Draft report of the seminar on a working definition of anti-Muslim hatred/Islamophobia

19th December, 2019

Brussels

The objective of this seminar was to bring together a diverse range of experts to explore the need for and possibility to develop a working definition of anti-Muslim hatred / Islamophobia, in order to contribute to policy responses related to the fight against hatred, racism and discrimination, in particular targeting Muslims.

A call for such reflections had been made at the recent Commission-led stakeholder conferences held in Brussels on 3 December 2018 and in Madrid on 25 June 2019.

The seminar was an opportunity for experts in the field to engage in an open-ended and trustworthy debate. It brought together representatives of civil society organisations, international organisations, national authorities, equality bodies, and academia. The role of the Commission and the Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred was to facilitate the discussion.

The following general issues framed the discussion:

- The need for a working definition of anti-Muslim hatred/Islamophobia (purpose, added value, etc.)
- Possible elements of a definition of anti-Muslim hatred/Islamophobia
- Possible follow up (e.g. recognition and support)

Key decisions on next steps

- Set up a working group among the participants to draft a report of the meeting.
- The report will highlight elements of the issue, focusing on mechanisms (based on the model of the reference paper on antigypsyism www.antigypsyism.eu) but also highlighting how these mechanisms manifest in practice
- The report can be the basis to develop a reference paper drafted by experts on the definition. Wider consultation could follow in order to build legitimacy, support and ownership of the future paper and a bottom-up approach.
- The group has also identified opportunities for advocacy once a paper is drafted: e.g. any UN forthcoming report on Islamophobia (by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief), EP resolution, Council of Europe/ECRI review of its general recommendation, national authorities.

Summary of the discussion

This report collects all the input shared by the participants on a) the need and challenges of a working definition as well as b) on the possible terminology, the mechanisms and the manifestations of anti-Muslim hatred/Islamophobia

1. **Why is a working definition needed?**

   Generally:

   - To increase official recognition of Islamophobia,
   - To raise public awareness and understanding of Islamophobia including associated mechanisms and contexts.
   - To address the denial of the phenomenon
   - To provide a common platform from which Islamophobia can be tackled efficiently via informed and tailored measures
   - To increase protection against hostility and discrimination targeting Muslim individuals and institutions (or those perceived as such)
   - To ensure a space for empowerment of victims of Islamophobia
   - To strengthen anti-racism work via mobilisation and informed advocacy
   - To have a comprehensive document as a point of reference to explain mechanisms
   - To acknowledge, identify, and measure the harmful impact of Islamophobia on victims

   Specifically (advocacy and political actions):

   - To create a formal linkage between the phenomenon of Islamophobia and legislative and policy frameworks
   - To inform criminal justice system practice/policy, legislative review and legal interpretation
   - To support litigation work
   - To inform data collection and work with more accurate categories for recording mechanisms
   - To support advocacy work towards institutions (recognition and public action)
   - To inform state actions and adoption of policies that are practical and provide pragmatic measures and tools

2. **What safeguards/limits/factors need to be considered?**

   - It should not be embedded in legislation, the definition should go beyond criminal offences and cover manifestations of racism that are not punishable by law but important to tackle through different strategies
   - The risk of ending up in limitless debates on theory and terminology
   - Two kinds of definition may emerge:
     - One that is more theoretical and subject to academic/philosophical debate and another that is more pragmatic and legal in its orientation
     - One short and concise such as for example “anti-Muslim hatred / Islamophobia is anti-Muslim racism”, one more elaborated which describes mechanisms and manifestations.

- It should also belong to the general framework of anti-racism/anti-discrimination and in connection with other forms of oppressions (intersectional approach)
- There is a need for a workable and flexible definition

3. What terms are used to describe the phenomenon?

The terms used to define the phenomenon are generally: Islamophobia, anti-Muslim racism, anti-Muslim hatred and prejudice. These usually refer to a human rights framework, and are built on racialisation of Muslims, the real or perceived Muslim identity ("Muslimness"), the creation of the Muslim as "the other". The term is also related to lack of distribution of power to some categories of persons, exclusion, specific acts and prejudices. There are **different dimensions to this phenomenon**: systemic, structural, institutional, individual, targeting properties. Contexts/specific events can trigger the phenomenon.

4. Mechanisms: what are the elements that construct Muslims as problems in society?

- Who creates the Muslim problem? Institutions, media, certain political groups, etc
- How it is articulated? Otherness/otherisation, nationalistic arguments, as part of serving nationalistic identity formation, "great replacement" theory, danger, anti-immigration discourses, scapegoating, de-humanisation / invisibilisation of Muslims, suspicion, patronising, constructing national identities as monolithic and denying influence of Islam and Muslims in Europe
- Which aim? To control/conform (conditional inclusion) minority groups, diversion from political responsibility to tackle inequalities
- Through which means? Policies, e.g. foreign policies, war on terror/security agenda/counter-terrorism policies, exclusionary policies, geopolitics, past oppressions (i.e. colonialism and ongoing national institutional factors) and negative stereotyping, media, marginalisation and exclusion, distortion and denial of historical realities

5. Manifestations: what are the concrete implications for Muslims or those perceived as such?

- **Hate crime**: attacks on individual and properties identified as Muslim (halal shops, mosques, houses, cemeteries, cultural monuments)
- **Racist narratives and hate speech**: slurs, threats, incitement to hatred/violence, Islamophobic political speech, demonstrations, marches, distribution of racist literature in public, moderate vs extremist Muslim discourses, including online.
- **Discriminatory practices** (structural / institutional / historical / individual): (access to) employment, lack of possibilities to lodge complaints, resistance to building of mosques, lack of access to political participation and political representation, public spheres or decision making processes; racial profiling; barriers in full access to education, lack of recognition and responses by public institutions; public institutions' mistrust and lack of support to Muslim institutions, over targeting of Muslims in security measures; stigmatisation of religious practices (fast, prayers, etc.); biased teaching and curricula, headscarf bans.

- **Impact on individuals**: widespread perception of discrimination, self-censorship and self-marginalisation, impact on the shaping of identity, influencing behaviours, impact on health (physical/mental/emotional) and wellbeing, denies a sense of respect and dignity, avoidance strategies, social/civic and political withdrawal; social isolation; restrictions and limitations to use of everyday spaces; psychological harm; silences people; prevents people from reaching their full potential; (also the issue of repeated incidents and how they increase feelings of vulnerability and anxiety for victims and their families).
- **Impact on society**: infringement of rights and weakening of fundamental rights framework for all, climate of suspicion, ripple effect amongst communities impacted (Muslim and those perceived as Muslim as a separate community); ignores diversity and differences within Muslim communities.

Annexes:

- List of participants
- Position paper from the European Coalition against Islamophobia