, Miloš Zeman, has addressed anti-Muslim demonstrations in person.³⁶

While Zeman's power is limited in the Czech parliamentary democracy, there is widespread consensus among almost all the major political parties

29 Jan Wójcik, 'Pegida traci lidera z powodu wąsika Hitlera', 27 January 2015, available on *euroislam.pl* at <https://euroislam.pl/pegida-traci-lidera-z-powodu-wasika-hitlera> (viewed 8 August 2018).

30 Bonansinga, 'The role of public discourse in threat framing', 112.

31 Miroslav Mareš, 'The extreme right's relationship with Islam and Islamism in East-Central Europe: from allies to enemies', *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2014, 205–24 (218).

32 Bonansinga, 'The role of public discourse in threat framing', 112.

33 Mareš, 'The extreme right's relationship with Islam and Islamism in East-Central Europe', 219.

34 Selma Muhič Dizdarevič, 'Islamophobia in the Czech Republic: national report 2016', in Bayraklı and Hafez (eds), *European Islamophobia Report 2016*, 145–63 (150–1).

35 *Ibid.*, 152.

36 Nick Lowles and Joe Mulhall, 'Margins to mainstream', in Nick Lowles and Joe Mulhall, *The Counter-Jihad Movement: Anti-Muslim Hatred from the Margins to the Mainstream* (London: Hope Not Hate Publications 2015), 8–11 (10).

against admitting Muslim migrants into the country. This frequently deteriorates into open Islamophobia. Andrej Babiš, the leader of the ANO (YES) party, which won the most votes in the 2017 parliamentary election, is known for his promise to protect the Czech Republic from Muslims. ‘If there will be more Muslims than Belgians in Brussels, that’s their problem. I don’t want that here. They won’t be telling us who should live here’, he declared in an interview with the *Bloomberg* news site in June 2017.³⁷

In Slovakia, in June 2015, an anti-Islamization protest in Bratislava, organized by Stop the Islamization of Europe and backed by the right-wing party Kotleba–Ludová strana Naše Slovensko (Kotleba– People’s Party Our Slovakia), mobilized 14,000 people. This demonstration ended with 140 people being jailed.³⁸ In September of the same year, anti-refugee protests were also organized.³⁹ Two anti-Muslim demonstrations were held in Bratislava in 2016, the first in May and the second in June.⁴⁰ Several websites spread Islamophobic discourses. As in other countries, there are *Facebook* pages for groups like *Islam v Slovenskej Republike nechceme* (We Don’t Want Islam in Slovakia).⁴¹ In February 2016, a Pegida demonstration also took place in Slovakia, organized by an extra-parliamentary movement.⁴²

Islamophobic populism in Visegrád Four party politics

The strong role Islamophobic discourse plays in most Visegrád Four countries allows us to explain why, in Hungary, Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary), founded in 2003, is the most successful right-wing (most call it extreme-right) party in the Visegrád Four, enjoying a strong and continuous

37 Quoted in Ladka Mortkowitz Bauerova and Michael Winfrey, ‘“We don’t want the euro,” says Czech tycoon poised to be premier’, 25 June 2017, available only to subscribers on the *Bloomberg* website at www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-06-25/-we-don-t-want-the-euro-says-czech-tycoon-poised-to-be-premier (viewed 15 May 2018).

38 ‘Slovakia: 14,000 strong protest against Islamic fascism cause [sic] arrests’, 27 October 2015, available on *The Muslim Issue* website at <https://themuslimissue.wordpress.com/2015/10/27/slovakia-14000-strong-protests-against-islamic-fascism-cause-arrests> (viewed 9 August 2018).

39 ‘Slovakia: far-right hold anti-refugee protest in Bratislava’, *Ruptly TV*, 12 September 2015, available on *YouTube* at www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAUyFmSNrjk (viewed 9 August 2018).

40 Monika Zaviš, ‘Islamophobia in Slovakia: national report 2016’, in Bayraklı and Farid (eds), *European Islamophobia Report 2016*, 515–29 (521).

41 *Ibid.*, 525.

42 Will Worley, ‘Thousands take part in anti-Islam Pegida protests across Europe: in Birmingham, protesters held signs saying “Trump is right”’, *Independent*, 6 February 2016, available online at www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/thousands-take-part-in-anti-islam-pegida-protests-across-europe-a6857911.html (viewed 9 August 2018).

popular mandate when compared to other right-wing parties.⁴³ While Jobbik initially positioned itself as sympathetic to Islam,⁴⁴ it later adopted an Islamophobic discourse. However, the nominally centre-right—but, in terms of content and style, right-wing—ruling Fidesz (one of the Hungarian members of the transnational European People's Party) co-opted the issue. This could be observed during the refugee crisis in the summer of 2015, when the 'debate on Islam became one of the most prominent and omnipresent topics in Hungarian media and politics',⁴⁵ and the ruling Fidesz competed with Jobbik to portray Islam and Muslims as the threatening Other to both a Hungarian and a western identity. After the European Union (EU) had agreed to relocate refugees and Hungary refused to accept 1,294 of them, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán argued that the quota system would 'redraw Hungary and Europe's ethnic, cultural, and religious identities, which no EU organ has the right to do'.⁴⁶ This initiative was welcomed by his own party, its coalition partner and members of parliament of the oppositional Jobbik. The vice prime minister, from Jobbik's coalition partner, spoke of preventing Islamization.⁴⁷ Zsolt Sereghy claims that Islamophobic language in Hungary resembles anti-Roma and antisemitic language, arguing that the latter are considered taboo in mainstream media while anti-Muslim rhetoric has fully entered the mainstream.⁴⁸

In Poland, the extreme fragmentation of the right-wing (Christian democratic, clerical-nationalist and liberal) camp reduced the electoral success of the extreme right.⁴⁹ Islamophobic discourses were already in use in the mid-2000s by the right-wing Liga Polskich Rodzin (LPR, League of Polish Families).⁵⁰ While the LPR lost parliamentary representation, the centre-right PiS won the presidential election in May 2015 and, in October the same year, followed by winning a majority in the national parliament.⁵¹ While PiS won the absolute majority, the right-wing Ruch Narodowy (National Movement) crossed the threshold and now has five members of parliament. Both parties

43 Miroslav Mareš and Vratislav Havlík, 'Jobbik's successes: an analysis of its success in the comparative context of the Visegrád Four countries', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2016, 323–33.

44 Mareš, 'The extreme right's relationship with Islam and Islamism in East-Central Europe', 220.

45 Zsolt Sereghy, 'Islamophobia in Hungary: national report 2016', in Bayraklı and Hafez (eds), *European Islamophobia Report 2016*, 255–72 (258).

46 Quoted in *ibid.*, 265.

47 *Ibid.*

48 *Ibid.*, 269–70.

49 Sarah L. de Lange and Simona Guerra, 'The League of Polish Families between East and West, past and present', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2009, 527–49 (534).

50 Mareš, 'The extreme right's relationship with Islam and Islamism in East-Central Europe', 217–18.

51 Joanna Fomina and Jacek Kucharczyk, 'The specter haunting Europe: populism and protest in Poland', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2016, 58–68 (58).

referred to the 2015 refugee crisis as a 'Muslim invasion'.⁵² PiS stresses national identity and sovereignty and has strong bonds to the Catholic Church.⁵³ Its presidential campaign was built on nationalist and racist slogans while, in the parliamentary elections, PiS softened its image.⁵⁴ The party's rhetoric was anti-Muslim and it created anxieties about secularization, 'gender ideology' and other threats to family life and cultural tradition.⁵⁵ PiS councillors successfully mobilized the local population of Włochy to sign a petition (500 residents) in opposition to the construction of a local mosque.⁵⁶ When Polish Independence Day was commemorated on 11 November 2017, the annual march in Warsaw, including an estimated 60,000 people, was again a magnet for nationalist far-right political forces. The rally had the tacit approval of the PiS, since much of the government-controlled media was full of alleged crimes committed by Muslims in Europe. The far-right-dominated rally was called a 'great march of patriots' by Polish state television.⁵⁷

In the Czech Republic, many right-wing extremists exchanged their initial sympathy towards Islam (as a backdrop to their anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism) for a demonization of Islam as a threat to domestic cohesion. Parties like the Dělnická strana sociální spravedlnosti (DSSS, Workers' Party of Social Justice) and Národní odpor (National Resistance) in Brno began protesting against the construction of mosques.⁵⁸ The most elaborate and consistent anti-Muslim campaign emerged in the second half of the 2000s by the extreme-right Národní strana (NS, National Party), which was founded in 2002. The NS organized a demonstration in front of the Brno mosque in 2008 when the Czech ambassador to Pakistan was killed in a terrorist attack in Islamabad. After an NS-sympathizer placed a pig's head on the fence of the Prague Muslim Centre in 2009, the party expressed its approval of this act. The controversial Islamophobic film *Fitna* was also published on the party's website. The NS joined a banned demonstration of the Counter-Jihad movement in Brussels in 2007, as well as an anti-Islam congress in Cologne in 2009 organized by the right-wing Pro-Cologne. The NS was banned in 2011 for formal reasons (lack of organizational structure and so on). Meanwhile, other electorally unsuccessful right-wing populists took up the Islamophobic agenda.⁵⁹ Tomio Okamura, the head of Svoboda a přímá demokracie

52 Pędziwiatr, 'Islamophobia in Poland', 422.

53 Fomina and Kucharczyk, 'The specter haunting Europe', 66.

54 Ibid., 60.

55 Ibid., 62–5.

56 Narkowicz and Pędziwiatr, 'From unproblematic to contentious', 450.

57 Farid Hafez, 'Anti-Semitism, homophobia, and Islamophobia: the rising far-right in Poland', *The Bridge Initiative*, 16 November 2017, available at <http://bridge.georgetown.edu/anti-semitism-homophobia-islamophobia-rising-far-right-poland> (viewed 10 August 2018).

58 Mareš, 'The extreme right's relationship with Islam and Islamism in East-Central Europe', 212.

59 Ibid., 219.

(SPD, Freedom and Direct Democracy), positioned himself against Islam as well as in opposition to multiculturalism and the EU. Similar to those of the Dutch populist leader Geert Wilders, his claims were radical and provocative, calling on Czechs to walk pigs and dogs near mosques and boycott Muslim fast food.⁶⁰

Right-wing extremists have—in contrast to the rest of the Visegrád Four—almost disappeared from the political stage in the Czech Republic.⁶¹ Although the Czech Republic and Slovakia both share a constitutional basis for prohibiting parties that endanger the democratic nature of the state, it is only in the Czech Republic that the success of right-wing extremists has been limited due to a strict observation of this rule. Between 1992 and 2006, nineteen organizations and parties were banned.⁶² Efforts by Islamophobic politicians to form an alliance failed due to fragmentation. An attempt by Martin Konvička to create a coalition called *Úsvit s Blok proti islámu* (Dawn with Bloc against Islam) was refused by the Ministry of the Interior.⁶³ During the regional elections of October 2016, ‘at least seven parties that presented themselves as anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, anti-Islam and nationalist’ took part,⁶⁴ while only the party *Svoboda a přímá demokracie* (SPD, Freedom and Direct Democracy) was successful. Again, however, Islamophobic attitudes are not restricted to the far right. When ombudsman Anna Šabatová described a nursing school’s policy of banning pupils wearing a hijab as discrimination because of *denial of access to education*, she faced strong criticism, even from President Miloš Zeman, a former leader of the *Česká strana sociálně demokratická* (Czech Social Democratic Party) and thus not a supporter of the traditional right, who argued that allowing the hijab was the first step towards tolerating burqas.⁶⁵ Zeman also spoke out against ‘Islamic immigration’ from Muslim-majority countries.⁶⁶

Slovakia is quite different from the Czech Republic in that it is home to a relatively successful right-wing populist movement. The *Slovenská národná strana* (SNS, Slovak National Party) is quite successful electorally. It has been represented in parliament continuously from 1990 to the present (apart from 2002–6 and 2012–16).⁶⁷ It had already adopted an anti-Muslim agenda in 2010 when it joined the protest against the mosque in

60 Bonansinga, ‘The role of public discourse in threat framing’, 113.

61 Lukáš Novotný and Tom Thieme, ‘Jenseits des vereinten Europas: Rechtsextreme Parteien in Tschechien und der Slowakei’, *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2010, 105–21.

62 *Ibid.*, 113–14.

63 Dizdarevič, ‘Islamophobia in the Czech Republic’, 151.

64 *Ibid.*, 155.

65 Bonansinga, ‘The role of public discourse in threat framing’, 112–13.

66 Dizdarevič, ‘Islamophobia in the Czech Republic’, 152.

67 Alena Kluknavská and Josef Smolík, ‘We hate them all? Issue adaptation of extreme right parties in Slovakia 1993–2016’, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2016, 335–44.

the Czech city of Brno.⁶⁸ The SNS has issued several anti-Islamic proclamations that warn of an 'Islamization of Europe' and the introduction of sharia in Slovakia.⁶⁹

A more extreme, overtly neo-fascist party was founded in 2010 under the name of *Eudová strana–Naše Slovensko* (L'SNS, People's Party–Our Slovakia), later renamed *Kotleba–L'SNS* after its authoritarian leader, Marian Kotleba, taking the place of various extremist factions that had been banned by the Supreme Court. In 2016, Kotleba's party celebrated a breakthrough by winning more than 8 per cent of the vote in the national elections. The L'SNS originally focused primarily on anti-establishment and anti-Roma content.⁷⁰ In response to the refugee crises, it developed an anti-elitist, anti-EU and anti-Muslim platform. In its 2016 electoral programme, the party claimed that Slovakia was flooded by 'hordes of Muslim immigrants' who 'cannot and do not want to accommodate to our laws and social norms'.⁷¹

Islamophobic populism also entered the discourse of mainstream political parties. As in the other Visegrád Four countries, centrist parties like the ruling *Smer–sociálna demokracia* (Direction–Social Democracy) included Islamophobic claims in their politics. Former Prime Minister Robert Fico, for example, argued that 'Islam is not compatible with our culture' following the 2016 terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels.⁷²

Islamophobic politics in the establishment

Given the widespread occurrence of anti-Muslim attitudes and an exclusionist framing of national identity, any anti-Muslim movement ought to have great potential to mobilize large numbers of people on an ideological level in the Visegrád Four countries. As the section on Islamophobic populism has revealed, Islamophobia has long been on the agenda of most right-wing parties. In addition, centre-right as well as centre-left parties, such as *Fidesz* in Hungary, *PiS* in Poland, *Direction–Social Democracy* in Slovakia and the Czech President Miloš Zeman, as well as a number of Czech parties, have not only adopted an Islamophobic agenda but in some cases have been among the most vocal Islamophobes and participated in or even led

68 Josef Smolík, 'Far right-wing political parties in the Czech Republic: heterogeneity, cooperation, competition', *Slovak Journal of Political Science*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2011, 99–111 (105).

69 Mareš, 'The extreme right's relationship with Islam and Islamism in East-Central Europe', 216–17.

70 Alena Kluknavská, 'Od Štúra k parazitom: Tematická adaptácia krajnej pravice v parlamentných voľbách na Slovensku' ('From Štúr to parasites: thematic adaptation of the far right in Slovak parliamentary elections'), *Politologický časopis/ Czech Journal of Political Science*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2013, 258–81.

71 Quoted in Kluknavská and Smolík, 'We hate them all?', 339–42.

72 Quoted in Zaviš, 'Islamophobia in Slovakia', 522.

street-level activities such as demonstrations. When centre-right and centre-left parties take up the Islamophobia issue (often in coalition with right-wing parties), this leaves little space for movements that are dedicated to Islamophobia. Hence, a political opportunity framework explains why Pegida-like rallies have not materialized. Islamophobia has become central to mainstream politics in the Visegrád Four, which does not allow for other protests to emerge. It has however allowed several of the ruling governments to direct popular antagonism towards Muslims away from themselves. This is distinct from Western Europe, where Islamophobia is most aggressively used by the right-wing opposition against the political establishment. (The rise of the Lega and the Five Star Movement in Italy, however, invites comparison with the Visegrád Four.)

Islamophobic mobilization in the Visegrád Four is often supportive of the ruling political parties and their Islamophobic agendas. While in Western Europe, Islamophobia is often part of a horizontal antagonism that stands next to a vertical antagonism against the ruling elite, in the Visegrád Four, the Islamophobic vertical antagonism is primarily directed against the EU and NGOs that are supported by 'foreign' institutions. The cultural elite is thus framed as alien to the native elite. In addition, street movements regard it as their own success that Islamophobic discourse has become the 'new normal'.⁷³

This study both asks many questions and offers several observations. Even more than in many Western European countries, centre-right and centre-left political parties co-opt Islamophobic discourses and mobilize on the streets. Further investigation of this dynamic is needed as well as greater insight into the personnel and internal discourses within Islamophobic movements, and their relationship not only with right-wing extremists but also with mainstream ruling parties.

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73 Pędziwiatr, 'Islamophobia in Poland', 423–4.