



Islamophobia in the East of the European Union: an introduction

Ivan Kalmar

To cite this article: Ivan Kalmar (2018) Islamophobia in the East of the European Union: an introduction, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 52:5, 389-405, DOI: [10.1080/0031322X.2018.1512467](https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2018.1512467)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2018.1512467>



Published online: 28 Nov 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 438



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Islamophobia in the East of the European Union: an introduction

There is some truth in the common view that hostility to Muslims and Islam is more prominent on the eastern flank of the European Union (EU). Yet this East–West difference appears to be diminishing, as governments in Austria and Italy follow Donald Trump’s America by turning Islamophobia into a political platform. On the whole, East–West differences in Islamophobia are often seen as greater than they really are. In terms of content, the discourse of Islamophobia is practically identical to that in the East of the EU and the West, as well as in North America and other parts of the world. Charges of terrorism, immigrant crime, the oppression of women and homosexuals, and/or a desire to invade and ‘Islamize’ Europe and change its Christian character are directed at Muslims as a whole on both sides of the former Iron Curtain.¹ What *is* different is not so much in the character or degree of anti-Muslim *prejudice* as such. Rather, it is in the extent to which its *political expression* is entrenched in national consensus, and to which it is able to undermine resistance by the judiciary, the media and human rights organizations. Islamophobia is discussed in this issue not as the latest incarnation of an ‘East European’ cultural inclination towards racial prejudice, but as an example and a warning about a process that is also happening, though it may not have advanced quite as far (yet?), in most of the West. The most promising avenue of research into the specifically East Central European situation is to study how the fear and rejection of Muslim migrants has been employed in negotiating a new place for the formerly socialist eastern

I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The wise guidance of the editor-in-chief of *Patterns of Prejudice*, Barbara Rosenbaum, has been unfailing. I have relied extensively on Christopher Stevens, who acted as a research assistant. The colleagues and students who also helped substantially are too many to mention but among them I would like to single out Michał Bukowski, Bryan Cheyette, Jonathan Judaken, Leigh Manley, Selma Muhič-Dizdarevič, Kasia Narkowitz, Bori Simonovits, Anastasia Udarchik, Bronislav Ostránský, Zbyněk Tarant and Alexander Yendell.

1 This list of charges may do well here as a ‘definition of Islamophobia’, should one be necessary. For a discussion of the widely contested definition issue, see Salman Sayyid, ‘A measure of Islamophobia’, *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2014, 10–25; and the Runnymede Trust’s redefinition of Islamophobia as ‘anti-Muslim racism’, in Farah Elani and Omar Khan, ‘Introduction: What is Islamophobia?’, in Farah Elani and Omar Khan (eds), *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All*, 20th Anniversary Report (London: Runnymede 2017), 7, available on the Runnymede Trust website at www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Islamophobia%20Report%202018%20FINAL.pdf (viewed 25 September 2018).

members of the EU. Several authors in this special issue suggest that Islamophobia serves here as a misguided means to raise the region from its current status within the EU as a semi-peripheral, semi-colonial appendage.

The expression 'East of the EU' is used advisedly here, though throughout the issue it is frequently replaced by the more familiar 'East Central Europe'. What is meant here are the four members of the cultural and political alliance known as the Visegrád Group (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, also known together as 'the Visegrád Four' or 'V4') plus the former East Germany. This area is both post-socialist and part of the EU. This special issue is emphatically not about 'Islamophobia in Eastern Europe', which would include outsiders to the EU: especially Russia, but also the non-EU countries of the former Yugoslavia. There, attitudes to Muslims and their political instrumentalization function in a substantially different context. There may of course be important similarities between the V4 and eastern Germany, on the one hand, and some or all of the post-socialist members of the EU in the Baltic and Balkan regions, on the other. Hopefully, this issue will encourage scholars to explore further such similarities in the future.

The decisive moment in the story of the political exploitation of Islamophobia in the East of the EU came during the so-called 'migration crisis' of 2015–16. The V4 countries united against a directive from Brussels that they, along with most other EU members, admit a specific number of refugees. Although the proposed numbers were small, the V4 (unlike some other 'East European' countries such as Estonia) refused to comply, displaying a common front not previously seen on the European political stage. Thereby, Islamophobia, as a symptom of a populist upsurge in the post-socialist East, gained prominence as a major threat to the EU on its eastern flank, at a time when it was already damaged by the planned exit of the United Kingdom and the financial problems of Greece. But, as seen by many from within the East of the EU, it was a positive moment, when the poor cousins from 'Eastern Europe', long complacent with regard to western domination, finally stood up for themselves. The refusal of the refugee quotas, which were symbolic in the first place, acquired greater symbolic power as a refusal of domination by 'Brussels'. Anti-'Brussels' sentiment is also common among western Islamophobes. But its power as a symbol of self-affirmation in the East should not be underestimated. In fact, the dispute over compulsory quotas may have helped to develop a distinctive East Central European identity in a region characterized by a long history of animosity rooted in conflicting national aspirations. Nevertheless, the apparent consensus against migrant quotas hides important differences among all the eastern EU countries with regard to context, causes and foreseeable consequences.

For one thing, even the overall mood of citizens seems to be quite different in each of the countries. The 2018 edition of the *World Happiness Report* identifies Hungary as one of the unhappiest places in the world, ranking it 69th, just above Libya and below Turkmenistan. Slovakia is 39th and Poland 42nd, evidently in a much better disposition. The Czech Republic, 21st, appears to be

one of the happier countries in the world. (Germany is 15th, but no separate ranking exists for the western and the eastern part.)² Clearly, whatever the *World Happiness Report* measures is not correlated with Islamophobia, which is more or less uniformly high throughout the V4 and eastern Germany (see my article in this issue). For an explanation of this fact, we will have to look at something other than generalized dissatisfaction with the status quo.

The political situation varies significantly from country to country. In Poland, the voters of the ruling illiberal Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS, Law and Justice Party) blame the previous liberal government for the earlier vicissitudes of the post-Communist era. Unique to the Polish situation is not only the strength of the public's Catholic faith, but the associated political power of the Catholic Church. In this issue, Konrad Pędzwiatr shows how, in spite of Pope Francis's warnings against illiberal nationalism being heeded by about half the church hierarchy, the seminary students he studied hold anti-Muslim and other xenophobic opinions almost exclusively, which hardly bodes well for the influence these future priests are preparing to enjoy.

Both in Poland and Hungary, the government has limited the freedom of the courts and, in Hungary especially, also of the press and critical NGOs. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is widely considered to be the leader of illiberal nationalists not only in his country and the V4 but in Europe. In Hungary, more than in Poland, the opposition is badly splintered, ranging from right of the formerly 'far-right', and now 'reformed', Jobbik party to left of the socialists. And, even more than in Poland, in Hungary prospects for liberal democracy and guarantees for human rights are bleak at the time of writing. The country seems poised to continue serving as a safe haven from which illiberal ideas and conspiracy theories, such as the 'Soros Plan', will continue to spread, including to the West.

Unlike in Poland and Hungary, in the aftermath of the 'migration crisis', the governments of former Czechoslovakia have left the institutions, the press and the NGOs more or less alone, in practice if not always in rhetoric. One may speculate that this has something to do with the historically more 'western' character of, especially, the Czech part of the formerly united country. Czech nationalism is not very pronounced, and religion even less so: the Czech Republic is Europe's (and therefore probably the world's) most atheistic country, matched only by the eastern part of Germany.³

More traditionally, Catholic Slovakia has also preserved its democratic institutions but here, perhaps more than elsewhere in the region, the small size of the country (population 5 million) has favoured the informal, hard-to-measure

2 John F. Helliwell, Richard Layard and Jeffrey D. Sachs, *World Happiness Report 2018* (New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network 2018), available on the Amazon S3 website at https://s3.amazonaws.com/happiness-report/2018/WHR_web.pdf (viewed 25 September 2018).

3 *Eurobarometer 83.4* (Brussels: European Commission 2016), available on the *GESIS Data Archive* website at <https://dbk.gesis.org/dbksearch/sdesc2.asp?no=6595> (viewed 25 September 2018).

subversion of democracy through clientelism. Politicians are accused of running the country for the benefit of their personal agendas and those of their families and friends, prompting the respected President Andrej Kiška to declare that Slovakia is a 'mafia state'.⁴ However, unlike in Poland and Hungary, Slovak politicians tend to lack ideological motivation, and may use Islamophobic rhetoric mainly when attempting to distract attention from their own failings, as when, following a major scandal, Prime Minister Robert Fico floated some Orbán-style conspiratorial rhetoric about George Soros,⁵ but dropped the issue when it failed to get him any traction.

Eastern Germany is obviously in a different situation from the V4 in that it has been largely submerged in the political institutions and civil society of the former West Germany. The (East German-raised) Chancellor, Angela Merkel, was in fact, despite earlier misgivings about 'multiculturalism', a prime target of criticism by the Islamophobic leaders of the V4 for her historic decision to 'invite' Syrian refugees to enter the country (*Wir schaffen das*, 'We will manage!'). This, at least initial, avoidance of brazenly Islamophobic rhetoric by the Federal Republic opened more space for civil anti-Muslim movements such as *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Pegida, Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West). This Dresden-based organization was, as Farid Hafez shows in these pages, able to mobilize the public in ways that were pre-empted in the V4 by the established 'mainstream' authorities. Pegida spread westward and became an element in the formation of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD, Alternative for Germany), whose roots are likewise in the East but which rose in popularity throughout the country to the point that, in 2018, it became the leading opposition party.

For these and other reasons, including eastern Germany is essential in a discussion of Islamophobia in the post-socialist East of the EU. In many ways, the East is to the West within Germany as it is in the EU as a whole. Its post-socialist past connects it to 'Eastern Europe'. Though there are rather more Muslims living there than in the V4, outside cosmopolitan Berlin the presence of migrants with roots outside Europe is quite low by German standards. The one major difference between eastern Germany and the V4 is, furthermore, of the greatest importance when assessing the significance of Islamophobia in East Central Europe. In Germany, at the same time that the virus of Islamophobia encounters significant political resistance, its spread is unimpeded by national borders. The country is therefore a laboratory for observing the back-and-forth of Islamophobic rhetoric and action, East and West.

4 'President Kiska at Pohoda: Slovakia is a mafia state', *Slovak Spectator*, 7 July 2018, available at <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20865855/president-kiska-at-pohoda-slovakia-is-a-mafia-state.html> (viewed 25 September 2018).

5 Matthew Karnitschnig, 'Fico retains power behind Slovak throne', *Politico.eu*, 28 March 2018, available at www.politico.eu/article/robert-fico-slovakia-plays-the-jaroslav-kaczynski-card (viewed 25 September 2018).

The variety of conditions within the East of the EU, as well as the essential inseparability of Islamophobia there and in the West, makes it very difficult to suggest a general explanatory framework that would identify factors in the genealogy of Islamophobia that are distinctive in this region. Obviously, here as elsewhere, the discourses and practices of Islamophobia are overdetermined. At this initial stage of research all explanations will be partial. Yet some pointers can be discerned, and it is the goal of this special issue to provide them.

In a highly relevant article in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Rogers Brubaker distinguishes what he calls 'national populism' from 'civilizationism'. He locates 'civilizationism' in northwestern Europe, and contrasts it with the 'nationalism' of East Central Europe (although he discusses only Hungary and Poland in any detail).⁶ The two major characteristics of 'civilizationism' are: first, it is distinctive 'in construing the opposition between self and other not in narrowly national but in broader civilizational terms';⁷ and, second, its proponents espouse a discourse that Brubaker calls 'liberalism', not in the economic sense (as many 'civilizationist' populists are opposed to neoliberal policies) but in a social one: namely, 'embracing secularism, rejecting anti-Semitism, and presenting themselves as champions of gender equality, supporters of at least a minimal set of gay rights, and defenders of freedom of expression'.⁸ Brubaker suggests that these are characteristics that are found in the Northwest but not in the East of the EU.

In spite of Brubaker's insightful analysis of 'civilizationism' as such, however, his description of the difference between parts of Europe is plagued by a number of interpretive difficulties when it comes to the facts, not only in the East but even in the Northwest. It is based too strongly on the Dutch experience. Brubaker himself admits that the Dutch Islamophobic movement is considerably more liberal, especially on gender issues,⁹ than the other parties with which he is concerned. The Flemish Vlaams Belang is not particularly interested in promoting freedom of gender identification, and neither is the French Rassemblement (long known as Front) National. The Front's former leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, has in fact been accused, even though he insists unjustly, of being homophobic as well as antisemitic.¹⁰ If the party has put on a new face under the leadership of his daughter Marine, then that is part of a move towards mainstream respectability that is also very much in evidence in Hungary, where the leaders of Jobbik, a right-wing party whom Brubaker explicitly mentions, have now rejected

6 Rogers Brubaker, 'Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 40, no. 8, 2017, 1191–226.

7 Ibid., 1193.

8 Ibid., 1194.

9 Ibid., 1197.

10 Alexandre Sulzer, 'Jean-Marie Le Pen se défend (à sa manière) d'être homophobe . . . dans une revue gay', *L'Express*, 5 March 2018, available at www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/fn/jean-marie-le-pen-se-defend-a-sa-maniere-d-etre-homophobe-dans-une-revue-gay_1989910.html (viewed 25 September 2018).

their former antisemitism.¹¹ Even the issue of women's rights is almost as much misused in East Central Europe as in the West to condemn Islam as misogynistic (see the article in this issue by Monika Bobako). This 'liberal' attitude is matched, as in the West, by ubiquitous complaints about 'political correctness' stifling the free speech of Islamophobes.¹²

As for secularism as a characteristic of Northwest but not East of the EU Islamophobic 'populism', the fact is that this varies as much in the former region as in the latter. Dutch Islamophobes are more secular than the French, and Czech Islamophobes far more so than the Polish. This has to do with the fact that, in Poland, as Konrad Pędzwiatr makes clear, the Catholic Church is a powerful political force, while the Czech Republic, as already noted, is Europe's most atheistic country.¹³ (The article in this issue by Ondřej Slačálek and Eva Svobodová details the many other reasons why Islamophobia in the Czech Republic specifically is more of the 'civilizational' than the 'nationalist' type, in Brubaker's terms.)

There is, moreover, little reason to suppose that the Islamophobic aspect of 'Christianity', espoused to different degrees in the V4, is qualitatively different from the 'Christianity' that, as Brubaker notes, is espoused even by many northwestern European secularists. Viktor Orbán's 2017 Christmas message is instructive:

We Europeans—whether we admit it or not, whether we know it or not—live in a culture organized according to the teachings of Christ. I quote here our erstwhile Prime Minister, József Antall: *In Europe*, even the atheist is a Christian . . . According to the Gospel of St Mark, Christ's second commandment states, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Nowadays many in *Europe* like to refer to this commandment of Christ's. They mean to blame us for claiming to be Christians and yet not wanting, indeed not permitting, millions arriving from other continents to settle in *Europe*.

However, they're forgetting the second half of the commandment. And this teaching consists of two parts: we must love our neighbour, but we must also love ourselves.¹⁴

11 Pablo Gorondi, 'Head of Hungary's Jobbik renounces party's anti-Semitic ways', *The Times of Israel*, 15 December 2017, available at www.timesofisrael.com/head-of-hungarys-jobbik-renounces-partys-anti-semitic-ways (viewed 25 September 2018).

12 There are countless examples throughout the V4. See, for example, Janusz Kowalik, 'Islam i chore na poprawność polityczną zachodnie elity', *Racjonalista.tv*, 27 May 2017, available at <http://racjonalista.tv/islam-i-chore-na-poprawnosc-polityczna-zachodnie-elity> (viewed 25 September 2018).

13 *Eurobarometer* 83.4.

14 Pörge Béla, 'Meg kell védenünk a keresztény kultúrát—Orbán Viktor karácsonyi üzenete', *888.hu*, 23 December 2018, available at <https://888.hu/article-meg-kell-vedenunk-a-keresztény-kulturát-orbán-viktor-karácsonyi-uzenete> (viewed 25 September 2018) (emphasis added). All translations into English, unless otherwise stated, are by the author.

Orbán's sloppy Christian 'theology' completely rejects the spirit of Christ's interpretation of the passage from Leviticus, which Christ follows in Matthew 5:44 by saying that you should even love your enemies. As in most of Orbán's pronouncements, 'Christian' here serves merely as a synonym of 'European', which itself, as Salman Sayyid discusses in this issue, is a less obviously racial equivalent of 'white'. How is all this not a 'matter of belonging rather than believing, a way of defining "us" in relation to "them"'? How is it not affirming that, 'crudely put, if "they" are Muslim, then "we" must, in some sense, be Christian'? How is the quote from József Antall not saying that defining ourselves as Christian 'does not mean that "we" must be religious'? Yet these are just the statements that Brubaker uses to identify 'civilizationism' as opposed to 'nationalism'.¹⁵

Similarly, Brubaker's surprising claim that Germany is 'nationalist' rather than 'civilizational'¹⁶ is belied by the name of the most prominent Islamophobic nationalist movement there. 'Pegida' is an acronym for the German equivalent of 'Patriotic Europeans [not Germans!] against the Islamization of the West [not Germany!]'.

A much more ambitious explanatory apparatus than Brubaker's for nationalism and associated phenomena in East Central Europe, including Islamophobia, is Ivan Krastev's short volume *After Europe*.¹⁷ It is not necessary to agree with all the details of his rich analysis, or his extreme pessimism about the EU, in order to recognize a number of cogent hypotheses, some of them original and others previously raised in the growing literature on the subject. Among other things, Krastev suggests that the migrant crisis (and, by implication, Islamophobia) is caused by a number of factors. I have tried to arrange them on a scale from 1 to 11 of increasing relevance to East Central Europe, even though in all cases, as Krastev recognizes, there are similarities to Western Europe and the United States:

- 1 disappointment with 'Brussels';
- 2 neoliberal austerity measures;
- 3 a revolt against universal values;
- 4 a crisis of the left;
- 5 the rise of populism;
- 6 the failed integration of the Roma as a bad example for integrating Muslims;¹⁸
- 7 a desire for a different, illiberal EU;
- 8 the EU's inability to defend democracy in member countries;
- 9 the belief that the EU will defend their democracy so citizens don't have to;¹⁹

15 Brubaker, 'Between nationalism and civilizationism', 1199.

16 Ibid., 1193.

17 Ivan Krastev, *After Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2017).

18 Ibid., 53.

19 Ibid., 72.

- 10 the shallow roots of Central European democracy;²⁰
 11 given their past, the East Europeans' lack of optimism that things will
 work out.²¹

In a sort of summary, Krastev suggests that

Although eastern European hostility toward refugees may be shocking to many, it should not be surprising. It has its roots in history and demography and the twisted paradoxes of the postcommunist transition, while at the same time representing a Central European version of a popular revolt against globalization.²²

Although Krastev's book was not available at the time that most of the articles in this special issue were written, the authors anticipate many of his points and provide context for others. My own article further relativizes the 'East European' distinctiveness of some of Krastev's theses, and attempts to privilege as productive avenues of research the current 'popular revolt' over the undeniably influential historical aspects. It is clear from Krastev's discussion that the 'revolt' addresses far more than 'globalization', and that 'globalization' means much more than economics.

All of the V4 countries and to some extent eastern Germany are in a similar economic position.²³ In spite of a significant rise in prosperity in absolute terms, in relative terms they still lag far behind their western neighbours. They are still the poor cousins. But if the poor cousins have gathered the courage to rebel, it is also because they are not so poor any more.

Many in the West view the V4 as a dysfunctional backwater, an opinion reinforced by such terms as 'in transition', referring to the difficulties of changing from Communist-style socialism to capitalism. Such phrases imply disorder and disorganization. While outsiders still often associate 'Eastern Europe' with the period of the 'Wild East' that followed the collapse of the Communist regimes, the insider view is that a new period has been entered more recently, with the disorder and poverty of that initial phase replaced by a functioning state and reasonable prosperity.²⁴ In 2016 (and thereafter), the Gross Domestic Product rose faster in the East of the EU than in

20 *Ibid.*, 72–3.

21 *Ibid.*, 12.

22 *Ibid.*, 47.

23 One may speculate that, among the factors that influence the apparently more 'western' behaviour of the Czech Republic, its highly developed pre-war economy was far more akin to that of the Netherlands than to that of Poland and Hungary. These differences have, however, been erased during the socialist period and after.

24 Currently, I am involved in an ongoing project interviewing residents of all four Visegrád countries, including on their perceptions of the economy. The theme of a new period having been entered has come up repeatedly.

the West.²⁵ This type of statistic even led Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán to declare that Central European economies were ‘the economic engine of the European Union’ (he went on to say that he expected this to be reflected in the region’s ‘impact on EU affairs’).²⁶ There were considerable differences in the distribution of wealth within the region, but it has continued to experience low rates of income inequality.²⁷ Perhaps most impressively of all, the unemployment rate in almost every V4 country has been very low during the migration crisis of 2015–16 and beyond.²⁸ (Krastev notes the conflict between a need for migrants due to low unemployment and a rejection of non-white immigration.²⁹)

Interviews with residents reveal a sense of unprecedented well-being, and the conviction that the crime and chaos that followed Communism have been largely overcome. There is, attendant on this, a widespread feeling that the bad times were caused by the selfish intervention of global (read: western) capital, assisted by local opportunists and corrupt politicians, many of them former Communist apparatchiks and managers. There is a perception, too, that this semi-takeover by the West was also aided by the liberal, sometimes western-educated, professional, academic and media elite who benefitted disproportionately from grants from the EU and western NGOs such as the Open Society Foundation of the US financier and philanthropist George Soros. Such sentiments against what Czechs call ‘sunshine people’ (*sluníčkáři*) easily slide into antisemitism. Soros, like some of the local cultural elite (especially in Hungary, which has a fair-sized Jewish population) is Jewish.

Not this shadowing of Islamophobia by antisemitism, or the Soros conspiracy myth, or equating ‘Jew’ with ‘globalist’, or the broader singling out of the academic and financial elite as enemies of the nation, is unique to the East of the EU. All are commonplace across the world, including in social media, and

25 For data on the East of the EU versus the West, see ‘GDP growth (annual %)', 1961–2017, available on the *World Bank* website at <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG> (viewed 26 September 2018).

26 ‘Central European countries want their importance to be reflected in their impact on EU affairs’, Prime Minister’s Office news release, 3 January 2018, available on the *Hungarian Government* website at www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/central-european-countries-want-their-importance-to-be-reflected-in-their-impact-on-eu-affairs (viewed 26 September 2018).

27 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Data, ‘Inequality’, available on the *OECD* website at www.oecd.org/social/inequality.htm#income (viewed 26 September 2018).

28 Eurostat reported the following seasonally adjusted figures for September 2018: Czech Republic 2.3 per cent, Poland 3.4 per cent, Hungary 3.8 per cent and Slovakia 6.6 per cent. For comparison, note that France’s unemployment rate was 9.3 per cent and Germany’s 3.4 per cent. See ‘Unemployment rates, seasonally adjusted, September 2018 (%)’, available on the *Eurostat* website at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics (viewed 5 November 2018).

29 Krastev, *After Europe*, 46.

especially in the United States.³⁰ But, in the East, the Jew, the liberal, the leftist and the globalist, depicted as deracinated persons, are also seen as agents of a domineering West.

The trope of the ‘globalist’ as enemy is here employed by an alliance of various sections of the ‘ordinary’ public and government—supported by an increasingly confident section of the local middle class and petty bourgeoisie—against the essentially colonial takeover of the economy during the post-socialist privatization period that constituted the largest transfer in history of public to private capital and resulted in an oversized part of the local economy being owned by foreigners.³¹ Local capitalists—frequently former managers of state-run companies associated with the Communist Party—at first benefitted directly from foreign investment but some eventually found their interests competing with those of the outsiders. So did the younger economic agents, large and small, who appeared in the post-privatization period. Agnes Gagyi has cogently discussed this particular twist on the development of the Hungarian economy after the fall of socialism. She contrasts the ‘democratic anti-populism’ of modernization through western integration embraced by one segment of the economic elite with the ‘anti-democratic populism’ advocated by another part of the elite, allied with the Orbán government, that advocates the protection of ‘national’ wealth from western capital and its local allies.³² In this issue, Slačálek and Svobodová caution against using the term ‘populism’ in this kind of context and, after reviewing uses of the term, suggest a number of alternatives. Yet, on the whole, Gagyi’s analysis also applies to the rest of the V4.

Islamophobia without Muslims?

We can see that, everywhere, Islamophobia is but a utilitarian tool to broader ends and may have little to do with real Muslims. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the East of the EU, where Islamophobic sentiments are high in spite of the region having a very low number of Muslim residents. For 2016, the Pew Research Center reported that per each 10,000 inhabitants

30 Ivan Kalmar, Christopher Stevens and Nich Worby, ‘Twitter, Gab, and racism: the case of the Soros myth’, in *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Social Media & Society* (New York: ACM 2018), 330–4.

31 Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*, trans. from the French by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2014), 186; Thomas Piketty, ‘2018, the year of Europe’, *Le blog de Thomas Piketty*, 16 January 2018, available on the *Le Monde* website at <http://piketty.blog.lemonde.fr/2018/01/16/2018-the-year-of-europe> (viewed 26 September 2018).

32 Agnes Gagyi, ‘“Coloniality of power” in East Central Europe: external penetration as internal force in post-socialist Hungarian politics’, *Journal of World-Systems Research*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2016, 349–72. The paper also includes extensive references on the integration of East Central Europe in global relations of power from the point of view of world-systems theory, a perspective shared in this issue by Monika Bobako.

there were only four Muslims in Hungary, two in the Czech Republic, one in Slovakia and less than one in Poland.³³ It is difficult to estimate the Muslim population of eastern Germany outside the cosmopolitan capital of Berlin, as direct statistics are not readily available. However, in 2017, the Statistisches Bundesamt (Federal Statistical Bureau) reported that the population of the western state of Baden-Württemberg included 22.5 per cent of residents 'with a migrant background', and the eastern state of Saxony only 6.5 per cent. In both cases, however, the figures include people of German ethnicity and those from other European states. In Saxony, ethnic Germans account for over 50 per cent of the 'migrants', with both Europeans and Asians being more numerous than people from the Middle East.³⁴ In contrast, it is reasonable to assume that, in Baden-Württemberg, many more of those with a 'migrant background' are from predominantly Muslim Middle Eastern countries.

In this context, it has become common to speak of 'Islamophobia without Muslims',³⁵ or 'phantom Islamophobia'.³⁶ What is the significance of this phenomenon? Does it describe a uniquely East European situation, or are there parallels to it in the West? One thing that 'Islamophobia without Muslims' demonstrates is the point that racism does not need a real target. It is an ingredient of the white racism that is the heritage of colonialism, even in countries that claim (mistakenly, as Salman Sayyid rightly insists in this issue) not to have been involved in Europe's colonial enterprise.

Arguably, however, real events *activate* latent Islamophobia. Anti-Muslim attitudes increased appreciably in the V4 countries, Germany and elsewhere when hundreds of thousands of Muslim migrants arrived in Europe. That only a few wanted to reach, or succeeded in reaching, East Central Europe is not necessarily evidence that Islamophobia in the region is pure fantasy. Migrants from predominantly Muslim countries are not phantoms: they can be and are seen in western countries by migrants and visitors from the East. Central European emigrants and travellers bring home Islamophobic impressions of their encounter with Muslim migrants, with whom they had

33 Pew Research Center, 'Europe's growing Muslim population', 29 November 2017, available on the *Pew Research Center* website at <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population> (viewed 26 September 2018).

34 'Statistisches Bundesamt: Wo die meisten Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund leben', *Die Welt*, 1 August 2017, available at www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article167287260/In-diesem-Bundesland-hat-sich-die-Zahl-der-Migranten-mehr-als-verdoppelt.html (viewed 26 September 2018). The Bureau's data also show that a proportionately larger number of asylum-seekers with unsettled status are in the East, no doubt due to the government's targeted resettlement programmes.

35 See, for example, Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska, 'Islamophobia without Muslims? The case of Poland', *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2016, 190–204.

36 Michał Buchowski, 'Význam antropologie v době vzestupu islamofobie a "uprchlické krize": případ Polska' / 'Making anthropology matter in the heyday of Islamophobia and the "refugee crisis": the case of Poland', *Český Lid*, vol. 103, no. 1, 2016, 51–67 (English), 69–84 (Czech).

presumably been in competition for jobs and prestige,³⁷ another example of the struggle for full 'Europeanness' that Sayyid writes about in this issue.

The trope of the 'no-go zone', raised by Donald Trump among others with regard to European cities like Malmö in Sweden, is popular in the East; there, the absence of such areas is discussed in 'civilizationist' terms as Eastern Europe (in this context the East of the West) defending 'Europe' against the kind of pollution by the Other that brown Muslim migration brings. A rather spectacular example of this rhetoric occurred when, during the 2018 Hungarian election, János Lázár, an influential Hungarian minister, went to the Viennese suburb of Favoriten, densely inhabited by migrants. He posted a video that claimed, contrary to the visual evidence provided, that the area was filthy and free of white residents. This, he warned, would also be Hungary's fate if it agreed to accept Muslim migrants.³⁸ (What Lázár failed to mention was that the same neighbourhood he filmed was also home to a sizeable population of perfectly white Hungarian immigrants.)

My point here is that it is not literally the case that Hungarians, or other residents of the East of the EU, have absolutely no experience of Muslims. Nor does one really need to go to the West to have such experience. Though the number of Muslims in the V4 as a whole is negligible, in the larger, and increasingly even the middle-sized, cities of the eastern EU, the presence of Muslim tourists and especially of employees and owners of popular establishments such as kebab shops and shisha cafés is now quite visible. Given the low rate of unemployment and increasing wages in the region (see below), the Islamophobic fear that more Muslims will arrive is by no means unreasonable.

There is not that much of a difference between attitudes to the big cities of Western Europe and their alleged 'no-go zones' among East Central Europeans and Western European residents of rural areas, where there are also fewer Muslims.³⁹ Such rural residents are equally afraid of the 'Muslim invasion' that has not yet quite happened in their own relatively peripheral towns, but that they see as happening in the metropolises. In this respect, the entire East

37 Anna Gawlewicz and Kasia Narkowicz, 'Islamophobia on the move: circulation of anti-Muslim prejudice between Poland and the UK', in Yasir Suleiman (ed.), *Muslims in Europe and the UK I* (Cambridge: Centre of Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge 2015), 90–100.

38 'János Lázár's xenophobic video provokes outrage in Austria and Germany', *Budapest Beacon*, 8 March 2018, available at <https://budapestbeacon.com/janos-lazars-xenophobic-video-provokes-outrage-in-austria-and-germany> (viewed 26 September 2018).

39 In the 2018 Italian election, the liberal democratic centre-left, which formerly ran the country, survived only in cities with a population of over 100,000 and increased its vote as populations grew larger. (For a detailed map of all the results, see Salvatore Borghese, 'Politiche 2018: analisi del voto', 8 March 2018, available on the *YouTrend* website at www.youtrend.it/2018/03/07/politiche-2018-analisi-del-voto (viewed 26 September 2018)). This pattern of rural areas, where there are proportionately fewer Muslims, being *more* anti-migrant and Islamophobic has been observed in France and the United States, and in many other parts of the Euro-Atlantic world.

is to the West as the Country is to the Big City in the West. However, even within the East of the EU, rural residents are more likely to support Islamophobic political formations than the residents of big cities where some Muslim migrants are already in evidence.

In Poland and Hungary, the illiberal parties in power have long counted on provincial voters, with the liberal democratic opposition remaining strong in major cities. In the Polish elections of 2015, the more urbanized West voted heavily for the opposition, with the populist and strongly anti-migrant PiS party winning nationally but mainly supported in the East. In big cities like the capital Warsaw the opposition came ahead of PiS. In the smaller V4 countries, there was a radical divide everywhere between the capital, where the left and the traditional centre-right held out, and the rest of the country and especially the countryside. For example, in the 2018 Hungarian parliamentary election, Viktor Orbán's Fidesz and its sidekick Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt (KDNP, Christian Democratic People's Party) won a decisive victory by carrying the great majority of provincial seats, while Budapest's eighteen electoral districts elected only six Fidesz-KDNP candidates.⁴⁰ Furthermore, while the migrant issue was the deciding factor for rural voters, it attracted much less interest in the capital, even for Fidesz voters.⁴¹

In short, an unqualified opposition, between an East 'without Muslims' and a West with many Muslims, ultimately misses the point that, when it comes to Islamophobia, it is unfamiliarity that breeds contempt, across the continent. There is 'Islamophobia without Muslims' in parts of Western Europe as well.

Prosperity, precariousness, prejudice

I have so far discussed some of the objective contexts of Islamophobia in East Central Europe. But there is a necessary affective dimension to Islamophobia as well. What politicians instrumentalize is not only or mainly the public's perceptions and political calculations but also their emotions.

As noted, the small number of Muslims in the East of the EU, even with its explanatory limitations, does suggest that the immediate cause of Islamophobia is not the Muslim population that is already there, but a fear of more who may be coming and who, as we have discussed, are seen as having brought violence and disorder where they have already settled in the West. Those fears are, of course, completely unfounded in fact, both in

40 For results by the Hungarian Electoral Office, see 'Országgyűlési Képviselők Választása', 8 April 2018, available on the *Választás* (Election) website at www.valasztas.hu/dyn/pv18/szavossz/hu/oevker.html (viewed 26 September 2018).

41 Veronika Munk, 'Nem is a migránszás volt a fő csodafegyver', *Index*, 16 May 2018, available at https://index.hu/belfold/2018/valasztas/2018/05/16/zavec_z_felmeres_valasztasok_utan_kozvelemeny-kutatas_fidesz_ketharmad_migranszas (viewed 26 September 2018).

terms of the near-term likelihood that massive numbers of Muslim migrants will come to the East and in the 'damage' caused by them in the West. It is therefore reasonable to expect that the fear of Muslims is rooted in some broader feelings of anxiety.

Any such anxiety is unlikely to be caused by difficulties in the economy, which, as we have also seen, is healthy and growing. Petr Šabata, a leading Czech broadcast journalist, muses: 'Should anyone be looking, for research purposes, for a country where almost everyone lives in a kind of prosperity that they have never known, and yet are destroying step by step their democratic system, then in the Czech Republic they would have found the perfect example.'⁴² His compatriot, the journalist Martin Fendrych, puts it plainly: 'Keep the EU and NATO. We're doing well. Let's not wreck it!'⁴³

Not everyone agrees. The Slovak author Michal Havran sums up his experience as follows: 'Every day I see misery and fear, and in the evening I listen to nonsense about our successes.'⁴⁴ But even Havran's lament acknowledges the general sense of success in the country, even if it is, in his opinion, unjustified. The affective stimulus for the illiberal, Islamophobic reaction is, clearly, not one of general dissatisfaction with the economy.

How can a feeling of prosperity and success be accompanied by one of misery and fear? Much more work needs to be done in this area before we can begin to have confidence in an answer, but one solid possibility is that the newfound prosperity of much of the public brings with it a feeling of precariousness. The jobs that people have found still pay only around half of what one might earn in Germany,⁴⁵ and they do not provide the kind of long-term security that older people still remember from the socialist period. Tamás Boros, who conducted several studies of Hungarian opinion that resulted in twin reports on the 'Hungarian dream' and the 'Hungarian nightmare', finds that the political instincts of the Hungarian public are social democratic: people long for a state that protects their security. At the same time, they would like to have the incomes available in the most advanced capitalist societies. As an ideal, they turn to the Alpine republics that represent the desired combination of security and prosperity:

42 Petr Šabata, 'Návod, ako denne našťvať päť miliónov ľudí', *SME Komentáre*, 13 May 2018, available online at *SME.sk* at <https://komentare.sme.sk/c/20824414/navod-ako-denne-nastvat-pat-milionov-ludi.html> (viewed 27 September 2018).

43 Martin Fendrych, 'Oč jde ve volbách? Udržet EU a NATO. Máme se dobře, nezničme to', *Aktuálně.cz*, 20 October 2017, available at <https://nazory.aktualne.cz/komentare/ve-volbach-jde-o-eu-a-nato-mame-se-dobre-neznicme-to/r-f4bf89bcb4a811e7811f002590604f2e> (viewed 27 September 2018).

44 Michal Havran, 'Dajte sa dokopy', *SME Komentáre*, 16 May 2018, available online at *SME.sk* at <https://komentare.sme.sk/c/20827025/dajte-sa-dokopy.html> (viewed 27 September 2018).

45 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Data, 'Average wages', available on the *OECD* website at <https://data.oecd.org/earnwage/average-wages.htm> (viewed 27 September 2018).

‘Hungarians wish they lived some 800 kilometres further west—somewhere near the Austrian–Swiss border: in the predictability, safety, and social equality of the Kádár regime combined with a western European standard of living.’⁴⁶

Nostalgia for the relatively tolerant authoritarianism of János Kádár’s ‘goulash Communist’ regime omits the undeniable fact that most people are better off now than they were then, and stresses instead the socialist government’s success in eliminating extreme poverty and insecurity. As one interviewee put it: ‘Under the Kádár regime, we managed just fine up to our necks in tepid water. They always added enough hot water so we wouldn’t freeze.’⁴⁷

Once again, the ‘East European’ nature of the ‘Hungarian dream’ should not be exaggerated. It is hard to ignore the fact that the same essentially petty bourgeois ‘dream’ is what also motivates those voters—not only in East Central Europe but also in the United States, France or Italy—who combine support for government protection for the middle and upper working class with Islamophobic or other racist attitudes, perceived as a way of ensuring not only their physical but also their economic safety. In Italy, the Five Star Movement, victorious in the 2018 elections, had a fairly left-leaning social platform. In Slovakia, Robert Fico, who was prime minister from 2016 to 2018 and from 2016 to 2018, labelled himself a social democrat and, for example, supported striking workers at the country’s Volkswagen factories.⁴⁸ And Hungary’s Jobbik, often described as a far-right party, has argued for legislated EU-wide wage parity.⁴⁹

This brief survey of the region’s economic success-*cum*-precariousness suggests that apparent and even real prosperity may coexist with fear of its fragility. Perversely, this state of affairs has created a temporary partnership between sections of both the national corporate bourgeoisie and the working class who, like the large corporations, depend on the nation-state for protection as they compete with foreign workers. But ordinary employees with precarious jobs also want the state to protect them from the domestic competition that they

46 *The Hungarian Dream: What Kind of Future Do Hungarians Dream of for Themselves and for Hungary?* (Budapest: Policy Solutions and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Budapest 2017), 10, available on the *Policy Solutions* website at https://www.policysolutions.hu/userfiles/elemzes/276/what_is_the_hungarian_dream_executive_summary.pdf (viewed 27 September 2018).

47 Quoted in Ildikó Kovács, ‘Baloldali rémálmok aggasztják a magyarokat’, *24.hu*, 14 June 2018, available at <https://24.hu/kozelet/2018/06/14/magyar-remalom-kutatas> (viewed 27 September 2018).

48 Tatiana Jancarikova, ‘VW’s Slovak workers strike over pay, halt production lines’, *Reuters*, 20 June 2017, available online at <https://reuters.com/article/us-volkswagen-slovakia-strike/vws-slovak-workers-strike-over-pay-denting-production-idUSKBN19B10I> (viewed 27 September 2018).

49 ‘Jobbik’s wage union initiative to create Eastern Central European cooperation’, 25 February 2017, available on the *Jobbik* website at https://jobbik.com/jobbiks_wage_union_initiative_to_create_eastern_central_european_cooperation (viewed 27 September 2018).

see in the masses of migrants who, even if they are not yet here, are known to be gathering at the western horizon. This type of situation was summed up in a 1997 essay by Subcomandante Marcos, who argued that the age of mass migration has turned the migrant into a spectral figure whose 'destiny is to wander, and to act as a kind of scarecrow—frightening those who have jobs into forgetting the boss—as well as a pretext for racism'.⁵⁰ This is as applicable to the unionized steel workers and coal miners in the United States who voted for Donald Trump in 2016 as it is to the voters who support illiberal politicians in East Central Europe.⁵¹

In conclusion, all of the above should suffice to demonstrate that Islamophobia in the East of the EU is not an aberrant local mutation, but of the same strain as that which has infected the various populations of the western world that have been threatened by neoliberal globalization: the rural dwellers and the less-educated workers in alliance with segments of the local bourgeoisie fearful of international competition. East Central Europe as a whole can be considered as the locus of a further peripheralization that overlaps with these populations.

Several of the articles in this issue address the issue of peripherality—or, better, as Bobako puts it in world-systems theory terms, semi-peripherality—as perhaps the main key to the overdetermined issue of Islamophobia in the East of the EU. My own article provides some detailed illustrations. Sayyid's contribution discusses it in terms of 'Europeanness', a status aspired to but not quite reached in East Central Europe. He locates the phenomenon in the racialized context of white European domination, proceeding in degrees from its western centre and outwards to the rest of the world, with the East of Europe somewhere in between at the margins of the West.

Aleksandra Lewicki's paper can be seen in part as providing the German detail for Sayyid's discussion. She suggests that political projects in Germany's past and present have structurally retained distinct incarnations of race in the once separate eastern and western parts of the country. This led, initially, to a more Islamophobic articulation of a new German identity in the East, but soon the difficulties of unification were transposed into nationalist and racist resentment also in the West. Lewicki's analysis might profitably be applied to the entire region under consideration. The eastward expansion of the EU might also be seen as a form of 'unification', and the Visegrád region might be compared to eastern Germany not only in its greater propensity to Islamophobic racism but also in its ability to retransmit it to the West (where much of it originated).

50 Subcomandante Marcos, 'The fourth world war has begun' [1997], trans. from the French by Nathalie de Broglio, *Nepantla: Views from the South*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2001, 559–72 (565).

51 Krastev, *After Europe*, 49.

A complex of political, economic and affective factors emerges here that presents a varied and overdetermined, yet consistent picture of Islamophobia in the East of the EU. The papers in this special issue provide a first step towards understanding the phenomenon, and point to some of the directions in which further research on this topic should proceed.

Ivan Kalmar
Toronto 2018