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THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES' INFLUENCE ON DOMESTIC POLITICS IN NORTHERN EUROPE

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The study considers the political implications of a soaring Muslim community in Northern Europe, often viewed as a model for the rest of the European Union. It is shown that massive immigration challenging the foundations of the Scandinavian welfare state and its multiculturalist policy, and some aspects of the Scandinavian experience are also of practical significance to Belarus. The thrust of the argument is that multiculturalism is failing, and Scandinavia should begin to look for other alternatives.

Keywords: Muslims; Northern Europe; Scandinavian countries; diaspora (community); migrants; refugees; multiculturalism; political parties.

ВЛИЯНИЕ МУСУЛЬМАНСКОЙ ДИАСПОРЫ НА ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ В СТРАНАХ СЕВЕРНОЙ ЕВРОПЫ

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Мусульманская диаспора рассматривается как фактор, влияющий на политические процессы в странах Северной Европы, которые считаются эталонными для Европейского союза. Исследование позволяет сделать вывод, что массовый приток мусульман-мигрантов и стремительный рост исламской диаспоры стали серьезными вызовами основам социального благополучия и идеологии мультикультурализма скандинавского общества. Анализ опыта стран Северной Европы в данной сфере имеет практическое значение для Республики Беларусь. Основной вывод работы заключается в том, что политика мультикультурализма, по сути, оказалась неэффективной, а североевропейским странам следует искать иной путь социального развития.

Ключевые слова: мусульмане; Северная Европа; скандинавские страны; диаспора (сообщество); мигранты; беженцы; мультикультурализм; политические партии.

Introduction

To begin with, we adopt the commonly acknowledged academic definition of the well known term "Muslim issue" in relation to the Muslim diaspora within the European Union.

One characteristic that sets apart modern Western Europe is a substantial Muslim population. Islam has become a crucial element in the European Union, upending the principles of multiculturalism and marking

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a new chapter in the history of this geopolitical conglomerate. The Muslim community invariably has an impact on the political equation and the political power dynamic.

The Scandinavian nations are unique in that they have relatively recently come into contact with immigrants from Asia and Africa from very different racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds, and a distinct civilisational code. Examining how the Islamic discourse has affected politics in Northern Scandinavia is the goal of this research. The study's relevance is increased by our exploration of the interactions between Muslim communities and the host populations.

Scholars from Northern Europe and elsewhere have studied the difficulties affecting Muslim communities in the Scandinavian countries. The first thorough compilation of information on European Islam is the Oxford handbook of European Islam[1]. The Yearbook of Muslims in Europe offers up-to-date information on Muslim populations across 46 nations.

This study of Islam in Northern Europe benefits from the contributions of numerous scholars. The works of multiple academics, including B. A. Jacobsen[2] (a specialist on Islam in Denmark), J. Nielsen [1], A. Carlbom [2], S. Meret (a researcher on Muslim relations with radical right-wingers) [3], and G. Larsson (a writer on Islam in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and the Baltic countries, were consulted) [4]. V. Kinsella[3], K. Fangen[4], and K. Vogt[5] have investigated the interactions between Muslims and the Norwegian host society, while J. B. Simonsen has focused on Islam in Northern Europe [5]. Researchers T. Pauha and J. Konttori[6] have studied Muslims in Finland, while K. Loftsdottir examines how Icelandic society views minorities in general and Muslims in particular [6]. The website of the Danish embassy in Lebanon[7], publications from the US State Department[8], the Pew Research Centre[9], and Statista portal[10] are all excellent resources.

Russian scholars of Islam's influence on Scandinavian political processes include D. A. Nechitailo [7] and Archimandrite Augustin [8]. The works of the Belarusian author I. V. Kotlyarov [9] on migration to Europe are also pertinent, although overall interest in the topic is low among Russian and Belarusian scholars.

Communities of Muslims in Northern Europe

Muslims from former colonies were drawn to the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands, among other former colonial powers. Significant Muslim populations, however, were unusual for the Nordic nations – with the possible exception of Finland, where a small number of "Finnish Tatars" has lived since the 1800s.

The Nordic nations have long portrayed themselves as strongholds of liberal values, including multiculturalism. However, the rise of the Muslim community presented a major challenge, first fuelled by the demand for inexpensive labour and then by the flow of refugees. The appearance of a sizable ethnic-confessional minority sparked discontent among a significant segment of the indigenous populace, with some political ramifications, including the emergence of right-wing parties hostile to immigration.

Many Scandinavians see Muslims as *the relevant other*, which has created a *us vs. them* mentality[11]. Political forces that support anti-Islamic rhetoric in the sociopolitical agendas of their states have found fertile ground in these sentiments.

These shifts have also changed the mindset of the Muslim communities. Some, especially their younger members, have increasingly been drawn to radicalism. Given the large number of Muslims from Northern Europe joining jihadist paramilitaries such as ISIS, it is clear that jihadist ideas are gaining popularity. A significant part of the diaspora is struggling to fit in with European society and feels increasingly alienated[12].

On the bright side, Muslim communities have successfully integrated into their host societies. They are living better lives with better incomes, and more and

[1]The Oxford handbook of European Islam / J. Cesari (ed.). Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, 2014. 896 p.
[2]*Jacobsen B. A., Vinding N. V.* Denmark // Yearb. of Muslims in Eur. 2020. Vol. 12. P. 97–119.
[3]*Kinsella V.* Attitudes towards Muslims and Islamophobia in Norway [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.lifeinnorway.net/attitudes-towards-muslims-islamophobia/ (date of access: 12.02.2023).
[4]*Fangen K.* Why did Muslims become the new enemy in Norway and Europe? [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/news-and-events/right-now/2021/why-did-muslims-become-the-new-enemy-in-norway-and.html (date of access: 19.01.2023).
[5]*Vogt K.* Who are Muslims in Norway? [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.disorient.de/magazin/who-are-muslims-in-norway (date of access: 10.03.2023).
[6]*Pauha T., Konttori J.* Finland // Yearb. of Muslims in Eur. 2019. Vol.10. P. 231–246.
[7]Denmark in Lebanon [Electronic resource]. URL: https://libanon.um.dk/en/about-us/aboutdenmark/muslimsdenmark (date of access: 11.03.2023).
[8]2010 Report on international religios freedom [Electronic resource]. URL: http://www.refworld.org/docid/4cf2d0a2c.html (date of access: 18.04.2022).
[9]Religious composition by country, 2010–2050 [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/interactives/religious-composition-by-country-2010-2050 (date of access: 21.12.2022).
[10]Emprowering people with data [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.statista.com/statistics/533055/annual-number-of-individuals-identifying-as-muslims-in-finland (date of access: 30.01.2023).
[11]*Triandafyllidou A.* Nations, migrants and transnational identifications: an interactive approach to nationalism // The Sage handbook of nations and nationalism / G. Delanty, K. Kumar (eds). London : Sage; 2006. P. 285–306.
[12]The Oxford handbook of European Islam / J. Cesari (ed.). Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, 2014. P. 124.

more of them are well-educated and qualified for professional roles. Scandinavian Muslims are gaining traction in the political and social spheres, taking seats in legislatures, city councils, and other positions of authority. Public channels of communication between Muslim communities, the general public, and the authorities have been established. Radical Islamism is rejected by the diaspora's traditionally powerful mainstream religious organisations [8].

The Muslim issue differs greatly amongst Northern European nations. As an example, Sweden maintains it as a stronghold, while Denmark has rejected it. Beyond fringe far-right factions, this rejection has reached the political mainstream, which is already using anti-Islamic rhetoric. Conversely, Norway follows a moderate approach [7], balancing between a commitment to multiculturalism and the rise in anti-Muslim sentiments. Although the Muslim populations in Finland and Iceland are too small to foment intolerance, there has been a discernible rise in hostility, which is mostly due to the media[13].

Every country under review (except Iceland), has passed several noteworthy milestones associated with rising tensions with Muslims. A few examples are the Prophet Muhammad caricatures that were published in Sweden and Denmark in 2005 and 2007, the Utoya massacre that occurred in Norway in 2011, and the attack on a crowd in Turku (Finland) in 2017 by a Moroccan refugee[14].

Like in most of Europe, the Muslim populations in its North are concentrated in large cities, frequently creating separate neighbourhoods that eventually become ghettos. One famous example is Copenhagen's Norrebro neighbourhood, which is almost exclusively home to Muslims[15]. Muslims make up roughly 45 % of Malmo's population in Sweden[16], while the Danish Muslim community is located in the Copenhagen agglomeration. In Finland, Helsinki and other major cities (Turku, Tampere, etc.) are home to a significant portion of the Muslim population, while in Iceland, almost all Muslims reside in Reykjavik [6, p. 57].

Sunni Islam predominates in the diaspora throughout these nations, as in the rest of the Islamic world. However, there are additional factors, such as the growing Salafist movement and the sizeable populations of Shia Muslims in Denmark[17] (above 13 % in 2010) and Norway[18] (up to 19 % in 2011) [10, p. 9].

Many see Islam as not just another religion, but as an aggressive ideology that threatens civilisational norms, social structures, traditional values and the civilisational code. A large part of the populace believes that multiculturalism is in decline and has lost credibility [3, p. 124].

Three waves of Muslim immigration have occurred in the countries under review. The first wave, mostly made up of labour migrants and their families, arrived in Denmark in the 1950s and Sweden and Norway in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s, there was a smaller-scale influx to Finland[19].

The second was primarily composed of refugees from Somalia, Afghanistan, Iran, the former Yugoslavia, and the Middle East. It affected most of Northern Europe in the 1980s, reaching Finland in the 1990s. In 2010, Muslims made up about 1 % of the population in Finland[20] and about 3 % in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway[21].

Since there are no official statistics on religious affiliation in Northern Europe, estimates of the Muslim population and its various denominations are imprecise and subject to wide variations. The default classification of migrants from primarily Muslim countries as Muslims results in an overestimation of the Muslim population. In a 2008 Danish survey, only 79 % of immigrants from Muslim countries identified as Muslims, with the remainder adhering to other religions or being atheists[22]. Relying on mosque registration figures is equally flawed, in Norway, for example, in 1980, only 10 % of Muslims were registered[23]. The official estimates in Finland, which are based on registered Islamic communities, also do not accurately represent the larger Muslim population. As a result, the 2021 census significantly undercounted the Muslim population, showing 20.8 thousand people (0.37 %) as opposed to an estimated 120–130 thousand[24]. Estimates of the Muslim population in Iceland vary from 1.3 to 3 thousand highlighting the difficulties in accurate quantification[25].

[13] *Jacobsen B. A., Vinding N. V.* Denmark…
[14] *Vogt K.* Who are Muslims in Norway…
[15] *Jacobsen B. A., Vinding N. V.* Denmark…
[16] Malmö sees lowest crime stats in 17 years: new figures [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.thelocal.se/20190118/malmsees-lowest-crime-stats-in-17-years-new-figures (date of access: 11.11.2022).
[17] *Vogt K.* Who are Muslims in Norway…
[18] 2010 Report on international religious freedom [Electronic resource]. URL: http://www.refworld.org/docid/4cf2d0a2c.html (date of access: 18.04.2022).
[19] *Pauha T., Konttori J.* Finland…
[20] The Oxford handbook of European Islam / J. Cesari (ed.). Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, 2014. P. 409.
[21] 2010 Report on international religios freedom [Electronic resource]. URL: http://www.refworld.org/docid/4cf2d0a2c.html. (date of access: 18.04.2022) ; Religious composition by country, 2010–2050 [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/interactives/religious-composition-by-country-2010-2050 (date of access: 21.12.2022).
[22] The Oxford handbook of European Islam / J. Cesari (ed.). Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, 2014. P. 402.
[23] *Fangen K.* Why did Muslims become the new enemy in Norway and Europe…
[24] Religious composition by country, 2010–2050 [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/interactives/religious-composition-by-country-2010-2050 (date of access: 21.12.2022.)
[25] Ibid.

The events in Syria drove the third wave of Muslim immigration, which began in 2010 and peaked in 2015. As of 2017, the percentage of Muslims was 8 % in Sweden, 4.5–5 % in Denmark, and 3.4 % in Norway. In Finland, it was estimated to be five times larger than the official figure of 0.37 %[26]. Iceland continued to be an exception, not having seen any immigration waves [6, p. 62].

The ethnic makeup of Muslim communities in Northern Europe was dramatically changed by the arrival of Syrian refugees. By the early 2010s, Somalis, Afghanis, Iraqis, Pakistanis, and Turks (including many Kurds) constituted the largest Muslim communities in Denmark[27]. Similarly, in 2009, the largest groups in Sweden's diaspora were Turks and Iraqis, followed by Iranians, Bosnians, Albanians, and Somalis [4, p.123]. Somalis slightly outnumbered Pakistanis in Norway, while the natives of Iraq, Iran and Turkey trailed far behind[28]. Turks and Somalis made up the largest ethnic groups in Finland, closely followed by Iranians and Albanians (Kosovars)[29]. Albanians and Bosnians led Iceland's small diaspora, followed by Turks, Pakistanis, and Arabs[30]. By 2020 Syrians had become the second most populous Muslim in Denmark (after Turks)[31] and third most numerous group in Norway[32] (after Somalis and Pakistanis). In Finland, Syrians numbered over 50 %[33] of the Muslims, and in Sweden, up to 25%[34].

There is a pattern to how Muslim communities form in Northern Europe [11, p. 18]. Family reunification occurs after the initial labour migration, which is mainly from Turkey, Yugoslavia, and some Arab countries. Governments only encourage family members to immigrate when they impose restrictions on immigration and the labour force they invite. The second wave of immigration followed, consisting primarily of refugees fleeing crises or unrest in countries like Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and other places during the 1980s and 1990s. Among other things, the diaspora institutionalises, becomes more involved in the affairs of their new home, and constructs mosques and Islamic schools. A third wave of Muslim migration was spurred by the refugee crisis of 2010, which put pressure on Scandinavia's welfare states, worsened the housing and employment markets, and ultimately heightened tensions and animosities.

The crisis of the traditions and principles that once guided the Scandinavian peoples has been linked to these tendencies. Birth rates have reached all-time lows, in Norway, for instance, there were 1.7 children for every woman in 2018 (down from 2.9 in 1960). Meanwhile, Muslim communities continue to have high birth rates (4.4 among Somalis in Norway)[35]. The church serves as yet another example. In the past, the national Evangelical-Lutheran churches – the Danish People's Church, the Church of Sweden and Norway, the ELC of Finland, and the Church of Iceland – dominated the Scandinavian religious landscape. But in these countries, Islam has emerged as the second most popular religion, and the original churches have consistently seen a 1.5 % annual decline in the number of their parishioners. Just 2–3 % of people regularly attended these churches in 2010 [8].

When compared to the declining trend in traditional Scandinavian societies, the practice of religion in the Islamic communities is remarkably different. A Norwegian poll from 2022 found that 46 % of Muslims pray every day[36]. The percentage of Muslims in Denmark who pray five times a day rose from 37 % in 2006 to 50 % in 2018[37]. Mosques have proliferated, a sign of the Muslim diaspora's explosive growth and increased religious engagement. Mosques are relatively new in the region, the first one was built in Denmark in 1967, in Norway in 1972, in Sweden in 1976 and in Iceland in 2009. In Finland, the first Finnish Tatar mosque opened as early as 1942[38]. The numbers have significantly grown since then. There are more than 170 mosques in Denmark[39], between 173 and 300 in Sweden (the exact number is unavailable) [12], and 40 active mosques in Oslo alone in Norway[40].

According to J. S. Nielsen, by 2011, some mosques had transformed into hubs for the promotion of jihad [1, p. 178]. The Muslim community is becoming more radicalised; in the 2010s, more than 300 people from Sweden, up to 125 from Denmark, about 70 from Norway, and more than 50 from Finland (none from Iceland[41]) joined jihadists in Syria. Clashes between Muslim

[26] *Pauha T., Konttori J.* Finland…
[27] Religious composition by country, 2010–2050 [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/interactives/religious-composition-by-country-2010-2050 (date of access: 21.12.2022.)
[28] *Vogt K.* Who are Muslims in Norway…
[29] The Oxford handbook of European Islam / J. Cesari (ed.). Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, 2014. P. 399.
[30] Ibid. P. 405.
[31] Ibid. P. 199.
[32] Ibid. P. 502.
[33] *Pauha T., Konttori J.* Finland…
[34] *Jacobsen B. A., Vinding N. V.* Denmark…
[35] Ibid.
[36] Survey: Muslims in Norway are more religious than Christians [Electronic resource]. URL: https://sciencenorway.no/christianity-islam-ntb-english/survey-muslims-in-norway-are-more-religious-than-christians/2177054 (date of access: 12.04.2023).
[37] *Jacobsen B. A., Vinding N. V.* Denmark…
[38] *Pauha T., Konttori J.* Finland…
[39] *Jacobsen B. A., Vinding N. V.* Denmark…
[40] Ibid.
[41] *Fangen K.* Why did Muslims become the new enemy in Norway and Europe…

youth, local anti-Islamic groups, and law enforcement occurred in the early 2000s, Norrebro (2007) and Malmo (2008)[42] are two examples. Critics of Islam in Sweden claim that after a wave of Muslim refugees arrived in the middle of the 2010s, there was an increase in crimes, including incidents involving firearms and rapes[43]. The wearing of face-covering clothing by women has provoked acrimonious disputes.

With their increasing prominence in the social and political agendas of the region, the growing Muslim communities in Scandinavia have become a source of contention. According to a 2008 survey, 43 % of Danes thought Islam was incompatible with Danish culture and values[44]. According to later surveys conducted in 2017, two-thirds of respondents thought Muslims would never be able to fit in and would even be a threat to Denmark's cultural identity [5]. A 2017 survey found that 34 % of Norwegians had unfavourable opinions of Muslims, and 39 % saw Islam as a threat to their culture[45]. By 2020, 52 % of respondents said Islam was totally or partially at variance with Norwegian values. According to a 2018 Pew Research Centre survey conducted across 15 European states, 62 % of Finns thought Islam went against Finnish values[46].

Politicians have responded to these sentiments by enacting immigration restrictions. Over 100 restrictive immigration measures were implemented in Denmark between 2015 and 2019 by the centre-right government of L. L. Rasmussen, setting the precedent for other countries. Denmark now has some of the strictest immigration, naturalisation, and asylum laws in all of Northern Europe. Its 2017 law forbidding the wearing of face-covering clothing is a recent example [5].

In the region, Denmark is notable for being an important centre of right-wing anti-Islamic populism. With immigration at the forefront of debate, the trend gained momentum in the 2001 parliamentary election, which signalled the majority shift to right-wing and centre-right parties for the first time in 100 years. Initially, the Progress Party (*Fremskridts partiet*, FrP), which finished second in the 1973 parliamentary elections behind the Social Democrats, led the anti-Islamic political agenda. Eventually, the party's popularity declined, primarily due to internal conflicts, and it was eliminated from the Folketing in the 2001 election. After the FrP split up in 1995, the Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*, DF) was founded and garnered most of the electoral support of its predecessor. It made its Folketing debut in 1998 and placed second in 2015. In exchange for tougher immigration laws, DF later supported the minority government, which was a liberal-conservative alliance. In the 2019 election, it came in third place [12].

Displeased with DF's incoherence, its voters began to defect [3, p. 124]. In 2015, a newly established political party called the New Right (*Nye Borgerlige*, NB) focused much of its platform on criticising Islam. In the 2019 election, it picked up 4 seats and the DF group lost 16. Furthermore, in 2017 a more radical party known as the Hard Line (Stram Kurs) emerged, headed by R. Paludan, who was well-known for his anti-Islamic views. Despite being forbidden and missing the Folketing, this party further damaged DF [12].

In 2022, the former minister I. Stojberg – who also expressed anti-Islamic views – founded the party of Danish Democrats (DD). DD finished in fifth place in the election of 2022. Together, DD, DF, and FrP secured 25 out of a total of 179 seats[47].

In Sweden, the Sweden Democrats (SD) are building their political agenda around disparaging the Muslim community. In the 2022 parliamentary election, SD secured the second position and aligned itself with the centre-right government[48].

With a strong humanistic agenda and a moderate paradigm historically, Scandinavian politics saw a dramatic change after the Syrian refugee crisis of 2015. This was a change from the social democrats' long-lasting domination since World War II when they were able to hold onto power by putting a strong emphasis on the folkhemmet (people's house) concept and providing extensive social guarantees.

Political discourse changed as a result of the 2015 refugee crisis, with even the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SSDP) modifying its discourse due to worries that the welfare system might implode. In this setting, SD presented itself as a distinct political force in favour of immigration controls. Interestingly, one of the party's well-known representatives is an immigrant from Iran, highlighting its dedication to inclusivity and dispelling stereotypes of racism. Even with these initiatives, some Swedes still see SD through the prism of their previous beliefs, illustrating the difficulties in changing the public's perceptions [12].

D. L. Tomson identifies four key stages in the development of the SD [12]. Between 1988 and the mid-2000s,

[42]Malmö sees lowest crime stats in 17 years: new figures [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.thelocal.se/20190118/malmo-sees-lowest-crime-stats-in-17-years-new-figures (date of access: 11.11.2022).

[43]New report highlights attacks on 39 Swedish mosques in 2017 [Electronic resource]. URL: www.thelocal.se (date of access: 08.11.2019).

[44]2010 Report on international religios freedom [Electronic resource]. URL: http://www.refworld.org/docid/4cf2d0a2c.html (date of access: 18.04.2022).

[45]*Kinsella V.* Attitudes towards Muslims and Islamophobia in Norway …

[46]Religious composition by country, 2010–2050 [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/interactives/religious-composition-by-country-2010-2050 (date of access: 21.12.2022.)

[47]Folketingsvalg tirsdag [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.dst.dk (date of access: 07.06.2023).

[48]Val till riksdagen – Slutligt valresultat – Riket. Valmyndigheten [Electronic resource]. URL: https://resultat.val.se/val2022/slutlig/RD/rike (date of access: 06.06.2023).

the party was still in its infancy and had very little influence. During the second stage, which began in 2005 with J. Akesson's appointment as chair, SD made a determined effort to break away from its far-right image. Notably, SD was successful in elections, at least at the local level. In the third phase, SD won seats in the Riksdag in the elections in 2010, and its number of parliamentary seats increased steadily. The fourth phase began following the 2015 refugee crisis when SD took advantage of public discontent to boost its standing in the 2018 election. SD claims to speak for the average person and uses "alternative media" to highlight Muslim-related issues as a symbol of the failures of left-wing policies [12].

Sweden tightened its immigration laws at the same time. Starting in November 2015, checkpoints were implemented at seaports, especially those that received refugees arriving from Denmark. Some benefits for asylum seekers and families looking to reunite were removed. The Scone region outlawed the wearing of face-covering clothing in schools in 2019. In 2016, a law backed by the SSDP, which was in power at the time, provided made temporary residence the only status available for refugees on admission. As a consequence of this policy change, the number of asylum applications decreased from 112 thousands in 2016 – with a 60 % acceptance rate – to 35 thousand in 2018, with a 32 % acceptance rate [12].

C. Hagen, who led the Progress Party from 1978 to 2006 has been a member of parliament since 1974, and a leading figure in Norway's anti-Islam movement for several decades. However, the Norwegian Democrats, who were established in 2002 following their split from the Progress Party, currently hold the most radical anti-Islamic position. This party has seats in local councils but is not represented in the Storting. Founded in 2008, Stop Islamisation of Norway (SIAN) is the biggest anti-Islamic organisation in Norway. It organises protests against mosque activities and portrays Islam as a political ideology that is totalitarian and in violation of Norway's constitution. Although its activists have burned the Quran in public on several occasions (a practise allowed by Norwegian law as an expression of free speech), SIAN denies any animosity towards Muslims in general[49].

The Finns Party, the main anti-immigration political force in Finland, is comparable to similar parties in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. The Finns Party finished in second place in the April 2023 Eduskunta election with seven out of 19 ministerial positions[50], they joined the conservative coalition government in June.

The fact that Iceland has no political party dedicated to addressing immigration issues is indicative of how little importance migration has in the nation [6, p. 59].

Concurrently, there has been an increase in political participation among Muslims. In addition to local councils[51], Muslims are represented in the parliaments of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. The establishment of Muslim political parties has proven difficult, notwithstanding prior initiatives like the Nuance Party in Sweden (Partiet Nyans) and the Democratic Muslim Association in Denmark. Danish Democratic Muslims blended Islam with liberal values, but they were swiftly ejected out of politics by low electoral support. In 2014, there was yet another failed attempt to establish a Muslim political party in Denmark. The 2019 announcement of Sweden's Nuance Party called for the recognition of Islamophobia and the criminalisation of abusing the Quran. Experts draw comparisons between Nuance Party and the Dutch party DENK [12]. However, considering that the party's best showing in the 2022 election was 2.4 % in a small number of constituencies, its chances of winning a seat in the Riksdag are minimal. Differing perspectives among the diaspora impeded the formation of a political party in Finland.

Muslims in Scandinavia have historically backed political parties on the left and centre-left. All of Sweden's parliamentary parties, including the Christian Democrats and SD, have Muslim members of parliament. There are currently six Muslim MPs in the Norwegian Storting, three of whom are Labour Party members and one each of the Liberal Party, Conservative Party, and Socialist Left Party. There are currently five Muslim MPs in Denmark, two of whom are from the Social Liberal Party. The first Muslim MP was elected to the Folketing in 2001. Neither Finland nor Iceland has any Muslim members of the legislature.

Conclusions

The facts and findings of this study show a discernible trend: the traditional concepts of folkhemmet and multiculturalism face escalating challenges in light of the increasing influx of Muslim migrants, and the severity of issues is becoming more pronounced with larger migration numbers. Notably, Iceland, with a small Muslim community, exhibits a virtual absence of antagonism between Muslims and the broader society.

[49] *Bangstad S.* Islamophobia: what's in a name? Analysing the discourses of Stopp Islamiseringen av Norge [Electronic resource]. URL: https://brill.com/view/journals/jome/5/2/article-p145_2.xml (date of access: 24.07.2023).

[50] Parliamentary elections Finland – 2023 [Electronic resource]. URL: https://tulospalvelu.vaalit.fi/EKV-2023/en/tulos_kokomaa.html (date of access: 08.06.2023).

[51] Denmark in Lebanon [Electronic resource]. URL: https://libanon.um.dk/en/about-us/aboutdenmark/muslimsdenmark (date of access: 11.03.2023).

The mainstream political parties in Northern Europe can no longer dismiss the growing complexities associated with immigration or relegate anti-immigrant parties to mere populist margins, especially considering their substantial electoral standings in some countries. Responding to these parties and the intricate challenges posed by immigration demands a coherent ideological approach from the mainstream.

When considering the Muslim diaspora, it seems that its growth trajectory will remain constant, partly due to a high birth rate. In a more extreme case, Muslims could number as much as 25% of the population in a nation like Sweden in several decades. But whether this prediction comes true will depend on several variables, including how stringent immigration laws are, how quickly Muslim birth rates fall, particularly for generations of European-born Muslims, and where the newly arrived Muslims choose to settle.

In this context, some groups depict Islam as the *other*, claiming in a nutshell, that Islam is an ideology of totalitarianism inimical to liberal secular democracy, a demographic threat that has the potential to turn the diaspora into the dominant group and that a socio-religious structure of lesser importance than that of the West.

Conclusively, the political elites often exploit the threat posed by Islam to the Scandinavian nations' identity to hide the underlying socioeconomic problems.

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