Islamophobia and the Challenges of Muslims in Contemporary Eropean Union Countries: Case Studies From Austria, Belgium, and Germany[1]

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ABSTRACT

In the last two decades, the Muslim population in Western Europe has grown in unprecedented ways. At the broader regional level, there are approximately 25 million Muslims living in European Union member states as of 2016, which is estimated to increase to 35 million by 2050. The arrival of Muslims from various countries in the Middle East, Africa, and the Balkans has brought about significant changes and issues socially, economically, as well as politically. Undeniably, some phenomena of discrimination and Islamophobia arise in almost all EU countries in various aspects of public life such as hijâb clothing, building mosques, and housing. Using a qualitative approach and field research, this article explores not only the historical accounts of the presence of Islam in several EU countries, but also the relations between Islam and the state. This research presents several cases of discrimination and Islamophobia and the internal dynamics within the Muslim communities as to the challenges of living in completely different atmosphere. Three countries, namely Austria, Belgium, and Germany are chosen to represent European Union countries. This study contributes to the discourse on the integration of Muslims in European culture and to the way EU countries could involve Muslims in constructing European Islam.
Keywords: *discrimination, far-right groups, integration, Islamophobia, multiculturalism*

ABSTRAK

Dalam dua dekade terakhir, populasi Muslim di Eropa Barat telah tumbuh dengan sangat pesat. Di tingkat regional yang lebih luas, terdapat sekitar 25 juta Muslim

yang tinggal di negara-negara anggota Uni Eropa pada tahun 2016, yang diperkirakan akan meningkat menjadi 35 juta pada tahun 2050. Kedatangan umat Islam dari berbagai negara di Timur Tengah, Afrika, dan Balkan telah membawa perubahan dan masalah yang signifikan secara sosial, ekonomi, dan politik. Tak dapat dipungkiri, beberapa fenomena diskriminasi dan Islamofobia muncul di hampir seluruh negara Uni Eropa dalam berbagai aspek kehidupan masyarakat seperti hijâb, pembangunan masjid, dan perumahan. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan penelitian lapangan, artikel ini membahas tidak hanya catatan sejarah tentang keberadaan Islam di beberapa negara Uni Eropa, tetapi juga hubungan antara Islam dan negara. Penelitian ini memaparkan beberapa kasus diskriminasi dan Islamofobia serta dinamika internal komunitas Muslim terhadap tantangan hidup dalam suasana yang sama sekali berbeda. Tiga negara yaitu Austria, Belgia, dan Jerman dipilih untuk mewakili negara Uni Eropa. Studi ini berkontribusi pada wacana tentang integrasi Muslim dalam budaya Eropa dan juga cara negara-negara Uni Eropa dapat melibatkan Muslim dalam membangun Islam Eropa.
Keywords: *diskriminasi*, *integrasi*, *Islamofobia*, *kelompok ekstrem kanan*, *multikulturalisme*

INTRODUCTION

This article attempts to describe the current condition of Muslims in several European countries, and to understand the challenges and opportunities to integrate into European culture and society. It explores three countries namely Austria, Belgium, and Germany. These countries are deliberately chosen due to the high number of Muslims who live there, and to our prior relationships with academics in those countries which have supported our field research. Even though the discussions of these countries do not represent all European Union (EU) countries, it is expected that these findings provide a general picture of the growth of Islam and the dynamics of Muslims in Europe. We argue that regardless of the difficult relationship between Afro-Asia Muslim societies and Cauca-European societies, the dynamics of their relationship will bring about better cooperation and yield a new identity for European Muslims.

In the last ten years, Islam in Europe has significantly increased in terms of the growing Muslim population. Although Europe is not a "home" for Islam, it cannot be denied that according to the latest estimation (2016), Muslims make up 4.9% of European Union's total population.[2] In addition, projections which include migration at a medium rate suggest the Muslim population could reach as high as 11.2% to 14% by 2050.[3] Reasons for this growth include the projected shrinkage of the non-Muslim population and the fact that Muslims in Europe are considerably younger and have a higher fertility

rate (2.1) than that of other Europeans (1.6).[4] Although Muslims have made significant contributions to European society, they have also brought with them a number of social concerns: increased job competition, problems of Muslim-Christian relations, additional language barriers, the issue of Islamic headscarves, the need for worship space, and issues of religious extremism and radicalism.[5] Various EU countries have tried to reduce these social tensions by "integrating" Muslims with European culture through various policies including citizenship, language requirements for *imams* (religious leaders), and religious education in public schools. However, it cannot be denied that the issue of social integration is debatable.

In several EU countries, some Muslims are experiencing marginalization[6] and discrimination.[7] Many Muslims in those countries, who came from various national and ethnic backgrounds, experience economic, social, and political exclusions. The marginalization of Muslims is mostly caused by a misconception of Western societies (Caucasians) that Islam is a monolithic religion. The image that Islam is synonymous to violence and even terrorism is quite familiar in Western media. The *hijâb* (head covering) is perceived as confining women's freedom. Moreover, polygamy is often understood as a Muslim tradition, and *qishâsh*[8] punishment is deemed as violating human rights. Therefore, many Westerners are in doubt of the possibility of Muslims integrating into Western culture.[9]

In Western Europe, where governments and societies have Christian and secular state cultures, it seems difficult for practicing Muslims to find a suitable place to live. Nevertheless, the exclusion of Muslims from the mainstream society is not the right answer to solve the problem. In countries where democracy and human rights are maintained, there have to be opportunities where Muslims could engage in social life and become an integral part of European society. Although this is not an easy matter, it would provide an opportunity for the second and third generation of Muslims, and even new migrants, to prove that they have commitments to become European citizens. Tariq Ramadan, a European of Egyptian descent, for example, believes that Muslims' identity is determined by completely open, dynamic, inter-active, and multiple factors in which they live. When Muslims could settle the spiritual and ethical modalities of a harmonious life through a real integration, they will create European Islamic culture.[10] He further states: "We need to separate Islamic principles from their cultures of origin and anchor them in the cultural reality of Western Europe. I can incorporate ev-

erything that's not opposed to my religion into my identity and that's a revolution."[11]

Rather than alienating Muslims from social life, therefore, it seems that the integration of Muslims into European society is a better option. There has been a simmering debate on the concept of integration whether it means multiculturalism[12] or assimilation. Some leaders of EU countries such as Angela Merkel (2010) and David Cameron (2011) claimed that multiculturalism has failed and endorsed assimilation as an alternative.[13] Parekh also notes that European Muslims tend to take a narrow and pragmatic view of multicultural democracy.[14] Their presence in mainland Europe, however, is a source of 'wealth' for Europe to promote egalitarianism and cultural and religious pluralism. This proposition is very relevant because the growth of Muslims in Europe is inevitable. On a larger scale, there are an estimated 25.8 million Muslims (2016) living throughout the EU. This demographic projection illustrates that Muslim integration in Europe is an imperative.

In fact, there are of course some works on the issue of Islamophobia in Europe. There are several books, official reports, and also some journal articles dealing with this issue. The books dealing with Islamophobia area *Islamophobia in Muslim Majority Societies* co-edited by Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez.[15] While the first book dealing with the normative discourse of Islamophobia and few cases in several countries, the second book dealing with some cases in several European countries. Quite comprehensive reports have also been produced by SETA, a Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research in Turkey entitled European Islamophobia Report (EIR) since 2015 based on surveys and researches on media. Finally, there are also some articles published in several journal discussing on Islamophobia in Europe. Among them are "Public and Scholarly Debates on the Comparison of Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism in Germany" written by Farid Hafez.[16] Based on the writers' reading, however, most data were gathered are from online media and do not cover interview at the grassroot level. This current article based its findings not only on books and reports but mostly from interviews at the grassroot level. Moreover, it compares the cases among Muslims at the above-mentioned three countries.

This article starts with a brief description of the development of Islam in Austria, Belgium, and Germany. It then explores the relationship between the states and Islam in the three countries, as represented by its formal organizations. The article then discusses issues of discrimination, hostility, Islamophobia

as told by our interlocutors. The last part of the article attempts to highlight some opportunities and faced by Muslims in these three countries.

ISLAM IN AUSTRIA, BELGIUM, AND GERMANY

The Muslim population in Europe is tremendously diverse with varied histories and origins. Although the presence of Islam in Europe is not a new phenomenon, the Muslim population has experienced a significant increase in recent decades. Along with the existing Muslim community who has been in Europe since the 1960s due mostly to economic reasons,[17] there is an abundance of Muslims who migrated to Europe in the last two decades due to political instabilities or wars in certain Muslim countries.[18] Muslim communities in some EU countries have maintained and practiced Islamic teachings and cultures within their respective countries, such as the wearing of the *hijâb*, providing Islamic education for their children, and building mosques. These practices have sparked debate, controversy, fear, and even hatred on the part of some EU citizens.[19] Due to different political situations in EU member countries, Muslims have different experiences in their relations with society and in dealing with the state's regulations.

Islam in Austria has the longest history as compared to other countries discussed in this article. In 1525, many Austrians converted to Islam when the Ottoman dynasty tried to conquer the Austrian Empire.[20] After the collapse of the empire, the Ottomans were allowed to build factories and Muslim settlements in the region. Islam then influenced the culture and converted portions of the Austrian population. Since 1912, Islam has been constitutionally recognized as a corporation,[21] which is equal to other religions such as Christianity, Catholicism, and Judaism. Due to a shortage of workers after World War II in the 1960s, Austria brought in many immigrant workers from Yugoslavia and Turkey. After the 1974 oil crisis, the migrant worker policy was halted and Muslim migrants began to arrive again in 1986. According to Pew (2016), Muslims in Austria are approximately 600,000 (6.9%).[22] The majority of Muslims in this country are of Turkish descent and, therefore, they mostly adhere to the Hanafi school of Islamic law with a small Shiite minority.[23]

Austrian Muslims are officially organized under the *Islamistche Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich* (IGGiÖ), which coordinates the relations of all Muslim groups with the state. In addition to overseeing various Islamic organizations that manage registered mosques, IGGiÖ also has the

rights to give religious lessons in public schools. Since 1983, Austria has provided funding for religious education in public schools. In 1998, the government passed a law on the status of religious communities, one of which was related to the legal status and curriculum of Islamic studies in public schools. More importantly, women and girls are permitted to wear the *hijâb* at schools. In the same year, IGGiÖ founded the *Islamische Religionspädagogische Akademie* (IRPA), a higher educational institute that produces Islamic religious teachers.[24] In more recent times, however, the right-wing extreme Freedom Party Austria (OVP) led the issuance of several infamous anti-Muslim regulations, such as the banning of the *hijâb* in kindergartens and primary schools as well as attempts to close mosques.[25]

Different from Austria, Islam in Belgium is a relatively new phenomenon. Although the presence of Muslims in Belgium traces back to the 19th century,[26] a massive wave of Muslim immigrants to Belgium from Morocco, Turkey, Algeria, and Tunisia began in the early 1960s. From that time onward, the Muslim populations has grown significantly with the emergence of the second and third generations in the country. In 2016, the number of Muslims in Belgium was estimated at around 870,000 (15.1% of the total population).[27] They consist of 30 ethnic groups and the largest number (35%) comes from Turkey and Morocco. In the city of Brussels, itself, more than a quarter of the population is Muslim.[28]

Belgium is quite generous in its treatment of immigrants. This country gave official recognition to Islam in 19 July 1974. In 2007, Belgium was ranked third among 25 EU countries in assisting work rights, anti-racism, the opportunity for permanent residence, family reunion, and election suffrage. The formation of the *Executive des Musulmans de Belgique* (EMB, Muslims Executive Council) in 1998 in Belgium met the administrative needs of managing Muslim communities, especially administrative functions, mosques, and *imams*.[29] Similar to IGGiÖ, the EMB has a significant role in managing the relationship between Muslims and the state as Muslim ethnic communities should be registered with the EMB to receive facilities from the government. The EMB director said that the government has subsidized about 50 mosques and *imams*, and around 700 religious teachers in public schools.[30] This policy applies not only to the Muslim community, but also to other religious communities recognized by the state such as Catholicism, Anglicanism, Orthodoxy, Judaism, and Buddhism.

Relatively similar to Austria, Islam in Germany also has a long history. An

early recognition of Muslims in Germany came in 1732, when King Friedrich Wilhelm I built a mosque in Potsdam as a place of worship for Ottoman mercenaries (Janissaries). This relationship continued to the period of Friedrich II and until the Nazi era when hundreds of thousands of Turkish were recruited to join World War II. After the war, a wave of Muslim workers to Germany came from Turkey, North Africa, and former Yugoslavia, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. Since the 1980s, the number of Muslim asylum seekers in Germany has also increased, especially ethnic Turks (Kurds, Yezidis, and Assyrians).[31] Today, Germany has the second largest Muslim population in the European Union. According to Pew estimates, there are 4.9 million (8.7%) Muslims living in Germany[32] and about 80% of them hold German citizenship.[33]

Unlike Austria and Belgium, until now, Germany has not recognized Islam as an official religion. Therefore, religious education, mosques, and other social problems are still quite significant issues in this country. Some sources confirm that Islam has not been formally recognized because there is no umbrella for Islamic organizations which is accepted by all Muslim groups.[34] Some existing Islamic organizations have not been unanimously accepted as representative of all Muslims groups. The government seems to be more accommodating towards Muslims, especially in the field of education. Several universities have established training programs for Islamic teachers or *imams*, including the University of Osnabrück (2010), Erlangen-Nürnberg University (2011), Munich, and Frankfurt Universities.[35] Several states of Germany have also accommodated the status of Ahmadiyya which is administratively more well-organized.

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN ISLAM AND THE STATE

Although EU countries are formally secular states, in reality each country has a different pattern of religion-state relations that constantly evolves.[36] In the 1990s, five of the EU countries, namely Denmark, Finland, Greece, Sweden and the United Kingdom, had established state churches. As for Germany, although it does not have a state church, it recognizes Catholicism and Protestantism as the official state religion.[37] In some European countries, such as Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the central government or states even provide religious educational assistance for public or religious schools.[38]

Among the three countries we studied, Austria is a relatively better coun-

try in terms of relations between Islam and the state. Austria is the first country in the EU to recognize the Muslim community as one of the recognized religious communities by the state. The recognition occurred in 1912, when Bosnia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire where most of the population was Muslim. However, it was only in the 1960s, when many Muslim immigrants came to Austria from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia, the necessity to form an organization to take care of various problems faced by Muslim communities was increasingly felt.[39]

In 1979, IGGiÖ was established as a representative organization for all Muslim groups in Austria at the governmental level. Although the establishment of IGGiÖ could be regarded as a Muslim success in their negotiation with the government, they still face many issues in Austria. Carla Amina Baghajati, the spokesperson of IGGiÖ, explained to us that the struggle to form an organization recognized by the country took about eight years until finally being approved by the government. She could imagine that it would be much more difficult to form it nowadays.[40] Institutionally, all Muslim communities in Austria are required to register with IGGiÖ in the form of an Islamic religious community. Although this was not easy at first, in the end the Muslim communities understood it well. With a clear membership, the government will help them financially, but also oversee them easily. Currently, there are about 16 religious communities recognized by the Austrian government such as Christianity, Protestantism, Islam, and Alavism. The harmonious relationship between Islam and the state in Austria is also continuously growing. In the construction of the Austrian Islamic Center mosque, for example, Sheikh Salim Mujkanovic, the deputy *imam*, said that initially Muslims had difficulty to obtain permission in building the mosque, but finally it could be built and now the mosque stands majestically in the city of Vienna.[41]

In Belgium, the presence of the Muslim community is relatively new, as compared to Austria. Muslim immigrants, mostly ethnic Turks and Moroccans, began to come to Belgium in 1960s. Despite its status as a secular state, the Belgian government still gives equal rights to religious communities that have been recognized by the state. All recognized religious communities have the same rights before the state, such as the right to receive religious education for students in public schools, salaries for priests, and financial assistance in the construction of worship places. This was clearly stated by Semsettin Ugurlu, the president of *Executive Musulman de Belgigue* (EMB):

We have in Belgium a very special organization concerning the relations

between the state and the recognized religious communities. […] Because the separation between state and religious communities, it implies that religious communities have their autonomy, but they can claim some finances or supports from the government for many aspects.[42]

In addition, the government is also involved in many ways in various Muslims' affairs. Within the framework of EMB, the government assists Muslims with mosques and Islamic schools. Although almost all construction of mosques in Belgium is self-financed by Turkish and Moroccan communities, in many cases the Belgian government provides additional funds for these mosques and also for further management, including *imams* and other expenses. Whereas for Islamic education, the government also provides salaries for Islamic teachers in public schools.

Unlike in Austria and Belgium, the status of the Muslim community in Germany is an interesting case. At the national level, Muslim communities do not have an umbrella organization that represents all Muslims in Germany. This is because the country does not recognize Islam as a public corporation like other religious communities such as Jews, Protestants, Catholics and Ahmadis. The lack of recognition of Islam as a public corporation does not entitle Muslims in Germany to a variety of forms of financial assistance from the central or state governments. To build a mosque, for example, Muslims in Germany must finance it independently without any assistance from the government. This was conveyed by Muhammad Hajjaj, the chairman of the Palestinian Community in Germany:

> *The problem is, because in Germany we are not a public corporation, all the costs and the finances in the mosque or in Islamic community we have to pay ourselves, in terms of everything, the* imam, *the school, the* mimbar, *the carpet. Everything is on our shoulders.*[43]

At the local level, however, each state in Germany has different policies related to the existence of Muslim community. Some state governments provide assistance to Muslims not as a religious community but as a community organization. In Berlin, for example, the local government provides aid to the Islamic Federation of Berlin (IFB), which consists of around 30 organizations. In the Hessen region, the local government recognizes the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB), the largest umbrella organization of mosques in Germany. Also, Ahmadiyah (Qadiyan) as an official Islamic organization, has the rights to manage Islamic teachings in public schools.[44]

At the political level, Muslims' participation in the German parliament is noteworthy. There are some Muslims who have become members of parliament through different political parties as their vehicles. These include the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Christian Union Party (CPU), and the Green Party. Although their existence at the political level does not satisfactorily represent Muslims' aspirations in Germany, such phenomenon is important in terms of the openness of German political parties as well as the parliament to Muslims. This exactly corresponds with the eagerness of Muslims to integrate into Western society even without any Islamic political parties.

DISCRIMINATION AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

Before we examine further, it is necessary to discuss the definition of discrimination and Islamophobia. According to American Psychological Association, discrimination is defined as "the unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age or sexual orientation".[45] While Islamophobia is defined as "a term used to describe irrational hostility, fear, or hatred of Islam, Muslims, and Islamic culture, and active discrimination against these groups or individuals within them."[46] As discrimination could manifests itself through individual attitudes or behaviors and institutional policies and practices, discrimination could be attributed to Islamophobic phenomena.

According to *European Islamophobia Report* (EIR), Islamophobic phenomena in the Austria, Belgium, and Germany increase quite significantly. Based on the *Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit und antimuslimischer Rassismus* (Office for documenting Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism) of Austria recorded an increase of approximately 74% of anti-Muslim racist acts from 309 cases in 2017 to 540 cases in 2018. EIR also notes that, Islamophobia in Belgium has continued to grow and to permeate diverse aspects of Belgian society. The Islamophobic attitudes in Belgium have been widely spread and affected not only Islamic sites with physical attacks and graffities, some numerous attacks against visibly Muslim women in particular are increasing significantly. In Germany, although official state statistics of physical violence against German Muslims, refugees, and migrants have gone down, the discourse on Islamophobia has changed drastically over the past 70 years. In the past, migrant Muslims are normally called as "guest worker", "foreigner", "Muslim", today they are mostly named as "economic migrant", "refugee", physical "threat", or even "terrorists".[47]

The research conducted by Pew Research center may also be attributed to the Islamophobic phenomena. Based on the Government Restriction Index (GRI) and Social Hostility Index's (SHI) on minority religions of Pew Research Center, the three countries experience a lot of changes as shown on the table below. While Austria's index of both GHI and SHI are increasing, Belgium and Germany's index of GRI are relatively stable at moderate level, their number of SHI are increasing quite significant especially Germany increase from moderate to very high. Although the table does not necessarily highlight a specific religion, in general it measures the attitude of the government and dominant religions towards minority religions across the world, as can be seen in the table 1.

COUNTRIES	2007		2016		2017	
	GRI	SHI	GRI	SHI	GRI	SHI
Austria	2.6	1.1	3.9	3.8	4.2	3.2
Belgium	4.0	0.9	4.0	2.7	3.8	2.2
Germany	3.1	2.1	3.0	6.8	3.2	7.1

Table 1: Government Restriction and Social Hostility Index[48]

Regardless of all the opportunities for Muslims in Europe, some face difficulties in the form of discrimination and Islamophobia.[49] Economically, almost all Muslims enjoy and receive the benefits of the economic development and modernization of Europe. Many Muslims, however, faced discrimination and Islamophobia to various extents. Most discrimination in public spaces included limited admission to educational institutions and workplaces, difficulties in building mosques and in obtaining *imams*, as well as problems in renting houses. On the issue of full-face veils (*niqâb*), many EU countries have similar regulations. Several European countries, including France (2010), Belgium (2011), Bulgaria (2016), Austria (2017), and Denmark (2018), have banned full-face veils in public spaces. In the Netherlands, *burqas* and *niqâbs* are prohibited at schools, hospitals, and on public transport since 2012.[50]

Generally, the increasing number of migrant Muslims from Africa and Middle East has fueled political tensions in many EU countries, such as the emergence of far-right political groups. This could be explained by, among others, the view held by many Westerners that Islam and Muslims are a threat to Western values.[51] Among far-right politicians, suspicion and

Islamophobic discourse is quite obvious. While some politicians argue that Islamic culture would substitute Christian heritage, others have further termed the presence of Muslims in Europe as an "occupation".[52] Driven by these issues, many EU countries have implemented policies that are less tolerant towards minorities, chiefly Muslims. Several governments have already adopted regulations restricting the wearing of veils by Muslim women, particularly the wearing of full-face veils. Regardless of the similar patterns of discrimination and fear of Muslims, each EU country we examined has interesting characteristics that need to be further explored.

In the context of Austria, many (non-Muslim) Austrians have not been able to accept the Islamic cultural practice of the *hijâb*. Muslim women undergo various kinds of discrimination, especially within the workplace. Ummu Selime, a public relations officer for the Islamic Federation in Vienna (IFV), argued that many Westerners could not fully accept the presence of Muslims, especially a veiled woman. She underlined that the *hijâb* is basically still a barrier for Muslim women to work. She stated that upon the completion of her study in 2012, she sent many job applications, but she did not receive positive responses from any of them. She was not given the exact reasons why she was not accepted, even though she believed that she was qualified for the jobs. She argued that many Muslim women have similar experiences when applying for jobs.[53]

The rise of discrimination in Austria is also driven by the media. Several researchers see that the media in the country does not view Islam objectively.[54] Many IGGiÖ activities do not receive enough appreciation from the media and they even search for the weaknesses of Islamic organizations, such as the possibility of fundamentalist or extremist elements within them. Indeed, Austrian Muslims do realize that elements of extremism do exist within Muslim societies in the country, as narrated by Baghajati:

> *...Of course, we don't take a blind eye although there are very small groups (of extremists) that are in existence in all societies. But we feel that the groups are very small in numbers, and they don't meet in mosques in general.*[55]

In line with Baghajati, the president and spokesman of IGGiÖ Zekeriya Sejdini also stated that the presence of fundamentalist Muslim groups in Austria was quite complex. Besides being triggered by the international political situation, it is also caused by frustration among Muslim youth who do not possess what they hope from the country. In that case, Ummu Selime

underlined that the literalist understanding of Islam, which has developed among Austrian Muslims, is one of the obstacles for Muslims' integration to the country. She has tried to encourage Muslims in Austria, especially women, to be open-minded and urges them to attend to the substance of Islamic teachings rather than to take the literal meaning of the religion.[56]

The main challenge of Muslims in Austria is how to adapt to Western culture without losing their identity as Muslims. Zekeriya Sejdini believes that religious education in schools has a significant role in the integration process. Islamic religious studies do not only provide religious knowledge normatively, but also provide students with the ability to live in the society and to coexist with followers of other religions. This is exactly the target desired by the state by properly holding religious education in schools.[57]

Similar to Austria, the wearing of the *hijâb* is also perceived as a common problem in Belgium. Since 2007, the Belgian Federal Council of Education has banned headscarves for teachers with the exception of religious teachers who teach Islam.[58] The problem lies in the fact that there are teachers who teach other subjects and students who also wear the *hijâb*. Although wearing a *hijâb* could be understood as part of human rights, at the practical level this becomes an endless dispute. Several Muslim communities convinced us that Muslim students in Belgium also had difficulty entering college because the government tends to direct them more to vocational schools.[59]

The issue of the *hijâb* does not only impact the educational sector, but also the work sector. The Indonesian Muslim community in Belgium told us of the case of Mahmudah, an Indonesian citizen who worked in a hospital in Belgium, who was fired from her job because of wearing the *hijâb*. Although finally the case was solved by the Belgian Labor Bureau,[60] the fundamental problems still exist and have not been resolved properly. Apparently, EMB as a representative body of Muslims in Belgium was unable to solve various Muslim problems in Belgium. The *imam* of the De Koepel Mosque in Antwerp stated that EMB was less responsive in dealing with various Muslim problems in Belgium due to intervention by the government.[61] However, in general, some Muslim communities acknowledged that discrimination and challenges of Muslims in Belgium are mostly caused by the lack of integration of Muslims in European culture, both in terms of language and participation in society. This has worsened the image of Muslims in the country.[62]

In Belgium, the most difficult challenge for Muslims is the attributed stereotyping of extremism and terrorism. This is reasonable because the media

coverage of Islam is often negative so that more Belgians believe that Muslims are terrorists or, at least, related to terrorism. In line with this, the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) in Brussels stated that the primary source for the negative image of Muslims in Belgium is media coverage. Belgian media notoriously stated that Muslims are one of the five dangerous communities in Europe, together with Roman Catholicism, Judaism, immigrants, and those of African ancestry.[63]

The radicalism issue has given impetus to the rise of the far-right movement in Belgium. The *imam* of De Koepel Mosque in Antwerp stated that the local government, which is dominated by right-wing groups, labeled the Muslim community in Belgium as radical. Vlaams Belange and the New Flemish Alliance (NVA), the right-wing parties in Belgium, take advantage of Muslim issues to attract sympathy from their supporters. Both right-wing parties are also worried about the growing number of Muslims in Belgium. The success of Geert Wilders in the Netherlands has inspired NVA to seek community support to oppose Islam. It is precisely in this context that the *imam* of the mosque urges the Muslim community not to be easily provoked as this would further damage the image of Islam in Belgium and bring harm upon themselves.[64]

Quite similar to other EU countries in general, Muslims in Germany also experience some challenges and even discrimination. Discrimination against Muslims in Germany is also quite common, especially for Muslim women workers who wear the *hijâb*. In fact, there is no nationwide policy on wearing the headscarf, except in some states, which ban wearing the veil by female teachers. Furthermore, housing is also a quite serious problem for Muslims in Germany, especially educated youth living in the city. As productive workers, many young Muslims find it difficult to rent houses in urban areas of Germany. Based on his and also his colleagues' experiences, several times, some homeowners refused to rent their house or apartment for Muslims. The rejection usually occurs when the prospective tenant comes and shows that she is wearing the *hijâb*.[65]

The fast growing and influx of Muslim migrants in Germany has evoked the rise of Islamophobia. In 2014, an anti-Islam and far-right movement, *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Pegida), was established in Dresden. Pegida believes that Germany is being increasingly Islamicized and defines itself in opposition to Islamic extremism. The movement wants to control the immigration process, especially for Muslims.

Pegida has held rallies in various cities and their appeal has resulted in the formation of offshoots in many German states and even neighboring countries. However, there are also anti-Pegida movements in some other German states, some organizing public rallies against Pegida, which is also well known as a neo-Nazi movement.[66]

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MUSLIMS

Based on the various challenges, discrimination, and Islamophobia faced by Muslims in the above countries, we try to examine 'opportunities' for Muslims to better integrate in European culture. The term integration is preferable in this context as it is more neutral that Islam could integrate at multiple levels.[67] We do not opt for the term multiculturalism or assimilation, which are quite debatable at the empirical level. Although religion has historically created many negative perceptions in Europe, we cannot deny that it can also play a significant role in the development of the society. Undeniably, European countries also receive social benefits due to the presence of Muslims in their respective countries.[68] This is to say that European Muslims could also be part of European cultures and take part in the development of their respective countries.

Austria offers the greatest opportunity for Muslim communities to develop. It is also the country with the lowest level of discrimination as compared to the other two countries. Although in recent years the development of Islam in Austria has been relatively stagnant, Baghajati saw that, as compared to the early 2000s, Islam in the country has developed well. She believes that religion should not be an obstacle, but can instead offer a solution. For this reason, the integration of Muslims to European culture is necessary to achieve the goals to fully integrate into the European society. Many people still perceive that Muslims are half-hearted when it comes to integrating with the wider society. Ummu Selime, however, emphasized that both sides of Muslims and the government should build a better reciprocal relationship. Negative labeling of Muslims in the media or in state institutions instigates the reluctancy of Muslims to integrate. As for the Muslims themselves, they could start by conducting positive activities with their neighbors to show that they are good Muslims. On this issue, Baghajati underlined that Muslim women could take a significant role in fostering networking with communities of different religious and ethnic backgrounds.[69]

Religious education could also be considered as an opportunity for Mus-

lims in some EU countries. This is because the government in Austria, for example, gives the right for every recognized religious community to conduct religious education in the schools. The more Muslims in the country, the more students need religious studies in Austria. Through this education young Muslims in Austria could become European Muslims without losing their Islamic identity. At the beginning, most Islamic teachers in Austria were migrants from Turkey and Arab countries who did not have enough competence in pedagogy. But after the founding of IRPA, most of the teaching staff are professional teachers who have mastered the German language and are able to integrate Islamic values with European culture. Currently, there are approximately 450 Islamic teachers in Austria. Proper education for the young Muslim generation will determine the face of Islam in the future. Islamic education could also build positive dialogue among Muslim communities and decrease the negative image of Muslims in European society.[70]

In line with Austria, the presence of EMB as an organization that represents the Muslim community in Belgium allows greater opportunities for Muslims to become better citizens. In the fields of education, *imams* of mosques, and religious teachers in Belgium have brought positive developments from time to time. The Belgian government through the Ministry of Education gives students the rights to receive two hours of religious studies each week. With this Islamic education, students are expected to understand Islamic teachings within the European context. The establishment of educational institutions for religious teachers, such as those in the Flemish region, is also an opportunity for Muslims in Belgium to improve the quality of religious teaching.

In the German context, the unity of all Muslim organizations is necessary to foster a better relationship with the government. Unifying Islam as a public corporation in accordance with German regulation would allow the government to better communicate with and provide assistance to Muslim communities. Some efforts have been made including the establishment of *Coordinatesrat der Muslime* (KRM) and *Islamrat* (IR) but so far, they have not fulfilled the requirements of the government.

The German government, in general, does not have strict regulations governing the issue of mosques and *imams* yet so that Muslims can freely regulate their religious lives. Although German government has built some *imam* schools which is offered in four university centers in Münster-Osnabrück, Frankfrurt-Greissen, Tübingen, and Erlangen–Nürnberg,[71] the bill that requires

imams to utilize German as Friday sermon language has not been officially passed. The use of German, both in Friday sermons and as an introductory language for Islamic studies in schools, is a positive development for Muslim life in Germany. With this kind of awareness, it is expected that Muslims, especially the younger generation, have the ability to combine Islamic teachings and German culture. Moreover, the non-recognition of Islam as a public corporation also has several positive benefits for Muslims, such as the absence of government interference in Muslims' religious lives, including in the content of Friday sermon.

The above opportunities, however, do not free the Muslims from challenges. Within the context of Germany, for example, the German government and Caucasian society demand Muslims integrate in the form of assimilation, namely the fusion of Islam and Muslims into German culture. The second and third generation of German Muslims and even for those who have held German citizens cannot fully understand this concept. Muhammad Hajjaj, a Muslim of Palestinian descent explained:

> *I was born here and I now have German citizenship. ... Our point is now to motivate the Muslim community to participate in society because the process of integration is finished in my opinion, it is finished. Because we are living now in the third or fourth generation in Germany.*[72]

In our view, however, the integration in the form of adopting Western language has been completed, but some other forms of Western culture may not finish yet. For this reason, there needs to be a formulation of assimilation of Islam in the West-European context, which could form a European Islam. This could take the lesson developed in Indonesian Islam, in the concept of *Islam Nusantara* or *Islam Berkemajuan*, which consider the local context in its interpretation of the religion.

CONCLUSION

The above explanation illustrates the complex issues faced by European Muslim communities, especially in European Union member countries. Based on the above discussion, we could draw some conclusions and recommendations to foster a better relationship between (migrant) Muslims and Caucasian Europeans in the future. *First*, Muslims and Islam, in general, have a long history in EU countries which, in turn, offers many reciprocal social and economic benefits. On the one hand, Muslims receive the advantages of

being high-paid workers in many European businesses, but on the other hand, European countries also reap the benefits of accelerating economic growth.

Second, the discrimination and Islamophobia faced by Muslims should not be seen as merely as the fault of Westerners, but also that of Muslims. Most (Caucasian) Westerners tend to see Muslims as a threat which could dominate and endanger European culture, and most Muslims tend to be very strict and conservative in applying Islamic teachings. The widespread (violent) extremism in Muslim societies in the last decade has created an atmosphere of danger for Europeans. In return, the flourishing of far-right movements among Europeans jeopardizes the existence of Muslims in Europe.

Third, there are many opportunities for both sides to help solve the problem. There is no one-size-fits-all strategy to unravel the complex issues in the above-discussed EU countries. On the Muslim side, they could consider a more effective strategy to integrate their identity with the European cultures in which they reside, such as language acquisition and observing general cultural norms. For EU countries, they could issue more policies which are less discriminative and hostile to minority communities, including religious outfits, places of worship, and access to housing.

Fourth, as one of the underlying issues of Muslims in the West is Muslim-Christian relations, interreligious dialogue should be fostered. Discussion on the common grounds of both religions could be a starting point to build mutual trust, which could later be developed to include more difficult issues. Austria and Germany, for example, have been involved several times in interfaith dialogues with Indonesia through the Indonesia-Austria or Indonesia-Germany Interfaith Dialogue Symposium. Unfortunately, the involvement of the Muslim communities in these dialogue programs was insignificant because they were mostly dominated by academics from prominent universities. In the future, some universities and centers of religious studies in the above countries could open interreligious dialogue study programs so that universities could become places for dissemination of inclusive religious values.

Interreligious dialogue cannot instantly resolve conflicts, but as Rene Garfunkel argued, the dialogue is an important step to change attitudes and lay the foundation for building peace in the future. The interfaith gathering itself did not resolve the conflict, but it was an important step toward changing attitudes about the issues and may have helped lay the groundwork for cooperatively building peace in the future.[73]

ENDNOTES

1 This paper resulted from a research project funded by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs entitled "Social Challenges of Muslim Minorities in European Countries" in 2013. Realizing that there have been some changes in the Islamic landscape in those countries since our field research, we follow the development of Muslim communities in Europe in general to provide a more up-to-date data for this article. We wish to thank the former Ambassador of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia to the Kingdom of Belgium, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the European Union in Brussels, Mr. Arif Havas Oegroseno, and the former Counsellor for Information, Social Culture and Public Diplomacy at the same embassy, Mr. Riaz JP. Saehu, for all their assistances during our field research in different countries in Europe.

2 Pew Research Center, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population: Muslims are Projected to increase as a share of Europe's Population – even with no future migration*, US: Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures project, 2017, p. 4.

3 Pew Research Center, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population...*, p. 5.

4 Michael Lipka and Conrad Hackett, "Why Muslims are the world's fastest-growing religious group" in https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/06/why-muslims-are-the-worlds-fastest-growing-religious-group/ (retrieved 25 June 2020).

5 Aristotle Kallis, Sara Zeiger, Bilgehan Öztürk, *Violent Radicalisation & Far-Right Extremism in Europe*, Istanbul: Hedayah & SETA, 2018.

6 Marginalization is both a condition and a process that prevents individuals and groups from full participation in social, economic, and political life enjoyed by the wider society. Further see Niyara Alakhunova (et al), *Defining Marginalization: An Assessment Tool*. US: Elliott School of International Affairs of the George Washington University, 2015, p. 2.

7 On the definition of discrimination, see endnote no 43.

8 *Qishâsh* is one of several forms of punishment in traditional Islamic criminal jurisprudence. In traditional Islamic law (sharia), the doctrine of *qishâsh* provides for a punishment analogous to the crime.

9 Alwi Shihab, *Examining Islam in the West: Addressing Accusations and Correcting Misconceptions*, Jakarta: Gramedia, 2011, pp. 11-12.

10 Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 216.

11 Robert J. Pauly, Jr, *Islam in Europe: Integration or Marginalization?* UK: Routledge, 2004, p. 2.

12 Multiculturalism refers to an idea of integration without assimilation, or more precisely those deemed to be immigrant/migrant not having to give up facets of their culture (notably, clothing, religion and language) in order to be accepted as part of the national fabric. See Arzu Merali, "Countering Islamophobia in the UK" in Ian Law (et al), *Countering Islamophobia in Europe*. UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018, p. 44.

13 Michael Emmerson (ed.), *Interculturalism: Europe and its Muslims in search of*

sound societal models. Brussels: Center for European Policy Studies, 2011, p. 1.

14 Bikhu Parekh, "Is Islam a Threat to Europe's Multicultural Democracies?" in Krzysztof Michalski *Religion in the New Europe*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006, pp. 199-120.

15 Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez. *Europhian Islamophobia Report*. (UK: Routledge, 2020) and *Countering Islamophobia in Europe* co-edited by Ian Law (et al), (Palgrave MacMillan 2018)

16 Hafez, "Public and Scholarly Debates on the Comparison of Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism in Germany." (*Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2019). Also see Karolin Machtans Racism Is Not an Opinion" Muslim Responses to Pegida and Islamophobia in Germany (*German Politics & Society*, Vol. 34, No. 4, Winter 2016).

17 Pew Research Center, *An Uncertain Road: Muslims and the Future of Europe*. US: Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures project, 2005.

18 Bichara Khader, "Muslims in Europe: The Construction of a "Problem" at https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/articles/muslims-in-europe-the-construction-of-a-problem/ (retrieved on 1 July 2020)

19 "Muslims in Europe: The Construction of a "Problem" in https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/ en/articles/muslims-in-europe-the-construction-of-a-problem/ (retrieved on 20 June 2020)

20 http://www.euro-islam.info/country-profiles/austria/ (retrieved on 11 June 2020)

21 Corporation" in the Austrian context connotes a legal public entity. The recognition of Islam as a public entity, therefore, provided Muslims with guarantees to publicly practice Islam, establish mosques and other religious institutions, as well as self-govern internal matters.

22 Pew Research Center, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population...*, p. 29.

23 Pew Research Center, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population...*, p. 105.

24 Thomas Schmidinger and Alev Çakir, "Austria" in Jørgen S. Nielsen (et al), *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, Vol. 6*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, pp. 50-57.

25 Farid Hafez, "Paradigm shift in Austria's security politics vis-à-vis Islam" at https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/paradigm-shift-in-austria-s-security-politics-vis-à-vis-islam/1561316 (retrieved 1 July 2020).

26 Nadia Fadil, "Belgium" in Jørgen S. Nielsen (et al), *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, Volume*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, p. 67.

27 Pew Research Center, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population...*, p. 29.

28 Sarah Teich, *Islamic Radicalization in Belgium*. Brussels: International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), 2016, p. 9.

29 Nadia Fadil, "Belgium"..., p. 67.

30 Interview with Semsettin Ugurlu, the Vice President of EMB in Brussels, on 23 October 2013.

31 Joel S. Fatzer & J. Christopher Soper, *Muslims and the State in Britain, France and Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 99.

32 Pew Research Center, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population...*, p. 29.

[33] Mathias Rohe, "Germany", in Jørgen S. Nielsen (et al), *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, Vol. 2*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, p. 217.

[34] Conversation with Andreas Ismail Mohr, a scholar of Freie Universität Berlin on 31 October 31 2013.

[35] Albrecht Fuess, "Islamic Religious Education in Western Europe: Models of Integration and the German Approach" in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 27(2) 2007: 215-239. DOI: 10.1080/13602000701536166.

[36] Sergio Carrera and Joanna Parkin, "The Place of Religion in. European Union Law and Policy: Competing Approaches and Actors inside the European Commisson" as *Religare Working Document,* No.1, September 2010.

[37] Yudi Latif, *Negara Paripurna: Historisitas, Rasionalitas, dan Aktualitas Pancasila*, Jakarta: Gramedia, 2012, p. 98.

[38] Yudi Latif, *Negara Paripurna: Historisitas, Rasionalitas...,* p. 98.

[39] Interview with Carla Aminah Baghajati, the spokesperson of IGGiÖ in Austria on 14 October 2013.

[40] Interview with Carla Aminah Baghajati in Austria on 14 October 2013.

[41] Interview with Salim Mujkanovic, an imam of Islamic Center at Vienna on 14 October 2013.

[42] Interview with Syemsettin Ugurlu in Brussels on 23 October 2013.

[43] Interview with Muhammad Hajjaj, the spokesperson of Palestinian community in Germany on 21 October 2013.

[44] Interview with Muhammad Hajjaj in Germany on 21 October 2013.

[45] Further see American Psychological Association at https://www.apa.org/topics/racism-bias-discrimination/types-stress (retrieved 19 April, 2021).

[46] https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/explainers/islamophobia-europe (retrieved 23 April 2021)

[47] Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez (eds), *European Islamophobia Report 2018*. Istanbul: SETA, 2018, p. 91, 144, and 372.

[48] Pew Research Center, *A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World.* US: Pew Forum, 2019, p. 94.

[49] Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilizing and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat – real or invented – and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/rights/definition of a constructed 'we'.

[50] Jennifer A. Selby, "Defining the "*Hijâb*" in Jocelyne Cesari, *The Oxford,* p. 715.

[51] Jocelyne Cesari, *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam,* UK: Oxford University Press, 2014.

[52] Michael Emerson, *Interculturalism: Europe and its Muslims in search of sound societal model*. CEPS: Brussels, 2011, pp. 9-11.

[53] Interview with Ummu Selime, a public relation of Islamic Federation in Vienna (IFV), on 14 October 2013.

[54] Zeynep Sezgin, "Islam and Muslim Minorities in Austria: Historical Context and Current Challenges of Integration" in *Journal of International Migration and Integration* (2019), p. 881. DOI.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0636-3

55 Interview with Carla Amina Baghajati in Austria on 14 October 2013.
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59 FGD with Indonesian Muslim Community in Belgium on 25 October 2013.
60 FGD with Indonesian Muslim Community in Belgium on 25 October 2013.
61 Interview with Mohamad Ali, the imam of De Koepel Mosque Antwerpen, on 26 October 2013.
62 Interview with Mohamad Ali, the imam of De Koepel Mosque Antwerpen, on 26 October 2013.
63 Interview with Julie Pascoet, a policy officer of ENAR, in Brussels on 23 October 2013.
64 Interview with Mohamad Ali, the imam of De Koepel mosque Antwerpen, on 26 October 2013.
65 Interview with Muhammad Hajjaj in Germany on 21 October 2013.
66 "Germany anti-Islamic protests: Biggest Pegida march ever in Dresden as rest of Germany shows disgust with lights-out". *The Independent* (retrieved 16 June 2020).
67 Marian Burchardt and Ines Michalowski, "After Integration: Islam, Conviviality and Contentious Politics in Europe" in Marian Burchardt and Ines Michalowski (eds.), *After Integration Islam, Conviviality and Contentious Politics in Europe*. Germany: Springer VS, 2015, p. 4.
68 Elspeth Guild, Sergio Carrera, and Katharina Eisele (eds.), *Social benefit and Migration: A Contested Relationship and Policy Challenge in the EU*, Brussels: Center for European Policy Studies, 2013, pp. 128-129.
69 Interview with Carla Amina Baghajati in Austria on 14 October 2013.
70 Interview with Carla Amina Baghajati in Austria on 14 October 2013.
71 https://www.dw.com/en/german-universities-enroll-to-school-imams/a-6113372 (retrieved 23 April 2021)
72 Interview with Carla Amina Baghajati in Austria on 14 October 2013.
73 Renee Garfinkel, "What Works? Evaluating Interfaith Dialogue Programs," *USIP Special Report,* No. 123, July 2004, pp. 2-5.

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