

EUROPEAN
ISLAMOPHOBIA
REPORT
2020

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)



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ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
POLAND
NATIONAL REPORT 2020

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Executive Summary

Fearmongering, lack of systemic education, and hateful media campaigns and news are the main reasons why Polish people are prejudiced against Islam. The growing problem of threats, insecurity, and instability for Muslims living in Poland finds no specific answer from the Polish government. The systematic work of the Polish Ombudsman's Office and other institutions like the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) shows that there is a growing problem of underreported hate crimes; only a margin of the crimes committed is reported to the police.

The coronavirus pandemic did not improve the difficult situation of Polish Muslims, but rather - just like in other parts of the world - intensified the inequality and persecution of minorities. People who experienced exclusion on various levels on a daily basis were particularly vulnerable to the effects of health and safety restrictions. This group consisted mostly of migrants, refugees, and people applying for international protection in Poland - many of whom were Muslims. The government, which is dealing with the pandemic and the police, which is dealing with the results of the coronavirus, are not interested in protecting Polish Muslims or actively reacting to the problem of the worsening situation of minorities in Poland.

The presidential election campaign conducted in the first six months of 2020 was also an occasion for politicians to make Islamophobic statements. Though rarer than in previous years, it still shows that fearmongering against the Muslim community continues to gain political attention. That is why the government media like TVP and other right-wing media still publish a lot of news showing Islam and its followers in a one-sided, negative manner.

There were just a small number of positive initiatives by few activists and NGOs to counter the widespread Islamophobia. However, spreading stereotypes and false, negative information is a process and as a result, without systematic work, without changing the political and media language and the school curricula, the black-and-white, prejudiced view of Muslims in Polish society will not change.

Streszczenie

Podleganie do strachu, brak systemowej edukacji, a także pełne nienawiści kampanie medialne i informacje to główne powody, dla których tak wielu Polaków jest uprzedzonych co do islamu. Narastający problem zagrożeń, sytuacja niepewności i niestabilności muzułmanów mieszkających w Polsce nie znajduje konkretnej odpowiedzi ze strony polskiego rządu, który ignoruje ten problem, nie uznając, że istnieje on naprawdę. Systematyczna praca Biura Rzecznika Praw Obywatelskich oraz innych instytucji i organizacji, takich jak Organizacja Bezpieczeństwa i Współpracy w Europie (OBWE), pokazuje, że narasta problem braku zgłaszania przestępstw z nienawiści - na policję zgłaszany jest jedynie margines rzeczywistych przestępstw.

Pandemia koronawirusa nie poprawiła trudnej sytuacji polskich muzułmanów, ale raczej - podobnie jak w różnych częściach świata - pogłębiła problem nierówności i prześladowań mniejszości. Osoby, które na co dzień doświadczają wykluczenia na różnych płaszczyznach, są szczególnie narażone na skutki wprowadzanych w związku z pandemią ograniczeń. Taką grupę stanowią migranci i migrantki, uchodźcy i uchodźczynie oraz osoby ubiegające się w Polsce o ochronę międzynarodową, szukający w Polsce schronienia - często są to muzułmanie. Rząd zajmujący się pandemią i policja zajmująca się jej skutkami nie są zainteresowane ochroną polskich muzułmanów, ani aktywnym reagowaniem na problem gorszej sytuacji mniejszości mieszkających w Polsce.

Kampania prezydencka przeprowadzona w I półroczu 2020 roku była także okazją do wypowiedzenia się przez polityków w sposób islamofobiczny. Choć tego typu wypowiedzi były zdecydowanie rzadsze niż w poprzednich latach, to pokazują, że podsycanie strachu przed społecznością muzułmańską wciąż jest paliwem do zdobywania uwagi politycznej. Dlatego też media rządowe, takie jak TVP i inne media państwowe, wciąż publikują wiele informacji ukazujących islam i jego wyznawców w jednostronny, negatywny sposób.

Niewiele działaczy i organizacji pozarządowych podjęło tylko kilka pozytywnych inicjatyw, które miały przeciwdziałać szerzącej się islamofobii. Proces szerzenia się stereotypów i fałszywych, negatywnych informacji jest jednak procesem i dlatego bez systematycznej pracy, zmiany języka politycznego i medialnego oraz programu nauczania nie zmieni się czarno-biały pogląd pełen uprzedzeń względem muzułmanów w polskim społeczeństwie.

Country Profile EIR 2020

Country: Poland

Type of Regime: Democratic Republic

Form of Government: Semi-presidential

Ruling Parties: PiS – Law and Justice (right-wing, national-conservative, Christian democratic)

Opposition Parties: PO – Civic Platform (centre-right)

Last Elections: 2020 Presidential Election (Andrzej Duda, the PiS candidate, won 51.03% of the vote against the PO candidate Rafał Trzaskowski 48,97%); 2019 Legislative Election (PiS: 235 seats, PO: 134 seats, SLD [left]: 49, PSL [agrarian, conservative]: 30, *Konfederacja* [nationalist, far-right]: 11, German minority: 1)

Total Population: 37.97 million (2019)

Major Languages: Polish

Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: According to official data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, 736 procedures in hate crimes cases were initiated by the police in 2020, 27 of which concerned hate crimes against Muslims. Data was made available after an e-mail inquiry to the Security Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration. According to this data, the number of hate crimes is decreasing: in 2019, there were 972 procedures about hate crimes initiated and 33 of these concerned Muslims. In 2018, there were 1,124 procedures, of which 62 concerned Muslims. The police data speaks of 44 crimes committed based on the target's ethnicity that might be linked to Islam (Arabs, Bengalis, Turks, etc.).

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: For the first 10 months of 2020, the official police statistics provide the figure of 665 hate crimes of which 577 were based on national, ethnic, and racial affiliation of the victim or the victim's political, religious, or non-denominational status. However, recent research conducted by the Office of the Ombudsman indicates that hate crime is severely underreported and, in specific, that among people from Muslim-majority and sub-Saharan African countries only 5% of racist incidents are reported.

Major Religions (% of Population): Christianity (93.2%), Non-believers (3.1%), Jehovah's Witnesses (0.2%), Other (0.2%) (data for 2018 based on information from the Main Office for Statistics; GUS 2018).

Muslim Population (% of Population): Depending on sources, between 10,000 and 30,000 (around 0,05%).

Main Muslim Community Organizations: The Muslim Religious Association (*Związek Muzułmanów Polskich*) and the Muslim League in the Polish Republic (*Liga Muzułmańska RP*)

Main NGOs Combatting Islamophobia: The Polish Ombudsman's Office, Never Again Association, Centre for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behaviors, Hate Stop, Stefan Batory Foundation (*Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego*), Center for Research on Prejudice

Far-Right Parties: Confederation (*Konfederacja*), National Movement (*Ruch Narodowy*), National Revival of Poland (*Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski*)

Far-Right Movements: All-Polish Youth, National Radical Camp, Independence March Association

Far-Right Militant Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** No
- **Prayer Ban:** No

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic dominated narratives in Polish society, politics, and media. Despite the pandemic, the growing Islamophobia, the lack of education about Islam, the Islamophobic utterances of Polish politicians, and the consolidation of stereotypes through fake news and the manipulation on the Internet and mainstream media did not stop. Almost all events perceived as negative in Poland in 2020 were marked with attempts to somehow associated them with Islam.

Right before the outbreak of the coronavirus, certain Polish politicians started the presidential elections campaign with Islamophobic statements. At the brink of the election campaign Krzysztof Bosak (MP and the far-right *Konfederacja* candidate in the 2020 presidential elections) tweeted that “Islam has nothing to do with freedom, therefore its development in Poland should be stopped.” A month before the planned date of the presidential elections in April, Zbigniew Ziobro (Minister of Justice, Prosecutor General, and a leader of *Solidarna Polska* party) tweeted that “Islam is alien to our culture” and suggested that Poland should defend itself against it. Using Muslims as scapegoats is still a present and quite popular strategy in specific political circles in Poland (cf. Politics section)

The change connected with the global pandemic affected members and leaders of the Catholic Church. Although the Catholic media - including leading media such as *Gość Niedzielny* or the Polish section of Vatican Radio - continue to lead the way in publishing Islamophobic content, when it comes to clergy and hierarchs, they are no longer as active in the field of fearmongering against Islam as they were in the previous years. The Day of Islam organized by the Catholic Church in Poland became an occasion for positive statements from several bishops (cf. Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia section). Pre-occupied with the pedophilia scandal and media crisis connected to, the Church focused on attacking the LGBT+ community and the main figures of Catholic Islamophobia were not active this year (cf. Central Figures of Islamophobia section)

Polish authorities admit that according to the official data hundreds of hate crimes occurred in 2020, and the actual statistics for hate crimes may be as much as 20 times higher. The coronavirus pandemic intensified the inequality and persecution of minorities. People who experienced exclusion on various levels on a daily basis were particularly vulnerable to the effects of restrictions introduced in connection with the pandemic. This group consisted mostly of migrants, refugees, and people applying for international protection in Poland - many of whom were Muslims. According to the Polish Ombudsman’s Office, which is constantly ignored by the Polish government, the authorities focused on the pandemic and the anti-government women rights demonstrations, and were not interested

in protecting Muslims and other minorities.¹ (cf. Physical and Verbal Attacks section)

As our Twitter research has shown, Polish media readers and social media users are still interested in propelling Islamophobic content. Especially during the period when there was increased interest in Muslim-majority countries (Iran in January 2020 or Hagia Sophia in summer 2020) and immediately after terrorist attacks (not necessarily committed in the name of Islam), the number of publications and discussion on Islam increases significantly. Polish Internet users - very often with little knowledge of Islam - write about Muslims mainly negatively (over 90 percent of the content), presenting the problems related to Islam in black and white. (cf. Internet) The presence of people with an Islamophobic attitude among TVP journalists and other mainstream media outlets is a big concern (cf. Media section)

However, it is worth mentioning that in 2020 journalists promoting reliable information about Muslim communities were more active. More and more books are being published both on Islam abroad and on the traditions of Polish Muslims living in the country from the Middle Ages. In 2020, a virtual iftar was organized gathering over 100 Polish Muslims and the right-wing weekly magazine *Gazeta Polska* was punished for its racist publication. Still, without systemic work, the prejudiced view of Muslims in Polish society will not change.²

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

Research cited by the Office of the Ombudsman shows that only 5% of hate crimes against Ukrainians, and migrants from Muslim and sub-Saharan African countries were reported to the police.³ Consequently, the actual scale of hate crimes including verbal and physical attacks is greatly underestimated. Additionally, 18-23% of the victims of hate crimes show symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder while the average percentage of PTSD symptoms in the Polish population is 5%. According to official data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, 557 procedures in hate crimes cases were initiated by the police in the first 11 months of 2020. Fourteen

1. Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich, „Potrzeba całościowej strategii przeciwdziałania przestępstwom z nienawiści - pisze Adam Bodnar do premiera Mateusza Morawieckiego”, <https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/rpo-do-premiera-o-calosciowej-strategii-przeciwdzialania-przestepstwom-z-nienawisci>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
2. This report could not have been written without the assistance of the volunteers at Islamista Blog / Salam Lab. We would like to thank Maciej Gorywoda, Klaudia Sułek, Martyna Machowska, Nikol Tomar, Natalia Urbańczyk-Adach, Magdalena Hana, Amaal Julia Paterczyk, Karolina Ewa Wierzbowska, and Radosław Pociask.
3. Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich, „O przestępstwach z nienawiści wobec mniejszości. Adam Bodnar na posiedzeniu sejmowej komisji”, <https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/o-przestepstwach-z-nienawisci-wobec-mniejszości>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

of them concerned hate crimes against Muslims.⁴ According to police sources, there were 665 hate crimes in the first 10 months of 2020, 577 of which were based on national, ethnic, and racial affiliation of the victim or the victim's political, religious, or non-denominational status, and 44 crimes were committed based on the target's ethnicity that might be linked to Islam (Arabs, Bengalis, Turks, etc.).

Incidents of hate speech and attacks documented by NGOs in 2020 include many cases of discrimination based on the assumption that Muslims and people of ethnicity that might be linked to Islam are spreading the coronavirus. Such incidents include the refusal of service and orders to leave stores or places of service provision to customers of Muslim faith or foreign ethnic origin under the unsubstantiated suspicions that they will infect the staff with the coronavirus. Similar statements directly declaring that Muslims and refugees are spreading the disease were presented by public figures on the state-owned television channel TVP and were published on Twitter by journalists cooperating with the station. These statements resulted in the spread of Islamophobic content and provoked comments inciting hatred, violence, and expressing sickness and death wishes toward Muslims.⁵ Racist and Islamophobic comments also appeared under the online appeal made by the mayor of Poznań, Jacek Jaśkowiak, to stop discriminating against foreigners and people of other faiths, and to stop blaming them for the spread of the coronavirus.

The Ministry of Interior Affairs sees no need to regulate the issue of hate speech as has been recommended by international bodies.⁶ Furthermore, the Ombudsman reminded Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki that over two years ago he signaled the need to create a comprehensive strategy to counteract hate crimes. Despite the 20 systemic recommendations for changes in law and practice published by the Ombudsman in 2019, nothing has changed.

Employment

Our group interviews with Muslims have showed that they are often discriminated against in their workplaces and are asked to conceal their religion because of employers' fears of scaring off potential customers. Muslims experience Islamophobic jokes, gossip, are suspected of dishonesty, and are rejected by their co-workers who do not want to co-operate with them because of prejudices against Islam. Women are particularly vulnerable to discrimination in the workplace. In the group interviews, re-

4. Data as of November 26, 2020, was made available after an e-mail inquiry to the Security Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration.

5. Stowarzyszenie Nigdy Więcej, „Wirus nienawiści. Brunatna Księga czasu epidemii”, https://www.nigdywiecej.org/docstation/com_docstation/172/wirus_nienawisci_brunatna_ksiega_czasu_epidemii.pdf, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

6. Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich, „O przestępstwach z nienawiści wobec mniejszości. Adam Bodnar na posiedzeniu sejmowej komisji”, <https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/o-przest%C4%99stwach-z-nienawi%C5%9Bci-wobec-mniejszo%C5%9Bci-adam-bodnar-na-posiedzeniu-sejmowej-komisji>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

spondents stated that they experienced unequal treatment in relation to followers of other religions (e.g. wearing religious symbols of Christianity in the workplace was common despite top-down prohibitions, but wearing the hijab resulted in immediate orders to remove it), ridicule, public humiliation, and threats of dismissal due to covering their hair in the workplace. Chronic stress resulting from an atmosphere of prejudice caused by revealing their religious affiliation in some cases resulted in the interviewees quitting their work. A common strategy among Muslims in Poland is to hide their religious affiliation and avoid displaying symbols pertaining to Islam in their workplace.

The situation of foreign workers, including Muslims, became exceptionally difficult during the coronavirus pandemic. Refugees and migrants in need of appropriate work permits were often condemned to significantly extended waiting periods resulting in them not being able to get employment. In the face of the impending recession and taking advantage of the lack of knowledge of the labor law among migrants, employers reduced their salaries or, without prior warning, dismissed foreigners often employed illegally or on temporary contracts.

Additionally, Muslims may have encountered prejudices when trying to rent a flat. Cases of refusal to rent an apartment to a Muslim result from the belief that they do not keep their houses and themselves clean. Muslims may also have experienced a significant increase in their rents because of the belief that all Muslims in Poland are foreigners who do not know the rental market prices or Polish law.

Education

According to the primary and secondary public school curricula, topics concerning Islam are obligatory in history and religion classes. Education on Islam in history lessons boils down to a narrow introduction to the genesis of Islam, a basic characterization of its principles, and the introduction of early conquests and scientific discoveries.⁷ Outside of the Middle Ages, Islam is presented only in the context of conflicts between Muslim-majority and European states, and depicted as a foreign and distant cultural circle. Teachers who on their own initiative decide to take up topics such as Islam, religious diversity, the contemporary situation in the Middle East, or migrations, add them as a footnote to other subjects, as an extracurricular activity at the expense of their free time, without pay, and risking a conflict with the local Board of Education, the school principal, or the students' parents. During primary and secondary education on religion - which for a vast majority of students is understood as the Catholic catechesis - the topics related to non-Christian religions appear in one thematic block in secondary school. The curriculum specifies that in this block the cat-

7. Podstawa Programowa, „Historia”, <https://podstawaprogramowa.pl/Liceum-technikum/Historia>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

echist is to present basic information on Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, characteristics of religious sects, and the consequences of belonging to them. In this context, the catechist is also required to explain the concepts of religious fanaticism and religious indifference.⁸ The new core curriculum for teaching religion introduced in Poland on September 1, 2020, removed the obligation to teach the foundations of the most important non-Christian religions, instead emphasizing the uniqueness of Christianity over other religions and the paths of interreligious dialogue chosen by the Catholic Church. It is no longer required to teach the topics of religious fanaticism, but instead the curriculum mentions showing respect for other faiths.⁹

The growing problem in the Polish system of education is the lack of adequate support for the children of foreign and mixed backgrounds, and their parents. Children of migrants or of mixed origin, children of color, and children of the Muslim faith might have encountered high levels of prejudice from other students, their parents, and school staff. Our interviews with a group of several Muslim families has shown that the harassment often did not meet any reaction from school employees, and significantly affected the mental state of Muslim and migrant students.

Additionally, during the coronavirus pandemic, there was a visible lack of school and parental support in remote education for students with a migration background. This resulted from the parents' lack of appropriate ICT skills, the language barrier, and marginalizing the problems of migrant children in Polish schools.¹⁰ The difficult situation of migrant students in Polish schools was confirmed by a report by the Supreme Audit Office of 2020 which showed “a complete lack of interest in this issue by the Minister of National Education” and stressed that “the ministry does not monitor the situation, does not perform appropriate analyses, has practically no knowledge about it and has done nothing to obtain it.”¹¹

Politics

One could expect that during a pandemic and because of the poor economic situation and the catastrophe in the healthcare system, politicians would resign from the populist, fear-mongering style of rhetoric. Unfortunately, it is not the case. In 2020, the Polish political scene witnessed several serious Islamophobic statements during the presidential elections campaign and after it. What is important is that right-wing politicians have managed to create and maintain the widespread belief that a Muslim

8. “Podstawa programowa katechezy kościoła katolickiego w Polsce”, Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, WAM, 2010, p. 58.

9. “Podstawa programowa katechezy kościoła katolickiego w Polsce”, Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, Święty Paweł, 2018, p. 212.

10. Tygodnik Powszechny, Karol Wilczyński „Wyższa Szkoła Alienacji”, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/wyzsza-szkola-alienacji-165308>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

11. Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, „NIK o kształceniu dzieci cudzoziemców i obywateli polskich powracających do kraju”, <https://www.nik.gov.pl/aktualnosci/ksztalcenie-dzieci-cudzoziemcow-i-powracajacych-do-kraju.html>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

equals an immigrant, and that usually it means a terrorist (which is often, and improperly, used interchangeably with the term “Islamist” who originally meant a scholar of Islam in the Polish language). That is why statements on terrorist attacks connected with migration or/and refugees are also treated here as examples of Islamophobia - one of their aims is fearmongering against Islam and its believers.

Generally, there are three groups of politicians using Islamophobic discourse in their public speech or other forms of expression. First, there are the politicians connected to the far-right, nationalist party *Konfederacja* (Confederation) and other nationalist groups. This group includes Krzysztof Bosak (MP, *Konfederacja* party’s candidate in the 2020 presidential elections) who at the brink of the election campaign tweeted that “Islam has nothing to do with freedom, therefore its development in Poland should be stopped”;¹² Robert Winnicki (MP, leader of National Movement) who said that the Independence March is comprised of people who “do not want to follow their wrong path - multiculturalism, the path of mass migration, the path of cultural savagery and desolation”;¹³ Grzegorz Braun (MP) who is infamous for his anti-Semitic statements, but is identified as a member of a wider Islamophobic movement;¹⁴ Janusz Korwin-Mikke (MP) who is constantly warning that “Muslims will come and conquer us”;¹⁵ and Robert Bątkiewicz (a leader of the March of Independence Association) who appealed to the participants of the 2020 Independence March to become “knights” ready to “conquer Jerusalem.”¹⁶

The second group consists of politicians from the ruling party and its allies. This group includes some top politicians who were active this year, especially Joachim Brudziński (a former Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration, currently a European MP) who associated the Nice attacks with the policy of welcoming refugees,¹⁷ and Zbigniew Ziobro (Minister of Justice, Prosecutor General, and a leader of the *Solidarna Polska* party), who one month before the planned date of the presidential elections tweeted that “Islam is alien to our culture” and claimed that Poland is defending its sovereignty by not welcoming refugees.¹⁸ Furthermore, Ziobro has built

12. Twitter, Krzysztof Bosak, <https://twitter.com/krzysztofbosak/status/1212381249240752128>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

13. Polonia Christiana, “Robert Winnicki na Marszu Niepodległości: won gorszycielom, won lawendowej mafii z Kościoła!” <https://www.eng.pch24.pl/robert-winnicki-na-marszu-niepodleglosci--won-gorszycielom--won-lawendowej-mafii-z-kosciola--79858,i.html>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

14. Oko.press, Anna Mierzyńska, “Neofaszysta Roberto Fiore w Warszawie zagrzewał Grzegorza Brauna do walki o nacjonalistyczną Europę”, <https://oko.press/neofaszysta-roberto-fiore-w-warszawie-zagrzewal-grzegorza-brauna-do-walki-o-nacjonalistyczna-europe/>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

15. Korwin-Mikke.pl, “Korwin: Większość rządco ma rację” <https://korwin-mikke.pl/jkm/korwin-wiekszosc-racja/>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

16. Facebook, OkoPress Profile, https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=2811010725827126&tid=1683534065241470, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

17. Twitter, Joachim Brudziński, <https://twitter.com/jbrudzinski/status/1321866908996698114>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

18. Twitter, Zbigniew Ziobro, <https://twitter.com/ziobropl/status/1247036878047584256?s=21>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

a milieu of politicians who effectively use Islamophobic and fearmongering messages about Islam to gain political influence. These include Patryk Jaki (currently a European MP, famous for creating one of the most Islamophobic election spots in October 2018)¹⁹ who claimed that Islam or anarchy will fill the empty spaces left by Christianity;²⁰ Dominik Tarczyński (currently a European MP) who warned in March 2020 that “sharia is barbarism and its opposing our system”;²¹ local politicians like Dariusz Matecki, a member of a local council in Szczecin, an editor of the fan pages of Ziobro and the Ministry of Justice,²² and author of one of the most popular Islamophobic fan pages in the EU (No to Islamization of Europe, ndie.pl); and around 30 others.²³

There are also often, but not systematic, Islamophobic statements coming from less important or local politicians of the ruling party PiS like Kazimierz Smoliński (MP), who in 2020 tweeted that “immigrants are tormenting homosexuals in Sweden”²⁴ using the popular right-wing Islamophobic myth that presents Sweden as a huge “no-go zone” and spreading fake information about an unspecified group of immigrants (implicitly referring to Muslims) attacking homosexuals. There are also statements like that of Józef Kardys, the governor of Kolbuszowa, a small town in southeastern Poland, who claimed that the young people who protested against the near total ban on abortion imposed by the ruling party in the end of October 2020 should “go to mosques, they leave headless,” suggesting they would be beheaded by the believers of Islam who allegedly have no tolerance.²⁵ We can say that this Islamophobic stance is quite common among members of *Konfederacja* and PiS, but that only specific politicians use Islamophobia as a fuel to gain attention. The figure connecting the environment of *Konfederacja* and PiS is Adam Andruszkiewicz, who is a PiS MP and the Secretary of State and who used to be a member of the National Movement and the All-Polish Youth. He is one of the most active Islamophobic pol-

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19. The spot was contested by the Ombudsman’s Office. Despite the court’s repeated recommendations to deal with the case, the prosecutor’s office, led by Zbigniew Ziobro, discontinued the investigation several times. Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich, RPO po raz kolejny skarży umorzenie sprawy antyuchodźczego spotu PiS z 2018 r., <https://www.rpo.gov.pl/content/rpo-po-raz-kolejny-umorzenie-sprawy-antyuchodźczego-spotu-pis-z-2018>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
 20. Facebook, Patryk Jaki, <https://www.facebook.com/PatrykJaki/posts/2734762389961154>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
 21. Facebook, Dominik Tarczyński, <https://www.facebook.com/posel.tarczynski2015/posts/2236801326614167>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
 22. wprost.pl, Maski opadły. Facebook ujawnił, kto edytował profile znanych osób i fanpage, <https://biznes.wprost.pl/technologie/internet/10288414/maski-opadly-facebook-ujawnil-kto-edytowal-profile-znanych-osob-i-fanpage.html>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
 23. The prosecutor’s office, led by Zbigniew Ziobro, discontinued the investigation in February 2020. Matecki claimed that he was “persecuted for his Catholic convictions.” Wirtualne Media, Prokuratura umorzyła sprawę Dariusza Mateckiego i fanpage’y z mową nienawiści, <https://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artukul/prokuratura-umorzyła-sledztwo-dot-dariusz-matecki-i-fanpage-y-z-mowa-nienawisci>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
 24. Twitter, Kazimierz Smoliński, <https://twitter.com/KaziSmolinski/status/1317409598991642624>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
 25. RadioZet.pl, Mikołaj Pietraszewski “Starosta PiS o protestujących: niech idą do meczetów, wyszliby bez głów”, <https://wiadomosci.radiozet.pl/Polska/Polityka/Starosta-PiS-o-protestach-kobiet-niech-protestuja-w-meczetach.-J.-Kardys-chce-dyktatury>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

iticians in Poland, trying to show the so-called connection between immigration, Islam, terrorist attacks, and the policy of the opposition parties.²⁶

What is important is that these common Islamophobic stances affect the anti-immigration policy of the ruling party. One striking example is that EU funds for immigrants and asylum seekers are going to be used to buy 308 limousines and cars for ministries and other state offices. The news emerged in the end of October, at the very peak of the coronavirus pandemic.²⁷

The third group of politicians using Islamophobic fuel are opposition politicians who are constantly comparing the PiS government to “Islam” or “Islamic countries.” A good example is Krzysztof Brejza, a member of the Polish Senate from the party *Platforma Obywatelska*, who, in October 2020, tweeted: “The prosecutor’s office of Ziobro lets out the perpetrator of a woman-beater - so it encourages bandits to beat women. After forcing them to give birth to dead children, consent to beatings is the next stage of PiS fundamentalism. Women are like objects. As in some Islamic countries.”²⁸ Among the supporters of the opposition, there is a certain phenomenon that can be described as comparing the ruling party to Muslims which, of course, is supposed to be a form of depreciation. The term “PiSlam,” connecting Islam and PiS, is often used.

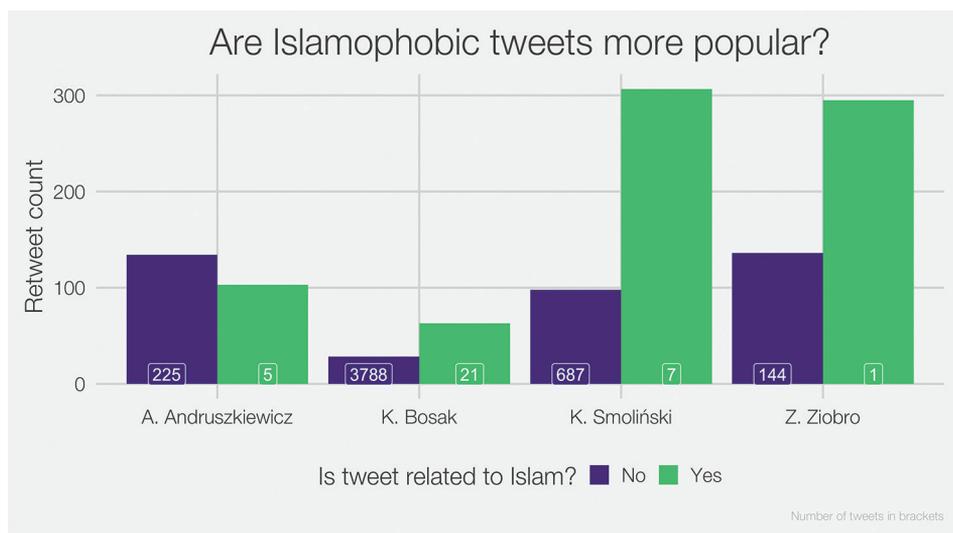


Figure 1: „Are Islamophobic tweets more popular?”²⁹

26. For instance: Twitter, Adam Andruszkiewicz: <https://twitter.com/Andruszkiewicz1/status/1319277272650575878>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

27. wyborcza.pl, Karol Rębisz „Rząd kupuje 308 nowych limuzyn. Za pieniądze z funduszu UE dla imigrantów”, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,155287,26465022,rzad-kupuje-308-nowych-limuzyn-za-pieniadze-z-unijnego-funduszu.html>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

28. Twitter, Krzysztof Brejza, <https://twitter.com/KrzysztofBrejza/status/1322492269732208641>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

29. Figure was compiled by Karol Wilczyński and Piotr Sobczyk based on research on Twitter between 11th Oct 2020 and 31st Dec 2020.

Generally, our research on Twitter shows that Islamophobic tweets help politicians gain attention and that Islam mobilizes the audience, especially emotionally. (Fig. 1)

Media

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, there were a lot of Islamophobic media events in Polish media in 2020. There are three main groups of media reproducing harmful Islamophobic stereotypes and Muslim racism: the mainstream media, the far-right media, and the nationalist and Catholic media. Among the mainstream media, the most important is the Polish state TV (TVP), currently under total control of the ruling party, which frequently broadcasts Islamophobic material. Examples include “the new demographic attack on Europe”,³⁰ “the brutal Islamization of Europe”³¹ or “the European left who want to secularize Muslims” but have not succeed and therefore Islam is still a serious danger.³² TVP hires journalists who often publish Islamophobic views on their personal Twitter accounts. A good example is Dominika Cosic, a reporter based in France, who claimed, for instance, that “Muslims are taking advantage of their growing strength and impose their rules”³³ or Michał Rachoń, a TVP presenter, who warned that welcoming immigrants ends up in “Muslims attacks and riots.”³⁴ Another PiS-owned state media outlet devoted to promoting Islamophobic stereotypes is the local radio station in Szczecin (Radio Szczecin), which is connected to Dariusz Matecki (cf. Politics section). It publishes a lot of material on “Muslim migrants” organizing riots in Sweden,³⁵ and terrorist networks that infiltrate the country through religious schools and institutions.³⁶

Ignorance or a kind of fear of Islam is rather widespread among Polish journalists. Usually, they do not know how to report, they do not know the situation in countries with Muslim-majority societies, and they follow foreign agencies in, for example, emphasizing the religious affiliation or nationality of the terrorists -

30. TvpInfo.pl, Witold Repetowicz, “Nowy atak demograficzny na Europę”, <https://www.tvp.info/46912498/nowy-atak-demograficzny-na-europe>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

31. WiadomosciTVP.pl, „Brutalna islamizacja Europy Zachodniej” <https://wiadomosci.tvp.pl/50418041/brutalna-islamizacja-europy-zachodniej>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

32. TvpInfo.pl, Petar Petrović, “Atak za atakiem – Francja w narożniku. Czas oddać islamistom sierpowym” <https://www.tvp.info/50704173/marzenia-europejskiej-lewicy-o-zlaicyzowaniu-swoich-muzulmanow-okazy-sie-plonne>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

33. Twitter, Dominika Cosic, <https://twitter.com/dominikacosic/status/1317398565937909761>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

34. Facebook, Mięła Dwudziesta Fanpage, <https://www.facebook.com/MRMinela20/posts/638704720055340>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

35. Radio Szczecin, Przemysław Gołyński, “Last night in Sweden” <https://radioszczecin.pl/364,166,last-night-in-sweden>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

36. Radio Szczecin, Przemysław Gołyński, Islamscy ekstremiści prowadzą w Szwecji kilkanaście szkół, <https://radioszczecin.pl/6,406593,islamscy-ekstremisci-prowadza-w-szwecji-kilkanas>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

as long as the nationality is Arab and the religion is Muslim. There are figures like former editor-in-chief of *Super-Express*, one of the biggest newspapers in Poland, Sławomir Jastrzębowski, who tweeted that “he sees a threat in Islam.”³⁷ On the other hand, a lot of liberal media and journalists use the term “PiSlam” to criticize the government. Most left-wing and anti-government media outlets republished the Charlie Hebdo Islamophobic caricature comparing the cult of Pope John Paul II to the cult of the Prophet Muhammad.³⁸ Poland under PiS rule is often called “Catotaliban” and anti-government journalists often warn that the government will soon impose a Catholic version of sharia in Poland. Another, smaller trend in mainstream media which was relevant in 2020 is portraying Pakistan as a “typical Islamic country,” where minorities are persecuted and people are forced to be Muslims. This trend is an example of how right-wing and biased media influence the mainstream.³⁹

In the polarized Polish media scene, it is hard to find mainstream journalists trying to overcome the biased and negative view of Islam and its followers. Editors and authors of Polish mainstream media who frequently publish reliable stories on events in countries with Muslim-majority populations are Marcin Żyła and Wojciech Jagielski (*Tygodnik Powszechny*); Bartłomiej Rumieńczyk (Onet.pl); Patryk Strzałkowski (Gazeta.pl); Marta Urzędowska and Blanka Rogowska (*Gazeta Wyborcza*); Agnieszka Lichnerowicz (Tok FM); and Marta K. Nowak (Oko.press). Freelance journalists and authors who are sources of reliable information include Paweł Pieniążek, Ludwika Włodek, or less-known media projects like Outride.rs, and blogs (*Stosunkowo Bliski Wschód*, *ReOrient*, *Polka na Pustyni*, *Zwykły Zeszyt*). There are researchers and academics like Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska (Szkola Główna Handlowa, Warsaw) or Karolina Rak (Jagiellonia University, Kraków) who try to be active in media. Finally, there is IslamistaBlog.pl, a project run by the authors of this report, which is currently the most popular platform on Islam in Polish (since 1st March 2021 its new name is SalamLab.pl). Still, there are very few sources of reliable information on Islam in the Polish language and there is a great need for workshops for journalists covering stories about Muslims and/or migration (cf. Policy Recommendation section).

Obviously, there is a whole section of right-wing and/or nationalist media which frequently feed their readers with negative (and often fake) news about Islam and Muslims. These include, among others:

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- 37. Twitter, Sławek Jastrzębowski, <https://twitter.com/sjastrzebowski/status/1317452340681736193>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
 - 38. Facebook, Jolanta Saacewicz Profile, <https://www.facebook.com/288749518582747/photos/a.288754038582295/581490462641983/>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
 - 39. o2.pl, Ewelina Kolecka “Pakistan. 13-latka została porwana i zmuszona do przejścia na islam” <https://www.o2.pl/informacje/pakistan-13-latka-zostala-porwana-i-zmuszona-do-przejscia-na-islam-6570547196725952a>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020)

- wpolityce.pl - one of the most influential and popular right-wing platforms in Polish, closely connected to the PiS ruling party.⁴⁰
- “Najwyższy Czas” – a media outlet connected to Janusz Korwin-Mikke, *Konfederacja* MP.⁴¹
- Nationalistic media outlets such as pantarhei24.com,⁴² tysol.pl,⁴³ wiadomosci.eu,⁴⁴ (connected to Dariusz Matecki and ndie.pl), Media Narodowe,⁴⁵ konserwatyzm.pl,⁴⁶ and Magna Polonia.⁴⁷
- Websites with a Christian “vibe” but officially not connected to any religious institutions such as Fronda.pl,⁴⁸ annur.pl,⁴⁹ and pch24.pl.⁵⁰

The problem with these websites and media outlets is not only that they publish Islamophobic and biased content but that they also spread it across social media,

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40. For example: 1. wgospodarce.pl, „Były szef wywiadu Niemiec: Islam zagrożeniem dla Europy” <https://wgospodarce.pl/informacje/75594-byly-szef-wywiadu-niemiec-islam-zagrozeniem-dla-europy>
2. wpolityce.pl, “Islam kontra republika. Muzułmanie coraz agresywniej wchodzą do francuskiej polityki”, <https://wpolityce.pl/swiat/516480-islam-kontra-republika> (access: 15th Nov 2020).
41. For example (last accessed: November 15, 2020): 1. nczas.com, “Muzułmanie wykorzystują czas zarazy do rozpychania się w przestrzeni publicznej” <https://nczas.com/2020/03/30/muzulmanie-wykorzystuja-czas-zarazy-do-rozpychania-sie-w-przestrzeni-publicznej/>;
2. Twitter, Tomasz Sommer, <https://twitter.com/1972tomek/status/1317206077595918337> (tweet by editor-in-chief).
42. Example: pantarhei24.com, “Impas lewicy w Szwecji: Imigranci znęcali się nad homoseksualistami” <https://pantarhei24.com/impas-lewicy-w-szwecji-imigranci-znecali-sie-nad-homoseksualistami/>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
43. Example: TySol.pl, “Wojna z katolicyzmem? Muzułmański Związek Religijny w RP poparł “Strajk Kobiet”” <https://www.tysol.pl/a55756-Wojna-z-katolicyzmem-Muzulmanski-Zwiazek-Religijny-w-RP-poparl-Strajk-Kobiet#.X5nq8L0CDzA.twitter>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
44. Example: wiadomosci.eu, “Chcą usunąć chrześcijańskie symbole religijne, aby muzułmanie czuli się komfortowo” <https://www.wiadomosci.eu/informacje/p,wlochy-usuwanie-chrzescijanskich-symboli-religijnych-aby-muzulmanie-czuli-sie-komfortowo.html>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
45. Example: medianarodowe.com, “Burmistrz Londynu-muzułmanin atakuje Polskę w żydowskiej gazecie” <https://medianarodowe.com/burmistrz-londynu-muzulmanin-atakuje-polske-w-zydowskiej-gazecie>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
46. Examples: 1. konserwatyzm.pl, “Smuniewski: Nacjonalizm i populizm w Europie, prawa człowieka w Izraelu, Brexit vs. Polesxit”, <https://konserwatyzm.pl/smuniewski-nacjonalizm-i-populizm-w-europie-prawa-czlowieka-w-izraelu-brexit-vs-polesxit/>;
2. konserwatyzm.pl, Mateusz Sanicki, “Kontrowersje islamu”, <https://konserwatyzm.pl/sanicki-kontrowersje-islam/>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
47. Examples: 1. MagnaPolonia.org, „Niemcy: Gazeta „Bild” wzywa do przyznania, że islamscy ekstremiści są zagrożeniem dla Europy”, <https://www.magnapolonia.org/niemcy-gazeta-bild-wzywa-do-przyznania-ze-islamscy-ekstremisci-sa-zagrozeniem-dla-europy/>;
2. MagnaPolonia.org, „Anglia: W Londynie mężczyzna zerwał Krzyż z kościoła w Chadwell Heath”, <https://www.magnapolonia.org/anglia-w-londynie-mezczyzna-zerwal-krzyz-z-kosciola-w-chadwell-heath/>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
48. Examples: 1. fronda.pl, Jan Bodakowski, “Kobieta w islamie. Czyli o potwornym upodleniu...”, <https://www.fronda.pl/a/kobieta-w-islamie-czyli-o-potwornym-upodleniu,142905.html>
2. fronda.pl, “Francja coraz bardziej czarnoskóra i islamska” <https://www.fronda.pl/a/francja-coraz-bardziej-czarnoskora-i-islamska,149727.html>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
49. Example: annur.pl, Aziz Mansour, “Islamizacja Niemiec – kolejny etap”, <http://annur.pl/islamizacja-niemiec-kolejny-etap/>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
50. Example: pch24.pl, Bogdan Dobosz, “Francja: zbrodnicze komando islamistów podpałilo kościół”, <https://www.pch24.pl/francja--zbrodnicze-komando-islamistow-podpalilo-kosciol,78871,i.html>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

provoking racist and hateful comments. The editors leave comments like “the Islamic plague should be kneaded like bedbugs.”⁵¹

The last category is the Catholic media, in other words, the media that is owned by the Catholic Church or Catholic institutions, which, considering the size, could be included into mainstream media section. The Islamophobia present in such media has a special character, because it presents Islam as a threat to the Church and Christian values. Those who write in these media outlets also use the discourse of the conflict between religions.⁵² One of the main examples is *Gość Niedzielny*, one of the most popular weeklies and websites in Poland.⁵³ Second is KAI (Catholic News Agency in Poland), which constantly republishes⁵⁴ Islamophobic content from the Polish section of Vatican Radio.⁵⁵ This news is then published by most of the Catholic media in Poland like *Niedziela*, *Deon.pl*, *Stacja 7*, etc. Another example is *Radio Maryja*, a very controversial and Catholic fundamentalist media outlet, that is constantly fueling Islamophobic sentiments among its readers.⁵⁶

All in all, however, we can observe that the number of Islamophobic publications decreased in 2020, probably due to the pandemic (cf. Internet section).

Justice System

In 2020, the Ministry of the Interior Affairs published information on the incidents caused by hatred towards or with the participation of national and ethnic minorities in Poland in 2018-2019 stating that the number of incidents motivated by hatred significantly dropped.⁵⁷ But according to the Polish Ombudsman’s Office, these figures are significantly understated and do not reflect the nature of the problem.

Twenty years after Poland adopted the directive implementing the principle of equal treatment of persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin (Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000), the country still lacks a comprehensive strategy for counteract-

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51. Example: wpolityce.pl, Grzegorz Górny, “Włoska wolontariuszka, więziona przez muzułmańskich terrorystów, przeszła na islam”, <https://wpolityce.pl/swiat/500179-wieziona-wloska-wolontariuszka-przeszla-na-islam> cf. comment section, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
 52. For more information see Anna Wilczyńska, Karol Wilczyński (2020), “In Poland the Stranger Threatens Christianity: Polish Catholics and Their Attitude towards Refugees”, in: M. Jacobsen et al. (ed.) *Cosmopolitanism, Migration and Universal Human Rights*, Basel: Springer.
 53. Examples: 1. [gosc.pl](https://www.gosc.pl), Franciszek Kucharczak, “Co to będzie” <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/6537378.Co-to-bedzie/2>. [gosc.pl](https://www.gosc.pl), Franciszek Kucharczak, “Życzenie dla kanałii” <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/6310346.Zyczenie-dla-kanalii/2>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
 54. Example: ekai.pl, “Islamscy ekstremiści współodpowiedzialni za wybuch pandemii w Azji?” <https://ekai.pl/islamscy-ekstremisci-wspolodpowiedzialni-za-wybuch-pandemii-w-azji/> (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
 55. Examples: 1. [vaticannews.va](https://www.vaticannews.va), „Szwecja: narastają napięcia społeczne, chrześcijanie są bezsilni” <https://www.vaticannews.va/pl/swiat/news/2020-09/szwecja-narastaja-napiecia-spoeczne-chrzescijanie-sa-bezsilni.html>
2. [vaticannews.va](https://www.vaticannews.va), Krzysztof Ołdakowski, “W roku 2019 roku wzrosła chrystianofobia w Europie” <https://www.vaticannews.va/pl/kosciol/news/2020-01/raport-gatestone-institute.html>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
 56. Example: [radiomaryja.pl](https://www.radiomaryja.pl), “6 tys. dolarów za przejście chrześcijańskiej rodziny na islam”, <https://www.radiomaryja.pl/informacje/6-tys-dolarow-za-przejscie-chrzescijanskiej-rodziny-na-islam/>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).
 57. [gazetaprawna.pl](https://www.gazetaprawna.pl), “MSWiA: Spada liczba przestępstw z nienawiści” <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/1490894,mswia-przestepstwa-z-nienawisci-rasizm.html>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

ing hate crimes. For the last two years, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki has been reminded of the need to create such a strategy by the Office of the Ombudsman but despite the 20 recommendations for systemic changes in law and practice proposed by the office in 2019, no changes were introduced.⁵⁸

Monitoring conducted by the Polish Ombudsman's Office shows that migrants, Muslims, representatives of certain national and ethnic minorities, LGBT+ people, and activists of civil society organizations in Poland have the biggest problems with obtaining protection against hate crimes. The prosecutor's office often refuses to initiate proceedings in such cases, discontinues them, or conducts them on a long-term basis for no apparent reason.⁵⁹ According to the Office of the Ombudsman, law enforcement agencies contribute to the promotion of racist ideology or to the spread of hatred based on prejudice.

In 2020, after the intervention of the Office of the Ombudsman, the court ordered the prosecutor's office to re-examine the case of the Islamophobic PiS party election spot accused of incitement to hatred and used in the 2018 local elections campaign. In the opinion of the Office of the Ombudsman, the spot violates the law prohibiting incitement to hatred on the basis of national, ethnic, racial, or religious differences. In September 2020, the prosecutor's office discontinued the proceedings in this case⁶⁰ – following a similar pattern with such cases.

In September 2020, parliament passed an act limiting ritual slaughter in Poland only to the needs of local religious associations. In October, the senate adopted an amendment to this law removing restrictions on the ritual slaughter of poultry. The new regulations on limiting ritual slaughter will come into force at the end of 2025.⁶¹

Internet

As mentioned above, there are a lot of websites and media which publish Islamophobic content. However, we can observe a decreasing interest in biased information about Islam on the Internet and social media. Many previously Islamophobic websites - often connected to the ruling party, nationalist parties or organizations, or the

58. Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich, "Potrzeba całościowej strategii przeciwdziałania przestępstwom z nienawiści - pisze Adam Bodnar do premiera Mateusza Morawieckiego", https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/rpo-do-premiera-o-calosciowej-strategii-przeciwdzialania-przestepstwom-z-nienawisci?fbclid=IwAR3vM2DjF5MJeeWt7tDTJXtPblu5XoDEQGodVe_nsaX-5hY3dDmple5e5k, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

59. Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich, "30 przykładów spraw "mowy nienawiści", w których działania prokuratury budzą wątpliwości", <https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/30-przykladow-mowy-nienawisci-w-ktorych-dzialania-prokuratury-budza-watpliwosci-RPO?fbclid=IwAR1qzBolvhppq78b63K2wPaYNMDfhMkq8THYX-DWKU0ocxIR0J1d-XYEDY578>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

60. Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich, "RPO po raz kolejny skarży umorzenie sprawy antychodźczego spotu PiS z 2018 r." https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/rpo-po-raz-kolejny-umorzenie-sprawy-antychodzczego-spotu-pis-z-2018?fbclid=IwAR39q7_V42yXxzESCqAWR9RNuFvd0vWCau5xpob2LUyUQ-K8o1Oiod2UJk8, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

61. Onet Wiadomości, "Ubój rytualny. Senat podjął decyzję" <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/uboj-rytualny-senat-podjal-decyzje/ymv38f7>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

Catholic Church - are now turning to news about the “fake virus” or promoting not wearing protective masks, etc.⁶² Ndie.pl (“No to Islamization of Europe”) owned by Dariusz Matecki, an associate of Zbigniew Ziobro, the Minister of Justice and Prosecutor General, is still publishing some Islamophobic content but with clearly lower frequency,⁶³ similarly to other outlets.⁶⁴

Unfortunately, there are still many active groups and communities, which often publish comments, which are not openly islamophobic on current events like murders by Muslim migrants, etc. Leaders of these group use a lot of keywords like “cultural enrichment” to let you know what their thoughts are, but not say it out loud. Those who comment on these entries allow themselves a lot more, and the moderators do nothing about it. A good example is the “Polish Defense League in Mazowsze”⁶⁵ and its moderator, Dariusz Biały.⁶⁶ There are radical Catholic groups which publish or distribute Islamophobic content, appealing to the defense of Poland and the Church from Islam.⁶⁷ There is also the media group *Idź pod prąd* (Go against the current) led by protestant pastor Chojecki, who attacks the pope and the Catholic Church for its official (though, not popular in Poland) stance⁶⁸ to build dialogue with Islam and accuses Muslims of terror, killing gays, and Americans.⁶⁹

Islamophobic authors are also active on Twitter. They include journalists (cf. Media section), but also regular supporters of the PiS or *Konfederacja* parties,⁷⁰ or even fantasy novel writers.⁷¹ We analyzed Islamophobic entries on Twitter in the last quarter of 2020 and a few common trends can be observed, apart from the increase of the

62. A good example is the following profile on Facebook, Kamieni Kupa: <https://www.facebook.com/Kamieni-Kupa1/>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

63. Examples: 1. Facebook, Nie dla islamizacji Europy <https://www.facebook.com/ndiepl/posts/2942303922562830>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

2. Facebook, Nie dla islamizacji Europy <https://www.facebook.com/ndiepl/posts/2938721172921105>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

64. Example: Facebook, Raz prozą, raz rymem - walczymy z propagandowym reżimem, <https://www.facebook.com/razproza/posts/2656229534588463>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

65. Facebook, Polska Liga Obrony - Dywizja Mazowiecka, <https://www.facebook.com/PolskaLigaObronyDywizjaMazowiecka/posts/3556943801094860>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

66. Facebook, Dariusz Biały, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=191700822293271&id=100043600625592, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

67. Examples (last accessed: November 15, 2020):

1. <https://www.facebook.com/ZolnierzeChrystusa/posts/3358124147635171>

2. Facebook, Żołnierze Chrystusa, <https://www.facebook.com/ZolnierzeChrystusa/posts/3112274742220114>

3. Fundacja Fileo, “Chrześcijańskie misjonarki gwałcone i ścięte, chrześcijańscy chłopcy torturowani i ukrzyżowani!” <https://fundacja-fileo.pl/chrzescijanskie-misjonarki-zgwalcone-i-sciete-mezczyzni-i-chlopcy-torturowani-i-ukrzyzowani/>.

68. Idź Pod Prąd, “Imam w katolickim programie TVP atakuje chrześcijan z IPP!” <https://idzpodprad.pl/aktualnosci/imam-w-katolickim-programie-tvp-atakuje-chrzescijan-z-ipp/>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

69. Facebook, Idź Pod Prąd, <https://www.facebook.com/idzpodprad/videos/651988648716732>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

70. 1. Twitter, Wojciech Batug, <https://twitter.com/BatugWojciech/status/1315181707126079490>,

2. Twitter, Stefan Wójcik, <https://twitter.com/Szczery2015/status/1317154697799737344>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

71. Twitter, Jacek Piekara, <https://twitter.com/JacekPiekara/status/1320375058238492672>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

reach of Islamophobic tweets by politicians (cf. Politics section). First, we can observe that there is always a correlation between the number of tweets on Islam and terrorist attacks (even if they are not carried out by Muslims). (Fig. 2)

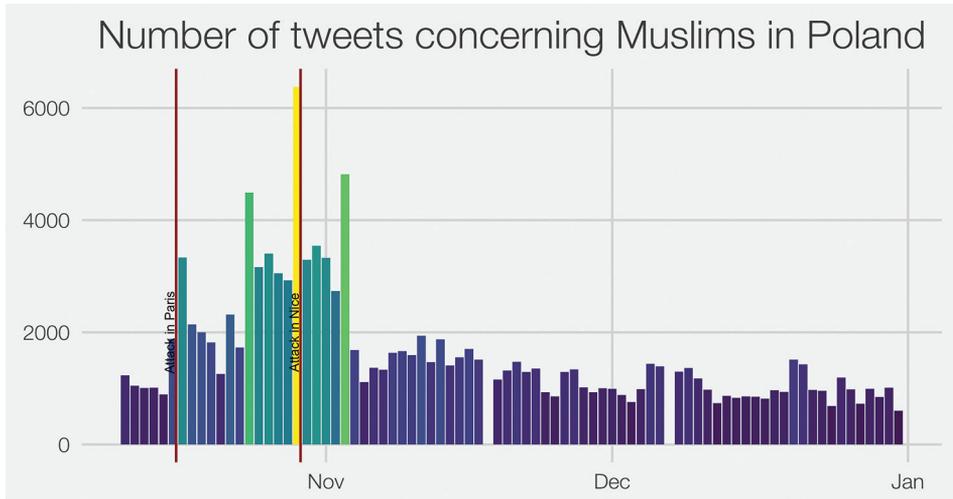


Figure 2: Number of tweets concerning Muslims in Poland.⁷²

Another trend is that positive stories are often neglected by the users of Polish Twitter. After the attack in Vienna, we checked the popularity of the story of the three Muslim men who saved the life of a woman and a policeman. Unfortunately, it was retweeted or commented by only less than 1.5% of users. (Fig. 3)

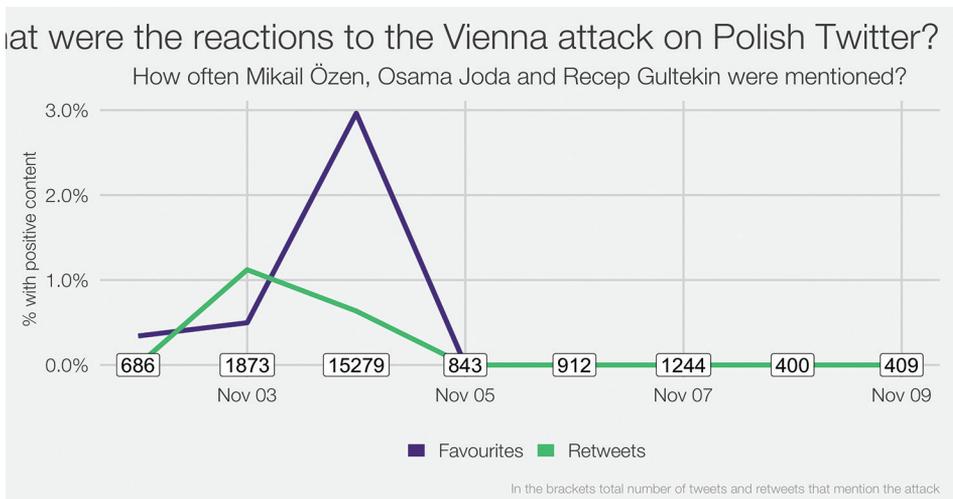


Figure 3: What were the reactions to the Vienna attack on Polish Twitter?⁷³

72. Figure was compiled by Karol Wilczyński and Piotr Sobczyk based on research on Twitter between 11th Oct 2020 and 31st Dec 2020.

73. Ibid.

We also analyzed how often Polish Twitter users use the term “PiSlam.” which - surprisingly - is also correlated with the dates of terrorist attacks and also with the days of intense critique of the Polish government (see November 9 in the figure below). (Fig. 4)

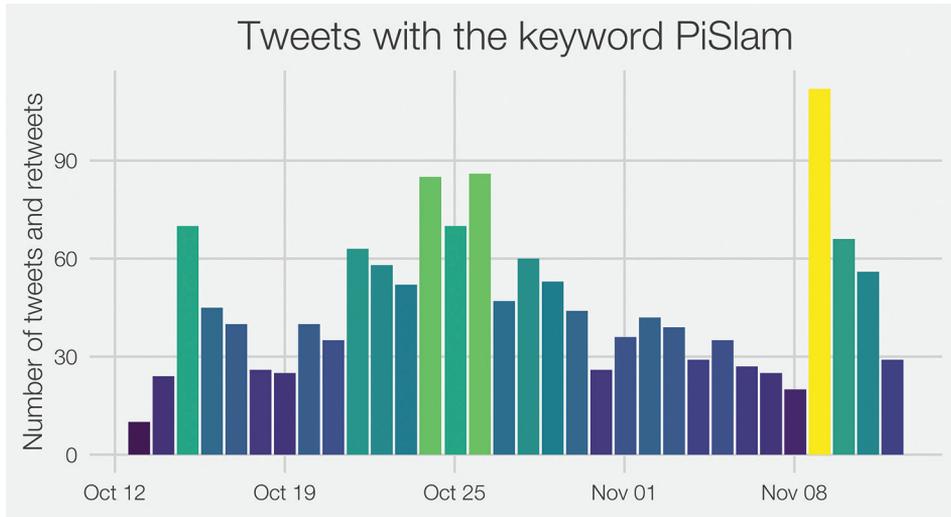


Figure 4: Tweets with the keyword PiSlam..⁷⁴

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

As was mentioned above, central figures in the Polish Islamophobic networks still receive significant institutional support which provides them with financial stability. Being anchored to governmental institutions, far-right media outlets, think tanks, and the Catholic Church, they are able to spread their messages across different socioeconomic groups.

Two important members of Islamophobic networks in the country are Dominik Tarczyński (cf. Politics section), a European MP from the ruling party PiS; and Dariusz Matecki, a member of the local city council in Szczecin and a close associate of Zbigniew Ziobro, the Minister of Justice in the PiS government and a Prosecutor General. Their Islamophobic messages in 2020 contain stereotypes like “police being afraid of offending *Muslim criminals*”;⁷⁵ repeating the discriminatory slogan that a Muslim equals a terrorist;⁷⁶ and that “Latin civilization” is under threat from “Barbaric Islam.” In church circles, the figure spreading Islamophobia is Dariusz Kowalczyk, a Catholic priest, a Jesuit, a Polish professor of theology working at Vatican

74. Ibid.

75. Facebook, Dariusz Matecki, <https://www.facebook.com/DariuszMateckiFanPage/posts/1377665145738727>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

76. Facebook, Dariusz Matecki, <https://www.facebook.com/DariuszMateckiFanPage/posts/1379192482252660>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

universities in Rome, and a journalist in the Polish Catholic press. His Islamophobic entries relating to the clash of civilizations theory and ridiculing the idea of interreligious dialogue can be found on his Facebook profile.⁷⁷

As was observed at the end of 2019, in 2020, the main Islamophobic websites, social media channels, and important individuals (cf. Media and Internet sections) focused more on questioning the existence of the pandemic and attacking the LGBT+ community, usually combining homophobia and Islamophobia in one message. Some of mainstream Islamophobic channels were deleted by social media corporations. The most well-known cases were deleting the Facebook profile of Janusz Korwin-Mikke (cf. Politics section) followed by 800,000 users, and the Facebook profile “Based Poland” with around 200,000 followers. The Based Poland profile was led by Adam Starzyński, a TV Republika journalist and a member of the international far-right Islamophobic group MEGA (“Make Europe Great Again”).⁷⁸ The most important Catholic figures of the Islamophobia network, such as the priests Dariusz Oko or Roman Kneblewski, were devoted to fighting the LGBT+ community, and were not recorded as engaging in Islamophobic speech this year.

Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

As in previous years, there were no systematic and countrywide initiatives to counter Islamophobia. The most important official institution fighting xenophobia and Islamophobia quite systematically is the Office of Ombudsman and Ombudsman Adam Bodnar. A 2020 report of the Ombudsman Office, appeals to the Prime Minister in the following words, “Fear and resentment towards migrants - reinforced by an unskillful and often even deliberately manipulated public debate - contributes to an increase in hate crimes against foreigners, especially people from the Middle East and followers of Islam. This proved that in mass-threatening situations it does not take much for hatred to escalate, especially against groups traditionally exposed to such crimes.”⁷⁹

77. Examples of his posts: (1) Facebook, Dariusz Kowalczyk, <https://www.facebook.com/dariusz.kowalczyk.104/posts/2713832938653261> (last accessed: November 15, 2020); (2) Facebook, Dariusz Kowalczyk, <https://www.facebook.com/dariusz.kowalczyk.104/posts/3229544603748756>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020). He also shares the Islamophobic content of Vatican Radio on his profile, for example: Facebook, Dariusz Kowalczyk, <https://www.facebook.com/dariusz.kowalczyk.104/posts/3474204329282781>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

78. Oko.press, Andrzej Górski, “Polski żołnierz islamofobicznej siatki bije rekordy w sieci. #MEGAgate cz. 4” <https://oko.press/polski-zolnierz-islamofobicznej-siatki-bije-rekordy-w-sieci-megagate-cz-4/>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

79. Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich, “Potrzeba całościowej strategii przeciwdziałania przestępstwom z nienawiści - pisze Adam Bodnar do premiera Mateusza Morawieckiego” <https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/rpo-do-premiera-o-calosciowej-strategii-przeciwdzialania-przestepstwom-z-nienawisci>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

For the first time since 1989, the court sentenced the owner of the far-right weekly magazine *Gazeta Polska* for publishing a racist photomontage. The District Court in Gdańsk ordered the publisher to apologize to the authors of the original works Rafał Wojczal and Wojciech Wilczyński, and to pay the amount of PLN 20,000 (c. EUR 4,500) for the Polish Humanitarian Action.⁸⁰ The cover showed a group of people from the Middle East with the words “Refugees brought deadly diseases. Shocking German report!”



Figure 5: The cover of the far-right weekly magazine *Gazeta Polska* (August 2017 issue) with the cover story entitled “Refugees Brought Deadly Diseases. Shocking German Report!”⁸¹

There were also positive messages from the Catholic bishops on the occasion of the Day of Islam in the Catholic Church, which is traditionally celebrated at the end of January every year. Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski sent a letter to Muslims from Krakow and bishop Henryk Cierieszko said that bishops “are not afraid to be open to Islam.” The initiative, dating back to late 1990s, however, is not popular in Poland.⁸²

80. Wirtualne Media, „Gazeta Polska” ma przeprosić fotoreporterów ws. okładki „Uchodźcy przynieśli śmiertelne choroby”, <https://www.wirtualnemedi.pl/artykul/gazeta-polska-musi-przeprosic-fotoreporterow-ws-okladki-uchodzczy-przyniesli-smiertelne-choroby>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

81. Ibid.

82. ekai.pl, Tomasz Królak, “Bp Cierieszko: Nie boimy się krytyki za otwartość na islam” <https://ekai.pl/nie-boimy-sie-krytyki-za-otwartosc-na-islam-rozmowa-z-bp-henrykiem-cierieszka/>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

There was also a great initiative by European MP Janina Ochojska, the leader and founder of *Polska Akcja Humanitarna*, who organized an exhibition with works of Moria refugees which also focused on the role of Muslim women. There was also an article and popular crowdfunding campaign to support young Muslim girls providing education in refugee camps in Greece conducted by Anna Alboth, a journalist and activist.⁸³

It is good to note that an initiative by a part of the Muslim community of Poland to support Polish women during Women's Strike, which opposes the near total ban on abortion in Poland, was very popular among the participants.⁸⁴

It is also worth mentioning that there were a few books published by Polish authors on Islam and Muslim communities: *Lajla znaczy noc* (Layla means night) about the coexistence of Muslim and Christian communities in Andalusia by Aleksandra Lipczak;⁸⁵ *U nas każdy jest prorokiem* (Everyone is a prophet here) on Tatar Muslims living in Poland by Bartosz Panek;⁸⁶ *Gorsze dzieci republiki* (The worse children of the Republic) on Algerians living in France by Ludwika Włodek;⁸⁷ and *Wojownicy o szklanych oczach* (The warriors with the glass eyes) on Turkey by Agnieszka Rostkowska.⁸⁸ All these works were an opportunity to start a debate in mainstream media and to promote a more nuanced view of Islam and Muslim communities (cf. Media section to see names of mainstream journalists and media projects which help to spread knowledge and reliable information about Muslims).

The authors of this report, we are involved in constantly trying to change the situation and to create a more complex and nuanced view of Islam. We have created the most popular platform on this topic in Polish, namely islamistablog.pl (since 1st Mar 2021 it is called SalamLab.pl). This year, we created a Muslim map of Poland to persuade Poles to visit attractive spots and symbols of Muslim presence in Poland.⁸⁹ We also provided Polish readers with hundreds of news concerning Muslim communities, organized a "Virtual Iftar" at the end of Ramadan, and online discussions about Islam. The lack of funding and institutional support, however, remains a challenge.

83. Wysokie Obcasy, Anna Alboth, "Poznały się w obozie Moria na Lesbos. Mają po 17 lat i robią, co mogą, żeby walczyć z łatką „uchodźczyńi”" <https://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/7,163229,26372269.poznaly-sie-w-obozie-moria-na-lesbos-maja-po-17-lat-i-robja.html>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

84. Facebook, Muzułmański Związek w RP, <https://www.facebook.com/MZRRP/posts/3025667070993800>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

85. [karakter.pl, Lajla znaczy noc](https://www.karakter.pl/ksiazki/lajla-znaczy-noc), <https://www.karakter.pl/ksiazki/lajla-znaczy-noc>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

86. [czarne.com.pl, „U nas każdy jest prorokiem”](https://czarne.com.pl/katalog/ksiazki/u-nas-kazdy-jest-prorokiem) <https://czarne.com.pl/katalog/ksiazki/u-nas-kazdy-jest-prorokiem>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

87. [czarne.com.pl, „Gorsze dzieci republiki”](https://czarne.com.pl/katalog/ksiazki/gorsze-dzieci-republiki), <https://czarne.com.pl/katalog/ksiazki/gorsze-dzieci-republiki>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

88. [wydawnictwopoznanskie.pl, „Wojownicy o szklanych oczach”](https://wydawnictwopoznanskie.pl/produkt/wojownicy-o-szklanych-oczach-w-poszukiwaniu-nowej-turcji/), <https://wydawnictwopoznanskie.pl/produkt/wojownicy-o-szklanych-oczach-w-poszukiwaniu-nowej-turcji/>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

89. The First News, Joanna Jasińska, „Couple create interactive Muslim map of Poland to show the many faces of Polish Islam” <https://www.thefirstnews.com/article/couple-create-interactive-muslim-map-of-poland-to-show-the-many-faces-of-polish-islam-14557>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

There is a dire need to regulate the issue of hate speech as has been made clear in the recommendations from international bodies, and a need to create a comprehensive strategy to counteract hate crimes using the systemic recommendations provided by the Ombudsman in 2019.⁹⁰ Specific changes should contain the following:

- A) introducing a statutory definition of hate speech in Polish law;
- B) amending the provisions of the Criminal Code in terms of penalizing membership in organizations promoting or inciting racial hatred or participation in all types of such activities;
- C) introducing a state-supported hate crime online monitoring system;
- D) introducing an obligation on the part of Internet service providers and media outlets to notify law enforcement authorities in the case of hate speech activities under threat of a proportionate administrative sanction;
- E) creating and financing effective systemic solutions aimed at providing foreigners (especially refugees) with a sense of belonging to the community, adequate social and living support;
- F) providing financial and organizational support for NGOs fighting against hate crimes.

Additionally, it is necessary for NGOs to engage intensively in activities related to the education in the field of hate crimes, and to offer training for students, teachers, public institutions, media, and other entities in the field of counteracting hate crimes and discrimination with the support of state and local authorities. It is also recommended to introduce actions to make the administrators of commercial Internet news portals aware of the wide range of obligations (moderating, filtering, removing comments) in relation to entries that may constitute hate speech.

A month before the planned date of the presidential elections in April 2020, Zbigniew Ziobro, Minister of Justice, Prosecutor General, and a leader of the party *Solidarna Polska*, tweeted that “Islam is alien to our culture” and suggested that Poland should defend itself against it.

Chronology

- **01.01.2020:** At the brink of the election campaign, Krzysztof Bosak (MP and the far-right *Konfederacja* party’s candidate in the presidential elections in 2020) tweeted that “Islam has nothing to do with freedom, therefore its development in Poland should be stopped.”

90. Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich, „Potrzeba całościowej strategii przeciwdziałania przestępstwom z nienawiści - pisze Adam Bodnar do premiera Mateusza Morawieckiego”, <https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/rpo-do-premiera-o-calosciowej-strategii-przeciwdzialania-przestepstwom-z-nienawisci>, (last accessed: November 15, 2020).

- **12.01.2020:** Polish Radio quotes foreign members of anti-Islamic parties and fosters fearmongering about the growing number of Muslims.
- **23.01.2020:** A case of French teenager, Milo, offending Islam becomes viral in most Polish mainstream media without any comment.
- **10.03.2020: Dominik Tarczyński, European MP from the PiS ruling party, posted a Facebook video where he said that “Sharia law is a barbarism.” There were almost 2,000 reactions to this post and it was shared almost 500 times.**
- **02.04.2020:** The news on TVP1 published a piece accusing refugees in camps in Greece of spreading the coronavirus. The TVP broadcast was full of manipulations and false news, the Court of Justice of the European Union judgment was used to present refugees as an epidemiological threat, and to identify them once again with “Muslim terrorists” responsible for attacks in Europe. Since 2015, the latter has been a constant theme on public television. In addition, the report broadcast clusters of pictures deprived of context. It is not known where and when it was recorded: they showed groups of refugees loaded with luggage, crowding along the Turkish border behind barbed wire, or dark-skinned men and women in hijab watched by a policeman. These images were juxtaposed with snapshots taken during terrorist attacks.
- **04.04.2020:** Via Twitter, the TVP correspondent in Germany, Cezary Gmyz, shared information accusing Muslims in Berlin of allegedly gathering in front of a mosque, which could have created a threat of spreading the coronavirus. This material was made available from an account of the far-right AfD party. Gmyz’s post sparked a wave of anti-Islamic comments visible on his profile.
- **06.04.2020:** In an interview on the main state television station, the Minister of Justice and Prosecutor General said, “We defended our sovereignty from a culture of Islam which is alien to us and which was forced upon us.” The tweet containing this part of the interview was published on his official Twitter account and retweeted more than 300 times.
- **08.04.2020:** During the program “Biedrzycka Express,” aired on YouTube on the Super Express channel, which was mainly devoted to the problem of the coronavirus pandemic, Janusz Korwin-Mikke (Confederation), a member of the Polish Parliament, made the following statement, “Men must know how to kill. If we don’t know how to kill, we’ll be slaughtered by Arabs, by Chinese, by anyone.” The journalist, Kamila Biedrzycka, did not comment on this statement in any way.
- **18.05.2020:** On the radical right-wing internet YouTube television channel *Idź Pod Prąd*, Paweł Chojecki, the leader of a religious group called the New Covenant Church, insulted members of the association *Nigdy Więcej* and Pope Francis, by saying that the pope is “a worshiper of pagan idols. This is a man

who claims that Catholics believe in the same God as the followers of Muhammad, so he is a spiritual impostor.”

- **30.05.2020:** Janusz Kowalski, secretary of state in the Ministry of State Assets and a member of the parliament from the *Solidarna Polska* (Solidarity Poland) party, posted an entry on his Twitter profile calling for rejecting migrants coming to Poland because of their Muslim background. He stated: “The deputy head of the Civic Platform, Rafał Trzaskowski, was in 2015 the face of the idea of accepting Muslim immigrants at the request of Brussels. This politician, in my opinion, will accept any number of culturally alien Muslim immigrants at Berlin’s call. Do you want this?”. Kowalski published this comment during the campaign before the elections in which Trzaskowski ran for the president of the Republic of Poland⁹¹.
- **25.07.2020:** The decision to turn Hagia Sophia into a mosque sparks Islamophobic comments across far-right websites.
- **10.08.2020:** The journalist and writer Rafał Ziemkiewicz made Islamophobic comments on YouTube channel wRealu24. When asked by presenter, Piotr Szlachetowicz, about the situation in Lebanon and the reasons for the explosion, which took place in Beirut on August 4 (as a result, 190 people were killed and over 6,500 were injured), he said, inter alia: “In the 1960s, Lebanon was the Switzerland of the Near East. A wonderful, beautiful, rich country where everyone would like to live; [it was a] Christian country. Later, Muslims began to appear there. And when Muslims appear somewhere, sooner or later the jihad starts, the war begins”⁹².
- **23.09.2020:** Janusz Korwin-Mikke, a far-right politician and MP of *Konfederacja* party, published a blog entry stating “we will most probably be conquered by Arabs or some other Muslims, which are powerful, because men are ruling there.”
- **29.10.2020:** Joachim Brudziński, a prominent PiS ruling party politician and an MP, after the Nice attack, posted a tweet connecting terrorism with refugees from Tunisia.
- **06.11.2020:** A spokesman for the District Prosecutor’s Office in Ostrów Wielkopolski, Maciej Meler, announced that a 32-year-old resident of Pleszew, Przemysław R., was convicted of “public incitement to racial, ethnic and religious hatred. With his entry, he insulted people who profess Islam and women who were in relationships with the followers of this religion”. The man posted the following comment on the social network: “It’s not a Pole anymore, but a *ciapate* rag! A Polish woman who lives with a Muslim is no longer a Pole!”. The District Court in Pleszew ordered the perpetrator to a fine of

91. This information was obtained thanks to Nigdy Więcej Association.

92. This information was obtained thanks to Nigdy Więcej Association.

PLN 2,000 (around 450 euros) and obliged him to pay the costs of the court proceedings⁹³.

- **11.11.2020:** Far-right and nationalist organizations carried out the illegal March of Independence. The leader of the march, Robert Bąkiewicz, appealed to the participants to become “true knights” who are able to “conquer the Jerusalem.”
- **18.12.2020:** A former Catholic priest and far-right nationalist activist and speaker, Jacek M., was acquitted by the court in Wrocław. In a film posted on social media, and later deleted, the former priest, according to the prosecutor’s office, said, “Brenton had a little right to behave like this. Why? Because he saw the direction in which this supposedly civilized world is going.” He added, “He had the moral right to chop the heads of Muslims who died in the hands of hundreds of whites.” “In defense of the white race and Latin civilization, those specific invaders who threaten us must be murdered.” In his decision, among other things, the judge wrote that the words quoted by the prosecutor’s office were taken out of context, and that the defendant “at no point in his speech approved of the acts of the killer Brenton Tarrant and did not call for racially motivated murders.” The court included an expert opinion in the field of forensic linguistics who stated that Jacek M.’s statements were not hate speech.

93. This information was obtained thanks to Nigdy Więcej Association.