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Muslims in Europe: different communities, one discourse? Adding the Central and Eastern European perspective

There is an old Polish saying, “każda pliszka swój ogonek chwali”¹ meaning that everyone emphasizes their good points. Being a representative of a country of approximately 40 thousand Muslims (for around 38 million citizens) puts the author in a difficult position. The European academia may not be expected to pay equal attention to Muslims in Poland as in France, UK or Germany. Almost all countries of the old EU have either bigger Muslim populations or a larger proportion of Muslims in the society (usually both). On the other hand, Bosnia and Herzegovina or Albania have a far higher percentage of Muslims in the population, and they also seem to be on the periphery of the European discourse on Islam.

This chapter aims to discuss why Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is absent or represented marginally in the European debate about Islam and Muslims. It starts with a brief presentation of the ethnic structure of CEE countries and its impact on perception of Others, in particular Muslims. Then it explores possible linking points between different Muslim communities across Europe. Finally, it tackles the issue of research on Muslims in CEE – its limitation and challenges. The concept of CEE is used both in a narrow and wider sense. In the first case it refers primarily to the Vyšehrad Group countries (i.e. Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia). For a wider background it will also embrace the wider CEE, which includes Slavic and Finno-Ugric countries of the former Soviet bloc.

Exploring Muslims of Central and Eastern Europe

A closer look on the distribution of Muslims in Europe reveals a white spot stretching from Finland in the north through the Baltic states and Vyšehrad countries to Moldova and Romania in the south-east. In none of these countries does the number of Muslims exceed 100 thousand, nor 1% of the population. At the same time, most of these countries have a very long history of encounters with Islam and Muslims, reaching back to the 10th century, only 300 years later than the first ever Islamic

¹ Literally: ‘Every wagtail praises its tail’.

appearance on the European continent in Al-Andalus and Sicily. So, in Hungary there were Böszörménys, who most probably arrived from Central Asia in the 10th century and remained Muslim until most of them were forcefully baptized, resulting in the disappearance of the community by the 13th century. Starting from the early 14th century, Lipka Tatars, who arrived with the Mongols, inhabited parts of Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine and Romania. In the 19th century small Tatar communities migrated also to Latvia and Estonia, but this time from Europe. The Tatars were a diverse group and soon they adapted to the local ways of life. Exogenous marriages (in the past), linguistic assimilation and limiting religion to the private sphere are just a few examples of their integration, or even assimilation into local cultures. Except for the Crimean Khanate (1441–1783), which was the longest lasting Tatar state in Europe, and few cases of rebellions (such as the rebellion of the Lipka Tatars in Poland in 1672), they always remained loyal to their European host countries which soon became their homeland. In the European history they are mostly mentioned as warriors who fought for Polish independence and supported Napoleon in his war against Russia (Maréchal 2003: xvii).

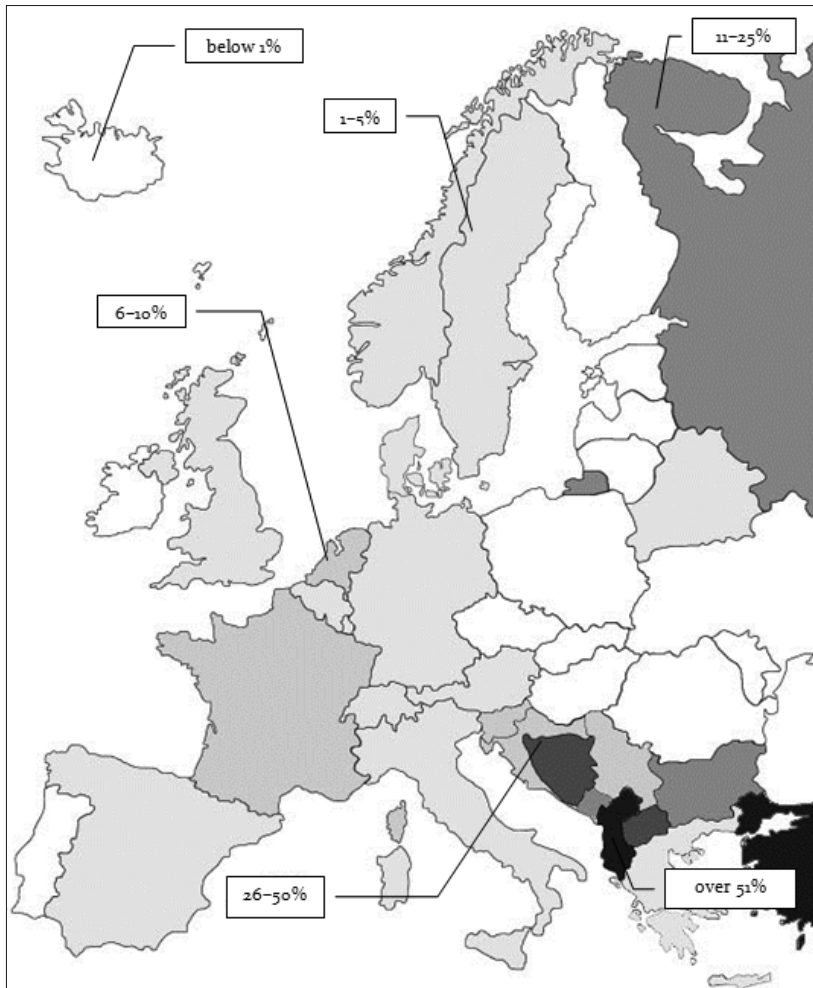
In the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Moldova the Muslim presence is a recent phenomenon, and as newcomers they need to work to gain recognition and institutionalization of their religion. Slovakia is most probably the only European country without a mosque (Macháček 2010: 307). In Moldova the Muslim community has just been officially recognized by the state, a move which despite being controversial shows the improvement of political climate for the emerging Muslim community (Radio Free Europe 2011).

The south-eastern part of Europe is much more diverse when it comes to the percentage of Muslims in the population. In Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia the percentage does not exceed 3%, while in Albania and Kosovo almost everyone adheres to Islam. This includes both the Islamized autochthonous population like Pomacs in Bulgaria, Albanians or Bosniaks, as well as Turkish population which settled in the Balkans after the retreat of the Ottoman army in the 19th century. The Muslim population in the Balkans is very diverse and often internally divided along ethnic or linguistic lines. Religion did not always play the role of the decisive identity factor. Often it was language, as in the case of Kosovar Albanians or Sandžak Muslims in Montenegro, or ethnicity – as in the case of Macedonian Muslim population, which is dominated numerically by Albanians, but also comprises minorities of Turks, Torbeş (Slavic) and Roma Muslims (Kandler: 601–604).

Just a short glimpse of Muslim communities in CEE reveals their great diversity, with Islam and their autochthonous character being the sole common denominators. What is more, there are hardly any similarities to the also diverse Muslim communities of the old EU. Attempts to merge the CEE and Western European Muslim perspective would be risky, or very hard to implement. The perspective of a Muslim immigrant or citizen of a West European state is hard to standardize with one of a Muslim fellow countryman, whose family has been living for centuries in his village or town of Central or Eastern Europe. The discrepancy is reflected e.g. in the social distance between Tatars and immigrant Muslims in Poland, who run their separate

organizations, have different goals and compete with each other for being the representatives of Islam (Górak-Sosnowska 2010). The Tatars have the historical advantage of being the first in Poland, and their religious union (Muzułmański Związek Religijny) is the official representative of Islam in Poland²; the immigrants, on the other hand, outnumber the Tatars at least thrice, and some of them (especially the Arabs) have better access to religious sources, i.e. the orthodox Islam.

Picture 1: Number of Muslims in European countries



Source: updated from Górak-Sosnowska (2009: 55).

² To be precise, another Muslim religious union was registered in 2003 by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This time it was Liga Muzułmańska w RP (Muslim League in Poland), an

The same sort of tension is observed in Lithuania – here it is the “ethnic Lithuanian Islam” that is recognized by the state. Newcomers from the Muslim countries are perceived as a competition in acquiring the state funding, but most of all a challenge to the local religious practice, deemed “un-Islamic” by the Arabs (Racius 2001: 182ff). It is worth noting that Muslim immigration does not always lead to tensions with the local community. Bulgaria can serve as an example (Zhelyazkova 2004: 2). Immigrants constitute there a minority within the Muslim community, and its ethnic (Turks, Pomaks, Roma, Tatars...) and denominational (Sunni majority + Shi’a, Alevi, Sufi...) diversity facilitates the absorption of immigrants. It is the Head Muftiate that presides over all Muslims in Bulgaria, regardless of their ethnic or denominational background (Merdjanova 2010: 63).

The discrepancy between CEE “own” and “immigrant” Muslims is also noticeable in the perception by the wider public. According to a survey carried out in Lithuania,³ 39% of respondents would not like to have a Muslim in the neighborhood, but only 17% would object to a Tatar neighbor (Etninių tyrimų institutas 2010: 3). Only 11% of Bulgarians would accept a marriage with an Arab, but 22% would not mind marriage with a Bulgarian Muslim; similarly in further questions on social distance Bulgarian Muslims scored about twice as much favorable answers as Arabs (Pamporov 2009: 30ff). In Poland no surveys on this issue were made, but the split between “our old Muslims” and “those” immigrants is noticeable in the media discourse (Górak-Sosnowska 2010a). Interestingly, “the” Muslim usually evokes more negative attitudes than a clearly indicated autochthonous Muslim (e.g. Tatar, Bulgarian Muslim). This means that the stereotype of one’s “own” Muslim is constructed differently than the “immigrant” one, especially in regard to the place of religion. CEE’s “own” Muslims do not belong into “the” Muslim stereotype. So, according to the already quoted survey, when it comes to the stereotype of an Arab and a Bulgarian Muslim, the first is religious, fanatic and rich, while the latter hard-working and kindly-spirited (Pamporov 2009: 95–97). Religiosity is not a distinctive feature of a Bulgarian Muslim at all.

Transplanted discourse and the Muslim Other

The division between immigrant and autochthonous Muslims brought up another feature of the ethnic structure of the CEE states. Unlike the Western Europe, CEE has not been a popular destination for immigration. In fact, most of these countries are international suppliers of labor force. The countries of CEE never had a colony, so

organization representing mostly immigrants, which has been established in order to represent their interests. Giving the fact that the MZR is the official representative of Islam in Poland by the Law of 1936 on the Relation of the State towards the Muslim Religious Union (Dz.U. Nr 30, poz. 240), the legal status of Muslim League has been unclear, more by: Nalborczyk (2005) as well as Nalborczyk (2011) and Pędziwiatr (2011) in this volume.

³ I would like to thank the following persons for access to resources in Slavic and Finno-Ugric languages: Liliana Bugailiskyte (Lithuania), Inna Simonova (Latvia), Daniela Stoica (Romania) and Denitza Vidolova (Bulgaria).

there was no historical link to any particular non-European region. After the World War II they became isolated from the outside (i.e. Western world). Even though they kept in touch with fellow-socialist and communist countries from Africa and Asia, they attracted only a limited number of immigrants. Most often these were young people who came to CEE to study. Many of them stayed in CEE after graduation, often married local women, and currently belong to middle or upper-middle class. After 1989 when the Soviet bloc collapsed, CEE opened up its borders, but no significant immigration flow took place. The states were too weak and vulnerable to attract foreigners, while the recent socialist past was also not really a pull factor. CEE is also geographically too far from Muslim majority countries to become the last stop for desperate illegal migrants.

Access to the EU of some CEE countries in 2004 and 2007 translated into a moderate interest in immigration. Comparing to the old EU, the new member states (as well as the rest of CEE) have lower GDP per capita and provide less social capital for a foreigner to settle down and live. Slavic or Finno-Ugric languages are hardly known outside CEE and Russia, while the working knowledge of English or French in CEE is lower than in the Western part of the continent. This limits possible professions of a foreigner to physical jobs (no need to communicate) or international companies (everyone communicates in a foreign language). Relatively low attractiveness of CEE comparing to Western Europe refers not only to Muslim migrants, but any Non-European migrants.

The table 1 below provides an overview of ethnic structure of CEE states. The Vyšehrad countries are the most homogenous, with majority ethnic group building up from 86% (Slovakia) to 98% (Poland) of country's population. In the former USSR republics there are dominant ethnic groups, but also significant Russian minorities (from 5% in Lithuania to 28% in Latvia). The population of former Yugoslavia reflects the Balkan melting pot, even though there is a clear dominating group in every country. Other Balkan states are homogenous to a great extent; however, there are significant minorities in each (except for Albania). As one can notice, all other national groups come from the neighboring countries, or are local ethnic communities (e.g. Gorani, Gagauz, Roma). In none of the CEE countries is there a significant external minority, populous enough to make it into the above-quoted statistics.

The CEE countries are in the earlier phase of encountering the Other – provided it is a linear process – as compared to their Western counterparts. Most of the Others constitute citizens of neighboring countries, often enjoying a status of national minority. There are indigenous ethnic groups, which also have been living there for centuries and became familiar to the mainstream society, or even merged to become a part of local cultures. The “distant” Others – that is newcomers originating from countries with significant cultural distance – started arriving only recently, and their number is still marginal. Except for the Vyšehrad countries, other CEE states easily qualify as multicultural; however, it is a sort of a borderland-multiculturality, which does not necessarily translate into greater tolerance towards (distant) Others.

Table 1: Ethnic structure of Central and East European states

	Country	Dominating nation (%)	Other significant ethnic and national groups (%)	Muslims* (%)
Vyšehrad	Czech Republic	Czech (94)	Roma (2), Slovak (2), Silesian, Polish, German, Ukrainian	0.1
	Hungary	Magyar (90)	Roma (4), German (3), Serb (2)	0.2
	Poland	Polish (98)	German, Ukrainian, Belarussian, Lithuanian	0.1
	Slovakia	Slovaks (86)	Hungarians (10), Roma (2)	0.1
European ex-USSR	Belarus	Belarusian (81)	Russian (11), Polish (4), Ukrainian (2)	0.5
	Estonia	Estonians (69)	Russians (26), Ukrainians (2)	0.3
	Latvia	Latvians (60)	Russians (28), Belarusians (4), Ukrainians (3), Poles (2)	0.4
	Lithuania	Lithuanians (85)	Poles (6), Russians (5)	0.2
	Ukraine	Ukrainians (78)	Russians (17)	0.6
ex-Yugoslavia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bosniak (48)	Serb (34), Croat (15)	40.0
	Croatia	Croat (90)	Serb (5)	1.3
	Kosovo	Albanians (88)	Serbs (7), Gorani (3), Roma (2)	90.0
	Macedonia	Macedonian (64)	Albanian (25), Turkish (4), Roma (3)	29.0
	Montenegro	Montenegrin (43)	Serbian (32), Bosniak (8), Albanian (5)	18.0
	Serbia	Serbian (83)	Hungarian (4), Bosniak (2)	3.2
	Slovenia	Slovenes (83)	Croats (2), Serbs (2)	2.4
Other Balkan states	Albania	Albanian (99)	Greek (1)	99.0
	Bulgaria	Bulgarian (84)	Turkish (9), Roma (5)	12.2
	Moldova	Moldovan (76)	Ukrainian (8), Russian (6), Gagauz (4), Bulgarian (2), Romanian (2)	0.2
	Romania	Romanians (90)	Hungarians (7)	0.2

Source: US State Department (2011), for * estimates from various online resources.

Direct contact with “distant” Others, i.e. non-European peoples, is limited. At the same time the indirect exposure – especially through media – is comparable to the one in the wider Europe. The media discourse on Islam focuses on international politics and situation in the Western Europe. Only seldom is there any counterbalancing

information on local Muslim communities. The CEE discourse on Islam is therefore in most cases transplanted, that is, it refers to peoples and events from outside the CEE, with no relation to local reality. The views of CEE audience (except for the Balkans) on Islam are therefore shaped by external factors. Usually well integrated and easy-going local Muslims fall victim to this transplanted discourse. The fear of the coming “Eurabia” and “stop Islamisation” campaigns⁴, which also struck a fruitful ground in CEE countries, seem to refer to an external and unreal threat: it neither seems that the CEE will achieve a similar immigration level to the one of the old EU in the nearest (or even distant) future, nor has the autochthonous Muslim population ever caused any significant problem, socially or ideologically. The old immigration from socialist Muslim countries is well integrated, while the newcomers hardly matter (in fact, one cannot argue that they belong to the lowest social strata, since no adequate research was made, and even if, they could hardly be a burden to the welfare system or a competition to the locals on the labor market). Similarly, there was no threat of radical Islam either in the form of *da’wa* or violence. The situation in the Balkans is different, as Islam is embedded into politics and national identity.

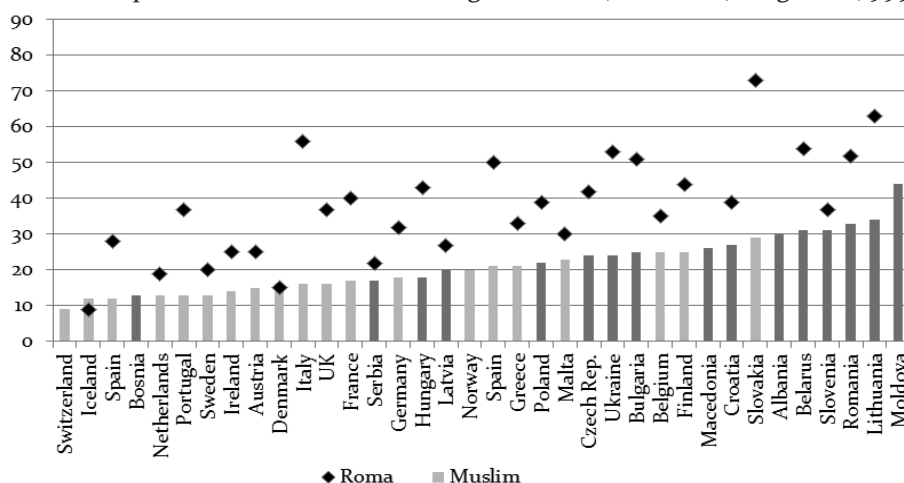
One can therefore assume that an average CEE citizen had neither met a “real” Muslim (due to their marginal numbers, also because the opportunities of traveling abroad are limited, comparing to the old EU), nor could have heard about any problems caused by the local Muslim population. However, asked about his national likes and dislikes, he or she will point to Muslims as one of the least liked groups. In Lithuania Muslims are the 4th least desirable ethnic or religious neighbor and scored only better than Chechens (also Muslims actually), Jehovah’s Witnesses and Roma people (Etninių tyrimų institutas 2010: 3). In Romania people indicate the highest social distance to Arabs and Roma, and the only significant difference is that they would more opposed to an Arab visiting Romania, and a Roma living in Romania (TOTEM 2010: 13). Moreover, Arabs are the least liked group of immigrants (twice less liked than Asians and South Americans; Alexe, Păunescu 2011: 124). In Latvia around 38% of people believe that Muslims should be denied entry to their country, and 44% would only allow Muslims to enter Latvia as tourists (Pilsoniskās izglītības centrs 2010: 12). In Poland, according to annual CBOS surveys, Arabs for many years score – interchangeably with Roma – the last rank in national preferences of the Poles (CBOS 2011).

It might be called a “Platonic Islamophobia” – a negative attitude towards non-existent Muslims (Górak-Sosnowska 2006). One of the very few comparative surveys on this topic, the *European Values Study* clearly shows the difference between the negative attitude towards Muslims in CEE and the old EU. The data is from 1999, that is

⁴ In Czech Republic there is an association AntiMešita o.s. (‘Anti-Mosque’), <http://www.antimesita.eu>, registered by the Ministry of Interior in 2010 and <http://eurabia.parlamentnilisty.cz> – an internet portal launched in 2005. In Poland the Stowarzyszenie Europa Przyszłości (‘Association Europe of the Future’) was registered in 2005 and became popular thanks to its website <http://www.euroislam.pl> and an anti-mosque campaign in the Warsaw district of Ochota. Since both promote themselves as pro-European, one can argue that the anti-Islamic sentiment is used in order to build up and strengthen the European identity. And

before the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks which fundamentally changed the Western perception of Islam (not mentioning the local terrorist attacks in London and Madrid), and before the EU accession of some CEE countries, which must have had an impact on the attitude towards Others. On the other hand, the old EU already had its numerous Muslim communities and experienced first challenges related to the growing Islamic presence. The Western discourse on Islam was hardly prevalent in CEE. Still, the difference between these two regions is obvious.

Chart 1: Europeans who would mind having a Muslim (and Roma) neighbor (1999; %)



Source: European Values Study (1999)

Limiting this narrative to Muslims only would not be fair. As a reference point, the data on the Roma people was added to the graph. The two trends are correlated – i.e. societies that would welcome a Muslim neighbor also would be more open to a Roma one, as compared to societies that would object to a Muslim neighbor. The same discrepancy between CEE and the Western Europe is visible in the case of other minorities included in the study, not only ethnic or religious ones, but also e.g. gay people, people with mental illnesses, or the HIV-positive. This brings back the homogeneity (or borderland-multiculturality) issue. Lack of exposure to Others can be one of the factors reinforcing a growing fear of diversity.

even more as both organizations see the 'Islamic threat' that was overlooked by the old EU. More on that in the case of Poland in: Górak-Sosnowska (2010a). Anti-Muslim sentiments are also present in several neo-conservative websites such as *Europa 21*, <http://www.europa21.pl>, ran by a foundation. There is also a Romanian website *Contradictii si absurditati in Coran*, which "is intended to show that Islam has been falsely created by a pedophile Muhammad, rapist of slaves, caravan robber, killer, who wrote Qur'an in order to satisfy his vicious and psychopathic appetites", <http://coransicontradictii.blogspot.com>. There used to be a Romanian SIOE website (the Stop Islamisation in Europe campaign), currently there is one in Polish (<http://sioepolska.wordpress.com>) and Russian (<http://sioeru.wordpress.com>).

Different Europes, different Muslims

The history of contacts between Europe and the Islamic world goes back to the birth of Islam, that is the 7th century. During the 14 centuries, the patterns of mutual relations and positions were fluctuating. Stefano Allievi illustrates it by splitting the history of European-Islamic relations into five phases. Two of them comprise together over one millennium. The three latter refer to the last several decades. The phases are not monochronic, as their course depends on the country and the generation of Muslims.

Table 2: Phases of relations between Islam and Europe

#	Phase	Description
1	Islam and Europe	From the birth of Islam to early 16 th century, confrontation and exchange between European countries and Islamic world.
2	Europe and Islam	European domination in the Islamic world, including the colonial presence.
3	Islam in Europe	Labor immigration from Muslim countries to Europe, starting after World War II.
4	The Islam of Europe	Consolidation of Muslim communities and integration in European societies; the forming of Muslim middle class, being at the edge between Europe and countries of origin, and their unique identity.
5	European Islam	Creation of a unique European Islam which is different from Islam in Muslim countries, grounded in 'citizenization'. Its form depends on Muslims and the non-Muslim environment.

Source: adapted from Allievi (2009: 10–12).

European countries with relatively short history of Muslim immigration (e.g. Italy, Spain), in which the majority of Muslims have the status of immigrants, are in the third phase. Countries with advanced institutionalization of Islam (e.g. UK, France) are in the fourth phase. The European Islam seems to be, to a large extent, a future phase.

The phases seem to display the relations between Islam and the old EU (only). One could attribute the Mongol invasion which led to Tatar settlements in the Eastern Europe starting from 13th century to the first phase, but to which phase belongs the 600-years long Tatar presence in the Eastern Europe? The 8 million Muslim population in the Balkans – both autochthones and immigrants, who arrived to Europe between 14th and 19th century (Parzymies 2005: 25f) – far earlier than labor immigrants to Western Europe – are also not included in any phase. Despite their long presence

in Europe, most of the CEE Muslim communities should also not be included into phase 5, since they either inhabit multicultural countries of former Yugoslavia, which after years of conflicts and partition are in the process of negotiating and defining their national identity (Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina), or, as minorities, inhabit countries which are in the process of nation building, which indirectly influences the position of Muslims (Bulgaria; Kandler 2005: 598). In other CEE countries, one can speak about Muslim citizens, but their presence (in terms of numbers) is marginal, and so is their influence on social life, not to mention politics.

Despite these facts, it may not be claimed that Muslim presence in CEE, especially in the Balkans, is not a sort of European Islam. Only if the definition of European Islam by Allievi was more inclusive (i.e. not build on the concept of citizenship, understood far wider than enjoying certain legal status), one could easily state that European Islam is not a project, but a reality. Limiting European Islam just to the old EU helps to maintain and enforce the image of Islam as the “Other”, standing apart from the collective historical memory of Europe and simply not belonging there (Larsson and Račius 2010: 352f).

It seems to be too hasty and too superficial to claim that the absence of CEE Muslims in the European research on Islam and Muslims in Europe is caused solely by the way the “Muslim Other” is constructed. Nor is it to be explained by the marginal number of Muslims or political closure of CEE until 1989 (even though CEE, regardless of whether we discuss the new EU member states or other countries, are, in a way, on the periphery of Europe – at least from the Western European perspective). To a much larger extent, it seems to be caused by the scope and access to the research on Muslims in CEE.

A straightforward reason for the absence of Central and Eastern European Islam in the mainstream research is the lack of access to relevant literature or fieldwork. Field research would require fluency in Slavic or Finno-Ugric languages, as the working knowledge of English is much lower in Southern and Eastern Europe as compared to Western Europe.⁵ A local facilitator would also be desirable, since access to Muslim communities in some CEE countries might be limited due to their marginal number or their living in closed rural communities that view outsiders with suspicion. In CEE countries with marginal Muslim population the challenge of the fieldwork is to actually find Muslims. It is not that one could encounter a respondent just across the street, if statistically one person in a thousand is Muslim. They could also be simply bored with new researchers, new questionnaires to be filled, new interviews to be given. This is also due to a new trend of writing BA or MA theses in social sciences and humanities about Islam. There are many online requests of students who seek Muslim respondents for their papers. Poland has a few “on-duty Muslims” – Tatars, converts and immigrants – who are usually referred to if an essay has to be delivered for the end

⁵ Except for Croatia and Slovenia, the declared working knowledge of English in the EU countries of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe ranges between 11% (Latvia) and 23% (Estonia, Romania). In Croatia 41% of the respondents declared that they can have a conversation in English, while in Slovenia – 34%. The EU25 average for English is 30% (Eurobarometer 2006 :144).

of term, or an article to be written. Since it happens that Muslims are misquoted or misrepresented in the media, many of them hesitate to talk to a researcher or journalist. A good way of getting in is to be referred by an insider. Still, it requires establishing a network of contacts. The groups where the access is relatively easy are the Chechen refugees, since they remain in refugee centers and are relatively numerous (approximately 5 thousand in Poland).

The literature on local Muslim communities (if existent) is published in local languages, and therefore it is hardly accessible to foreign researcher. In consequence, CEE Islam is popularized worldwide by a couple of Westerners who got interested in this part of the world,⁶ or Easterners who have been living in the West.⁷ Now and again, CEE is included into a wider framework of studies on autochthonous Muslim communities – Tatars (Baltic states, Poland, Belarus) and Turkic peoples (Balkans, Hungary). A step forward seems to be the *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* (Brill, vol. 1, 2, 2010–2011). The first volume offers country profiles of all European countries, while two out of six articles in the second part refer to CEE issues (Islamic education in Bulgaria and in the Balkans).

Browsing the literature on CEE and “Western” Muslims, one may conclude that approaches differ significantly. The Western approach focuses on migration studies, while the Eastern on ethnology and history. The focus is enforced by the subject of study. In the case of Muslim immigrants and their children, it is crucial to investigate the integration and acculturation processes, institutionalization of Islam and emerging Muslim identity. The question is how the traditional cultures of origin adapt to secular and liberal Western realities. The research questions in the case of autochthonous Muslims of CEE are different – which language they used to speak, how their sense of ethnic and national belonging was changing over the centuries, how are they dealing with recent immigration from Muslim countries. The core is not about acculturation, it is rather about preserving tradition. Western postmodernity is not so much a challenge, nor a reference point, since it has not yet developed in large parts of CEE; nor it is threatening Muslims more than any other religious group.

Moreover, the models of religiosity of CEE and immigrant Muslims differ. It is most clearly reflected by the tensions between the Tatars and immigrant Muslim communities in Poland (Górak-Sosnowska 2010b) or Lithuania (Račius 2001). The co-existence used to be peaceful and of mutual benefit until the late 1990s, when the

⁶ See e.g. Neuburger, M. (2004). *The Orient within: Muslim minorities and the negotiation of nationhood in modern Bulgaria*. Cornell University Press; Ghodsee, K. (2009). *Muslim Lives in Eastern Europe: Gender, Ethnicity and the Transformation of Islam in Postsocialist Bulgaria*. Princeton University Press; G. Larsson (ed.) (2009). *Islam in the Nordic and Baltic countries*. Routledge. History of Eastern and Southeastern Muslim communities was extensively researched and documented by Harry T. Norris in his books: *Islam in the Balkans: Religion and Society Between Europe and the Arab World*, University of South Carolina Press 1993; *Islam in the Baltic: Europe's Early Muslim Community*, Tauris Academic Studies 2009; *Popular Sufism in Eastern Europe*, Routledge 2011.

⁷ See e.g. Minkov, A. (2004). *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*. Brill; G. Nonneman, T. Niblock, B. Szajkowski (eds.) (1997). *Muslim Communities in the New Europe*. Ithaca Press; Eminov, A. (1997). *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*. Routledge.

autochthonous Muslims helped their fellows in faith to find their place in CEE societies, while the immigrants (mostly from Arab states) provided the autochthones with religious education. The Arabic language has never been native to any of the local CEE Muslim communities, and since they lived on the periphery of the Islamic world and for many years had limited access to the global *umma*, even basic Arabic knowledge is marginal, not to mention understanding the original text of Qur'an. This often refers also to local religious scholars, who have been far from fluent in Arabic. Muslim newcomers therefore offered access to religious sources that were out of CEE Muslims' reach. However, this initial symbiosis soon transformed into mutual moralizing. CEE Islam of the autochthones has been influenced by local Christian and Slavic cultures. It is reflected both in some of the rituals and practices, as well as in limiting religion to the private sphere. As Kristen Ghodsee explains:

On a more everyday level, few Bulgarians who would call themselves Muslim refrain from drink or pork, and most generally ignore a variety of practices associated with being a proper Muslim. The proponents of "orthodox" Islam trace the roots of this laxity in the local Muslim culture to lack of education and lack of critical reflection on what it means to be a Muslim in Bulgaria (2010: 19).

The "orthodox" Islam that Ghodsee is referring to is known in Bulgaria either as Arab Islam or as "true" Islam and means the Salafi/Wahhabi practice imposed on autochthonous Muslims in Bulgaria. This of course provokes resistance among the locals. This Islam is not only "imported" and therefore unfamiliar, but also would not work in the European setting. As one of the Polish Tatars explained:

I am not fond of Arab-Islamic culture, because I associate it with religion classes held by Arabs. That wasn't a nice experience, that's why often I didn't take part. Arabs imposed on us their interpretation of religion, they told us what is allowed and what not [...] Arabs didn't understand at all that we live in Poland, that we have 21st century. They are from another world. I am Muslim, my ancestors were Muslim, but I keep away from Arabs, because they don't understand us (quoted in: Górak-Sosnowska and Łyszczarz 2009).

Even though "orthodox" Islam tries to make footholds in the old EU, the social setting is completely different and hardly comparable. It is not a fight against secularism of Western Muslims, but against the folklore and "ignorance" of CEE Muslims. In fact, secularism of CEE Muslims is lined with ethnic folklore and assimilation to local Slavic or Finno-Ugric cultures, and not devoid of ethnicity – as in the case of changing religiosity among second and further generations of Muslim immigrants in the West (Mandaville 2002: 24). Thus European Islam of CEE is ethnic and far from being universalistic, while in the West – universalistic, and therefore abstracted from ethnic or national elements.

The question arises – are these two groups comparable at all? The researchers from CEE are only partly in better position, because they still could adapt Western

methodology and investigate recent Muslim immigration or contemporary autochthonous Muslims. This is, however, very hard, as no sufficient research base exists. It is also easier and more convenient for the CEE researchers to follow a well-trodden path and concentrate on what has always been the research priority – e.g. ethnology and history of local Muslims.

Conclusion

Even though CEE worked out its unique model of European Islam, in which autochthonous Muslim communities contribute to local and national cultures of their homelands, the picture seems to be hardly transferable to Western European realities. The opposite scenario seems much more probable – that CEE states will have to use some of the experiences of Western Europe in order to manage its immigrant Muslim communities, or respond to some common challenges across Europe, such as discrimination against Muslims, bad media or institutionalization of Islam.

At the same time, CEE experiences with its Muslim population can definitely enrich Western discourse on Islam. Not only do they indicate that European Islam has been a fact for centuries, but also challenge the deterministic approach, according to which it is Islam which hinders integration of Muslims in the mainstream society of the West. Far more probably the socio-economic conditions of Muslim immigrants are being translated into their very low cultural capital, pulling them down in the social structure.

While Muslims in the Western Europe are well known in CEE, both to researchers⁸ and – through mass media – to wider public, CEE Muslims hardly ever have made it to the consciousness of the Western academia. On the other hand, the dynamically evolving research on Muslims in Europe and vast literature on this topic made several Western researchers compelled to look further to the East. Joint projects that combine Western and CEE perspective on Islam and Muslims might be of mutual benefit, and erect another bridge between the two parts of the European continent.

⁸ E.g. in Poland there are at least seven academic books on Muslims in Western Europe written by Polish authors: A. Parzymies (ed.) (2005). *Muzułmanie w Europie* ('Muslims in Europe'). Warszawa; Górak-Sosnowska, K., Pędziwiatr, K., Kubicki, P. (eds.) (2006). *Islam i obywatelskość w Europie* ('Islam and citizenship in Europe'). Warszawa; Nowaczek-Walczak, M. (2012, in print). *Życie codzienne w muzułmańskim Mardycie*. ('Daily life in Muslim Madrid'). Warszawa; Pędziwiatr, K. (2005). *Od islam imigrantów do islamu obywateli: muzułmanie w krajach Europy Zachodniej* ('From Islam of Immigrants to Islam of citizens. Muslims in countries of Western Europe'). Kraków; Widy, M. (2005). *Życie codzienne w muzułmańskim Paryżu* ('Daily life in Muslim Paris'). Warszawa; Zawadewicz, M. (2008). *Życie codzienne w muzułmańskim Londynie* ('Daily life in Muslim London'). Warszawa; Kielan-Glińska, I. (2009). *Muzułmanie w laickiej Francji. 1974–2004* ('Muslims in laic France. 1974–2004'). Kraków; Nalborczyk, A. (2003). *Zachowania językowe imigrantów arabskich w Austrii* ('Linguistic behavior of Arab immigrants in Austria'). Warszawa.

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