UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

HEARING ON
ANTI-MUSLIM POLICIES AND BIAS IN EUROPE

Wednesday, February 9, 2022

10:30 a.m.

Virtual Hearing

P A R T I C I P A N T S

USCIRF COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Nadine Maenza, Chair
Nury Turkel, Vice Chair
Frederick A. Davie
Khizr Khan
Sharon Kleinbaum

C O N T E N T S

P R O C E E D I N G S

CHAIR MAENZA: Good morning and thank you for attending the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's hearing on Anti-Muslim Policies and Bias in Europe. I would also like to thank our distinguished witnesses for joining us.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, or USCIRF, is an independent, bipartisan U.S. government advisory body created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, or IRFA.

The Commission uses international standards to monitor freedom of religion or belief abroad and makes policy recommendations to the U.S. government.

Today, USCIRF exercises its statutory authority under IRFA to convene this virtual hearing. USCIRF works to monitor and promote religious freedom in a diverse array of countries and contexts.

This diversity calls for a variety of tools and approaches as different contexts present

different landscapes for the success and failure of religious freedom efforts.

For today's hearing, we will be focusing on government policies and societal biases that negatively impact Muslims' religious freedom and related rights in European states and how the U.S. government should address these issues.

In March 2021, United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, informed the Human Rights Council that institutional suspicion of Muslims has reached epidemic proportions.

Depending on the context, anti-Muslim bias targets individuals on numerous grounds, including religion or belief, race, nationality, gender, migratory status, and ethnic origin, resulting in the intersection and confluence of discrimination based on religion or belief and other grounds.

In Europe, surveys show four in ten citizens hold unfavorable views towards Muslims, and acts of discrimination and violence target Muslim communities in the region that are on the

rise.

This bias manifests through laws, discrimination in public institutions, prejudice through the immigration process, online harassment, and violent attacks, which peaked in 2017 across 29 member states of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE, and disproportionately impacted Muslim women.

Some governments across Europe have also adopted legislation that discriminates against Muslims. Claims of countering extremism have been used to justify the closure of mosques in France and Austria and to ban the construction of new minarets in Switzerland.

Attacks on and the desecration of Muslim properties, including mosques, community centers, homes and businesses, have been reported in Norway, France, Greece, Latvia, Georgia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In Denmark, children born into immigrant, often Muslim, neighborhoods--labeled "ghettos" by the Danish government--must be separated 25 hours

each week from their families to learn Danish values.

The governments of France and Austria have identified "Islamist separatism" and "political Islam" as national security concerns without clearly defining those terms or requiring a connection to the use or advocacy of violence.

The OSCE defines hate crimes as criminal acts motivated by bias or prejudice towards particular groups. Hate crimes take the form of individual threats, attacks on property, attacks causing physical injury, and, in the most grievous cases, murder.

The OSCE notes that in some countries anti-Muslim hate crimes have become an everyday occurrence. Public intolerance against Muslims has increased the fear of Muslim communities, and, as a result, mosques and Muslim community centers are increasingly likely to securitize against threats from far right and nationalist groups.

Intolerance against Muslims has negatively impacted--has negative implications for their

freedom of religion or belief, and it is the responsibility of governments to protect their Muslim communities' human rights and dignity.

I will now turn it over to Vice Chair Turkel to discuss some of the key issues that intersect with anti-Muslim policies in Europe.

VICE CHAIR TURKEL: Good morning. Thank you very much, Chair Maenza.

I'd like to join in welcoming you all to today's hearing. As Chair Maenza has highlighted, many European governments have adopted restrictive discriminatory legislation that violates the religious freedom of members of their Muslim communities.

Discriminatory restriction on the ways in which individuals choose to worship, observe, practice or teach their religion or belief are contradictory to international human rights standards.

States must take steps to purposefully address both international indirect violation of freedom of religion or belief.

Anti-Muslim bias in Europe is grounded in centuries of essentializing discourse that paints Islam and Muslim communities as Europe's--or more generally the West's--existential "other." Yet, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and other attacks thereafter committed in the name of Islam marked a significant shift.

Many European governments started adopting policies that institutionalized suspicion of Muslims. For example, in the UK, the government adopted a counter-extremism strategy that included a "Prevent Approach"--quote-unquote.

The goal of the approach was to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. Muslim communities have stated that the policy includes draconian and counterproductive provisions that curtail civil liberties, challenge Muslims' participation in public life, continue to discriminate openly against Muslim communities, and encourage spying on one another.

The 2015 migrant crisis in Europe further worsened long-standing issues of anti-Muslim

intolerance and discrimination. The U.N. Special Rapporteur notes that European states have denied citizenship to Muslim applicants, alleging the incompatibility of Muslim practices with national values.

Indeed, some European governments utilize vaguely defined concerns over Muslim communities' ability to integrate as grounds for discrimination.

The Special Rapporteur notes that in Hungary and Slovakia, leaders claim publicly that Muslim migrants are "criminals," "impossible to integrate," "not refugees but Muslim invaders."

Recently, the spokesperson for Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orban, stated that the potential accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the European Union presents a challenge in terms of integrating a country with two million Muslims.

This discourse--labeling even Europe's indigenous Muslims as foreign--mirrors narratives Yugoslav politicians used to justify genocide of Muslim Bosnians in the 1990s. There should be no space for such a rhetoric from government

officials.

Now, I'll turn the floor back to Chair Maenza to introduce our witnesses.

Thank you.

CHAIR MAENZA: Thanks so much, Vice Chair Turkel.

Well, we are fortunate to now be able to hear from Ambassador Rashad Hussain, the recently confirmed Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom.

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Good morning. I'd like to thank the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom for hosting this hearing and inviting me to participate.

I value USCIRF's work and their longstanding partnership with the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom in advancing freedom of religion or belief around the world.

Monitoring and combating anti-Muslim hatred has always been a part of my office's mandate. We document cases of violence and

discrimination against Muslims around the world in our international religious freedom report.

We also engage diplomatically and programmatically to address the overt and underlying drivers of these issues. Anti-Muslim hatred, of course, does not occur in a vacuum. It is often part of a political context that includes political leaders and parties that espouse hatred and intolerance, laws and policies that unduly restrict religious freedom, the denial of justice and accountability resulting in a culture of impunity, and unchecked societal intolerance towards members of religious minority communities.

Our focus today is on anti-Muslim hatred, but other forms of racism, xenophobia and intolerance, including antisemitism and anti-immigrant discrimination, flourish under these conditions as well, which ultimately undermines peace and security.

In recent years, we've seen how anti-Muslim hatred has often corresponded with other societal trends, including the rise of populism and

nationalism, and an increase in xenophobic language and political rhetoric.

Muslims along with Jews and other religious and ethnic minority groups face growing threats of violence from racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism, or what we call REMVE.

REMVE individuals and groups are motivated by intolerance and ethno-supremacist ideologies, particularly white supremacy.

While these violent extremist actors are diffuse in their organization, they capitalize on societal grievances by way of technology to further their hatred and intolerant ideas.

Discrimination, misinformation and stereotyping, both in online and offline media, contribute to the rise of anti-Muslim hatred.

In my capacity as Ambassador-at-Large, I look forward to working with European governments at the highest levels to address all these issues.

The witnesses we will hear from today are bridge builders and problem solvers. They understand how anti-Muslim hatred infringes on

religious freedom. They recognize that the consequences of policies and actions born of this hatred stunts the development of safe, inclusive, and equitable societies.

I look forward to hearing their thoughts on how we can collectively stem the disturbing tide of anti-Muslim hatred we are witnessing in Europe. We must determine how to push back on hurtful ideologies and actions and to find constructive ways to build communities, not only free of fear but full of hope.

Thank you so much.

CHAIR MAENZA: We are also fortunate to have an impressive panel of experts to testify at this hearing, and you can read their full biographies at uscirf.gov, but I'll do a quick introduction of them and their titles.

First we'll have Christie Edwards, who is the Deputy Acting Head of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or the OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human

Rights, the ODIHR.

And with her will be also Sabrina Saoudi, an adviser on intolerance against Muslims, also at the OSCE, ODIHR.

And then we'll have Rim-Sarah Alouane, a constitutional legal scholar.

And Zara Mohammed, the Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain.

And Dr. Peter Kreko, the Director of Policy Capital Institute.

And Jasmin Mujanovic, political scientist and analyst of Southeast Europe, co-host of the Sarajevo Calling Podcast.

So, first, we will be begin with Christie Edwards and Sabrina Saoudi.

MS. EDWARDS: Thank you, Chair Maenza, and dear distinguished commissioners, thank you so much for the opportunity to speak in today's hearing.

My name is Christie Edwards. I'm the Deputy Head of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department at ODIHR, which provides support, assistance, and expertise to participating states

and civil society to promote democracy, rule of law, human rights and tolerance and non-discrimination.

In the OSCE, 57 participating states recognize that manifestations of discrimination and intolerance, such as anti-Muslim hatred, racism, xenophobia, and hate crimes, threaten the security of individuals, communities, and societies, and may give rise to wider-scale conflict and violence that undermine international stability and security across the region.

And so for this reason, OSCE participating states strongly condemn racial and ethnic hatred, anti-Muslim hatred, antisemitism, xenophobia and discrimination, as well as persecution on religious or belief grounds, and have committed to combat these phenomena in all their forms.

However, numerous hate crimes against members of these and other minority communities can be seen across the OSCE region as contributions to ODIHR's annual hate crime report show.

Additionally, civil society organizations

addressing anti-Muslim hatred, racism, and xenophobia are also often themselves victims of hate crimes by association. And in some participating states, they also report that intolerance and discrimination has led to an increasingly hostile environment for their work, cuts in government funding, and other ways of impeding their work.

So there is definitely a need to tap further into the potential of dialogue and coalition building between governments, faith groups, and civil society, and, in this light, ODIHR convenes regular international events to address hate crimes, intolerance and discrimination.

And in all of these events, ODIHR takes a comprehensive approach, bringing together stakeholders from different sectors and different communities to work together on a wide range of tolerance and non-discrimination issues.

OSCE participating states have committed to take steps to prevent and address intolerance

and discrimination while applying a "common approach" to address all acts and manifestations of hate, while still acknowledging the "uniqueness of the manifestations and historical background of each form."

Different types of intolerance have their own unambiguous etymologies and rationale. In order to address the underlying biases and "othering" that underpins many forms of discrimination, we need to be aware of their similarities, their interconnected developments, and their constant intersection.

To give you an example, the "international Jewish conspiracy" has joined the "Muslim conspiracy" in the minds of many followers of the far right. Both forms of racism go hand-in-hand today and need to be acknowledged and addressed.

So in order to address this, ODIHR has developed a collection of resources and programs to raise awareness about discrimination and hate crimes and intolerance against Muslims and other forms of intolerance.

Through advising on policy and the training of law enforcement personnel and educators, ODIHR works to build the capacity of governments in preventing and responding to this problem. ODIHR remains at the disposal of OSCE participating states, civil society and other actors in supporting the implementation of their commitments to counter intolerance and discrimination.

I'd now like to pass the floor over to my colleague, Sabrina Saoudi, who is our Adviser on Combating Intolerance Against Muslims, to give you a quick overview of ODIHR's tools and resources to address intolerance against Muslims.

Thank you.

MS. SAOUDI: Thank you, Christie.

Chair Maenza, dear distinguished commissioners, thank you for inviting ODIHR to speak with you today. ODIHR's annual hate crime report shows that Muslims and their property are often targeted, and that Muslims can be the victims of racial/ethnic/religious profiling.

In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic has added new layers of complexity to the already difficult task of addressing discrimination and hate crime, exacerbating it by introducing new forms of intolerant discourse and the scapegoating of minorities.

Toxic narratives espoused by state and non-state actors in certain participating states have emerged, blaming Muslims for spreading the virus. Such negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence based on religion or belief combined with its intersectional reach, including across gender, race, ethnicity and nationality, have affected the ability of individuals and communities to manifest their freedom of religion or belief, particularly in public.

Women are also victims of pandemic-related gender-based hate crimes, with single and multiple bias motivations in which gender intersects with race/ethnicity and religion.

The safety of Muslim communities is the

responsibility of governments, and ODIHR can help governments confront the specific challenges posed by intolerance against Muslims, as well as to build robust partnerships with Muslim communities on matters of security.

To address this issue, ODIHR has published a practical guide on "Understanding Anti-Muslim Hate Crime and Addressing the Security Needs of Muslim Communities." The guide offers practical steps--ten practical steps--that governments, in cooperation with Muslim communities, can take to prevent and respond to anti-Muslim hate crimes and better address the security needs of these communities, as well as to discuss the security challenges that Muslims and Muslim communities face.

In addition to the Security Guide, ODIHR reports on hate crimes annually in line with its mandate and official reporting by the OSCE's 57 participating states. The report shows that anti-Muslim rhetoric often associates Muslims with terrorism and extremism, or portrays the presence

of Muslim communities as a threat to national identity.

Muslims are often portrayed as a monolithic group whose culture is incompatible with human rights and democracy.

I would also like to mention that ODIHR is in the process of updating the 2011 Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination Against Muslims: Addressing Islamophobia through Education, which was developed to support educators in countering intolerance and discrimination against Muslims.

They are intended for a wide audience, including education policymakers, officials, teacher trainers, teachers, principals, staff in teacher unions and professional associations, and, of course, members of NGOs.

Finally, I would like to make a few recommendations on how the U.S. and other OSCE participating states can support ODIHR's work:

First, by promoting and encouraging dialogue through coalition-building activities in

Europe and in the U.S. Indeed, ODIHR offers regular trainings and capacity building to law enforcement, prosecutors, and civil society on hate crimes, including to address intolerance against Muslims.

Next, since ODIHR only received 2020 official data specifically on hate crimes against Muslims from 14 OSCE participating states, the U.S. could also encourage other participating states to systematically report on hate crimes, including hate crimes against Muslims.

Key observations for other OSCE participating states on their hate crime data is also available online.

A longer version of our remarks has been submitted for the written record. Thank you for your time, and we both look forward to your questions.

CHAIR MAENZA: Thank you so much for that testimony to both of you, and I want to let those who are watching know that our website will have all of their testimonies--uscirf.gov--and we have a

special page under "Events," for this hearing, and we'll have the video of this entire event, as well as all their testimony for you to be able to read.

And next we're going to go to Rim-Sarah Alouane. You can begin.

MS. ALOUANE: Thank you.

Ambassador Rashad Hussain, Madam Chair Nadine Maenza, Mr. Vice Chair Nury Turkel, honorable members of this Commission, I would like to express my gratitude for giving me the opportunity to testify before your Commission today.

As a French legal scholar and a Ph.D. candidate in comparative law at the Universite Toulouse I Capitole in southwest France, I have been working on these concerning issues from a legal perspective for quite some time.

I will present before you my findings regarding the legal treatment of Islam and Muslims in France and the impact of legislation and policies on French Muslims and on civil liberties.

France is home to one of the largest

Muslim populations in western Europe, comprising around seven percent of the French population and making Islam the second-most practiced religion in the country. For your information, statistics based on race, religious affiliation and ethnicity with a very few exceptions are prohibited under French law. So those really are estimates.

Since the arrival of an important Muslim population in metropolitan France after decolonization, France has struggled with concerns over its national identity and culture. The changing interpretation of "laicite," a concept that has been so misunderstood both in France and abroad, which was first intended to guarantee a strict neutrality and religious freedom and freedom of conscience, has led to the point where visibility of religion in the public square, particularly Islam, is seen as a threat to the so-called "cultural and republican values."

This has resulted in a toughening of the legislative narrative on religious signs, for instance, the ban of conspicuous religious signs as

code in 2004 in reality targeting the wearing of the hijab. The full-face covering ban in 2010 in reality targeting the wearing of the niqab. Local burkini bans from summer 2016, which eventually were overturned, the anti-separatism law on August 2021, and more recently last week, in January 2022, while ironically debating the law on democratization of sports, the French Senate adopted an amendment prohibited the wearing of conspicuous religious signs, in reality targeting female Muslim athletes wearing a headscarf during sports competition.

The law has not been adopted yet. The amendment will most likely be dropped by the National Assembly, but it has contributed to the spread of a toxic conversation around the presence of visible Muslim people, and especially Muslim women.

Most political parties have joined forces to essentially make Muslims, especially Muslim women, but not only, disappear from public squares using the tenuous grounds of public order

disturbance and violation of laicite. The weaponization of laicite has not only allowed in public discourse to constantly question Muslim loyalty to France and debate whether or not Muslims can be good French citizens on both a societal level by preventing them to be full part of the fabric of the country, as well as an economical work front. For instance, private companies are now more and more inclined to apply a prohibition of religious signs in the workplace.

The normalization of anti-Muslim bigotry by politicians from across the political spectrum is not only becoming a threat to French republican values of liberty, equality and fraternity, which are constitutionally guaranteed principles, but increasingly a threat to national security and with increasing tolerance of de facto discrimination, the creation of a second and lesser form of citizenship.

However, I believe there are possible models of reconciliation. Of course, there are differences of opinion between France and the

United States regarding the integration, assimilation and socialization of minority communities, particularly Muslims.

In some areas, we would never find common ground, but in others we may find ways not only of understanding each other but learning how to reach a goal both countries purport to share: a well-adjusted, culturally integrated Muslim population.

As someone intimately familiar with the experience of growing up Muslim in France, I can attest to the fact that French Muslims want to be French, consider themselves to be French, and have no issues in combining their religious identity with their French one even if their compatriots think this is an impossibility.

French Muslims want nothing more than to be able to contribute to French society in ways that benefit the neighbors, but to do so in ways that do not force them to leave behind who they are.

Without such accommodation, French Muslims will continue to feel like strangers in their own

land, and history is replete with examples of what happens to populations who are constantly marginalized. I believe we still have time to act.

And so my recommendations. I believe that a joint commission featuring Americans and French that meets on a regular basis, invites experts with a wide spectrum of approaches and ideas, interviews with Muslim community leaders, activists, experts, and an honest attempt at introspection could start a chain of events that breaks the current logjam and moves beyond today's polarization.

We need to move these issues away from political campaigns and into reasonable policymaking. Were such a commission to be formed, I would be honored to be part of it.

I appreciate your time and thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

CHAIR MAENZA: Thanks so much.

And now we're going to go to Zara Mohammed.

MS. MOHAMMED: Hi, everyone, and distinguished guests, chair, thank you so much to

the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom for the opportunity to speak with you all today.

I am Zara Mohammed, Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain. We are the largest and most diverse Muslim representative body in the UK, and what I really want to share with you all, I guess, is my testimony in three parts, which is what does what we would call Islamophobia or anti-Muslim bias look like? What are we talking about? What is the impact? And what is our recommendations of what we propose and you should do moving forward, but also what has really worked for us.

When we talk about this topic, it's deeply personal to myself as a visibly Muslim woman because when I was elected the first female Secretary-General to my organization in its 24-year history, whilst the congratulations was significant, I was belittled and undermined and Islamophobic tropes were a sign to me that she's just a puppet, she's not really going to be able to

lead, who's going to let her be in charge of the organization, whilst my mandate came from a majority male affiliated base.

So what I'm getting at is the consequence and impacts of Islamophobia transcends all parts of society. The discourse comes right from the top from our political leaders all the way to our neighbors, colleagues, friends, so on and so forth. And when we say what does it look like, you know, it's not just the physical and verbal abuse that the Muslim woman faces when she's taking public transport or at the workplace, but it's the institutional nature of the problem that is the most difficult to overcome, and that is about the correlation of Islamophobia and social mobility, and my ability as a Muslim woman to obtain employment, my ability as a young Muslim to have opportunities beyond what the society says I can and can't do, or what job applications will allow me to do.

And what we found from our British Muslim experience, and to give you context, I'm a third-

generation British Muslim, many of us now are very educated, but when it comes to employment, our parliamentary when you poll these communities found that Muslim women are the most marginalized when it comes to obtaining employment.

That is profound, and I myself with a law degree sent hundreds of applications before being able to actually obtain employment, you know. So the consequences are real, and I think about that socioeconomic impact to our communities who are already part of minorities and marginalized in that regard.

47 percent of all religious related hate crimes targeted Muslim communities. Now in Britain, we have around three million Muslims. 50 percent of those are under the age of 25. So whether we like it or not, those young people, irrespective of their religiosity, are impacted by anti-Muslim bias. Islamophobia is pervasive.

And it goes all the way to the top where our politicians remark that Muslim women who wear the burqas are like letter boxes, you know. It

goes all the way to the top when political decision-makers are trivializing, when hate speech is rampant, and we feel that and hear that across the globe.

So what Islamophobia looks like is most certainly sinister and ugly, but also in its institutional nature, it's so pervasive that it's difficult to say I am experiencing this. It's very difficult to create this tangible sense that why am I being denied opportunity or economic progress, but I know why. I absolutely know why. And when we talk about the consequences of this--the MCB has a center for media monitoring--we ask, well, why is it happening? You know, why are Muslims being treated so differently?

At the heart and the substantial cause of this is people's fears and misunderstanding of Islam and Muslims, this idea that we are this other force coming to impose our way, our rules, and, you know, my term, when I was elected, marked 20 years since 9/11 and 20 years since the War on Terror.

As a young person growing up in that,

Muslims became a suspect community, a community that was "othered," that was treated differently, and I recall when I put my headscarf on, attitudes and perceptions to me changed very markedly compared to when I wasn't wearing it.

And the surprising part of that is that 20 years on, what has really changed? Certainly there's more of us, but the politics, the discourse, and the media portrayal of Muslims remains consistently hostile, and our Center for Media Monitoring found that over, over 59 percent of all articles associated to Muslims were negative.

So if you hadn't met a Muslim--many people haven't--your reference point for someone like me is negative, and we know that when terrorist attacks happen, and the terrorist claims to be of a Muslim faith, we have a direct consequence on places of worship, hate crime increases, and we had two in the UK just last year. We're working with a local mosque. We said we've had to close services and classes because we're worried about people

attacking, vandalism, and most arson attacks, and notably who is the central victim? Muslim women.

Muslim women are the primary target and the most vulnerable when it comes to these instances. So the real world consequence is absolutely real, and the rising politically hostile climate that necessarily makes Muslim communities very anxious. What are we going to do? You know, what does it mean? Are we all going to be tarnished with the same brush? And so the media is really important, has a really important role in that perception.

And, finally, and my third point in terms of, well, what are we going to do about it, or what have we been doing about it, and at the MCB, you could say that this is a twofold. On the political side, it is so central that we have a definition, and the MCB supports the All-Parliamentary Group on British Muslims' definition that Islamophobia is rooted in racism.

It's a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.

And by that, we realize that association of Muslimness is sometimes the reason why people are attacked, and so when 9/11 happened, it was the Sikh community that actually was targeted majority, and so we know that, you know, being ethnically different can put you into that suspect lane.

So politics plays a central role in this conversation, and our wonderful decision-makers here really do have the power and the responsibility to wield that. This is something that you have to take on board because it's impacting our lives, our communities. So a definition goes really a long way because some people will say it doesn't exist. It's not a problem. It's just racism. It's just another issue that you have.

Police don't record this as a distinct type of racism or discrimination, and, therefore, the statistics don't reveal it. Hate crime reporting is another huge issue. Communities don't trust the system. They don't believe the system favors them, and in feedback and anecdotal evidence

that we have, they become suspect. So the victim who's telling you this is happening faces so much difficulty in conveying that point. They say, well, what's the point? Nothing is being done about it. Where are the stats to show the follow-up, what actually happened?

And the third point, on the political side, is political narrative and discourse is imperative. How you speak about this issue and how you challenge those who speak about this issue is really critical, and we've seen that with leadership all the way at the top all over the world, notably also in the States.

And then the second point that I would say to you is about community and a community-led approach and community-led engagement, those policies that you design impact our communities. But do you realize the disproportionate impact that some of those negative policies have?

Looking at policies, particularly security is a big one, so much legislation that's being passed through has really targeted Muslim

communities in such a negative way for such a long time.

But on a positive note, one project that I'd like to share with you is our Visit My Mosque project, in which we had 250 mosques across the country open their doors. While some were building walls, we were opening doors, and we were inviting the community in because our message is that Islamophobia, anti-Muslim hatred, is not a Muslim problem. It's a societal evil. And all of us have to have a partnership-led approach to tackle that.

And so for us, it's deeply important that communities get together to learn more about it, and you endorse that good work that's already happening. Communities are driving it forward.

So on that note, I give you my thanks for listening and hope to be an ally and a partner. Of course, we have to get through it together. It's certainly not going to be easy, but I'm very confident in spaces like this, we'll be able to make positive and meaningful change.

Thank you.

CHAIR MAENZA: Thanks so much.

And now we have Dr. Peter Kreko.

DR. KREKO: Dear Chairman, dear distinguished Commission members, dear guests, it's a great honor to talk to you today, and I'm the director of a think tank called Political Capital Institute, based in Budapest, also a senior fellow at the Center for European Policy that now exists in D.C., and both institutions are doing tremendous work on analyzing/revealing patterns of disinformation and also for countering that.

So I will talk in my cap at CEP as a social psychologist and political scientist and approach the topic through the lens of disinformation.

Hungary has a long history of cohabitation with the Muslim culture, as the central and southern parts of the country were conquered and ruled by the Ottoman Empire for more than 150 years between 1541 and 1699.

This did not automatically create, though, historical animosities, and mosques and Turkish

baths, for example, built during the Ottoman occupation, are regarded to be part of the national cultural heritage.

According to the data of Pew Research, Muslims comprise only 0.4 percent of Hungary's population, and other sources indicate even lower figures than that. Due to the lack of large visible Muslim community, hardly any Hungarians encounter Islam in their everyday lives and have deep knowledge of it.

Therefore, Islam was not present in the public discourse before the 2015 refugee crisis. The situation changed when an unprecedented number of asylum seekers passed through the country in 2015, mostly as a result of the Syrian conflict.

However, the number of migrants fell in Hungary considerably after the tightening of asylum regulation and the construction of the southern border fence in the fall of 2015. Still the topic remained on the political agenda.

Hungary's populist governing party Fidesz's campaign against immigration and Muslims

exploited the objection of Hungarian society to "others," which is traditionally strong in Central and Eastern European countries.

With the most centralized media system within the European Union, the Fidesz government was able to control the public discourse. Exploiting the political opportunity of the refugee crisis, the main enemies of the government have become refugees and migrants, and those actors, who, in the government's rhetoric, help, organize and bring them to Europe, such as NGOs, the European Union, or Hungarian-American billionaire and philanthropist George Soros.

Fidesz has been able to keep immigration on the top of the agenda via continuous state-sponsored disinformation campaigns based on hate-inciting rhetoric, conspiracy theories, fake news, and half-truths.

In the dominant narrative, Hungary was waging a two-front war: they defend Christian values by fighting against "Islamization" of Europe and protect traditional values against the liberal,

"post-1968" ideologies, such as multiculturalism, LGBTQ, and gender equality.

This narrative is often supported by references to Hungary's defensive war against the Ottoman Empire from the late 14th century and the Ottoman occupation between the 16th and 17th centuries: Hungary has again become the bulwark of Christian Europe and protects the continent from Muslim invasion in this narrative.

This rhetoric has helped to whip up xenophobic attitudes and conspiracy theories in the Hungarian public. According to the poll of Pew Research Center, 72 percent of Hungarians had unfavorable views of Muslims in 2016 compared to the EU median of 43 percent.

Hungarians were also more likely to consider refugees a burden or significant threat to the average European. However, according to more recent data from Pew, the animosity towards Muslims has dropped from 72 to 58 percent between 2016 and 2019, which is good news, as the topic became less important on the political agenda.

Also, the poll indicated that anti-Muslim sentiments in the central and eastern European region are not exceptionally high. Hostility towards Muslims was found to be higher in Slovakia, Poland, and the Czech Republic, as well.

Given that in these countries there are no considerable Muslim minorities, this is more a form of platonic xenophobia and Islamophobia, fear of the unknown, than real hatred based on real experiences.

Conspiracy theories sometimes spread from the official level also have a massive impact on public opinion. In a poll of Political Capital Institute back in 2018, a relative majority, 45 percent of the Hungarians, agreed that Muslim leaders have a secret plan to conquer Europe and make it an Arabic continent, and 48 percent agreed that Muslims want to enforce their culture upon us stealthily. 51 percent of the population agreed that George Soros is the driving force behind this process.

The anti-Muslim political campaigns and

disinformation campaigns in the public domain led to moral panic in the Hungarian population as well, leading to the misperception of average citizens, or tourists, or guest workers as illegal Muslim migrants.

According to Vivienne Walker and Lorant Gyori--the latter is a colleague of mine--in 2015, independent online media outlets have reported a total of 25 instances of misperception of non-Muslims as illegal Muslim refugees involving more than 250 victims. At least half of those "spotted" were Hungarian citizens. Not one of the individuals denounced had broken the law but usually had been reported to the police by the local population.

The Hungarian government's immigration policy is we can say luckily more practical than the rhetoric suggests: issuing residency permits from non-EU countries has accelerated in the last five years. More than 55,000 residency permits were issued only in 2020, in a country of ten million people. Most of them are guest workers,

not from Muslim countries, but a considerable proportion of them are coming from Muslim countries, including Iran, for example.

Prime Minister Viktor Orban's treatment of Islam, Muslims at official diplomatic events, strongly contradict the official narrative over this clash of the Muslim and Christian civilizations.

For instance, during the visit of Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi to Hungary back to 2015, Prime Minister Viktor Orban praised Islam for its honorable, spiritual, and intellectual contributions, and he described Muslims as representatives of a high civilization. He also mentioned and praised the sympathy between Hungarians and Arabs.

The foreign policy of the Hungarian government is "pragmatic" enough to build close ties to partly religious, partly secular authoritarian countries with dominantly Muslim cultural backgrounds, such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, in the

so-called Turkic Council where Hungary has an observer status.

Anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant rhetoric therefore is more of a political marketing product than a deep ideological and religious commitment.

The government had some recent highly problematic and troublesome statements that has been already referred to, as well, regarding Muslims. Recently, Viktor Orban spoke about Bosnia Herzegovina, the scene of the Yugoslav wars less than three decades ago, saying that integrating the country into the European Union could be a challenge because, as he said, "how we manage the security of a state in which two million Muslims live is a key issue for their security, too," referring to other EU member states.

Bosniak leaders condemned the statements and canceled the meeting with the Hungarian prime minister. Hungarian authorities have also failed to publicly condemn China's policies against Xinjiang and the persecution of its Uyghur population, but at least reluctantly supported some

soft EU sanctions against some Chinese officials over human rights abuses in the Xinjiang region.

Thank you very much for your attention and looking forward to any questions you might have.

CHAIR MAENZA: Thanks so much.

Now we will go to Jasmin Mujanovic.

DR. MUJANOVIC: Honorable members, thank you very much for hosting me today.

When we speak about the Bosnian Genocide, we refer to the systematic campaign of extermination and expulsions of non-Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, BiH, during the Bosnian War between 1992 and 1995, conducted by the Army of the Republika Srpska, the VRS, directed by the wartime leadership of the self-declared Republika Srpska entity, the RS, in particular, by its president, Radovan Karadzic, and organized and financed by the then regime in Serbia.

While Serb nationalist authorities targeted both Bosnia Herzegovina's Bosniak--that is formerly "Bosnian Muslim"--and Croat communities during this campaign, according to the

International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the ICTY, the Bosniak community accounted for nearly 65 percent of the approximately 100,000 total victims of the Bosnian War, and nearly 70 percent of all civilian deaths during the conflict.

As such, in most of the scholarly literature, the Bosnian Genocide refers to the specific genocidal campaign against the Bosniak community of Bosnia Herzegovina by the VRS.

To date, the ICTY and its residual mechanisms have only formally recognized the killings in Srebrenica in July 1995 as genocidal in nature. Other European courts have expanded the genocide label, however, to other killing sites in BiH by the VRS. And these, taken together with the ICTY decisions, gesture clearly also at the legal justifications for the Bosnian Genocide label.

As such, in both the scholarly and policy communities, there has been a growing normative shift towards adopting the term "Bosnian Genocide," or "Genocide in Bosnia," as a reflection of the

logical improbability that a genocide--the highest crime in international law--could be localized to a single municipality. That is Srebrenica.

The historical origins of the Bosnian Genocide are twofold. One stream concerns the immediate consequences of the hostile takeover of the Yugoslav political and security apparatus by the regime of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia between 1987 and 1991, and its use to carve out of the imploding Yugoslav federal state a so-called "Greater Serbia," an ethnically homogenous polity, which was to be created through the wholesale expulsion and extermination of non-Serbs from occupied territories in Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, and later Kosovo.

The ideological roots of that putsch and the accompanying genocide, however, are in the emergence of a millennialist strand of Serb nationalism after the First Serbian Uprising of 1804 through 1813, which became a significant feature of Serbian political thinking over the subsequent two centuries.

In the standard telling of this narrative, the 1389 Battle of Kosovo--a bloody but indecisive clash between the invading Ottomans and a coalition of Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, and Albanian lords--marked the metaphorical death of the medieval Serbian state.

Prince Lazar, who lead the Serbian forces, and his knight Milos Obilic, who in the oral tradition is said to have killed Ottoman Sultan Murad I on the battlefield but may have been a mythic figure invented after the fact, subsequently assumed Christ-like characters.

They became folk heroes who sacrificed themselves to preserve the Serbian people and their state in the kingdom of heaven even as it was conquered on Earth.

The prophecy of a second coming of the Serbian polity was then fulfilled in the 19th century as the Ottoman hold on the Balkans slipped and a modern Serbian state emerged and quickly began vying for political and military supremacy in the region.

Left unaddressed for both 19th and 20th century Serbian nationalists was the lingering problem of what were pejoratively referred to as "the Turks," that is, indigenous Muslim populations of the Balkans--primarily the Bosniaks of Bosnia Herzegovina and the Albanians of Kosovo.

In the century and a half between the First Serbian Uprising and the end of World War II, a de facto, if not always systematic, method took root to address this problem: local Muslim populations, whether Slavic, Albanian, or the remnants of the actual Turkish population, were to be expelled and/or exterminated wherever Serb nationalist authorities managed to establish even a momentary political claim.

In effect, Milosevic and Karadzic's activities in the 1990s sought then to "complete," quote-unquote, this process of extermination and expulsion, which had begun more than a century earlier.

Today, the Bosnian Genocide remains a central feature of the political discourses in

Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina's RS entity, but also increasingly among the Western far right.

The governments of Aleksandar Vucic and Milorad Dodik, in Serbia and the RS entity respectively, take a revisionist and/or negationist posture concerning these events when dealing with the international community.

Significant diplomatic efforts are undertaken to minimize the scale of the atrocities and to distance the current leadership from both entities, from both governments, from the political structures involved in the events at the time.

At home, however, genocide triumphalism and glorification are the norm. Perpetrators are valorized in virtually all mainstream media, by most government figures, and often provided with continued financial support by the governments, including the awarding of state honors.

In sum, the genocide is celebrated as a righteous and necessary crusade to create the RS entity by the regimes in Belgrade and Banja Luka.

Concurrently, the ongoing secessionist

efforts of the Dodik regime in Bosnia Herzegovina represent a major continuation of the logic and politics of the Bosnian Genocide. The failure by the Milosevic regime to successfully annex the Bosnian territories, which were eventually to be incorporated into the RS entity, has remained a source of revanchist fervor in both Belgrade and Banja Luka.

As in the 1990s, contemporary efforts to break up the Bosnia and Herzegovina state by these two governments are above all an immediate threat to the physical security of the Bosniak community in the RS entity, who even after the genocide today constitute approximately 13 percent of the population of the region, which is down from about 28 percent in 1991, just before the start of the war.

Given the continuing glorification of the Bosnian Genocide as a chief ideological pillar of both the Dodik and Vucic regimes, respectively, it is almost certain that any move towards realizing the secession of the RS entity would entail another

major round of atrocities against Bosniaks in the region and a return to violence in Bosnia Herzegovina and the wider Western Balkans, which in turn would represent a major security crisis for the whole of the Atlantic community.

Thank you very much for your time.

CHAIR MAENZA: Thanks so much--really wonderful testimonies this morning.

So we're really looking forward to this next portion, which will be our time of really asking some questions and having a fuller discussion. I'm going to go ahead and kick it off, and then I'll hand it off to my colleagues.

My first question is I was curious about this anti-Muslim bias in Europe. Does it present itself the same way against Sunnis, Shias, Ahmadiyyas, and is there an effort in these communities to support one another?

MS. EDWARDS: Sorry. Was that question directed toward--

CHAIR MAENZA: Yeah, to any of you actually so go right ahead, Ms. Edwards.

MS. EDWARDS: Okay. Actually, I am going to refer to Sabrina on that. She might have more details on our specific hate crime report than that we get regionally.

CHAIR MAENZA: You're mute, Sabrina.

MS. SAOUDI: Sorry about that.

CHAIR MAENZA: No worries.

MS. SAOUDI: Muslim minorities have been portrayed as non-belonging and wanting to separate themselves from the rest of society. Anti-Islamic narratives have been mostly characterized as followers, mostly affects security, demographic threat and polarization, democracy, threats to identity, gender inequality, innate violence, incomplete citizenship and homophobia.

There are many--Muslims are often seen as a monolithic group, as I mentioned. The Muslims, there are concerns that stereotypes and generalizations about Muslims are informing counterterrorism measures in Europe that restrict liberties for all and negatively impact Muslim communities. Rhetoric around security and

terrorism and the so-called "war on terror" can contribute to abuse or attacks against Muslims and spark discrimination even from institutions and authorities during appropriate or disproportionate application of counterterrorism procedures.

And whether you're Shia, Sunni, people see Muslims as a monolithic group and discriminate them because they are perceived as Muslims or are Muslims. So there is no real, let's say, discrimination against one minority within the Muslim communities, but more like, in Europe, at least, more like, yes, discriminations against Muslims as a group, monolithical group, related group--sorry.

CHAIR MAENZA: Okay. Anyone else want to add to that?

MS. MOHAMMED: Yes, I can add as well.

I think I completely agree with what Sabrina is saying. So the MCB actually represents both Sunni and Shia, and there is no distinction here. You know, if you're at the airport, if you're applying for a job, and it doesn't go, and

it's religiosity and that, but it's that perceived "Muslimness," so it could just be you're from a South Asian background, and you're perceived to be Muslim because, you know, you could be Indian, you could be Hindu. You could be--so you could be of another faith denomination. It's a blanket discrimination, you know.

And I think the way it manifests is so strongly rooted in society, in the institutions. When we talk about the institution in each of the problems, we're not saying that everybody is racist or bigoted. What we're saying is when racism, Islamophobia is brought to the institution, how does it deal with it? Does it just sweep it under the rug? And, you know, we had a very notable incident, an allegation of Islamophobic in the cabinet office by a very senior official, which I'm sure was headlined across the world.

So it does transcend. And to the average person, they don't really know if they're just perceiving someone to be Muslim, and in terms of absolutely there's definitely a concerted effort

with not just Muslim community groups but also minority groups. There's several pieces of legislation coming through the government right now--nationality and borders bill, for example, that's going to impact lots of different communities but especially ethnic minority communities.

There's definitely a lot of solidarity and a lot of shared learning, as well, because we're not the only community that's gone through this historically. We've had this with the Irish community as well. So I think there's definitely solidarity across society, but there is no distinction between anyone who is perceived to be Muslim.

CHAIR MAENZA: Thank you.

MS. ALOUANE: Pardon.

CHAIR MAENZA: Yes, please. Yes.

MS. ALOUANE: If I may weigh in, I absolutely agree with what Ms. Saoudi and Ms. Mohammed just said. And I will add on top of that, like I mentioned in my testimony, that in France,

we do not have statistics. They are prohibited, except in cases of academic research, but we don't have those numbers. So it's very hard to even evaluate the impact.

But we perceive them as being Muslim. So a monolithic group, even though Islam in France is very diverse because of the diversity of its people, and on top of that, we also, there is also this racist confusion with the, quote-unquote, of course "Arab. "The Arab" coming to invade Europe and be a threat to so-called Judeo-Christian values. Of course, throwing under the bus the Jews as well, and when you know the history of Europe, you know that this is extremely problematic. Right?

So, yes, perceived--they're perceived as a monolith--quote-unquote--"threat" that will destabilize the country and the preservation of the nation. So we don't do that distinction really, and we don't even have numbers to evaluate that.

CHAIR MAENZA: Thank you so much.

I was going to hand it to Vice Chair

Turkel and then open it to my colleagues.

VICE CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you very much.

I appreciate our witnesses sharing their wisdom and knowledge on this important issue that I care so much in my personal professional life because of my own background, being a member of an oppressed ethnic group.

I have two questions. One--this is for all of you. I wonder if you can share your thoughts on the source of the problem that we're dealing with in Europe? Is it a rise of fascism? Is it people like Viktor Orban politicizing it, cozying up with one type of Muslim while fanning the flames for anti-Muslim sentiment, even though his country does not have really Muslim population?

Or this has something to do with backsliding of democratic values in the system, a rise of authoritarianism in Europe? In light of Europe's history with fascism and Nazi Germany, one would think that there would not be room for this kind of collective punishment, societally, against vulnerable ethnic religious groups. So if you can

comment on the source of the problem.

And then the second question that I have is more broader policy question, which is what ways that the United States government can be supportive of this endeavor to push back against this kind of hatred, the hatred in Europe?

DR. MUJANOVIC: If I may very quickly jump in on that.

As concerns your first question, I don't think it's an either/or. I think both are happening simultaneously. I think it's very important, as you yourself noted, that we situate contemporary anti-Muslim prejudice and policies in Europe in the context of the Holocaust but also still longer legacies of sectarianism across Europe.

There is this mythology that is very prevalent among a number of shall we say, quote-unquote, "Christian nationalist movements," across Europe, which is both that Europe is this kind of mythic origin place of, quote-unquote, "white people," and that it is also inherently and has

always inherently been, quote-unquote, "Christian."

Both of these are historical fictions. Europe, as best as we can tell, has always been an extremely diverse continent. But, nevertheless, I think any time where we see a breakdown in democratic governance and a slide towards authoritarianism and illiberalism, that always is accompanied by a growth of sectarianism and scapegoating.

Historically, Jewish communities in Europe have been the greatest victims of that, but now with the sort of evolving political and demographic landscapes of the continent, it's increasingly, it's increasingly Muslims.

I would also highlight here the way in which the broader Western far right has incorporated various myths from various anti-Muslim but also antisemitic movements across the world.

For instance, in the case of the Christchurch massacre in New Zealand, the terrorist attacker there used very, very prominent Serb nationalist motifs. In that attack, he had all

kinds of mythic figures, including Obilic and others, written on his rifle and his bullets. He played a song driving to the mosque that was glorifying Radovan Karadzic, and so on and so forth.

So we see how the Western far right itself is kind of growing and adapting, bringing into its normative space the language of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice in the way that in previous generations it has brought in antisemitism, say the Apartheid regimes of Southern Africa, and so on and so forth.

VICE CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you. Very insightful. Thank you.

CHAIR MAENZA: Dr. Kreko.

VICE CHAIR TURKEL: Anyone else?

DR. KREKO: If I can add to this very important question a few remarks.

Yes, I think that there are in central eastern Europe, at least, where I said this is more a platonic Islamophobia, I mean rhetoric against Muslims without real visible presence of Muslim

communities. The sources of the problem are twofold.

First, the fear of the unknown, which is I think important. If you take a look at the math of the European Union, the Islamophobia math, you can see that the lower the ratio of the Muslims in a given country, the higher the Islamophobia it is, and I don't want to be over-optimistic about this because it does not mean, of course, that Muslims in Western European countries do not face real experiences of segregation and hate incitement and so on and so on, but it also means that we can be slightly optimistic in the respect that, for example, in Austria, a country also in central and eastern Europe, where there is about eight percent of the population that are Muslims, there are very low levels of Islamophobia according to the polls that in Hungary, for example, that is just a neighbor with a similar size, but there is only 0.4 percent of Muslims.

So I think fear of the unknown is very important, but the second one--this is the most

important--is what Zara has referred to as well, the political level, and also Jasmin and others all mentioned that. This is mostly the political rhetoric that can fuel this kind of hatred, and, interestingly, in Hungary, for example, there was an immigration program until 2015 with statements such as there is a need of Hungary of external labor workforce, and there should be steps to reduce xenophobia so that integration of future immigrants be easier.

And then the refugee crisis happened. Then politicians in central eastern Europe just easily jumped on this topic because they could feel that there is an opportunity in exploiting this fear of the unknown. And I think in this fear of the unknown, you have more of this kind of tribal myths that they are coming, occupying our land, and raping our women, and so on and so on, than some deeply let's say theologically rooted Islamophobia.

So it's less about religion, I think, and it's more about this, let's say, exploitation of in-group/outgroup conflict.

And a last remark on what the U.S. government can and should do, and also the Congress, and all the business of diplomacy, I think what Jasmin was talking about is the most important threat in eastern part of Europe. And I mentioned how Viktor Orban is building up a very bizarre relationship with Milorad Dodik that Jasmin has just talked about. Also, he has very good relationship to Vucic, as well, so he can be an important player I think in both accelerating or even probably to even let's say slowing down the problematic trend that we can see in Bosnia Herzegovina.

So I think making it clear for our NATO allies that, yeah, investing into fueling the conflict is a no-go, I think it would be crucially important.

VICE CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you.

CHAIR MAENZA: Ms. Edwards, go ahead.

MS. EDWARDS: Yeah. I mentioned very briefly earlier that the international Jewish conspiracy has now sort of morphed into this

international Muslim conspiracy. And I guess I wanted to just highlight, we are seeing some of these same tropes and trends that were used, obviously more in print media, magazine cartoons and things that were shared maybe during the Second World War or before the Second World War. And we're seeing these now more in the online space but towards Muslim communities or towards migrant communities or Roma and Sinti peoples.

So, you know, these, literally, the exact same image--like I don't know if you've--you've probably seen that image of the octopus that's basically encircling the globe. That was a very, very common trope that was used during World War II to describe the spread of international Jewry, and now it's being used. Literally, that same exact image is being used towards often to Muslim communities.

And so, you know, there's really no one political perspective that is using these tropes that we are seeing that they are frequently being shared and that remain online in the electronic

space. And so that is something that ODIHR is really looking at to see how can we work with some of these online communities in these spaces, these tech companies, to identify and respond and take these images down when they occur because this is really a challenging issue for anyone that is experiencing these types of bias and conversations that are happening about these communities.

CHAIR MAENZA: Yes. Ms. Mohammed.

MS. MOHAMMED: There is really, really excellent, I think, both from Ms. Edwards and Peter, as well. All I would say is, keeping it short and sweet, is political capital is absolute political capital, and you see it here in the UK. It wins elections. It scores points. And you see it all over Europe, and mayoral campaigns that are actually fed on Islamophobic tropes, the othering, the fear of the unknown, all of this is absolutely present.

It's deep rooted, it's historical, but most notably, we are the scapegoat community. You know, we're on [?] and people are scared, and they

will vote because they think you're going to keep our borders secure. You're going to keep our jobs. You know, this economic threat is another part of that story, and I think all of that feeds into this community is not of us. You know, I was born in this country. You know, we're contributing, all of these things, that narrative is not there.

The only narrative is they're not part of our society. They're a threat, too. They're coming for our jobs. They're coming for--you know, they're bringing their Sharia law, and this, that, and the other, and all this kind of garble--you know, all this language.

So I think in terms of what we can do about it, and certainly what the U.S. government can do about it, is narrative is so important, and I think the U.S. has such an important role in geopolitics, accountability, and actually projecting what we would say is the society that we want, you know, the world that we want, the inclusion that we want.

And that comes all the way from the top.

We need to see leadership from the top, you know, and we see it from Canada. Actually President Trudeau is always calling it out, you know. We had a man, you know, ram his truck into a Muslim family for no other reason but, you know, the far right view that he held. Even here in the UK, a young person was groomed online watching far right propaganda and felt he needed to go attack Muslims and was planning an attack on a mosque.

He had never met a Muslim, you know. He's in prison now. And he just said I don't even know what I was doing. I was just watching it, and I thought they were the problem. And he was going through his own issues, right. So I think it's really critical that there is a strong voice, there is accountability, you know, and look at the situation of the Uyghur community in China, you know, and what we are calling a genocide.

And, of course, trade is, you know, the Beijing Olympics, you know, so things are still happening. So I think there's a really strong role that you can play in being that exemplary voice but

also shaping and changing the narrative, and empowering those who are disempowered in this discourse to have a voice and a face because often we forget those we're trying to help should also be at the table with us.

VICE CHAIR TURKEL: Thank you.

CHAIR MAENZA: Thank you.

I know that, Mr. Mujanovic, I know you have your hand up, and then we'll go to Commissioner Kleinbaum.

DR. MUJANOVIC: I wanted to be very quick with respect to Rabbi Kleinbaum.

In terms of concrete policy issues, I will put to you that Bosnia and Herzegovina is at this hour very much the likeliest site for actual renewed violence against Muslim communities in Europe--organized systemic government sponsored violence on the part of the regime of Mr. Dodik but also his patrons in Belgrade and other centers in Europe.

The United States has imposed very, very important sanctions against Mr. Dodik and some

people in his inner circle. I would strongly urge that those sanctions be expanded to cover a greater number of people in his political party and their various coalition partners, but also very importantly that the United States use its international leverage to urge our European partners to join this sanctions regime.

I know that there are serious conversations to this end going on in the United Kingdom. I trust that our friends in the UK will join the sanctions regime. It is very, very important that we at least get one or two governments within the EU to join this regime. The EU as a whole will not do it because of the blockades by people like Mr. Orban and others, but nevertheless there is a tremendous amount of room still left for diplomatic leverage on the part of the United States.

CHAIR MAENZA: Commissioner Kleinbaum.

COMMISSIONER KLEINBAUM: I want to add my thank you to all of those who have offered testimony today. It's fantastic, and we could

spend hours really on this really important and complicated issue.

So I have a few responses and then a question to the point that was made earlier that it doesn't really matter, Shia, Sunni, it's just kind of--in the United States, after 9/11, I believe the first victim of anti-Muslim was a Sikh person, who was misidentified, and here in the United States, there's such a broad misunderstanding and confusion about who Muslims are and what Muslims look like. So we certainly know that to be true.

And anything that involves this kind of level of ignorance is terrifying, and to the point that Hungary might not have any Muslims, well, as a Jew, I certainly know you don't need Jews to have antisemitism.

You don't need Muslims to have the rhetoric because it serves a political purpose. And so I see this as functioning on two different levels, that personally I've been very deeply moved by. One is on the personal level. How do you get people who are not Muslim to see Muslims as our

neighbors and our friends?

And yet we also know in a place like the former Yugoslavia, we, there was a deep connection between people right next door to each other, and the political evil of Milosevic was that he, as a former Communist, turned this into a religious, on some level, an ethnic, which before, you know--so I don't need to go. So sometimes the deep presence--and that's terrifying.

It happened, of course, to Jews also throughout Europe who were very integrated into societies. So it can happen in both ways, which is really terrifying. After we had in the United States tremendous anti-Muslim rhetoric from very high levels of our government, our synagogue was really confused about what to do since we couldn't impact necessarily political level.

We simply went to a local mosque on a Friday before Jum'ah prayers and stood there with flowers to hand out, and then for every single Friday before the pandemic, which stopped the Muslims from praying in person, and stopped our

ability to be there in person, we stood there and held signs that said we Jews support our Muslim neighbors and friends. Very simple. Low to the ground.

And here in New York City where there are so many Jews and so many Muslims and very few of us know each other. That's the other reality. And through that process, our synagogue, one synagogue and one mosque became very, very close. Now, the children of our synagogue once a week serve Iftar meals throughout Ramadan as part of their religious training.

So that's all wonderful, and you can do that, and when there was an attack on a Pittsburgh synagogue and a right wing, right supremacist killed Jews during the Sabbath prayers, the first people our synagogue heard from were the Muslims from the mosque we had been standing in front of, and a hundred of them came to our service that Friday night and stood in front of our synagogue with signs that say "We Muslims support our Jewish neighbors and friends."

So that's deep and profound, and there's a lot that can happen, and I'm so moved by your Open the Mosque because there's little, very little contact that people actually have. And to really deeply begin to understand each other's religious practices and talk about them--fantastic.

As a Jew, I know there are many narratives of hate. Some of them stem from the Palestine-Israel conflict, and we need to be able to talk about them directly. Some of them have historical roots. But the most important thing is for that human contact. However, I just read a book called How Civil Wars Start. I'm not sure if anybody here is familiar with it--by Barbara Walter.

It is terrifying. She was part of a CIA task force that studied how you can predict the beginning of civil war in a country, and they studied European countries and South American countries, and they came out after studying a lot of data and many, many, many, many different political scientists, journalists, social scientists of all kinds on this task force, and the

book has a very moving chapter on the situation in Serbia and Bosnia and really goes deep dive into that.

She said there are two elements that you can find in every one of these exploding civil wars. One is that the country is neither a full democracy nor a full autocracy. In both of those situations, civil wars can, will not emerge. So it's kind of in between, going one way or the other.

And the other is that either a religious, ethnic, or--either ethnic, religious or racial group is targeted by one political body to make the others feel like they're responsible for all the issues of decline in society. And she goes through in this book how many times it now is exactly what you are describing. Muslims are that easy target in many places, and it's really terrifying.

So I don't know if any of you have, are familiar with her theory or have heard of her. She's now--the book just came out so she's kind of on all the circuits now. But if you have any

responses to her, I'd love to hear it.

DR. MUJANOVIC: I guess I'll just jump in very quickly, if I may.

Rabbi, first of all, I feel like I need to acknowledge the very, very important role that the global Jewish community played during the Bosnian Genocide. The global Jewish diaspora was really the first that spoke up about what was going on in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and there's a long memory of that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and also with the relationship, with the actual indigenous Bosnian Jewish community, who, of course, I have to add at this point are systematically discriminated by the current sectarian constitution in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnian Jews, Bosnian Romas are prevented from standing for a number of public offices. This is an injustice of the highest order.

I think to your question and to the broader thrust of your commentary, I think we have to really work collectively to make room for each other.

I think, I'm very aware, for instance, of the fact that though I myself am not religious, I come from a culturally Muslim community, and I am seen as being Muslim for better or for worse. And I have a role, in particular, because in the United States I present as a white man, because I present as someone who speaks unaccented English, for the most part, that I have to use that privilege and that space to create room for all of those persecuted and marginalized communities.

So I would really urge all of us to engage in a kind of solidarity building that you've just described so beautifully and powerfully with our Jewish neighbors, with our Muslim neighbors, with our Sikh neighbors, whoever it may be in our communities, and also very importantly at this hour to speak about systematic and politically directed forms of discrimination.

What is happening to the Uyghur community in China, in particular, at this hour, especially in the context of the Olympics, is horrendous. It is a genocide, and it is happening again, though we

continue to say "never again."

So, again, using all of our collective experiences, but also I always say our collective traumas, to make sure that we contribute to the struggle that, you know, we are vocalizing contemporary struggles. And, you know, as somebody born in Bosnia Herzegovina who went through aspects of the war and the genocide, I take that very, very seriously. And I'm so grateful to all of you for creating this space for us to have these kinds of connections and to create networks to protect each other in the future as well.

CHAIR MAENZA: Yes, Sabrina, go ahead.

MS. SAOUDI: Thank you. Following up on what Jasmin said and the Rabbi, indeed addressing anti-Muslim hate incidents and crimes in all different manifestations is fundamentally a human rights issue.

Coalition building across institutions and civil society groups can help combat hate crimes in tandem with other forms of racism, bigotry, and prejudices. For example, organizations working to

address intolerance against Muslims can consider partnerships and coalitions with women's organizations, groups countering racism, antisemitism, and those working for LGBTI, or disability rights.

The starting point for any governmental or civil society response to anti-Muslim hate crimes is the recognition that this problem is a shared concern.

COMMISSIONER KHAN: Madam Chair.

CHAIR MAENZA: Yes, go ahead, commissioner.

COMMISSIONER KHAN: If I may, I wish to pay tribute to our panelists and our commissioners and share a profound experience that I recently had, and that is in tribute to your voice and your words and your appearance before the Commission.

I recently was invited to receive a terrorism legacy award. Terrorism is part of the Holocaust camp [ph]. So when I went to receive that award, I sat at the table where Holocaust survivors were seated. I asked them a question for

their advice. I was so honored and taken by the profoundness of that moment.

I asked them that this increase in antisemitism, this increase in Islamophobia in Europe, what is your advice to me and to rest of us? This is what they said. And this is--I share this as a tribute to your voice. They said had more people spoken before the Second World War, had more people spoken against antisemitism, we could have avoided, we could have avoided the worst atrocity of the history.

And I share this. I normally don't talk about, about such profound experiences in public, but thank you. Thank you for speaking. Your voice matters. Your words matter. Your work matters. You're involved in something so profound that you may prevent the worst atrocities that might occur. So thank you to your voice, to your valor, to your courage. I am so honored while you were speaking on the side of my table I was given as an award replica of terrorism wall.

I kept looking at it, and that wall speaks

to me. Whenever I appear commission's hearing, whenever I appear and listen to the atrocities against all faiths, against all human dignities, throughout the world, I from the corner of my eye, I look at that replica of that wall. And the voice of those survivors reminds me to speak up. This is the time to speak, talk, regardless of your faith, your ethnicity, where you are, what your platform is.

So I am grateful. I am so honored to have listened to you. Thank you. Thank you very much.

CHAIR MAENZA: I just want to open it up to our panelists if you have any additional. I know a couple of you had your hands up, and I certainly want to give you the opportunity to speak up before we end. Go on, Rim. Go ahead, Rim-Sarah, yes. I think you are mute. No worries.

MS. ALOUANE: Thank you very much. Thank you for your kind words, Commissioner.

If I might add some insight regarding the previous conversation. I agree with everything that has been said. But I would also like to

emphasize the need and the emergency of fighting disinformation, as well, because I think on top of the political, the political agendas that often for different reasons in our different countries or zones in Europe, we have a serious issue of disinformation that has been fueled, that has fueled in terms of bigotry, antisemitism, and any form of hatred, not only online, but also in certain type of media, and I think there is like we have been avoiding of, you know, treating that part of the issue even though I think it plays a fundamental role in it.

If I take France, for example, you know, so we do have a serious issue regarding racism as a whole and antisemitism and bigotry and so on. But, you know, there is what happens in Paris within the political establishment, and there is reality on the ground. And when you dig a little bit, you know, people just want to live together in peace. They have a lot of issues, and most of the time without diminishing anti-Muslim bigotry, people, you know, just want to live safely together, you

know, being able to have a job, health care, and so on and so on.

And I think it's also time for our politicians to take that responsibility because using anti-Muslim bigotry as a distraction from real issues will only get things worse, and unfortunately they are doing that through conduits such as the media and social media. So I think it is an important element to tackle, and I hope there will be space for that to be discussed in the future.

Thank you so much.

CHAIR MAENZA: Thank you so much.

Mr. Mujanovic and then Ms. Mohammed.

DR. MUJANOVIC: I'll be very quick. Just in light of Mr. Khan's powerful comments, I think it is very important that we always act to be each other's canary in the coal mine, as it were, and we have to recognize and normalize in our collective language, especially those of us who are privileged to live in the United States, but any global democracy, how precious and how fleeting democracy

is.

An assault, an attack on any community, especially such vulnerable and marginalized communities, as most Muslim communities, but also Jewish communities, Roma communities in Europe are, is an assault on the very foundations of democracy and the rule of law.

I will not repeat the famed recitation about the nature of the Holocaust, but when they come from one, they come for all of us eventually, and we have to be very, very cognizant of that, and engage in public policy with that very much in view.

Thanks.

CHAIR MAENZA: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Mohammed.

MS. MOHAMMED: I just want to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to Rabbi and Mr. Khan for really, really pointed reflections. I completely agree. That's part of openness. We have this wonderful Visit My Mosque project because we realize we need to meet people and people need

to meet us, and we need to take down the barriers, the tropes, you know. If you get to know another human being, you know, then you know them, and you understand who they are, and just as you said, it's about humanizing our communities.

It's about getting to know one another because we make up the fabric of society. So if we are all working together in that diversity and inclusion, then we make for greater societies from greater contributions.

So I think, you know, our objective and our purpose and our goal is to work for the common good, is to serve all of society and humanity. And I think this is really an evil that is infecting all societies too. Until we overcome it, we're all going to suffer its consequences. So I really wanted to thank you for you reflections and for all of us in this in collective effort and goal.

And I guess my final reflection is to say that, you know, this work is absolutely essential but sometimes overlooked and sometimes not taken seriously. It's regarded as the interfaith section

or, you know, more life communities, and we shelve it.

But actually this work has global consequences and shapes national politics in a very strong way, and I think many of us here have an even bigger voice when it comes to the environment or sustainability because the communities that are the most marginalized are the ones that suffer some of those bigger issues.

And the final point I'll say is that a lot of this discourse is interlinked with conversations around immigration, a very toxic narrative about these other groups are always trying to take over. But I think what--my visit--when I did visit the States--taught me, and I think something that you do really well is about a shared national identity, a shared heritage, and actually appreciating the strength of our diversity in that conversation.

I think we need to continue to do that and own who we are, not let others define that for us, but my sincere thanks and gratitude. It's been a complete honor and privilege to join you all.

CHAIR MAENZA: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. Edwards and then Dr. Kreko.

MS. EDWARDS: Thanks. I'll be very brief.

I just wanted to also share with everyone ODIHR's Coalition Building Guide, which I've put in the chat note. As I mentioned earlier, this is something that we truly believe is a way for not only Jewish communities or Muslim communities or LGBTQI communities to face on their own, but it's for all communities, as we've discussed numerous times today, to stand up for each other as they are more steps in supporting this on a wider scale than any one community can ever do on its own.

And this is truly the way, and the U.S. has a very strong example of this in the way that they passed the Matthew Shepard Act ten years ago now, that this, this joining together of different communities to support each other and to say that this is absolutely unacceptable when any one targeted community is targeted, you know, whether it's the Jewish community 75 years ago or the

Muslim community today or, you know, a different community tomorrow. This absolutely is not acceptable under any circumstances.

So these communities joining together is a great way to push back on this and any form of discrimination that any community faces.

CHAIR MAENZA: Dr. Kreko. And you are mute.

DR. KREKO: Thank you.

So I will be very brief, and I will have two short comments, first, on what Rabbi Kleinbaum and Mr. Khan have said. Right now there is an emerging narrative, not only central and eastern Europe, but in whole Europe, that if you want to defend the Jews, you have to hate the Muslims. And that's, I think, it's more particularism that totally pulls away the moral universalism.

And the argument is that in the defense of Jews, you have to be very cautious with all Muslims belonging to anywhere. So I think what you have talked about is extremely important to reiterate this message that hatred of one kind is not, cannot

be a cure for hatred of other kinds, and in most of the public opinion, we can see that, in fact, Islamophobia and antisemitism goes hand-in-hand. So it's simply not true that if you want to defend Jews, then the good way is to fuel Islamophobia.

And my second remark would be a short reflection to Rim-Sarah's comments, which I think is crucially important to the role of disinformation, and during the refugee crisis, we could see that Islamophobia was fueled on the basis of totally fabricated stories about, for example, lead speeches of Muslim leaders about how to conquer Europe and things like that to support the great transreplacement theory and the theory of the conspiracy theory.

And, for example, the Russian disinformation, as well, was fueling these kind of stories because they could see that in France, in Germany, and in all parts of Europe, and in Hungary, as well, this is a topic that the public resonates with. It can divide society. And given that a lot of this disinformation is spreading on

social media, and big social media platforms, and the fact-checking and let's say anti-disinformation, a force of social media companies and platforms are still understaffed, and I think a lot of cases more so window dressing than real problem solutions. I think more pressure in this direction would be definitely welcome.

CHAIR MAENZA: Thank you so much.

Now I want to say now that we are ending our time together, I want to say a special thanks to our expert panelists for being a part of this important discussion. We really are so thankful to have heard from each of you.

And, of course, to my colleagues for their robust participation. It is truly an honor to serve on the Commission with all of you.

Hopefully, this time together will inspire others to continue this dialogue and the priority about building relationships because it really is the best way forward in order to have the kind of tolerance that we're talking about today where we can all live together in peace and respect one

another's beliefs. And so thanks again.

I'd also like to thank the USCIRF professional staff, as these events are certainly a team effort. So, first of all, to Nina Ullom, our Congressional Relations and Outreach Specialist; to Danielle Ashbahian, our Supervisory Public Affairs Officer; and, of course, our Executive Director, Erin Singshinsuk, who and the entire team all kind of have their hands in this hearing today.

So thanks to all of you, and again, to those of you that were able to participate and join and watch this discussion, we hope that you have a great day. Thanks again.

[Whereupon, at 12:05 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]