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Questioning Islamophobia in the Context of Greece

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ABSTRACT:

Since 9/11, there has been a growing academic literature about Islam across the world. Islamophobia is a relatively newer concept that needs further focus and analyses of researchers in various realms of social sciences. In the context of Europe, Islam per se is actually an old phenomenon. Until the early 1920s, the concept of peaceful coexistence and cohabitation of Islam with other religions had actually been promoted and strengthened particularly under the Ottoman administration all over the Balkan Peninsula for centuries. With the newly-drawn map of Europe, minorities and their rights came to the forefront under various mechanisms of the League of Nations. After the end of the Cold War epoch during which positive discrimination measures for minorities had been kept at the minimum level, religious freedoms of Muslims living in non-Muslim countries started to attract more attention of scholars seeking to find out how and to what extent Islam is incorporated within the majority societies.

In this respect, this study takes Greece as a case study and analyzes to what extent Islam has been incorporated in Greece. While doing so, it dwells both on historical and new Muslim groups so as to find answers to two primary questions. To what extent does Greece respect rights of Muslims residing inside and outside of Western Thrace? What does Islamophobia mean in the context of Greece? Doing so, this study argues that since its establishment until this day, Greece has never allowed full enjoyment of Muslims' freedoms across the country. It rather

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aimed to limit their religious liberties, penetrate in their internal affairs via different ways and finally have the ultimate control over fundamental issues of Islam, which actually keeps triggering various interpretations of Islamophobia towards Muslims within the Greek society.

1. Introduction

Depending on the context, the term Islamophobia means any type of hatred, discrimination, intolerance, fear or bias towards Muslims. Compared to other versions of religious phobias, it is a relatively new concept used in different disciplines of social sciences. From a Eurocentric perspective, even if there used to be changing modes of fear and discomfort towards the historical survival of Islam across the European continent, Islamophobia as a concept entered into the academic and scientific discourse of the Anglo-Saxon world with the end of the Cold War. Etienne Dinet, a French scholar, used it for the first time in 1922.¹ It reappeared in an American periodical almost seventy years later, in 1991, and became popular across Europe with the Report of Runnymede Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia.² Yet, the terminology started to be used more frequently by scholars and media particularly after 9/11 in the US, a means by which the debate about the place of Islam in the Western world articulated.

Along with states, international organizations also started to devote more attention to rising trends of Islamophobia. This proved especially the case in those Western European countries accommodating Muslims either as historical minority groups, migrants or refugees. Often a source of tension, many of these

¹ Jocelyne Cesari, "Islamophobia in the West: A Comparison Between Europe and the United States" in *Islamophobia, The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, eds. John S. Esposito, Ibrahim Kalin, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p.21.

² "Islamophobia, A Change for Us All", accessed April 4, 2017, <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/publications/17/74.html>.

Muslims now found in larger numbers in Western Europe adopted different strategies to help integrate themselves in the non-Muslim majority. This process of attempted integration is often reported as the source of tensions in post-Cold War Europe.

For instance, in the mid-2000s, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) created the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims.³ For the preeminent organization dealing with Europe's internal conflicts, the idea behind this office was to engage with cases of anti-Islamic policies or movements. In this spirit, since 2007 the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has prepared an annual observatory report on Islamophobia that charts cases from across the world.⁴ Other global organizations have joined the struggle against Anti-Muslim behavior. Various organs of the United Nations, along with the Council of Europe and European Union have taken up the cause, but usually confined it to broader terms such as equality and non-discrimination. Unlike the OSCE and OIC, none of these international organizations address Islamophobia exclusively.

In the European context, it is apparent that with the rise of ultra nationalist movements across the continent, ethnic, religious and cultural minority groups started to feel more uncomfortable about their place in society. This was especially the case both for older Muslim communities and those who had recently settled in various parts of Europe. As noted in studies on minorities in Europe, Muslims are particularly affected from an increase in nationalist movement activism. Members of these rapidly growing movements have been regularly documented to express their hostility towards those whose religious affiliation differs from the majority community. Drawing from this larger

³ "Combating Discrimination Against Muslims", accessed March 5, 2017, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/countering-discrimination-against-muslims>

⁴ Islamophobia Observatory, accessed April 3, 2017. http://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=182&p_ref=61&lan=en.

trend in Europe, this study deals with Islamophobia in one of the EU-member states, questioning the extent to which Islamophobia exists in Greece.

While being a general problem, it is necessary to show the reader some of the main similarities and differences Muslims have in Greece, especially with respect to the limited rights of religious practice, a factor unique to the country. Later, this chapter focuses on what Islamophobia means in the context of Greece and ends with introducing some of the main actors behind the expression of hostility toward Muslims across the country. This survey of the main Islamophobes in Greece extends to studying their roles in the construction/deconstruction of anti-Muslim sentiments, attitudes and perceptions inside larger Greek society.

While doing so, this research argues that simultaneously there are many similarities and differences between Muslims in Greece. The extent to which they suffer from discrimination primarily depends on the group they belong. Islamophobic actions that different Muslims face in both the Greek public and private spheres is very much linked to such groupings. Furthermore, it is necessary to briefly differentiate the groups actively engaged in hostile acts toward Muslims in Greece. There are many state and non-state actors that both encourage and sometimes even discourage Islamophobic acts when targeting different groups of Muslims (a distinction often made between older and newer communities) found within borders of Greece. It is ultimately concluded after this analysis that the Muslim's limited religious authority and the increase in Islamophobia (which remains in denial in larger Greek society) is likely to widen the gap between the Muslim and non-Muslim population in Greece for the foreseeable future.

2. Categorizing Muslims in Greece

The existence of Islam in Greece is not a new phenomenon. Muslim presence in the region (including also today's Greece) dates back to the Ottoman administration of the Balkan Peninsula. It was in that Ottoman context that Islam flourished. There are

two reasons behind this particular success: first, Islam was the primary faith of the Ottoman Empire, a composite of religious communities divided according to the *Millet* System (Muslims and non-Muslims) and second, the territories of contemporary Greece were ruled by Ottomans from the late 14th century until the independence of Greece in 1830. Invariably, Islam was one of the two primary religions practiced both in the old and new lands of Greece. In this respect, Greek exposure to Islam and practicing Muslims is not something new as it is the case in many other European countries.

The latest official figures from 2011 suggest that the total population of Greece is 10.816.286.⁵ It is not clear, however, how many Muslims are among this almost 11 million Greeks because official statistical information does not include religious affiliation. It is nevertheless safe to say that the vast majority of Greek citizens (more than 90%) identify themselves with Orthodox Christianity, whether they practice it or not.⁶ The importance of religion is quite robust across different segments of Greek society and this is reflected in the power of the Orthodox Church. From official openings of school years to cultural festivities, from religious oaths taken at the Parliament to the celebration of national holidays, Orthodox Christianity is quite visible across the country. Its hegemony is safeguarded under the Article 3 of the Greek Constitution: "The prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ." In this respect, all other faiths fall under the category of minority religions.

It is estimated that Muslims outnumber all new and old minority religious groups, such as Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, Old Calendarists, Mormons, Sikhs, Adventists, Agnostics, Roman Catholics, Protestants and Hare Krishnas.⁷ Based on some latest

⁵ "Απογραφή Πληθυσμού-Κατοικιών 2011 [Residential Census 2011]", accessed September 12, 2014, <https://goo.gl/y3iHxX>.

⁶ "Greece 2015 International Religious Freedom Report", accessed February 2, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/256407.pdf>.

⁷ John Anderson, "The Treatment of Religious Minorities in South Eastern Europe:

estimates, the size of Muslim communities residing in Greece (temporarily or permanently) is around 600.000 as of 2016. This constitutes more than 5% of the Greek population. Compared to the overall number of Muslims in Europe, the ratio of those living in Greece seem to be slightly above average levels.⁸

To reflect this relatively large presence in Greece, since the beginning of the 1990s there has emerged a growing literature in Greek about Islam and the quality of life for Muslims in Greece. Tsitselikis's research is one of the most recent and comprehensive examples.⁹ Despite this long history of scholarship on Greek Muslims, there are almost no academic works about Islamophobia in Greece in either Greek or English. The most recent country report prepared by a Greek scholar stands as the only study devoted to Islamophobia in Greece.¹⁰ This stands in stark contrast to the heavy investment in the study of Islamophobia in the Netherlands or Germany. There has been some information published about hate acts directed toward Muslims as reported to different international organizations by local NGOs such as the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association based in Komotini, but the general trend has been to circumvent the issue.

Muslims in Greece can be roughly divided into two main groups with another two subgroups drawn from each. The first are the older Muslims who have been living on their own historical lands

Greece and Bulgaria Compared", *Religion, State and Society*, vol.30, no.1, 2012, p. 11. For a detailed analysis of some of those religious groups and their rights see Richard Clogg, ed., *Minorities in Greece: Aspects of a Plural Society*, London: Hurst & Co, 2002.

⁸ Conrad Hackett, "5 facts about the Muslim population in Europe", accessed November 1, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/19/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/>.

⁹ Konstantinos Tsitselikis, *Old and New Islam in Greece: From Historical Minorities to Immigrant Newcomers*, Leiden; Boston, Martinus Nijhoff, 2012, p. 19.

¹⁰ Alexandros Sakellariou, "Islamophobia in Greece: National Report 2016" in *European Islamophobia Report 2016*, eds., Enes Bayraklı, Farid Hafez, Istanbul: SETA, 2017, pp. 239-254.

for centuries. The second group we can identify as the 'Newcomer Muslims' who make up the vast majority of those who arrived Greece in the last decades during different waves of migration.

From within the Old Muslims two ethnic Turkish groups are identifiable. There are those established Turkish communities still living in Western Thrace and then those living on the two islands of the Dodecanese, i.e. Rhodes and Kos.¹¹ Crucially, there were far larger Muslim populations spread throughout the country prior to the the Turkish-Greek Population Exchange facilitated by the



<http://www.maps-of-greece.com/thrace-map.htm> (accessed April 4, 2017)

Also known as the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, people belonging to this community have been residing inside the abovementioned region for centuries.¹² In fact, the area has been

¹¹ It is useful to point out that a small number of members of this group identify their ethnic or religious identities other than Turkishness or Islam. However, this does not distort the overall picture that the vast majority of Old Muslims identify themselves with ethnic Turkish identity and Islam. Indeed, many of them prefer using triple criteria (ethnicity, religion and citizenship) for self-identification: Turk, Muslim and Greek citizen.

¹² For a detailed analysis about the Turkish-Greek Population Exchange see Onur Yıldırım, *Diplomacy and Displacement: Reconsidering the Turco-Greek Exchange of*

inhabited by a majority Muslim population long before Western Thrace became part of contemporary Greece in the early 1920s. This population is one of the oldest autochthonous minority group in Europe. Almost all members of this group belong to the Sunni Hanefi sect while there is a small number of Alevi-Bektashis living primarily in the highlands of the region close to the Bulgarian border. This community is the only minority group that has an official minority status with the Greek state. As such, their rights are safeguarded under the bilateral and international agreements signed between Greece and Turkey, including the 1923 Peace Treaty of Lausanne (Articles 37 - 45).¹³ Compared to some other minority groups across the country, such as Macedonians, Greece has never questioned the existence of a minority group in its northeastern borderlands with Turkey and Bulgaria. As for their fellow Muslims of Rhodes and Kos, these ethnic Turks became citizens of Greece in 1947 with the inclusion of Dodecanese Islands into Greek national boundaries.¹⁴

For the main purpose of this special issue on Islamophobia in Europe, it is useful to highlight that there are differences and similarities between the two historical Muslim Turkish communities. As noted above, Muslims in Western Thrace have an official status of minority through which their rights (both individual and collective ones) are protected by the international community. Those Muslims inhabiting two islands have no such privileged status and their liberties are safeguarded only through national legislation, as is the case for all citizens of Greece.

Another difference relates to the right of education in the mother tongue. Compared to those Muslims residing in the Rhodes and Kos Islands, Muslims of Western Thrace have always had the right to choose either a bilingual (Turkish and Greek) or monolingual

Populations, 1922-1934, New York; London, Routledge, 2006.

¹³ Martin Lawrence, *The Treaties of Peace, 1919-1923 (Vol.2)*, New York; Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 1924, pp. 970-973.

¹⁴ Deniz Bölükbaşı, *Turkey and Greece, The Aegean Disputes*, London; Cavendish, 2004, p. 919.

public primary schooling for their own children.¹⁵ In the case of Rhodes and Kos, the right of primary education in their Turkish mother tongue kept provided after 1947 until the early 1970s when the last school providing bilingual education was closed by the Greek state. Since then, Muslim Turkish children on the islands have been prevented from learning their mother language at public primary schools.

Both cases are widely interpreted as "national" or "nationally-sensitive" issues for Greece. In this respect, Greek governments have historically remained very sensitive to Turkey's relations with those Muslims living on Greek soil. Heraclides underlines that there are two main consequences for defining this issue as one of "national" importance. First, it risks being exploited by Greek governments for their own purposes. Second, the issue has historically proven to create stress and tension throughout Greek society.¹⁶ Aksu underlines that such issues interpreted within the rubric of "national" security also compels the Greek and Turkish majorities in each country to remain hostile toward granting any concessions to the other side.¹⁷

Both Muslim groups in Greece also share some common relations with the larger Greek society. For instance, it is safe to say both groups enjoy some religious freedoms in their historic areas of residence. That said, the problems surrounding these rights are equally shared. For instance, neither of the two Muslim Turkish communities are allowed to appoint either their own religious leaders or members of their religious charitable foundations. It is the Greek government that appoints members to those seats, assuring that the state has the ultimate control over the primary

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of minority education in Western Thrace see Ali Huseyinoglu, "The Development of Minority Education at the South-easternmost corner of the EU: The Case of Muslim Turks in Western Thrace, Greece", (PhD diss., University of Sussex, 2012), pp. 120-266.

¹⁶ Alexis Heraclides, *Yunanistan ve "Doğu'dan Gelen Tehlike" Türkiye*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2001, p. 71.

¹⁷ Fuat Aksu, *Türk-Yunan İlişkileri*, Ankara, SAEMK, 2001, p. 29.

religious freedoms of both communities. Moreover, the rights and liberties provided to the Old Muslims are interpreted within the principle of *in situ*. In case they leave their lands and start a new life in another part of the country, they then forfeit those liberties. For instance, in case a group of Muslim Turks decide to leave their historical lands and start residing in Thessaloniki, they will have no permission to construct a mosque and cannot start their own cemeteries.

New Muslims in Greece are categorized as either immigrant Muslims or ethnic Greeks who converted to Islam. The former group constitutes the biggest proportion of Muslims in Greece; they largely arrived during or after the Cold War. In fact, Greece had turned into a country of immigration, especially from Albania, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the MENA region since the early 1990s. Despite their large numbers, compared to the two other autochthonous Muslim groups mentioned above, these immigrant Muslims are continuously the most discriminated, alienated and vulnerable group. This ethnically diverse pool of primarily foreign-born Muslims suffers from the lack of even basic religious liberties. The following provides some indications of the extent of their suffering:

First, Athens has long been criticized at the local, national and international levels for being the only European capital without an official mosque. On the one hand, there are more than 300 official places of worship across Western Thrace that functions freely and meet the religious needs of Muslims numbering around 150.000.¹⁸ Similarly, the Islander Muslims have their officially-sanctioned mosques. For those Muslims living in Athens, on the other hand, even though they number at least three times those found in Western Thrace, they have never had an officially sanctioned mosque built in the capital city. In other

¹⁸ In the mid-1950s, the number of mosques and masjids functioning across Western Thrace had been given as 259, showing us an increase in the number of places of worship for Western Thracian Muslims. See K. G. Andreadis, *Η Μουσουλμανική Μειονότητα της Δυτικής Θράκης* [The Muslim Minority of Western Thrace], Thessaloniki: ΙΜΧΑ, 1956, p. 6.

words, hundreds and thousands of Muslims have no other option than praying collectively at makeshift places of worship, often owned and managed by immigrants. These are often garages or apartment basements spread across different parts of Athens. In recent years, only a few of these places were legalized and given official permission while the rest, which count around 100, keep functioning illegally.¹⁹

After decades of criticism and immigrant Muslim activism, a bold step was taken by the Greek government in 2016 and a new official house of prayer for Muslims was planned to be opened for 2017. Even though this mosque, planned to at most host 350 people is insufficient for the half million Muslims who live in Athens, its construction retains considerable symbolic meaning, in part because it is meant to accommodate Muslim nationals of the city. As of November 2017, the construction of it hasn't been finished yet.

The second major obstacle for immigrant Muslims is the lack of graveyards. Unlike their coreligionists in Western Thrace, Rhodes and Kos, Muslim immigrants living outside of these two regions have no option to bury according to Islamic traditions since they do not own a functioning cemetery. Those who pass away have only one option for a religious funeral; corpses are transferred to Western Thrace where they get buried based on Islamic rituals. Considering these conditions, most non-native Muslims do not send the dead to their countries of origins. These often incur prohibitive costs for the family and is far more expensive than sending the deceased to Western Thrace for burial. In the last ten years, there were occasionally steps taken by Greek officials and the Greek Church to devote some parts of non-Muslim graveyards to construct an Islamic area. In the end, however, promises and official statements bore no fruit. Henceforth, many immigrant Muslims living in different parts of the country have no right for an Islamic burial.

Compared to immigrant Muslims, Greek converts are the least

¹⁹ Until 2004, there used to be 25 makeshift places of worships in total all of which belonged to the Arab community of Athens. As of this day, they count around 100. Interview with Anna Stamou (over Skype), May 2, 2017.

visible and numerically smallest group of Muslims in Greece. Being ethnic Greeks, this group of Muslims are very fluent in Greek. In addition to their linguistic proficiency, their knowledge of Greek culture and traditions is much better than any other Muslim group in Greece. This helps them escape much of the stigmatization other Muslims experience in Greece.

From the three Muslim groups discussed above, there is almost no literature, either in Greek or English, about Greeks converts. The exception is the work of Sakellariou²⁰ and a few articles published in Greek newspapers.²¹ It seems that it is not an "attractive-enough" topic for the Greek media and academia compared to other types of Muslims in Greece, especially immigrants. As a result, they are the least known group living primarily in urban centers of the country. Anna Stamou is one of the few Greek converts who speaks openly about her religious choice and sheds light on the religious concerns of Muslims residing in Athens. It is from her testimonials that it is possible to discuss further Islamophobia in Greece.²² As it will be clarified, the increasing Islamophobic discourse in Greece, as it has been the case in almost all countries of Europe, precipitated the anti-Islamic rhetoric at different levels of public and private spheres. This not only broadens the gap between Muslims and Orthodox Christians, but also contributes to the alienation of both groups of Muslims feel vis-à-vis larger Greek society.

3. Reflections of *Phobia* against Islam in Greece

²⁰ Alexandros Sakellariou, "From Greek Orthodoxy to Islam: Conversion in Contemporary Greek Society and Public Self-Representation", *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, vol.1, no.1, 2012, pp. 59-80.

²¹ For instance see Maria Antoniadou, "«Γιατί έγινα μουσουλμάνος», Έλληνες πρώην χριστιανοί ορθόδοξοι εξηγούν γιατί ασπάστηκαν το Ισλάμ ["Why did I choose Islam", Former Orthodox Christian Greeks tell why they chose Islam]", *To Vima*, March 13, 2011.

²² For a comprehensive and recent analysis about limits of religious autonomy of Muslims in Greece see Ali Hüseyinoğlu, "Islam and Religious Liberties in Western Thrace, Greece" in *Islam in the Balkans: Unexpired Hope (Vol.4: From Times of Glory to Times of Humility)*, ed., Muhammet Savaş Kafkasyalı, Ankara, T.C. Başbakanlık Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı, 2016, pp. 141-158.

Terminologically speaking, phobia is a term originating from the Greek language (φόβος/φοβία). It means fear from somebody or something. Islamophobia has a meaning of fearing from Islam but it has many similar connotations depending on the context such as hatred towards Islam or anti-Muslim racism or discrimination. This study deals with Islamophobia in Greece regarding both old and new communities separately because many of the anti-Muslim attitudes are displaced quite differently regarding both types of Muslim groups living in different parts of the country.

3.1. *Islamophobia and Old Muslims*

As mentioned in the beginning, Islam has a long history on the lands of Greece. In the official Greek discourse, Islam is associated with the Ottoman administration of Greece on the one hand, while affiliated with the ethnic Turkish identity on the other. In the past, both terms were used widely and interchangeably so as to refer the Muslim *ummah* of the Ottomans as Turks. At this point, it is useful to underline that, mainly because of the negative image of Ottomans and Turks in Greek history textbooks, both associations are quite negative among the majority of Greek people. That is to say, the Ottoman rule in today's Greece is widely perceived as a period of subjugation. Therefore, the Greek War of Independence followed by the establishment of Kingdom of Greece in 1830 is perceived as a new beginning for the Greek nation. Similarly, the foundation of the Republic of Turkey after the War of Independence in 1922 is considered in Greece as the "Asia-Minor Catastrophe" because it formally ended the *Megali İdea*, a term introduced in 1844²³. In other words, the beginning of the Republic of Turkey means the end of Greeks' fantasy of uniting the coastal lands of the Aegean, Mediterranean and Black Seas with that of mainland Greece.

In this respect, this study emphasizes that the abovementioned zero-sum perception has not only been quite central to the bilateral relations of Greece with Turkey since the 19th century, but also

²³ Herkül Millas, *Yunan Ulusunun Doğuşu*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 1994, p. 199.

it has widely been evident in Greek government policies towards its indigenous Muslim population since 1923. In many ways this policy is informed by the fact these Muslims are associated with an ethnic Turkish identity.²⁴ In contrast, Greece's New Muslims come from a wide range of different ethnic backgrounds, such as Albanian or Arab. As a result, they do not suffer from any anti-Turkish policies. Therefore, this study contends that one of the primary sources of bias towards Islam emanates from Greek history itself; the official discourse stipulates that the Ottomans and Turks are the main "others" of the Greek nation. Thus, unlike some European countries unfamiliar with Muslims until recently, the historical presence of Islam in Greece not only enabled the Greek nation to learn more about Islam and even experience it in their everyday lives, but also triggered bias, fear and even hatred towards a religion and its followers.

Taking the abovementioned interchangeable usage of both terms, i.e. Turks and Muslim, incidents of intolerance, anger, hatred and bias towards the ethnic Turks living in Western Thrace, Rhodes and Kos has gained momentum in recent years with the rise of ultra-nationalism across Europe. The most prominent arena for this anti-Turkish display are the sacred places of these communities, such as mosques, masjids and graveyards. Attackers generally prefer to smash the windows of mosques with stones, write anti-Muslim or anti-Turkish slogans on the outside walls of mosques and plant freshly-cut pigs' heads outside of mosques.

Since the beginning of 2000s, such attacks have increased throughout Western Thrace. For instance, the mosque of the Isalon, a Muslim village was attacked in 2003 and 2011. Its windows were smashed with stones.²⁵ Toxotes, is another location

²⁴ In a book dedicated to the principle of reciprocity enshrined at Article 45 of the 1923 Peace Treaty of Lausanne, the Muslim Turkish minority's position located in between the two antagonistic nationalisms (Greek and Turkish) is explained in detail. Samim Akgönül, ed., *Reciprocity Greek and Turkish minorities: Law, Religion and Politics*, Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press, 2008.

²⁵ "Combating intolerance and hate-motivated attacks against the Muslim Turkish

facing frequent Islamophobic attacks. It is a village where only a handful of Muslims live. Its mosque was attacked almost five times between 2004 and 2012. Some attackers smashed its windows while others aimed to set it on fire by throwing oil inside the mosque.²⁶ Each time the mosque of Toxotes is attacked, members of the community repaired the damage. Similar attacks, including the use of Molotov cocktails, took place in the Avato Village of the same prefecture. On 13 December 2010 the attack damaged the windows and the doors of the mosque.²⁷ A year before, it was reported that the entrance of the Sunne Mosque located in central Xanthi had been vandalized with anti-Turkish graffiti.²⁸ The use of pig heads to desecrate Muslim places of worship has taken place on three separate occasions across Greece in recent years. Severed pigs heads were placed in front of the Halil Bey Mosque in Kavala (3 February 2011)²⁹, Avantos Masjid in Alexandroupoli (13 April 2014)³⁰, and the Greek-Arab Educational and Cultural Center in Athens (17 October 2014), also, used as place of worship.³¹

Minority of Western Thrace in Greece", Written Contribution by the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association, OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, 23 September – 4 October 2013, Warsaw, Poland, HDIM.NGO0127/13, September 25, 2013, pp. 3-4.

²⁶ Ali Hüseyinoğlu, "Balkanlarda Azınlıklar ve Siyasal Katılım Hakkı: Batı Trakya (Yunanistan) Örneği", *Yeni Türkiye*, vol 21, issue 69, 2015, p. 4785.

²⁷ "The Examples of Hate Crimes in Western Thrace", Written Contribution by the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association, OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, September 26 – 7 October 2011, Warsaw, Poland, HDIM.NGO/0372/11, October 4, 2011, p. 2.

²⁸ "The US International Religious Freedom Report", 17 November 2010, Bureau Of Democracy, Human Rights, And Labor, accessed July 5, 2015, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/148940.htm>.

²⁹ It serves as a museum, not as a house of prayer. "Cami Girişine Domuz Başı Asıldı", *Millet Gazetesi (İskeçe)*, February 10, 2011.

³⁰ 'Dedeğaç'ta Mescide Domuz Başı ile Çirkin Saldırı', *Millet Gazetesi*, April 17, 2014.

³¹ Sotiria Nikolouli, "Pig's Head, Hate Slogans at Athens Muslim Center", accessed June 2, 2016. <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2014/10/17/pigs-head-hate-slogans-at-athens-muslim-center/>. See also *The Examples of Hate Crimes in Western Thrace*, Op. Cit, p. 2.

In Rhodes and Kos, there are a number of mosques established under the Ottoman administration of the Dodecanese region. Yet, contrary to the demands of the Islander Turks, only one mosque is open on each island for use; the rest remain closed. From time to time, mosques are also targeted on both islands. For instance, walls of the Lonca and Cezayirli Hasan Pasha Mosque located in Kos were defamed with Islamophobic slogans.³² Beyond the difficulty in using the available mosques, historically the Greek state has converted mosques into places of public access. The Süleyman Pasha Mosque, for one, was closed in 1978 but later restored and started to function as a museum while Şehitlik Mosque is used as a health center and the Mosque of Kattavia Village as a café.³³

From a broader framework, it is crystal clear that a majority of the Ottoman heritage that remains standing in Greece suffer from being abandoned, dilapidated and all structures in need of urgent restoration. In 2011, for instance, a part of the magnificent Recep Pasha Mosque collapsed due to the lack of "effective restoration".³⁴ The neglect continues however. Even with the call of the Resolution 1867 adopted in 2012 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE-COE), the Greek state refuses to properly respond to the call:

Greece is invited to continue the restoration program of Islamic and Ottoman monuments, which are an integral part of the cultural heritage of the two islands, in co-operation with Muslim associations and with

³² Mustafa Kaymakçı, "Ege'nin Unutulan Rodos Ve İstanköy Türkleri", *Star Gazetesi*, September 27, 2014.

³³ Mustafa Kaymakçı, "Current Problems and Solutions Concerning Turkish Identity in Rhodes and Kos" in *Turkish Identity in Rhodes and Kos*, eds., Mustafa Kaymakçı, Cihan Özgün, İzmir: Rhodes, İzmir, Kos, and the Dodecanese Islands Turks Culture and Solidarity Association, 2014, p. 11.

³⁴ In fact, the mosque had been under restoration since early 1990s. But almost no massive work had been done in the passage of more than half a decade resulting in the partial collapse of the building. "No:309, 23 Aralık 2011, Yunanistan'daki Recep Paşa Camii Hk.", accessed April 1, 2017, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_309_-23-aralik-2011_-yunanistan_daki-recep-pasa-camii-hk_.tr.mfa.

all necessary respect for the integrity of the historic monuments;³⁵

Similar incidents that may be labelled a product of Islamophobia (and anti-Turkish policies) also occur in Muslim graveyards. Either tombstones are desecrated or these sites are covered with anti-Muslim and/or anti-Turkish graffiti. For example, many tombstones located inside the Kahveci and Kırmahalle Muslim graveyards of Komotini were attacked in May 2010.³⁶ Similarly, on 16th of February 2012, the Poshbos cemetery located in Komotini was targeted for the third time in three years, resulting in some gravestones entirely smashed. One month later, "Τούρκος Καλός Μόνο Νεκρός (The best Turk is the dead Turk)!" was written on the main exterior walls of the Bektashi *Tekke* located in central Xanthi.³⁷ Finally, in February 2014, some individuals or groups torn the Holy Quran and scattered its pages inside the main Muslim graveyard of Rhodes.³⁸

Because ethnic and religious identification is intertwined in the context of Western Thrace, one often observes anti-Muslim stereotyping through attacks against the ethnic Turkish identity of the Minority members. Some historical associations of the Minority bearing the term 'Turkish' in their titles. For instance, some wrote "Εξω οι Τούρκοι (Turks Out)!" on the wall of Xanthi Turkish Union in 2012 while some months later a group of Golden Dawn supporters throw plastic bottles and attacked verbally those Minority members sitting inside the Komotini Turkish Youth Union. Similar examples of hatred regarding Muslims of ethnic Turkish identity happened

³⁵ "The Situation of the Greek Citizens of Turkish Descent in Rhodes and Kos", text adopted by the Standing Committee, Acting on Behalf of the Assembly, 9 March 2012 (Doc. 12526, Report of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Rapporteur: Mr Gross), accessed February 5, 2015 <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=18075&lang=en>.

³⁶ *The Examples of Hate Crimes in Western Thrace*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

³⁷ "Combating Intolerance and Hate-motivated Attacks Against the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece", *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

³⁸ "Rodos'taki müslüman mezarlığına çirkin saldırı", accessed April 2, 2017, <http://m.iha.com.tr/haber-rodostaki-musulman-mezarligina-cirkin-saldiri-335063/>.

in Rhodes and Kos, particularly during tensions between Greece and Turkey over the issues of Cyprus and the Aegean Sea.³⁹

As we have shown here, it is about both ethnic and religious identities of Old Muslims that are getting targeted frequently through hate-motivated attacks. Such incidents not only create an atmosphere of fear and anxiety for the two historical minority regimes but also it prevents any attempt of the Greek governments seeking their integration with the majority Greek society. In this respect, Islamophobia rather assists ghettoization and isolation of autochthonous Muslims, thus broadening the gap between them and those followers of the majority religion.

3.2. Islamophobia and New Muslims

Aspects of Islamophobia targeting New Muslims seem to remain distinct from their Western Thracian and Islander coreligionists. They rather face different forms of anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination. That is to say, no reporting about smashing of windows in mosques located in Athens is possible since there are not any official mosques yet. Similarly, given that there are no functioning Muslim graveyards outside Western Thrace, Rhodes and Kos no one can speak of incidents of smashed tombstones at Muslim cemeteries.⁴⁰ Yet, members of New Muslims, cannot escape from Islamophobic attacks.

These immigrants are generally located in main urban centers. That said, there are also significant numbers who work at seasonal jobs in less populated regions of Greece. Estimates dating back to 2010, show that there are 82 different areas where Muslim immigrants have settled across the country.⁴¹ These numbers

³⁹ For a variety of personal experiences see Kaymakçı and Özgün, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 102-109.

⁴⁰ To note, there are some Muslim graveyards outside Western Thrace, Rhodes and Kos that date back to the Ottoman times. But, almost all of them remained as abandoned sites and do not function for religious purposes.

⁴¹ Maria Antoniadou, "Ο Χάρτης του Ισλάμ στην Ελλάδα [The Map of Islam in Greece]", *To Vima*, February 14, 2010.

have surely increased in recent years thanks to the arrival of new refugees from Turkey, most who crossed illegally the Aegean Sea. Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, Greece has turned into a significant hub for those seeking to access Europe. As of July 2016, it was reported that there were more than 56.000 refugees living in Greece.⁴² Unofficial estimates suggest that this number is much higher.

Some of the main reasons for discrimination in Greece among these new Muslims can be attributed to some core disadvantages long responsible for Islamophobia in larger Europe. First, race is likely to be the biggest reason for discrimination in the Greek public sphere. Migrants' dark skin makes it easy to identify for those who target the immigrants in Greece. Second, Muslims are often stigmatized because of their names. Even if some Muslims are born and bred in main urban centers like Athens or Thessaloniki and are quite fluent in reading and/or writing in Greek, they may still face bias because of their non-Greek names. As a result, many immigrants (both Muslim and non-Muslim) prefer to adopt a Greek name. We have personally witnessed some Albanian Muslims who were called 'Ilyaz' in their villages in Albania electing to use the Greek version of it, Ilias, when trying to find work in Greece.

A similar practice of using a second name, though not so popular, is also applicable for some members of the Muslim Turkish minority who reside outside Western Thrace. They would rather use it when trying to have new friends from the Greek majority and to become a part of Greek groupings. Also, it is easy to find similar examples for Islander Turks in the Dodecanese Islands. Such examples are another indication of why names are highly crucial for accommodation of different cultures and religions inside the majority Greek society. Had they felt comfortable enough with their primordial identities, we think that they would not opt for a second name and use it for the sake

⁴² "Στους 56.881 οι καταγεγραμμένοι πρόσφυγες και μετανάστες [The Number of Recorded Immigrants and Refugees is 56.881]", *H Avgi*, July 13, 2016.

of preventing any kind of possible stereotyping and stigmatization inside the Greek society.

The third reason for being prone to discriminatory actions is their proficiency in Greek; there are many documented and undocumented immigrants living in different parts of Greece with poor fluency in Greek or not at all. One of the main criticisms raised against the language barrier is that they could not speak Greek fluently even if they had been living in Greece for a long period of time. Particularly those immigrants living in ghetto districts do not have many chances to improve their level of Greek language since many Greeks sharing the same space with them prefer not to develop contacts or friendships with immigrants. This type of social exclusion across Greece is another reason why many immigrants develop their ties with their co-ethnies or coreligionists rather than getting harmonized within the majority Greek society.

And the fourth main reason is about belonging to a different religion than the one of the majority. In a country of citizens, the majority of whom belong to Orthodox Christianity, Islam is widely perceived and interpreted as the "historical rival". Thus, many Greeks keep growing up with stereotypes of Islam and Muslims. Here it is primarily the Greek education system, Greek media organs and the Greek clerics who fuel negative perceptions about Islam and the Muslim world. In this context, the perception that Muslims belong to the "other" religion is one of those reasons that actually obstructs the integration of Muslims into the Greek society and culture.

This study underscores that being an immigrant in Greece does not always imply being a newcomer to the country. There are many Muslim and non-Muslim immigrants who have been residing in Greece for decades. Some of them have already managed to get Greek citizenship through different ways such as marriage, but a number of them still live with citizenship of their origin country or live as stateless.

Before dwelling on Greek Muslim converts, this research argues that everyday life seems to be highly difficult for the vast

majority of immigrants in Greece due to their status as newcomers or undocumented people. Yet, for many Muslim members of this group, survival in Greece gets another aspect of difficulty, thus increasing the overall level of their sufferings as immigrants. On the one hand, they need to escape from any possible xenophobic manners coming from members of the majority Greek society. On the other hand, they may also face different types of Islamophobic attitudes emanating from their religious preferences. Therefore, some Muslim immigrants either pretend to change their religion (especially among Albanian Muslim immigrants) while many others hide their faith to escape religion-based discrimination in Greece.

The other group of New Muslims, Greek converts, do not face many of the abovementioned problems. Interpreting the concept of Greekness through the lense of ethnic belonging but not citizenship, we prefer to refer to this group as Greek Muslims, ethnic Greeks belonging to the faith of Islam.⁴³ It is estimated that they number around 3000 people some of whom reside abroad.⁴⁴ There may be different reasons for their choice of Islam. Yet, as it is noted, a spiritual search and interaction with Muslims stand as the two main factors for their conversions.⁴⁵

Their fluency in Greek and knowledge of Greek cultural practices are among those reasons why Muslim Greeks escape many kinds of religion-based discrimination coming from the majority Orthodox Christian co-ethnics. Yet, this is applicable particularly to those who prefer not to depict their religious preference openly in the public.⁴⁶

⁴³ It is crucial to keep in mind that some Greek state officials, academics and journalists use this concept while referring to different types of Muslims in Greece.

⁴⁴ Interview with Anna Stamou (over Skype), April 12, 2017.

⁴⁵ Sakellariou, "From Greek Orthodoxy to Islam", p. 73.

⁴⁶ Until recently, there used to be a website called www.greeksrethink.gr where there were many individual stories of conversion of ethnic Greeks from Christianity to Islam in which they shared their experiences with their close relatives before and after conversion. As of 2017, the website is not accessible anymore. However, another website owned and run by Greek converts is quite popular about Islamic

Anna Stamou is the most widely-known figure of Greek Muslims in Greece. She is functioning as Responsible Person about Public Relations at the Muslim Association of Greece (MAG), an NGO that is quite active in protecting the rights of New Muslims, particularly those residing in Athens. Never shy from TV programs or interviews to Greek media, she has become the go-to person, a Greek woman wearing *hijab*. However, the image of an ethnic Greek who chose Islam and speaks fluent Greek on television is almost nonexistent. In fact, conversion stories of Greeks to Islam are rarely discussed in Greek media organs. More, there are insufficient academic studies on Muslim Greek converts and their problems related to their choice.

Having interviewed Stamou, some points that she raised seem to be highly relevant while talking about religious liberties of Greek Muslims, ethnic Greeks of Islamic faith. For Stamou, unlike Muslim immigrants, the Greek converts need to explain only to their very close environments and sometimes even persuade them for reasons of choosing Islam. At the beginning, it is very hard for their relatives to understand those reasons of conversion. As she underlines, in most cases people ask basic questions such as "why do you wear *hijab*?". Greek converts would rather stay away from their close relatives in the beginning period of their conversion. This problem that Stamou raises is not applicable to any other members of New and Old Muslims.

She also underlines class and economic aspects of Islamophobia in Greece. For Stamou, Islamophobic actions target particularly those vulnerable low class immigrant Muslims who cannot easily fight for their own rights due to their low level of Greek language and (undocumented) status inside the Greek society. It is quite difficult for them to cope with such stigmatization so they would rather ignore without making it public. Nevertheless, it is rare for middle and upper class Muslim immigrants, who are small in numbers, to experience Islamophobic or xenophobic acts. In case

issues for the Greek-speaking world where there are ten different individual stories of conversion. Accessed April 13, 2017, <https://islamforgreeks.org>.

it happens, she/he knows how to respond and claim justice before the Greek courts.

As for the economic aspect, Stamou aptly emphasizes that Islamophobia grew with the deepening economic crisis in recent years. The rise of Islamophobia corresponds with increasing racism and xenophobia within the Greek society. With a few exceptions, many Greek Muslims prefer to hide their individual choices of conversion due to the possibility of getting stigmatized in their working environments, likely to result in otherization, discrimination and finally losing their jobs. This pragmatist approach indicates that converting to Islam, taking a Muslim name or wearing *hijab* still contain high risk of losing job or changing profession. Therefore, it stands as a rational choice for many Greek Muslims to hide their religious preference in public and make it visible only inside their families.⁴⁷

Before finishing this section, it is useful to underline one of the most significant aspects of Islamophobia in Greece. Looking closer at hate motivated Islamophobic attacks, it becomes obvious that many of the perpetrator(s) remain unidentified. Based on the OSCE's Hate Crime Reporting Data, the overall numbers of hate crimes recorded officially by the Greek police counts as 245 for the period between 2009 and 2015.⁴⁸ Only 10 out of 68 cases were prosecuted under the Greek law.⁴⁹ Given that the level of punishment remains so low, hate motivated attacks against Muslim and non-Muslims of the society are not likely to diminish in the near future.

4. Perpetrators of Islamophobia

This study has identified four main perpetrators of Islamophobia

⁴⁷ Interview with Anna Stamou (over Skype), May 2, 2017.

⁴⁸ It is unavoidable that those numbers increase when the unrecorded attacks provided by various NGOs located in Greece are also included in the list.

⁴⁹ For the table of hate-motivated attacks in Greece see "OSCE-OIDHR, Hate Crime Reporting, Greece", accessed April 19, 2017, <http://hatecrime.osce.org/greece?year=2015>.

in the Greek context:

The first is the Greek state itself. For many years after the end of Cold War, Greece - governed either by rightwing or leftwing political parties such as ΠΑΣΟΚ, New Democracy and lately ΣΥΡΙΖΑ and Independent Greeks- applied different policies towards the integration of immigrant groups primarily residing in Athens. Yet, there has never been a consistent policy towards their accommodation inside the Greek society. None of the governments have effectively found a solution to the fundamental problems that immigrants face in their everyday lives. Another issue is the fact that the fundamental religious liberties of Old Muslims are still restricted. As of 2017, for instance, no step has been taken by the Greek state to return the rights to Western Thracian and Island Muslims to choose their own religious leadership. Similarly, the problems Muslim Greek converts face have never been dealt effectively by the Greek state.

The second main perpetrator of Islamophobia in Greece is the third-biggest political party, Golden Dawn. Reinforced primarily by increasing trends of racism across Europe and deepening of economic crisis, the party has secured a broad base of supporters from within the Greek society and eventually won seats in the Greek Parliament. By winning seats in the Parliament, their ultra-nationalist, xenophobic and Islamophobic statements and actions started to get heard from the highest level of Greek politics. In 2012, Golden Dawn launched a campaign that aimed to help exclusively those of ethnic Greek origin in need for food, clothes and shelter.⁵⁰ At the same time, it launched several anti-Muslim and racist campaigns against New Muslims of Athens. The most popular of these campaigns targeted the construction of a mosque that has a history going back the 1880s.⁵¹ Even though Golden

⁵⁰ “Κοινωνικό παντοπωλείο μόνο για Έλληνες από τη Χρυσή Αυγή [Social aid from Golden Dawn only for Greeks”, accessed April 8, 2017, <http://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/208102/koinoniko-pantopoleio-mono-gia-ellhnes-apo-th-xrysh-aygh/>.

⁵¹ For a detailed research see Anna Triandafyllidou and Ruby Gropas, “Constructing Difference: The Mosque Debates in Greece”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*,

Dawn's "No Mosque in Athens" campaign resulted in repeating many criticisms coming from Greek citizens, these efforts were ultimately defeated by the determination of the SYRIZA-ANEL Coalition Government coupled with Muslim NGOs' unabated demands for an official mosque.⁵² As of the time of writing, the latest news from Athens indicate that the mosque is supposed to get opened in 2018. Nevertheless, this study highlights discriminatory and hate-motivated acts against Muslims at the highest level of the Greek political sphere through Golden Dawn. This surely is one of the most significant examples of the level of Islamophobia in Greece.

Being the highest religious authority of the country, the Greek Orthodox Church is also a major perpetrator of Islamophobia in Greece. It is quite influential in different aspects of the religious, social and cultural lives of Greek citizens. Statements coming from this institution and regional bishops have always been influential in affecting perceptions across different segments of the Greek society. From time to time, figures of the Church, those either based in Athens or peripheral areas of the country, prefer to express their own opinions on some matters of Islam in Greece.

The Mosque in Athens is one of the most-frequently discussed topics among clerics. In fact, the Orthodox Church has never rejected the right of Muslims to have an official house of prayer in Athens. However, some Metropolitan Bishops, like that of Seraphim from Piraeus or Athimos from Thessaloniki, openly expressed their opposition to the construction of Islamic places of worship in Greece. "Islam is a destructive faith" quotation is from one of his latest interviews on a Greek TV channel in late January 2017. Indicative of his general anti-Muslim views coupled with his continuous statements against the construction of an official mosque in Athens, it is hard not to associate such discourse with

Vol.35, No. 6, 2009, pp. 957-975.

⁵² Jenny Tsiropoulou, 'Ραμαζάνι στο Σκαραμαγκά [Ramadan in Skaramagka/Athens]', The Press Project, accessed June 1, 2017. <https://www.thepressproject.gr/article/111915/Ramazani>.

the larger Orthodox Church.⁵³ Similarly, Damaskinos, the local Metropolitan Bishop based in Komotini, had claimed in the 1990s that many religious events organized by Muslims “disturbed and even challenged” the local Orthodox Christian population.⁵⁴ Another book printed by the same local church blamed Muslim clerics for distributing Turkish propaganda during religious activities either inside or outside houses of prayer.⁵⁵ Until his death in 2012, a number of controversies had taken place between Damaskinos and many leading figures of the Muslim Turkish minority concerning the religious autonomy in Western Thrace.

The last major perpetrator of Islamophobia is the Greek media. A number of privately owned organs play a significant role in the way Islam in a predominantly non-Muslim society is portrayed. Some of the Greek mass media associate Islam with extremism and religious fundamentalism while some others show how Islam is incorporated within a multicultural Greek society. Both types of media generally tend to question Islam in Greece after some terrorist attacks in different parts of Europe. Islamic headscarf worn by Muslim students at National Parades (25th of March and 28th of October) and *Eid* prayers practiced collectively at stadiums in Athens are some of the common instances where Greek media diverts its attention to debates about the limits of Islam in the Greek public sphere.⁵⁶

⁵³ “Μητροπολίτης Πειραιώς Σεραφεΐμ: Το Ισλάμ Είναι Μια Καταστροφική Λατρεία – Όχι Τζαμί Στην Αθήνα [Seraphim, the Metropolitan Bishop of Piraeus: Islam is a Xatastrophic Religion- No Mosque in Athens]”, accessed April 10, 2017, goo.gl/zX8Eoh

⁵⁴ Damaskinos, *Mitropolitits Maronias kai Komotinis* [Metropolitan Bishop of Maronia and Komotini], *Η πνευματική δυναμική παρέμβασης της τοπικής εκκλησίας εις τα προβλήματα της ακριτικής περιοχής της Ροδόπης* [*Cultural Dynamics of Intervention of the Local Church Regarding Problems of the Border Area of Rhodopi*], Komotini, 1996, p. 21.

⁵⁵ Damaskinos, *Mitropolitits Maronias kai Komotinis*, [Metropolitan Bishop of Maronia and Komotini], *Η συμβολή της τοπικής εκκλησίας εις την αντιμετώπισιν των εθνικών προβλημάτων της Θράκης* [*The Contribution of the Local Church in dealing with of the national problems of Thrace*], Komotini: Iera Mitropolis Maronias kai Komotinis, 1989, p. 21.

⁵⁶ “Με μαντίλα στην παρέλαση: Μήνυμα συνόπαρξης [With Hijab in Parade: A Message

Yet, of all other matters regarding Islam, the construction of a mosque in Athens turned out to be the most widely-covered issue by the Greek media which contributes triggering the whole debate about Islam inside the Greek society. In this respect, discussions presented through Greek media about the religious rights of Muslims in Greece directly affect construction and deconstruction of image about Islam in the minds of Greek citizens at various levels and segments.

5. Conclusion

This study has shown that there are many similarities and differences among Muslims living in different parts of Greece. Muslims in Western Thrace enjoy more religious liberties than all other Muslims across the country. Being the only officially recognized minority group in Greece, their rights emanate from their minority status which is safeguarded under the Greek and international law. The Island Muslim Turks also have some primary religious rights, though they are kept at a minimum level. Muslim immigrants are the most vulnerable group whose rights and liberties are kept at the minimum level by different policies of the Greek state. Being the smallest group in number, ethnic Greeks who converted to Islam have their own problems in respect to their religious liberties.

Depending on which group they belong to, Muslims in Greece face a variety of Islamophobic policies and practices targeting particularly their religious identities. It is almost impossible for many of them to escape from Islamophobic actions or statements coming from non-Muslim members of the Greek society including some Greek politicians or journalists. Only a small proportion tries to find justice before the Greek law while many others just ignore any kind of stigmatization or discrimination they face based on their Islamic identity. It is apparent that economic crisis

of Living Together]", accessed April 11, 2017, <http://news247.gr/eidiseis/koinonia/me-mantila-sthn-parelash-mhnyma-synuparkshs.3972726.html>.

in Greece has fueled extreme nationalism, xenophobia and racism among Greeks, thus accelerating the overall pace of Islamophobia towards any kind of Muslim group residing across the country.

Looking from a broader framework, this study has confirmed that phobia is not always directed at something unknown or alien. Historical knowledge, as in the case of Old Muslims in Greece, may actually trigger negative sentiments. At this point, perpetrators of Islamophobia come to the forefront. As emphasized above, there are many different state and non-state actors portraying Islam in Greece. Islamophobic actions are rarely persecuted and many perpetrators remain unidentified. More importantly, the Greek media refrains from covering issues about discriminations or hatred against Muslims. The result may likely be that the growing trend of Islamophobia in various segments of Greek public and private spheres is likely to continue in the coming years.

From a wider perspective, it seems urgent for the Greek state to take action to fight Islamophobia inside the Greek society. This research contends that the effectiveness of those action depends on the inclusion of Muslims in decision-making processes. Decisions need to be taken and implemented after close cooperation and collaboration with all Muslims. Otherwise, as the history of the poor treatment of minorities in Greece indicate, none of those unilateral actions by non-Muslim members of the Greek majority will adequately address and solve the problems of Muslims in Greece.

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