



DOES EUROPEAN ISLAM EXISTS? THE ITALIAN AND SPANISH CASE

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According to the data collected in 2017 by the Pew Research Center^[1], Muslims are a relatively small minority in Europe, accounting for roughly 5% of the entire population. Their distribution across the “Old Country” is not homogenous and states like France and Germany have the largest Muslim population (it should be noted that the Institute considers in its estimates the 28 current European Union member countries plus Norway and Switzerland). As of mid-2016, there were 5.7 million Muslims in France (8.8% of the country’s population) and 5 million Muslims in Germany (6.1%).

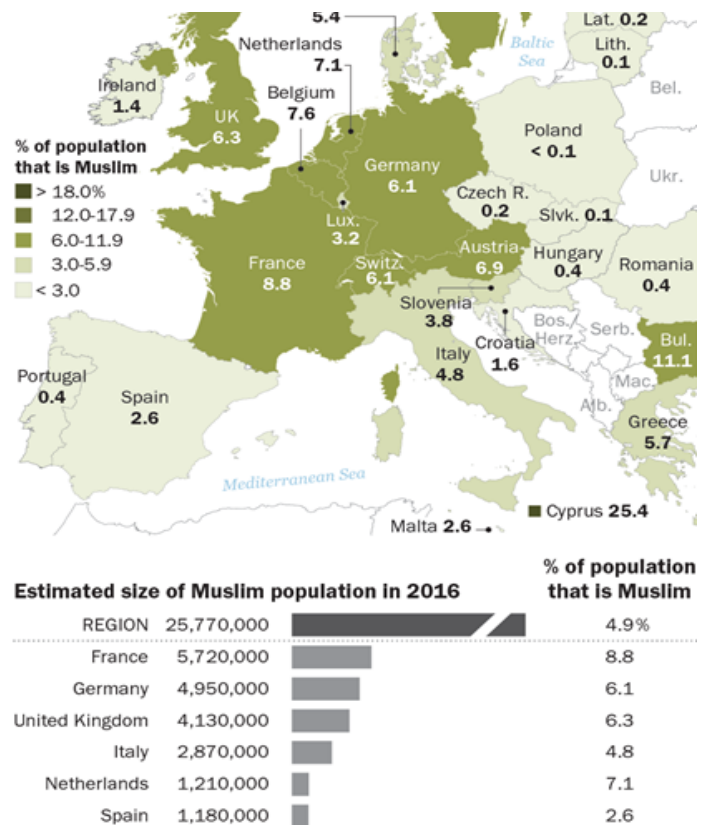
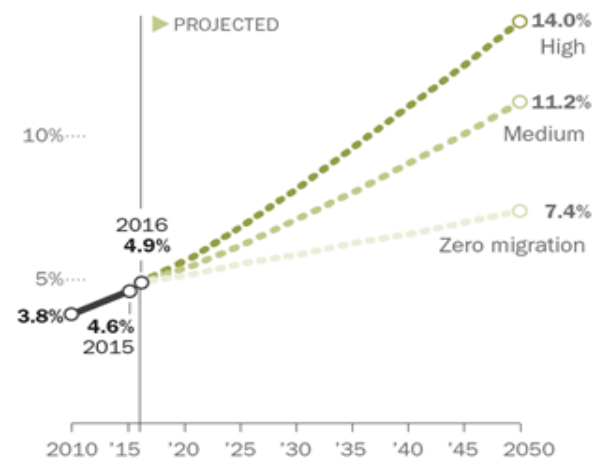


Figure 1 | <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/29/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/>



Conrad Hackett, a senior demographer and associate director of research at the Pew Research Center, asserts that the percentage of Muslim population in Europe is expected to increase in the next three decades, whatever the migration path might be. Namely, he suggests three different migration scenarios: a zero, a medium and an high one. From all these projections we can stress that by 2050, the share of the continent's Muslim population could rise to 11.2% or more, depending to what extent migration policies implemented by European countries are restrictive (high and medium scenario). Furthermore, because of the relative youth and high fertility rates of Europe's current Muslim residents, also in a zero migration scenario a growth of the Muslim presence is estimated.



Note: In zero migration scenario, no migration of any kind takes place to or from Europe. In medium migration scenario, regular migration continues and refugee flows cease. In high migration scenario, 2014 to mid-2016 refugee inflow patterns continue in addition to regular migration. Europe defined here as the 28 countries of the European Union.

Figure 2 | <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/29/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/>

Even if Islam is already a reality very deep-rooted into the European soil, the majority of European population has not yet achieved this awareness, continuing to regard Muslims as guests (most of the time unwelcomed because considered dangerous).

Stereotypes, stigmatizations and prejudices are of daily occurrence. By spreading a narrative (perpetuated at political as well as at social level) of the Muslim as a violent individual and a potential terrorist, the recent crisis of refugees (many of them Muslims), which is affecting Europe, has exacerbated the islamophobic trend. This has led to two main consequences: the securitization of religion from one side and the perception of a Muslim invasion from the other one (but data is a stronger barometer and as previously stressed, Muslims in 2017 were roughly 5% of the entire European population).



Islamophobia has deep social implications, primarily because it is a “symptom of the disintegration of human values,” according to former Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg. Values such as nondiscrimination, tolerance, freedom of thought, justice, solidarity, and equality are supposed to be inherent to European societies, but the increase -in terms of number and intensity- of the episodes of violence against Muslims settled in Europe seem to show another, more inhuman reality^[2]. The Open Society Foundation, which has been working against Muslim’ discrimination in Europe for decades, highlights that many institutions and NGOs have acknowledged the rise of this worrying phenomenon and noted the increasingly aggravated nature of the incidents. Islamophobic episodes, despite this, are still under-documented because of the lack of reliable data and statistics.

How to tackle Islamophobia? In the article “*We need to support Islam in Europe throughout the knowledge*^[3]”, Francesca Cadeddu highlights the importance of transversely spreading the knowledge in the political and social spheres in order to fight all kinds of stigmatization and cultural prejudices. The author, without considering the peculiarities of every European country, but rather taking into account a more general European framework, shows a hopeful scenario. For instance, she underlines how in 2007 the Center for European Policy Studies dedicated for the first time an entire volume to “Euroislam” (a neologism used in the academic

What Europeans think of a ban on Muslim immigration

In 2016, before US President Trump’s travel order, more than 10,000 people were asked whether they agree that further immigration from Muslim-majority countries should be halted. Here are the results:

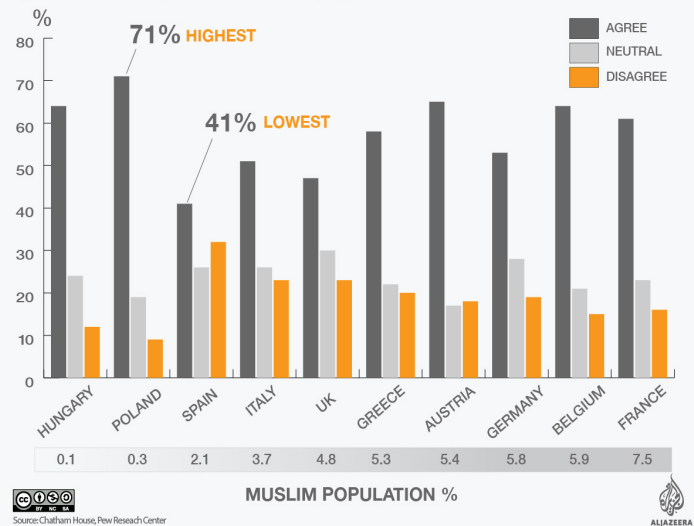


Figure 3 |

https://www.google.com/search?q=banning+islam&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwidzoP-157jAhUiMuwKHQT7BYkQ_AUIESgC&biw=1440&bih=766#imgsrc=OHVnZjFJ3CCzeM

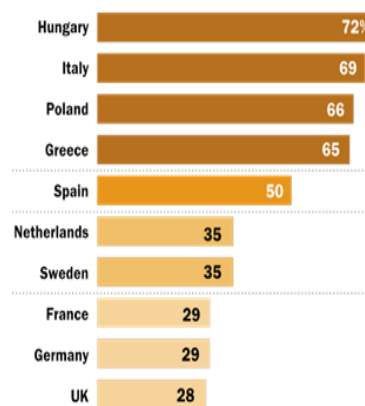


world since 1990's), which stressed both its concreteness and its heterogeneous nature. Between 2009 and 2012 the European institutions launched the "Euroislam project", whose goal is to analyze to what extent issues of national identity and citizenship have affected the process of integration of Muslims in the European member states. Many European research funds have been allocated during these years: "Horizon 2020" is the latest in chronological order. Its aim is, on one hand, to contextualize the historical coexistence in Europe of a religious pluralism and, on the other one, to wonder how Europe could exercise a global soft power action in the intercultural relations field in order to counter the religious radicalism.

According to this graph^[4], we can note that islamophobia is a phenomenon more spread in the so -called "latecomer" countries (namely Spain, Italy and Greece) and in states like Hungary and Poland. With regards to Eastern Europe, data highlights how the presence of Muslims in these countries is statistically irrelevant. Hence, the islamophobic path has to be related mainly to questions of national identity-building following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Views of Muslims more negative in eastern and southern Europe

Unfavorable view of Muslims in our country



Note: In Poland, question was asked of a subsample of 686 respondents.

Source: Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey, Q36c.

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Figure 4 | <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/09/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/>

By contrast, in the latecomers case, the growth of such cultural racism can be traced back to several factors. Firstly, the financial crisis that mainly affected the European Mediterranean countries in 2007 has left people in a state of economic and social insecurity. It is a sense of precariousness that still lasts today and pushes (mainly) the impoverished social groups of society to find a scapegoat in order to justify their condition. This scapegoat is the



migrant, who they consider to be a burden for the welfare system, as the biggest cause for national unemployment and economic underdevelopment^[5] and, at the same time, as a source of social insecurity and instability. This last belief has been produced by overlapping the term “migrant” with “Muslim” and by stereotyping the latter as a potential terrorist or more generally as a threat for the national social cohesion. The recent refugee crisis and the “panic path” spread in these countries can be read through this framework. Finally, we have to consider that states like Italy, Spain or Greece only recently have become places of foreigner immigration.

According to Joaquín Arango and his book: *“European Immigrations: Trends, Structures and Policy Implications^[6]”,* a comparison with countries such as France or the UK, which have a historical tradition of migration patterns, could explain the different attitudes toward immigration and how immigration itself is perceived by different societies. Still taking into account the economic dimension, the author stresses, for instance, how the Southern European countries have become land of immigration in a historical period characterized by neoliberal economic policies (deregulation and privatization policies, global flows) that precisely have generated labor precariousness and different and more difficult social conditions for the insertion of migrants in the labor market (by contrast, France or the UK became countries of immigration in the 1950’s and 1960’s within a Fordist-Keynesian regime).

Furthermore, how migration is perceived by the “host societies” is strictly connected to the politics of integration perpetuated by the governments of each country. Again, France and the UK are conceived as archetypes of two antithetical integration models: by assimilation (French case) and by pluralism (Anglo-Saxon case). All this “theoretical discourse” is functional in order to explain the relationship between Muslims and the native population: indeed, in the first case the presence of Muslims will be accepted as long as



religion is a phenomenon lived by the individual in its private sphere and not in a public dimension. How the French case shows, integration means transformation of foreigners into citizens who are supposed to join secular principles guaranteed by the Constitution. By contrast, a multiculturalist approach in the Anglo-Saxon type aims at emphasizing and valorizing the different cultural heritages.

What kind of policy are latecomer countries such as Italy or Spain supposed to implement? Even if they are experiencing of the migration phenomena in relatively recent times, they have not yet developed their model of integration and, at the same time, they have rejected the French and the Anglo-Saxon one.

In the Spanish case, we can highlight a tendency to foster the so called “circular migration”, especially throughout agreements with the Moroccan government in order to let Moroccan women work seasonally in the fields of southern Spain. This type of model that sees migrants like guests-workers is considered by the European Commission a “triple win solution” towards the integration problems inside the host country society: from one side, migrants cannot hope to remain and to obtain the citizenship, from the other, the social implications derived from processes and policies of integration are removed.

Even if it is always difficult to make a correct estimate because of the lack of database on the individual religious confession (indeed, we tend to generalize by considering the country of origin), both in Italy and Spain, the Muslim population has increased in the last years.

It has been estimated^[7] that in 2018 Muslims in Italy were roughly 2,6 millions, i.e. 4,3% of the entire resident population. Moreover, taking into account the latter figure, it should be stressed that the number of Muslims with Italian citizenship has increased of 79.000 units for the period 2017-2018 and nowadays it represents the 44% of the Muslim residents. On the other hand, Muslims with a foreign



citizenship (especially from Morocco, Albania and Bangladesh) are the 56%, but their total increase for the period here considered (2017-2018) was only of 25.000 units.

We can note a similar trend in the Spanish case^[8] where the UCIDE (the Union of the Islamic Communities of Spain - *Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de España*) calculates that 4,2% of the resident population is Muslim (roughly 2 millions). Especially, we talk about Spanish Muslims that in the last five years, according to the UCIDE, have grown by about 300.000 units. Instead, if we consider the "immigrant presence", the majority comes from Morocco, Pakistan and Senegal and its growth during the last five years has been steady.

According to this general background we can say that Islam is nowadays a phenomenon deep-seated in the two latecomer countries.

From a legal perspective, the two Constitutions^[9] reveal a regulatory framework capable of guaranteeing some of the most important democratic principles, namely: the freedom of conscience, the principle of equality and the confessional pluralism. Indeed, making a comparison between the Italian and the Spanish Constitution we can recognize many similarities. For instance, by considering the issue of pluralism the article 19 of the Constitution of Italian Republic declares: *"Anyone is entitled to freely profess their religious belief in any form, individually or with others, and to promote them and celebrate rites in public or in private, provided they are not offensive to public morality"* and the article 16, first comma of the Spanish Constitution claims: *"Freedom of ideology, religion and worship is guaranteed, to individuals and communities with no other restriction on their expression than may be necessary to maintain public order as protected by law"*.



The freedom of conscience appears both in Italy's (art.2^[10]) and in Spain's Constitution (art.10, c.1^[11]) in terms of *inviolable rights of the person* and *personal development*.

Finally, the principle of equality is guaranteed by the Italian Constitution in art.3, c.1: "*All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions*" and in art.14 of the Spanish Constitution: "*Spaniards are equal before the law and may not in any way be discriminated against on account of birth, race, sex, religion, opinion or any other personal or social condition or circumstance*".

Hence, it is not difficult to claim that the Italian and the Spanish jurisdictions become promoters of the principle of secularity^[12]. It should be stressed that secularity does not only acquire a civil value of respect in order to achieve a peaceful coexistence and to maximize a social inclusion, but laicity has also to be read firstly as a religious value because it permits the faith to arise autonomously without constraints and without attempts by the Public Authorities to impose a particular religion. In this regard, the Spanish Constitution several times emphasizes the *condition of neutrality* of the State in its relationship with the issue of confessionalism (art. 16, c.3^[13]): secularity means both religious neutrality and separation of the State from the context of religious pluralism. Only in this way it becomes possible to guarantee equality among all citizens, over and above religious convictions.

In terms of cooperation with the various confessions and in particular with the Muslim one, it should be highlighted a first difference between the Italian and the Spanish normative system. The Constitution of Italian Republic in art.7 recognizes only the legal weight of the Catholic Church throughout the *principle of non-interference*, by contrast, for the other religions the institutional relationship with the State is based on the conclusion of agreements with their representatives.



Even if Islam is the second religion, Italian State has concluded only one agreement until now, that with the Cultural Islamic Center of Italy. Several opinion-makers, because of the difficulty to achieve these arrangements with the Islamic associations, have spoken about this issue in terms of “Islamic anomaly”, finding in the fragmentation inside the Islamic community itself (heterogeneous because of the different origins of its members)^[14] a possible explanation^[15]. The legal recognition which would derive from it, would ensure several rights such as the possibility to access to public funding or the regularization of “core subjects”: the building of mosques, the construction of Muslim graveyards or the access of Ministers of worship to prisons and hospitals.

Anyway, Italian authorities have always sought to maintain a channel of communication and collaboration with the Islamic world: after the Islamist attacks that have affected Europe in the last years, the Italian government strongly believes in the proactive role of the Islamic associations in order to fight the Islamist radicalism. The creation in 2015 during Prime Minister Renzi’s government of an institutional dialogue channel with an Islamic council (representative of many associations) in order to discuss about the role of Islam in Italian society, is an evidence of this.

By contrast, in the Spanish Constitution the principle of cooperation with the religious confessions (including the Catholic one, considered on a par with others) is based not only on the stipulation of agreements (like the Italian case) but also on relationships of cooperation mentioned by the art.16, c.3 cited above. With regard to the first case, the Organic Law on religious freedom^[16] (namely art.7, c.1) narrows the signing of agreements to these confessions that for number of worshippers and for nationwide network, enjoy the so called *notorio arraigo*, namely a status of deep rootedness in Spain. Islam is included and the CIE^[17] (Islamic Commission of Spain - *Comisión Islámica de España*) has obtained in 1989 this recognition, signing an agreement of cooperation in 1992^[18], integrated by another one in 1996 with the aim to introduce the teaching of Muslim religion in the Spanish educational system (on the request of the parents of at least 10



students; with the availability of teachers proposed by the CIE and accepted by the education authorities^[19]).

Nowadays the social coexistence is not easy as evidenced by the ever-increasing episodes of cultural racism and islamophobia both in Italy and Spain around issues such as the building of Mosques or the teaching of Arabic language/Muslim culture in the schools. I would like to briefly focusing on these two matters due to their strong pertinence with the topic of the existence of a real European Muslim presence.

The Mosque represents an ideological and political *polemos*^[20]. It is the material expression of something that can no longer be considered as fleeting and short-lived: Muslims are no more migrants but European citizens who should be able to exercise their rights, namely their religious freedom.

The autochthones often perceive the construction of Muslim worship places or the erection of minarets as a “cultural shock”^[21]. This happens when the environment that surrounds them and that it is impregnated with sacred symbols linked to Christianity (expression of a collective national identity) starts to change, becoming populated by other symbols (Mosques, minarets) considered a threat for the society itself.

With regard to the Italian case, we can see a clear example of negation of civil rights that is affecting the Muslim population. Indeed, according to the Ministry of the Interior latest estimates (updated to 2016), in this country there are 1.251 places of worship of which only 4 official Mosques, 906 prayer halls and 341 Islamic centers^[22]. It goes without saying that 4 official Mosques for roughly 2,6 millions people across the national territory are not enough^[23].

Furthermore, one cannot omit to mention the “anti-mosques”^[24] laws imposed by Italian regions and municipalities, formally for reasons of urban planning and public security, in order to stop the



construction of Muslim cult places. It has to be remarked that these regulations are anti-constitutional because they are in contrast with the art. 19 mentioned above.

Regarding the spread of a sense of insecurity and threat at social level, it has to be highlighted how acts of intolerance against Mosques have increased in the last years across the whole Europe. By considering the Spanish case, three days after the Barcelona terrorist attack of the 17th of August 2017, for instance, the mosques of Sevilla and Granada became object of the first islamophobic demonstration in Spain against Muslim religious buildings lead by ultra-right wing groups^[25]. Vandals and protesters in Seville targeted local mosques with graffiti, hate speech, and violent threats. In Granada, a mosque was attacked with flares and surrounded by people chanting racial slurs and accusing Muslims of terrorism^[26] - the first episodes of a cultural racism that is progressively rising throughout the country.

The educational environment could be a suitable place for developing programmes of social inclusion and integration between “old” and “new” citizens. If many local authorities and native residents are scared by mosques because considered as a “den? of (potential) terrorists”, why do they not promote and support some activities undertaken by several schools in order to teach the Arab language to Muslims pupils in classrooms? Why, as in the case of an Italian municipality near Milan^[27], has an intercultural meeting in a primary school, introducing the Egyptian culture to pupils (because one of the classmates was originally from that country), turned into a political scandal and media case, instead of being considered a good instrument of integration and social cohesion?

To sum up, what really should be stressed is the processual and sociological nature of integration itself which has not to be mistaken with the integration policies. Indeed, this process surfaces into space and time and not necessarily depends on efficient



policies. It is a non-linear and a multidimensional process where the local dimension (namely, its institutions and its residents) can be considered the place where to play the civic integration game. The phrase *civic integration* has to be stressed in order to emphasize that the conditions for being accepted by the host society derive from a two-way dialogue between migrants and local authorities and residents. The latter need to open their minds, the former need to prove their will and commitment to adaptation (which is not assimilation!) to the new context.

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^[9] Italy's Constitution:
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http://www.congreso.es/portal/page/portal/Congreso/Congreso/Hist_Normas/Norm/const_esp_texto_ingles_0.pdf

^[10] *"The Republic recognises and guarantees the inviolable rights of the person, both as an individual and in the social groups where human personality is expressed. The Republic expects that the fundamental duties of political, economic and social solidarity be fulfilled"*.

^[11] *"The dignity of the person, the inviolable rights which are inherent, the free development of the personality, the respect for the law and for the rights of others are the foundation of political order and social peace"*.

^[12] Jose Antonio Rodriguez Garcia, "L'immigrazione islamica ed i conflitti con l'ordinamento spagnolo", in *Stato, Chiese e pluralismo confessionale*, 2011, available at https://www.statoechiese.it/images/uploads/articoli_pdf/rodriguez_limmigrazione3.pdf?pdf=limmigrazione-islamica-ed-i-conflitti-con-lordinamento-giuridico-spagnolo

^[13] *"No religion shall have a state character. The public authorities shall take into account the religious beliefs of Spanish society and*



shall consequently maintain appropriate cooperation relations with the Catholic Church and other confessions”.

^[14] In this regard, it should be stressed that a great number of associations are claiming the representation of the interests of the Muslim resident community, but an unitary institution like in Spain does not yet exist.

^[15] Paolo Naso, “Per un Islam italiano”, in *Dall’islam in Europa all’islam europeo*, ed. Mostafa El Ayoubi, Claudio Paravati (Carocci editore, 2018).

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^[21] *Ibidem*.

^[22] Josep Buades Fuster, "Spagna: da immigrati a cittadini", in *Popoli*, December 2009, available at: http://www.popoli.info/easyne2/Articolo/Spagna_Da_immigrati_a_cittadini.aspx

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^[24] The most famous anti-mosques laws have been enacted respectively in 2015 and in 2016 by Lombardy and Veneto, the main Italian regions led by "Lega".

^[25] Laura M. Mateo, "Primeros ataques islamóforos contra mezquitas en España", in *El Mundo*, August 20, 2017, available at: <https://www.elmundo.es/andalucia/2017/08/20/59994ab0ca4741dd488b4635.html>

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