



## HOW THE CZECHS AND SPANISH PERCEIVE ISLAM: ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

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### Abstract

The paper discusses the transformations of the religious structure of European society manifested, among other ways, in an increased intolerance toward cultures other than Christian and secular, most notably the Muslim culture. The objective is to analyse the causes of the fear of Islam and explain Islamophobia in two socially and geographically distinct contexts: in Czechia and in Spain. The paper is based on a survey carried out in both countries in 2014. The issue of Islamophobia is viewed from the perspective of mainstream society, with a focus on differences in the perception of Islam by people of different nationality, religious belief, gender, age and education. The main objective of the paper is to analyse the differences in the perceived fear of Islam with regard to sources of information about the Muslim culture and personal contact with Muslims in an attempt to uncover the causes of Islamophobia. The analysis of the survey revealed that the phenomenon is generally very complex. In summary, however, Czechia registered a higher level of Islamophobia than Spain, likely due to less frequent contact between Czechs and Muslims and the Islamic culture.

### Keywords

geography of religion, Islamophobia, perception of Islam, Czechia, Spain

## INTRODUCTION

The modern globalised world is characterised by a blending of cultures and religions. This has resulted in the contemporary problem of some groups of people being unprepared for the diversity of culture and religion, leading to intolerance shaped by traditions, history and other regional specifics, as well as current events in the local and global context. In European secular or Christian societies, this issue generally leads to a fear of a growing presence of Islam in the public space. Since the second half of the twentieth century, the immigration of Muslims to Europe has been on the rise. "In this context, the political issue of international migration started creating a division in the attitude towards Islam. The traditional European society *a priori* equates Islam with fundamentalism or terrorism" (Nešpor and

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Lužný, 2007: 165-166). Religious extremism is recently most often associated with the impact of Islam on political decisions in certain regions, in particular in Southwest Asia (the Taliban, the Islamic State, etc.), resulting in armed conflicts that led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people from Southwest Asia and North Africa. The refugees leave mainly for Europe and bring along their culture and religion, which causes various responses in all European countries. In general, the different backgrounds of European societies create various forms of perception of other cultures and religions which are considered different, untraditional, incomprehensible. According to Huntington (1996), religion is the fundamental “mover” of the development of civilisation and a central force motivating human behaviour. The differences in religious values will therefore lead to a collision of societies, which is the basic principle behind his concept of a “clash of civilisations” (Huntington, 1996). Religion is therefore becoming an important topic in social sciences for reasons even beyond the immigration wave from Southwest Asia to Europe. “One of the reasons for studying religion is undoubtedly its social, political, cultural and economic dimension” (Nešpor and Lužný, 2007: 10). The role of religion in European politics is a multi-dimensional one at both levels, the national and international (Steven, 2009), and the relationship between religion and space is therefore a key issue (Pastorelli, 2009). Peach (2006) even believes that religion is a more important transformative element than race or ethnicity. In many countries of Western Europe, conflicts are often flaring up precisely in those places that have a religious dimension. Here we encounter a greater resistance towards the communities and holy places of minority religious groups, primarily those tied to Islam and the Islamic tradition and culture. The issue of a fear of Islam or Islamophobia has long been neglected by research in geographic sciences, unlike in sociology or psychology (e.g. Fekete, 2008; Gottschalk and Greenberg, 2008). Henn (2008) even claims that one of the greatest mistakes of modern social theory in general was excluding religion from the social sphere. Because contemporary society may be considered more religious than ever before (Berger, 1999), some authors even talk of a “bottom-up” re-Christianisation, re-Judaisation or re-Islamisation (Kepel, 1994) or generally of post-secularisation (Williams, 2015; Habermas, 2008). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, socio-geographical research is starting to reflect the plurality of religion to a greater extent, particularly in the relationship between the Islamic minority and the secular/Christian majority in Europe (Knippenberg, 2014; Schmitt, 2013; Hopkins, 2004; Peach, 2006).

The fear of Islam caused by the militant politics of extremist Muslim groups and terrorist attacks in various parts of Western civilisation (e.g. New York City 2001, Madrid 2004, Paris 2015) is often referred to as Islamophobia<sup>1</sup>. The term has been

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1 The authors are aware of the problems and criticism arising from the unclear definition of the term “Islamophobia”; for the purposes of this paper, it is understood as a phenomenon



in use since the 1980s and can be defined as a spectrum of various manifestations expressing an elitist disdain or even hateful aversion toward Muslims, particularly Arabs, with whom the xenophobic individuals or groups come into contact (Kropáček, 2002). Islamophobia is a contemporary phenomenon motivated by the war on terror after 9/11, migration and the cultural influence of Muslims on Europe (Soyer, 2013).

Fear of Islam or even Islamophobia also appears today at the political level, but Islamophobic stories in the media are its most visible and strongest form. Fuelled by the media and other channels, the fear of Islam that surfaced in the late 1990s and which is therefore not a direct consequence of the immigration wave caused by the policies of the Islamic State has naturally led to an increase in the interest of the geography of religion in Muslim culture. Geographical research is focused mostly on the manifestations of Muslim culture in public space and on Muslim identities, communities and societies on all geographical levels (e.g. Gökariksel and Secor, 2015; Schmitt, 2013; Kong, 2010; Aitchison, Hopkins and Kwan, 2008; Hopkins, 2004; Peach, 2006; Falah and Nagel, 2005), which is one of the directions of the new geography of religion based on the research of societies and countries with different religious beliefs and the study of religious groups in their social and political context (Kong, 2004, 1990).

This paper addresses the perception of Islam in two different European societies: Czech, traditionally secular without any historical experience with Muslim culture, and Spanish, formed by centuries of Christian tradition as well as a strong historical influence of Islam. The causes and symptoms of the fear of Islam and perception of the Muslim minority by the non-Muslim majority have been analysed on the basis of a survey carried out in both countries. The aim of the paper is to serve as a contribution to the discussion of Islamophobia or fear of Islam in Europe through an analysis and comparison of the manifestations of Islamophobia in two societies (Czech and Spanish) with a different historical experience with Islam. We can then expect that the higher level of awareness of Islam and more direct experience with the religion will be reflected in a lower level of Islamophobia in Spain compared to Czechia. We also expect to see lower rates of Islamophobia among the younger generation under 26 years of age, as the younger generation is generally less traditional and more open to different opinions and cultures than only Christian European values. The analysis will also focus on the causes and manifestations of Islamophobia in relation to the respondents' sources of information about Islamic culture and their religious beliefs.

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describing a fear of Muslims and the Islamic religion (Kunst, Sam, Ulleberg 2013) or as a prejudice against Muslims often unsupported by any personal experience with the religion. Islamophobia may take the form of an opposition to the construction of mosques as well as direct violence against Muslims (Parkes et al. 2013).



## THE FEAR OF ISLAM IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Muslims today are the second largest religious group in Europe, without taking into account the non-religious population. Islam has been present in Europe since the seventh century, with a particularly strong representation on the Balkan and Iberian peninsulas. After the Second World War, Europe was characterised mostly by an openness towards immigration (Čermáková and Leontiyeva 2017), resulting in the first large influx of Muslim immigrants (Heřmanová and Faryadová, 2012). Postwar Muslim migrants, however, were not fully integrated into society (Castels, 1973). There are about 20-25 million Muslims living in the European Union today, especially in France and Germany (Janeček, 2011). The geographic distribution of Muslims in Europe is very uneven. Most of them live in rich countries, particularly in cities. Some demographers estimate that by 2020, the Muslim population in the EU will grow so much that one in ten Europeans will be a Muslim; by 2050, the figure could be one in five (Heřmanová and Faryadová, 2012).

Different historical experience of contacts with Muslims and their culture in Czechia and in Spain also strongly influences the contemporary view of Muslims and Islam in each country (Aguilera-Carnerero 2018, Dizdarevič 2018). Probably the most important factor in the distribution of Muslims in Europe is geographic location. The Iberian Peninsula has been home to Muslims for centuries (Meer 2013). Central Europe, on the other hand, has had very few historically recorded contacts with Muslims over the centuries (Parkes et al., 2013).

Due to its geographical location and nature of its historical development, Czechia never came into more permanent and direct contact with Islamic civilisation. The first Muslims came to the Czech lands at the turn of the twentieth century after the occupation and annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This immigration wave continued after the founding of Czechoslovakia (Havlíček 2006). In 1930s, Muslim communities began to emerge in Prague, Brno and Zlín. The Czech Muslim Community was founded between 1934 and 1935 as a group with roughly 700 members. It was not officially recognised until 1941 (Mendel, Ostránský and Rataj, 2007). After the fall of the communist regime, interest of the Czech population in religious ideas and values was partially reinvigorated (Havlíček 2008) before weakening again. The estimated number of Muslims in Czechia varies from roughly three thousand (Czech Statistical Office, 2011) to twenty thousand (Murad 2009) due to the fact that the question about religion on the official census is optional and because many Muslims are foreigners who are often not included in the census. Czech Muslims are joined together in the Central Muslim Community, which was registered as a religious society in 2004 (Heřmanová and Faryadová, 2012). Most Czech Muslims are educated men well-integrated into the mainstream society in which they have been living since their studies and in which they establish new



families. Muslims have been arriving to study in today's Czechia since the 1960s, when the first students came from Syria (Heřmanová and Faryadová, 2012).

Spain, on the other hand, has extensive historical experience with Islam. It became a centre of Muslim learning in the Middle Ages (Kropáček, 2002). Muslim Spain flourished from the eighth to the thirteenth century, including at the time when the northern Catholic kingdoms (Castile, Aragon and Portugal) conquered the entire Iberian Peninsula. Even under Catholic government, a significant number of Muslims remained in the area (Soyer, 2013). There was, however, a strong disproportion in birth rates between Christian and Muslim families, leading to the adoption of almost "fascist" measures under the reign of King Philip II. A Muslim uprising that occurred in the early seventeenth century was suppressed in 1609 by Philip III; after the event, the king ordered the expulsion of more than three hundred thousand Muslims, particularly to North Africa. The expulsion meant the end of efforts by the Spanish government and the Catholic Church to assimilate the minority by destroying its culture; it also signalled the end of the presence of a Muslim minority for a long time, until the 1980s, when a large Muslim immigration wave arrived in Spain (Soyer, 2013). In the 1990s, Spain's position towards Muslims was noticeably friendlier, resulting, for example, in the establishment of a religious-cultural centre in Madrid and the International Islamic University in Córdoba (Communicatie, informatie, educatie, 2001). A Muslim influence is also apparent in Spain in the third millennium. The 9/11 attacks and those on the train system in Madrid on 11 March 2004 did not produce any significant rise in violence towards Muslims, but there were several protests (Al Hassani, 2005). The attitude of the Spanish towards Muslims is influenced not only by extremist or fundamentalist Islam, but also by immigration, particularly from North Africa. The increase in the number of Muslim immigrants has even led to a revival of the Catalan radical right-wing party *Platforma per Catalunya*. Today, Spain is trying to integrate the Muslim population into the predominantly Christian society with mixed results (Aguilera-Carnerero 2018). The Muslim community of Spain is very heterogeneous and shows varying degrees of assimilation (Soyer, 2013). Today, almost 3% of the Spanish population is Muslim, representing roughly 32% of all non-Catholic believers in the country (World Christian Database, 2014, Centro de investigaciones sociológicas, 2008). They live mainly in and around large industrial cities such as Barcelona or Madrid, and in the south of Spain.

## CAUSES AND MANIFESTATIONS OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

Islamophobia as a research subject remains highly controversial (Ostřanský 2017). The very definition of the term is divisive. Viewing Islamophobia from a psychological perspective, Goottschalk and Greenberg (2008) regard it as a phobia or



an irrational fear of Islam and Muslims. Větrovec (2013) disagrees, believing that "Islamophobia is not a phobia in the psychiatric sense; the term has been transposed to the context of interaction between people" (Větrovec, 2013: 7). However, he considers the use of the term "phobia" to be fully reasonable. Halliday (1999) speaks of hatred towards Muslims and stereotypical views of their behaviour. Similarly, Lee et al. (2009) argue that Islamophobia should be understood as an affected component of the stigmatisation of Islam and Muslims. Islamophobia can also refer to various manifestations (written, spoken, drawn; songs, gestures and other non-verbal means of communication) expressing a deeply negative attitude towards Islam (Janků et al., 2013). In contrast, there are scholars who disagree with the term "Islamophobia" itself, preferring to speak about a "Muslim-phobia" (Erdenir, 2010) or "anti-Muslimism" (Halliday, 1999), or consider the phenomenon to be a specific form of racism (Werbner, 2013; Rattansi, 2007; Modood, 2007; Al Hassani, 2005; Wieviorka, 1995; Balibar, 1991), i.e. a phenomenon characterised as a "new" racism that is not primarily targeting biological heredity, but cultural differences (Meer, 2013).

There is, however, a consensus that it is one of the leading sociological problems of contemporary global society, one that must at the very least be approached with great caution. Fear of Islam, or Islamophobia, began to appear in the United States in the 1970s after the Arab-Israeli war and in response to the Islamic revolution and the capture of American hostages in Tehran. The trigger mechanism of Islamophobia has not always been the same; formerly, the fear of Muslims was mostly based on their perceived self-indulgence and related polygamy. Today, people fear Islam mostly for its puritanism and activism leading to terrorism (Kropáček, 2002). Equally important are the natural social imagination and a deeply rooted fear of diversity, leading to contemporary racism and its historical mutations, e.g. American slavery, colonialism (apartheid) and the Holocaust (Werbner, 2013). The heterogeneity of the causes of Islamophobia is therefore very diverse (Bayrakli, Hafez, 2018). The root cause of Islamophobia is the fact that Islam as a religion has very strong external aspects (as is the case with Judaism, for example). Islam is an orthopractical religion which permeates all aspects of life and, unlike Christianity, has several distinctive features that make it externally visible (e.g. praying at set times of the day, a specific dress style for women, regular rituals, etc.; Kantarová, 2007). The second major factor determining the fear of Islam is awareness of its spread through holy war ("jihad"; Janeček, 2011) or the fatwa, which imposes the duty upon each individual Muslim to kill Americans and their allies (Lewis, 2004). It should be noted, however, that it would be highly misleading to generalise and to consider the statements of radicals to be binding for all members of the Muslim community around the world. The third widespread cause of Islamophobia is the significantly higher birth rates of Muslims living in Western Europe and



elsewhere (Janeček, 2011). Another cause is the synergy between old concepts and stereotypes of Islam that have been passed down and which are based on each society's specific experience with Islam. These concepts are primarily derived from the colonial past and subsequent migration. "The religiosity of immigrants is becoming a major issue of intercultural coexistence in Western Europe" (Nešpor and Lužný, 2007: 148). This aspect is strengthened by various controversies related to the veils worn by Muslim women (known as hijab), e.g. in France. Last but not least, the causes of the fear of Islam also include second-hand experience, which in this context has the opposite effect of personal contact. This includes information spread by the media and politicians, which is often incomplete and to some extent misleading. This situation is also evident in the general opinion of the European public, namely that "with the exception of the French, most Europeans believe that there is a strong conflict between devotion to the Islamic faith and life in modern Europe" (Černý, 2008: 3), even though the French in particular, due to their colonial past and a high number of African immigrants living in the country, have had more direct experience with Muslims than most European states. The latest stimulus of the fear of Islam and Muslims was the terrorist attack of 11 September 2001 in the USA. This event dramatically changed the perception of Islam in Europe and around the world, mostly due to various Islamist movements and the fear of any ties linking the Muslim population to terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda. According to Fekete (2008), Muslims were demonised after 9/11 not only as supporters of terrorism, but also as disseminators of drugs, even though Islam forbids their use and Muslim countries punish drug-dealing very severely. In general, however, there are many reasons Islam and Muslims could be perceived as a serious threat (Mendel, Ostránský and Rataj, 2007).

In Czech society, one of the key causes of the fear of Islam is the fact that the media focus on Muslims only occasionally and primarily at the local political level, partially because the main political parties only rarely deal with this issue on the national level (Janků et al., 2013). Muslims are often equated with terrorism. The media only mention Islam in sensationalist contexts (Dizdarevič 2018). Muslims are portrayed as foreigners, emphasising their differences. Articles and comments in the media have a strongly negative bent, e.g. rallying against the construction of mosques in Brno and Hradec Králové or reporting on the unruly behaviour of Muslim spa guests in the town of Teplice. The media and social networks also often disseminate unconfirmed predictions that provoke fear of a potential increase in Muslim extremism, resulting in xenophobic moods in society and stereotypical thinking (Janků et al., 2013; Křížková, 2007). Unlike in some other European countries, the root cause of contemporary Islamophobia in Czechia is not any personal experience with the Muslim community and its differences, but the populism of a large segment of the media and politicians (Mendel, Ostránský and Rataj, 2007).





In contrast, Spanish Islamophobia is based on direct experience with the Muslim population. As a consequence of the economic crisis of 2011-2012, unemployment rose sharply in Spain, particularly among immigrants (Lahuerta, 2014); at the same time, the number of illegal migrants, mostly Muslims, also grew. This situation contributed to a radicalisation of political parties and caused a negative campaign in the newspapers and other media, supported by demagogic and extremist statements about Muslims. The media play an important role in Spain as well, as their choice of Islam-related news stories typically favours topics such as extremism, veiling, funerals or ritual circumcision (Al Hassani, 2005).

Islamophobia has many different forms, ranging from everyday discrimination and harassment or protests against the building of mosques to Islamophobic rhetoric in the media and in social media (McGinty, Sziarto and Seymour-Jorn, 2013). It may be manifested as negative, insulting and defamatory statements about Islam and Muslims, or it may also transform into more systematic activities and protests and eventually escalate into physical attacks. This may ultimately lead to attacks on mosques, Muslim schools and cemeteries or minor incidents such as insults, violent removal of headscarves worn by Muslim women, threats, banning entry of veiled women to restaurants, etc. The fear of Muslims may also evolve into an effort to segregate and discriminate a particular group or to assimilate it. Even though the countries of the European Union are bound by the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees that no state may be tied to any particular ideology or a specific religion (Mendel, Ostřanský and Rataj, 2007), many European Muslims are facing "discrimination in employment, education and housing, especially with regard to their ethnic origin or religious beliefs" (European Union Military Committee, 2013: 1). In Europe, there has been an increase in discrimination and a rise of negative attitudes towards Muslims in public opinion and the media, as well as a growing number of verbal and physical attacks on Muslims (Kunst, Sam and Ulleberg, 2013; Al Hassani, 2005). The most frequent victims of harassment are Muslim women wearing a headscarf and men with turbans and long beards (European Union Military Committee, 2013), which for example in France led to a law prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols at schools adopted in 2004 or a ban on full veiling, e.g. the burqa (Fekete, 2008). Fekete (2008) adds that the most common manifestation of the fear of Islam in most countries is employment-related discrimination, creating the greatest barrier to the successful integration of Muslims into society, particularly women. Other forms include discrimination against Muslims in access to housing, healthcare, social services, schools, restaurants, banking, etc. (Taras, 2013).

Muslims in Czechia are not generally targeted by hateful attacks; hostility towards them usually takes the form of mistrust, negative prejudice or low levels of tolerance. Islamophobia is not a major political issue in Czechia (Janků et al. 2013),





but “women wearing the hijab are often regarded with suspicion, which is not caused only by the somewhat poor reputation of Islam in the country, but probably the more important fact that Czechs are not accustomed to any open manifestations of religiosity” (Mendel, Ostřanský and Rataj, 2007: 428). Despite that, Muslims still face problems at Czech schools (female students wearing headscarves) or in the healthcare system (Janků et al., 2013).

Another expression of the fear of Islam is the discussion surrounding the construction of mosques in major cities with a larger Muslim community (Prague, Teplice, Brno, Hradec Králové). The fear of the construction of mosques in Czechia follows the same pattern as in Western Europe and is therefore not aimed against Muslims as such, but rather against expressions of any religion other than Christianity in public space (Mendel, Ostřanský and Rataj, 2007). Czech Islamophobia is heightened, for example, by the problematic behaviour of Muslim spa guests in the city of Teplice who tend to ignore certain local laws (regarding noise at night, cleanliness of public spaces, etc.). In recent months, the rising number of people immigrating to Europe due to the deteriorating security situation in Southwest Asia has led to an increase of Islamophobic sentiment in the Czech society. Several anti-Muslim initiatives were established (e.g. *Islám v ČR nechceme*, “We Don’t Want Islam in the Czech Republic”), mainly organised on social media.

In Spain, Muslims are also facing stereotyping and various obstacles in practicing their religion, e.g. in the issues of mosque construction or veiling (Lahuerta, 2014). This is strengthened by the unfavourable presentation of Muslims in the media, where they are often linked to negative events (demonstrations against new mosques, conflicts over veiling, cultural differences, terrorism, fear of dominance, etc.; Lahuerta, 2014). Muslims are facing problems in education as well, as the vast majority of Muslims do not have access to Islamic religious education and girls are punished and excluded from schools for wearing headscarves (Lahuerta, 2014). Generally speaking, women are more affected by Islamophobia, particularly on the labour market, because their religious affiliation is more apparent, which also prompts various political debates in Spain (Parkes et al., 2013). The country is trying to address the issue, for example, with manuals on social diversity for employers (Lahuerta, 2014).

## METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on the results of a survey conducted between January and June 2014. The questionnaire was spread on the Internet using the method of snowball sampling. The use of an online application allowed fairly quick distribution among a relatively varied structure of respondents both in Czechia and Spain.



**Table 1** Structure of respondents

	Czechia	Spain
<i>number of respondents</i>	312	203
<i>gender</i>		
male	64.1%	34%
female	35.9%	66%
<i>age</i>		
26 years and under	53.2%	55.2%
27 years and over	46.8%	44.8%
<i>education</i>		
primary / bachillerato	2.2%	9.4%
vocational school, secondary school / grado medio	41.3%	3.4%
higher vocational school	4.8%	
university education	51.6%	84.7%
<i>religion</i>		
Christianity	20.8%	42.4%
without religious affiliation	64.4%	49.7%
other	14.8%	7.9%

Notes: because the education systems in Czechia and Spain are significantly different, their comparison is only approximate.

The questionnaire was divided into five thematic sections. The first contained informative questions (country, gender, age, achieved education, religion, town size). The next section focused on personal experience with Muslims and Islam in general (questions: have you ever visited a Muslim country; have you ever had/do you have personal contact with Muslim culture; is anyone in your family a Muslim; where do you get most of your information about Islam and the Muslim culture). The answers to these questions were used to analyse the degree of personal contact with Islam and Muslims. Questions from the third part focused on knowledge of Islam. Their objective was to determine the level of knowledge of basic and theological aspects of Islam (who founded Islam; when Islam was founded; what is the holy book of Islam; what is the hajj; what are the two main branches of Islam; what are the holy cities of Islam; what is the percentage of Muslims in your country's population). This part of the survey was multiple choice (with the exception of the last question). The answers to these questions were used to analyse the relationship between the fear of Islam and knowledge of Islam. The next set of questions concerned specific opinions about Islam, which were used to determine the subjective degree of Islamophobia in the respondents (do you perceive Islam as a threat; do you agree with the construction of mosques in your



country; do you mind seeing women in traditional Muslim clothing; would you mind having a Muslim as a neighbour). The answers to these questions were used to identify the intensity of the fear of Islam and Muslims (the answers “yes” and “somewhat” were considered Islamophobic) and to calculate the variable for *Islamophobia*, combining four manifestations of Islamophobia: a) perception of Islam as a threat; b) disagreement with the construction of mosques; negative attitude to c) the presence of women in Muslim clothing and to d) having a Muslim as a neighbour. The degree of Islamophobia is calculated from the number of Islamophobic answers to the four questions (see Tables 2 and 4). The survey was also processed using statistical analysis methods in the SPSS 20.0 software package (correlation analyses, comparing averages).

### **ISLAMOPHOBIA IN CZECHIA AND SPAIN: COMPARISON AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

The analysis of the survey shows that the degree of the fear of Islam and prejudice against Muslims and their culture is influenced by several factors. There is still insufficient contextually focused research to provide more general conclusions about comparisons by European states. For example, research from 2015 to 2017 compared the willingness of people to accept a Muslim as family member could be used as a possible input to the discussion. There was a very big difference between the attitudes of Czechs and Spanish. Only 12% of Czechs would accept Muslims as family members, but in Spain, this proportion was 74%, indicating a significant difference in both model states (Pew Research Center 2018). The use of the same survey in two countries different in terms of their geography, social structure, culture, historical development associated with Islam and most importantly, a different predominant religious affiliation, made it possible to analyse Islamophobia in different contexts. The analysis showed a clear difference in the degree of the fear of Islam between the two countries, with Czech respondents expressing more Islamophobic opinions than the Spanish (see Tables 3 and 4). The different attitude towards Islam in Czechia compared to Spain is probably due to a combination of various factors, the most important of which, i.e. different historical experience with Islam, is unfortunately impossible to capture in the questionnaire. We can therefore only assume that due to their minimal contact with Islam, Czechs are more afraid of its manifestations than the Spanish, who have had extensive historical experience with Muslim culture.

The comparison of the attitude towards Islam and Muslims in the two countries with a different religious majority also made it possible to analyse the degree of Islamophobia in relation to the respondents' own religion. It's clear that believers (mostly Christians in this survey) are generally more tolerant of Islam than respondents without religious affiliation, even though the difference is not statistically



significant (Table 2). The degree of Islamophobia positively correlates with the age of the respondent. There is a lower fear of Islam among the younger generation (26 years and under) in both countries, probably as a result of the greater openness of young people towards different cultures and their more liberal opinions. Among the older generation, the fear of Islam is made stronger by personal contacts with Muslims (either with Islamic culture in general or with a Muslim in the family), which is not true for the generation 26 years and under (Table 2; see Sobotová, 2014). As with age, the fear of Islam is also affected by education; this link was stronger in Czechia, where it can be generally stated that Czechs with a university-level education are least affected by Islamophobia. A very important factor influencing the fear of Islam is gender. In general, there are higher levels of Islamophobia among males than females (the difference being more pronounced in Czechia). Among both groups, Islamophobic views are more influenced by fears arising from personal contacts with Islam than Islamophobia based on normative information about Islam, but direct contact with Muslim culture has a different

**Table 2** Degree of Islamophobia in selected categories

		degree of Islamophobia	
aggregate average for Czechia and Spain		2.26	
gender			
	male	2.93	0.000*
	female	1.91	
age			
	26 years and under	2.16	0.025*
	27 years and over	2.72	
education			
	primary / bachillerato	2.67	0.000*
	vocational school, secondary school / grado medio	2.9	
	higher vocational school	3.61	
	university education	2.15	
religion			
	believers	2.10	0.280
	without religious affiliation	2.37	

Notes: \* the difference in the degree of Islamophobia among the listed groups shows a significant correlation at the 0.05 level based on the independent samples test and the Kruskal-Wallis independent-samples test. The degree of Islamophobia is calculated from the number of Islamophobic answers in the corresponding part of the survey (see Table 4). The minimum value is 0, the maximum value is 8 (each Islamophobic answer scores 2 points). Answers "I don't know" and "I do not care" did not exceed a significant percentage.



effect on females and males represented in the sample. Among women, Islamophobia significantly decreases with increased personal contact, whereas it increases among men (Sobotová, 2014). Generally speaking, therefore, personal contact with Muslims and their culture leads to a loss of Islamophobia in women, while the opposite is true for men.

Regardless of the demographic characteristics of respondents, an important factor determining the degree of fear of Islam is the source of information from which respondents draw their knowledge about the Muslim culture and religion. The strongest influence comes from the media (in Czechia 34% of information, in Spain 42%; see Table 3). Statistical analysis of the source of information about Islam determined that respondents who listed the media as one of their sources of information about Muslim culture showed a higher degree of Islamophobia (Sobotová, 2014). The media thus emerged as an important source of information about Islam and a significant factor influencing Islamophobia in the society. It is also clear that the media do not mollify the Islamophobic views of respondents. The frequent association of Islam and Muslims with problematic behaviour, terrorism or crime and the emphasis on the differences of Muslim culture in the media may have a very negative impact on the perception of Islam by mainstream society. Among Spanish respondents, a frequent source of information about Islam is personal contact with the culture, which is related to the higher percentage of Muslims in the total population of Spain compared to Czechia.

**Table 3** Sources of information about Islam and the definition of Islam in the Czech and Spanish population (n=515)

	Czechia (share in %)	Spain (share in %)
<i>source of information about Islam</i>		
media	33.8	42.4
personal contact	15.7	17.2
scientific literature	18.4	8.3
friends	14.5	8.9
school	10.2	13.6
other	8.5	9.7
<i>what does Islam represent</i>		
religion	23.9	54.4
threat	25.5	1.2
terrorism	14.3	2.7
way of life	12.7	22.8
system of society	12	12.7
other	7.4	6.2

Notes: the other options did not exceed 5%



The differences in the fear of Islam between Spain and Czechia are also highly apparent in the answers to the question of what Islam represents for the respondent (Table 3). One-quarter of Czech respondents see Islam as a threat; fewer people said it was a religion and a significant percentage of respondents directly link Islam to terrorism (Table 3). In Spain, on the other hand, more than half of respondents identify Islam as a religion, followed by a way of life or a system of society. The percentage of Spanish respondents who connect Islam with the words “threat” or “terrorism” is negligible. Even this rough analysis shows that respondents from Czechia see Islam in a very stereotypical light as a threat to society and associate it with terrorism, whereas the Spanish see it primarily as a social and religious system. In this aspect, Czechs are significantly more Islamophobic, even though (or because) they have much more limited direct experience with Muslims or Islamic fundamentalism (compared e.g. to the Spanish experience with the terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2004).

Based on the evaluated criteria, the degree of Islamophobia (answers to specific questions, Table 4) is generally higher in Czechia than in Spain. The greater fear of Islam among Czechs is expressed in various ways. Specifically, Czech respondents are more likely to see Islam as a threat to society (roughly 80% of respondents from Czechia, 50% of respondents from Spain). Furthermore, only one-third of Czechs

**Table 4** Value and structure of the Islamophobia variable in Czechia and Spain (n=515)

	Czechia	Spain
degree of <i>Islamophobia</i> *	2.93	1.27
<i>Do you perceive Islam as a threat?</i>		
yes	82.4%	51.1%
no	17.6%	48.9%
<i>Do you agree with the construction of mosques in your country?</i>		
yes	27.4%	76%
no	72.6%	24%
<i>Do you mind the presence of Muslim women in traditional Muslim clothing around you?</i>		
yes	34.2%	22.2%
no	65.8%	77.8%
<i>Would you mind having a Muslim as a neighbour?</i>		
yes	33.6%	9.5%
no	66.4%	90.5%

Notes: \* the degree of Islamophobia is calculated from the number of Islamophobic answers to the corresponding questions. The minimum value is 0, the maximum value is 8 (each Islamophobic answer scores 2 points). The values “I don’t know”; “I do not care” were not included.



agree with the construction of mosques in their country, while in Spain the figure is roughly two in three respondents. It is also apparent that due to the relatively high proportion of Muslims in Spain, most people are used to the presence of women in traditional Muslim clothing and almost 70% do not mind. Czechs, however, are also relatively positively inclined towards women in headscarves (almost two-thirds of respondents). An interesting result is the significant difference in the answers to the question of whether respondents would mind having a Muslim neighbour, with 34% of Czechs reporting they would mind compared to 10% of Spanish respondents. This difference can be explained by a higher proportion of Muslims in Spanish society and extensive historical experiences with Islam in Spain.

Literature describes two types of Islamophobia, the first stemming from ignorance and therefore fear of the unknown and the other motivated by personal experience with a different culture (Sobotová, 2014, Janků et al., 2013, Meer, 2013). The general rule is that the more contact with Muslim culture the respondents have, the more knowledgeable they are about the normative aspect of Islam. It cannot be proven, however, that Islamophobic views of the respondents are influenced by their knowledge of Islam and its culture. The relationship between knowledge of Islam and the degree of Islamophobia is also moderated by other factors (Novotný and Polonský, 2011). It is clear that there is a different level of knowledge of Islam among Czechs and the Spanish (with Czech respondents actually scoring higher in their knowledge of the basics of Islam), but there is no provable correlation between the degree of Islamophobia and the number of correctly answered questions about Islam-related facts (Sobotová, 2014). On the other hand, there is a significant correlation between the degree of personal contact and the level of Islamophobia in the respondents (a negative correlation – see Table 5); therefore, an extended contact with Muslims and their culture generally leads to a lower level of Islamophobia. In each of the countries, however, the relationship works in a different way. In Czechia, the rule is that personal contact with Muslim culture leads to a higher degree of Islamophobia (Sobotová, 2014). In Spain, the opposite

**Table 5** Correlation between the degree of Islamophobia and personal contact of the respondents with Muslims and Islam

			<i>personal contact</i>
Spearman's rho	<i>Islamophobia</i>	Correlation Coefficient	-.132**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.003
		N	515

Notes: \*\* correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. The personal contact variable was calculated as the sum of positive answers to the questions: have you ever visited a Muslim country; have you ever had/do you have personal contact with Muslim culture; is anyone in your family a Muslim. For the calculation of the Islamophobia variable, see Tables 2 and 4.





is true: direct contact reduces Islamophobia. Once the personal contact with Muslim culture transforms into contact with a family member who is a Muslim, the correlation changes in Czechia to the generally negative one, i.e. a greater degree of contact in the family leads to lower levels of Islamophobia (Sobotová, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

Contemporary society in Czechia and all of Europe is transforming (Havlíček and Klingorová, 2018) and religion is becoming an increasingly important element determining its further development (Williams, 2015; Kong, 2010; Habermas, 2008; Peach, 2006; Berger, 1999). The issue of Islamophobia is therefore becoming a pressing problem not only in relation to Muslim immigration to Europe. The cultural and religious differences of Muslims, which are often externally manifested, cause fear in the largely secular and Christian society of Europe, as well as misunderstanding and hostility. For the new geography of religion, Islam and its perception by the majority society of Europe is becoming an important topic of research (Kong, 2010; Aitchison, Hopkins and Kwan, 2008; Peach, 2006). This paper was an attempt to contribute to this debate with a questionnaire-based analysis of the attitudes of the secular and Christian majority towards the Islamic minority, using the examples of Czechia and Spain, two countries with a different geography and more importantly also historical and social development.

The perception of Islam among Czech and Spanish respondents is significantly different. The different cultural background of the selected countries, their geographic location and historical experience with religious diversity are reflected also in this issue. Czechs more often consider Islam a threat to society and link it to terrorism more frequently than the Spanish, who generally see Islam as a religion and a way of life. This aspect may also be strengthened by the difference in religious orientation, as the percentage of Christians, who are generally more tolerant of Islam, in the overall population is higher in Spain than in the secular Czechia. However, Islamophobia is also formed by other and often conflicting factors. An important factor is direct contact with Muslims and their culture, but its role in shaping Islamophobia is rather complex. Generally speaking, there is a lesser fear of Islam among women and the younger generation 26 years of age and under, which seems to be more open towards religious and cultural differences.

The questionnaire analysis also showed that Islamophobic opinions are negatively influenced by the media as a source of information about Islam compared to, for example, literature, information from friends, knowledge gained at school, etc. (Sobotová, 2014). This fact undoubtedly demonstrates the importance of the media as a source of information about Islam and can be considered a significant factor influencing Islamophobia in society. The promotion of positive media coverage of ethnical and religious minorities and the support of diversity and



understanding instead of prejudice in news stories (Janků et al., 2013; Lahuerta, 2014) may be a possible step towards reducing Islamophobia in society. This could prevent open protests against sacred Muslim buildings, discrimination, exclusion of Muslims from public spaces, physical attacks, particularly on veiled women, and other manifestations of fear and intolerance of different religions. Facilitating an interaction between Muslims and mainstream society (Lahuerta, 2014) could help improve understanding and combat prejudice, thus reducing Islamophobic opinions and behaviours.

The issue of Islamophobia, or a fear of Islam, is very complex. This paper discusses it only from the perspective of the non-Muslim majority in two selected countries, Czechia and Spain. More research would be required to achieve a full understanding of the issue of Islamophobia, particularly in the form of in-depth interviews and more questionnaires that would also take the Muslim minority living in a non-Muslim world into consideration.

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