

May 2015

25 Red Lion Square

London WC1R 4RL

TEL: 020 7404 3126

FAX: 0870 762 8971

EMAIL: enquiries@secularism.org.uk

WEB: www.secularism.org.uk

"Tolerance and respect: preventing and combating anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe"

A response form the National Secular Society to the FRA's questions for consultation with stakeholders

[About the National Secular Society](#)

This submission is made by the National Secular Society (NSS). The NSS is a not-for-profit non-governmental organisation founded in 1866, funded by its members and by donations. It campaigns for a diverse society where all are free to practise their faith, change it, or to have no faith at all. The NSS advocates separation of religion and state and promotes secularism as a pre-requisite to the creation of a society in which people of all religions or none can live together fairly and cohesively.

[1 – Can you inform about new trends showing an increase in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents? What are to your mind the underlying factors for each of these phenomena: religion, culture, socioeconomic or political circumstances, prejudices, etc.?](#)

We regard the nature and reasons behind anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents as having similarities and also important differences.

The traditional nationalist/Christian far-right has gone through significant changes across Europe. In some countries it has collapsed, although in others, particularly in Russia, it has seen a resurgence.

In many cases this far-right's focus has moved (largely) away from anti-Semitism and towards anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant prejudice.

The new anti-Semitism is in part driven by the Islamist far-right and some elements within the so-called 'anti-war'/anti-Israeli lobby.

According to the Community Security Trust, an expert body monitoring anti-Semitism in the UK, anti-Semitic hate crimes reached a record level in the UK last year.

Reported anti-Semitic incidents and offences had more than doubled to 1,168 in 2014.¹ Of these, 453 (39%) were classified as showing far right, anti-Israel or Islamist beliefs or motivations, up from 130 incidents (24%) in 2013.

According to the report: "Of the 453 anti-Semitic incidents in 2014 showing ideological motivation or beliefs as well as anti-Semitism, 256 showed anti-Israel motivation or beliefs; 159 showed far right motivation or beliefs; and 38 showed Islamist motivation or beliefs. During the months of July and August [during the Israel–Gaza conflict], the proportion of incidents that showed political motivation alongside anti-Semitism rose to 54% of the overall total, of which 76% showed anti-Israel motivation alongside evidence of anti-Semitism."

We suspect that anti-Semitic incidents are rather less numerous than Anti-Muslim ones, but affect a higher proportion of the (much smaller) Jewish community, and may be perceived to be more threatening to the point that Jews in Europe, including Belgium France and the UK, even those with much to lose professionally or in business, are leaving, often to go to settle in Israel, despite the growing security threat there. We are not aware of any anti-Muslim sentiment resulting in involuntary migration, although Muslims may be more likely to live in areas which are predominantly occupied by other Muslims. This has historically been a common immigrant defence strategy, but does not contribute to community cohesion.

Anti-Muslim prejudice has grown with the increasing proportion of the Muslim minority (through immigration and higher birth rate, often concentrated in particular metropolitan areas), many of whom are highly visible. They have become a group for related anxieties and prejudices to be projected upon.

Concerns about the 'Islamisation of the West' have been capitalised upon by several new far-right movements including the English Defence League (EDL) in the UK and Pegida in Germany. The latter in particular appear to be concerned about a further threat to the dominance of Christianity; they may already be sensitive to this given

¹ <https://cst.org.uk/docs/Incidents%20Report%202014.pdf>

the reduction in church attendance and affiliation in much of Europe. Those concerns will presumably be felt by supporters to differing degrees over a complex spectrum of related areas. These include a diminution of: their countries' devotional/spiritual Christian identities; of the (sometimes privileged) temporal influence of Christianity; culture; perhaps also of enlightenment values / and of adherence to democracy and human rights.

Europe's history of anti-Semitism has been appalling, and is impossible to do justice to it in a response as short as this. Nevertheless, the main drivers appear to have been racism, resentment / envy at (perceived) commercial and professional success and the, now rarely taught, doctrine of "blood libel" – wherein many Christian churches taught that Jews were responsible for Christ's death. This belief has almost entirely disappeared from the discourse of mainstream Christianity and even most of the nationalist/Christian far-right, however attempts should be made to curtail it where it plays a role.

Our impression is that most of those opposing 'Islamisation of the West' do not also oppose Jews, Judaism or any "'Judification' of the West". A partial explanation may be that while Islam strongly encourages converts of any faith or none, attempts at conversion by Jews – of whom there are far less - is restricted to other Jews and even then tends only to be ultra-Orthodox Jews seeking conversion of 'lapsed' Jews. This latter is therefore not seen as a threat.

The rise of social media and online forums allows the creation of insular communities where prejudices can be reinforced and enables greater organisation of offline anti-Semitic/Muslim hatred.

Some incidents misclassified as anti-Muslim hatred could be better described as racist or anti-immigrant as they are not based on religion or belief. Obviously we are not suggesting that any change of description reduces the seriousness of the problem or the need to tackle it.

An important contextual point is the obfuscation of language. The term 'Islamophobia' is problematic in that it is ill-defined and highly contested.

Whilst Islamophobia is sometimes used to describe hatred and bigotry towards Muslims, it is also used more broadly to describe criticism of Islamic ideas or opposition to Islamism. There is a tendency for any criticism of anything connected with Islam to be denounced as Islamophobic or racist, sometimes part of a deliberate

attempt to silence criticism² without providing a reasoned justification or simply the statement that “I am offended”. A price we should all pay willingly for living in a plural society is to acknowledge that others have the right to offend us, providing they do not also threaten or harass.

While it is tempting to accept all self-defined perceptions or descriptions of others’ activity as anti-Semitic or Islamophobic, this may lead to over-reporting and inappropriate action.

Legitimate freedom of expression must be protected; and seeking to stifle it can be counterproductive; it might stifle legitimate debate that may lead to solutions, and allows those silenced to claim victimhood.

We will touch on this in our answers to many of the following questions.

2 – To which extent do you think anti-Semitism and Muslim hatred require a specific or a common response?

As with many forms of prejudice, there are some common elements and also significant differences.

In terms of common approaches the aim should be to foster a free and open society where all citizens enjoy equal rights. Efforts should be made to protect a robust and diverse civil-society capable of protecting open debate and countering bigoted narratives. Education, particularly citizenship education and religion and belief literacy, may have a significant role to play, although attempts should major on building trust based on common values, shared humanity and shared activity.

The more evidence based and specific approaches are and targeted against genuine examples of hate-speech and incitement, the more successful they will be. An over-reaction by the authorities to baseless or trivial incidents can be counter-productive because risks fostering resentment where the majority community could resent what it sees as pro-Muslim bias.

As much information as possible should be gathered (with statistics collected and trends monitored) about hate speech and particular attention paid to violence or

² As was the case in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, where the former Muslim Mayor, Lutfur Rahman, made unfounded accusations of Islamophobia to defend himself against criticism of ‘corrupt and illegal practices’ – later proved in a court of law.
<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/lutfur-rahman-played-the-islamophobia-card-to-silence-his-critics-and-too-many-on-the-left-fell-for-it-10199238.html>

threats thereof, in order to prosecute offenders and focus on priorities and developments.

3 – Beyond security measures, which are necessary to ensure the security of people and sites, how can the feeling of security of Jewish and Muslim communities in European States be improved?

Adequately funding policing, taking appropriate action on threats, gathering and publishing statistics and making sure that the communities affected get feedback on this and are given the opportunity to give input. The shorter the lines of communication, the more effective they are likely to be. Some community leaders may have a vested interest in steering those they claim to lead in particular directions, even when not supported by the evidence. Better integration of Jewish and Muslim communities may also serve to diminish mistrust of 'the other' and leave Muslim and Jewish citizens themselves less exposed to anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred. The UK Government's policy of providing faith schools may unfortunately serve to exacerbate separation and social segregation. Indeed, research suggests that faith schools are exacerbating "social segregation."³

4 – Which measures do you think would be most effective in tackling the issue of hate speech, including online, with a particular focus on expressions of anti-Semitism and islamophobia?

We advise against the use of the imprecise and ambiguous neologism "Islamophobia" in such discussions⁴. The ambiguity is being opportunistically exploited by some intent on the introduction of blasphemy or similar laws, undermining legitimate discourse. Anti-Muslim hate speech must be proscribed, but legitimate discussion of matters concerning Islam and Muslims must be protected in everyone's interests. No one or no idea should be protected from critical analysis. It must not become illegal to disagree with an ideology. That would be tantamount to a blasphemy law and as we see in nations where it operates, such as Pakistan, it leads to dreadful injustice and corruption.

Drawing a clear distinction between anti-Muslim bigotry and criticism of Islam would allow a wider range of groups to contribute to a civil society strategy at countering the former.

³ <http://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2015/03/social-integration-commission-calls-for-limits-on-new-faith-schools>.

⁴ See our recent post on how the term 'Islamophobia' only serves to confuse the issues and shut down debate <https://www.secularism.org.uk/blog/2015/04/why-we-should-stop-saying-islamophobia>

The voices of Ex-Muslims, liberal Muslims and minority sect Muslims have been particularly marginalised in the debate. On the one hand they often suffer anti-Muslim prejudice; while on the other hand they suffer attacks from Muslim groups which they are unable to counter effectively due to erroneous accusations of 'Islamophobia'.

Other human rights and secular organisations who wish to challenge certain forms of Islamism and anti-Muslim hatred are similarly hampered. They should not be turned against any strategy for countering anti-Muslim hatred by attempts to criminalise legitimate free expression and criticism.

We recommend discussions with The Quilliam Foundation, a UK based organisation which "aims to challenge extremist narratives while advocating pluralistic, democratic alternatives that are consistent with universal human rights standards". We would be happy to arrange an introduction as one of our honorary associates, Maajid Nawaz, is Co-Founder & Chairman.

The most important tool for challenging hatred towards any community is to facilitate that community's integration into wider society; for Muslims and Jews to meet and interact with non-Muslims and non-Jews in the classroom, in the workplace, in secular public services and at the school gates. Good quality citizenship education and good quality religion and belief education can also play an important role.

5 – What are the main challenges and gaps in effectively combatting racist, anti-Semitic and islamophobic speech and crime in terms of legislation and its implementation? What should be done to overcome these challenges and how do you think the EU could facilitate this?

When individuals are attacked or discriminated against because of their (perceived) religion this does a specific social harm which the state has an interest in preventing.

Member states already have broad freedom to implement laws on religiously motivated or aggravated offences. United Kingdom law proscribes hate speech, and as far as we are aware, other member states already have sufficient laws to tackle such problems.

We strongly advise against unnecessary legislation in this area, particularly when it fails to incorporate freedom of expression safeguards. This stifles constructive discussion, leaving a vacuum which could actually encourage hate speech and could even enable malfeasance to go unchallenged for fear of recrimination.

Recent calls for specific laws against 'Islamophobia' are a cause of deep concern⁵. In England and Wales, religiously aggravated insulting behaviour is already punishable by seven years in prison. It is hard to see how much further the law be strengthened in a democratic society before becoming totalitarian.

Specifically legislating against 'Islamophobia' and Anti-Semitism risks the infringement of other liberties and creating resentment of a hierarchy of rights – creating the impression that these groups are favoured and other hate speech, e.g. on grounds of race or sexual orientation or disability are less worthy of protection.

Given the tendency for governments to wish to be having seen to act and introduce legislation without freedom of expression safeguards, the most needed EU facilitation would be to robustly defend freedom of expression EU wide. Ultimately the response to bigoted expressions needs to be a civil society response, and so civil society must be protected. Speech which is critical of Islam/Judaism, even if viewed as distasteful by some, should be protected as long as it does not constitute harassment or incitement – otherwise it risks being driven underground where it may mutate into hate speech.

6 – What would be the most effective avenues of cooperation to ensure greater effectiveness in preventing and combating anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim discrimination and hatred (i.e. in the area of investigation, prosecution, data collection, victims' reporting and support, etc)? What would be the role of civil society and national and local authorities and communities?

Although discrimination may lead to hatred it is necessary to separate the two when considering strategies.

On discrimination it should be noted that many member states have been extremely successful in outlawing direct and indirect discrimination. Recent research by the UK's Equality and Human Rights Commission has shown that equality and anti-discrimination laws are working well in Britain, with very few people reporting negative experiences of real or perceived religion or belief discrimination in the workplace or in service delivery.

An outstanding area of concern for us is the exemptions from equality laws that permit religion and belief discrimination in order to accommodate faith schooling.

⁵ <http://www.muslimnews.co.uk/newspaper/top-stories/labour-to-outlaw-islamophobia-says-miliband-in-an-exclusive-interview/>

On co-operation: in an unusual move the orthodox Jewish and Muslim communities have co-operated in defending their joint communities⁶. This may be a model which could be encouraged, as could another local initiative in west London to encourage better reporting shown in this footnote⁷.

As noted above, statistics should be collected and trends monitored about hate speech with particular attention paid to violence or threats thereof in order to track down offenders and focus on priorities and developments.

The involvement of a diverse range of civil society organisations in challenging anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic hatred should be encouraged. However in order to ensure effective cooperation an appropriate degree of scepticism is needed over the motivations of some groups.

An interesting case study is that of 'Tell Mamma' – a UK based helpline and campaigning group. While the organisation undoubtedly does some good work tackling anti-Muslim prejudice and supporting its victims, they have also been accused of conflating criticism of Islam with 'Islamophobia', misrepresenting statistics on anti-Muslim incidents, misrepresenting secular Muslim critics and promoting unsubstantiated or false stories of anti-Muslim incidents.

Multiple Press Complaints Commission inquiries have substantiated such allegations.

The organisation has also been labelled 'Islamophobic' by some more reactionary Muslim groups for their work challenging homophobia in the Muslim community – further illustrating the problems with the term addressed above.⁸

There is also a marked tendency in Britain for the most religiously devout or conservative voices in Muslim and Jewish communities to be presented as the most authentic representatives. Accepting these labels uncritically plays into the hands of those who wish to present the Jewish/Muslim communities as monolithic, and sometimes extreme, and can deny a voice to those more concerned with cohesion and the more liberal.

We have seen evidence of liberal Muslims feeling intimidated into silence (through fear for their safety and that of their families) by extreme groups. All avenues should be explored to allow their views to be heard.

As mentioned above we favour direct pluralistic community engagement over mediated engagement. When engagement with a community is mediated through 'community leaders' the actual community may be further marginalised.

6

http://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2015/Mar/98669/jews_muslims_in_london_neighbourhood_build_trust_by_working_together.aspx

⁷ <http://www.getwestlondon.co.uk/news/west-london-news/racist-religious-hate-crime-rise-9106821>

⁸ <http://tellmamauk.org/post-may-7th-anti-muslim-hatred-is-an-issue-that-needs-support-to-tackle/>

We reiterate our support of the liberal and secular Muslim groups mentioned above.

7 – How can social inclusion and inter-cultural cooperation contribute to actively combat anti-Semitic and Anti-Muslim discrimination and promote equality? What can be done at local level to contribute to actively combat such discrimination? Could you give some examples of best practices? What are in your opinion the most effective tools to counter amalgams, stereotypes and negative perceptions?

Our answers to Questions 4 and 6 in particular should be considered as also addressing this question.

We were surprised not to see any reference in this document to building cross-community cohesion.

A shared language is a precondition to building more integrated communities. All those who can't speak the language of the nation in which they are living are at a severe disadvantage and risk of marginalisation. It might be possible to initiate some kind of mentoring scheme, where volunteers are assigned to people who don't speak it but want to learn. They could, at the same time, educate their charges about the local culture so that people do not feel confused by, or isolated from it. State funding for such courses delivered in a religiously neutral context could help foster the idea of shared civic institutions and values and counter nationalist far-right claims that immigrants do not want to integrate or wish to impose their own language/values.

A major concern is the increasing separation of (particularly orthodox) Muslim and Jewish communities from the majority community; this is to the detriment of all. This is becoming more acute in schooling as demands for publicly funded religious schools are acceded to. Member states should therefore consider the extent to which policies of supporting and funding faith schools will hinder integration. Research demonstrates that day-to-day contact between children who can more easily see each other as equals is the best chance we have of breaking down barriers between communities⁹. Future community cohesion is therefore more likely to be achieved by children being educated together in inclusive secular schools. The younger children are when integrated through education, the greater the likelihood is that it will also help in integration of their parents.

Whilst parents' religious and philosophical convictions should be respected in the educational provision that member states offer, this is not an absolute right. The demand for states to provide a religious education, wholly on parents' terms, is an unreasonable and potentially divisive demand which should be resisted in the

⁹ <http://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/social-cohesion-sharing-crisps-with-someone-different.pdf>

interests of cohesion and respecting the rights of children and young people to a broad and balanced education.

Concerns over tendencies to 'self-segregate' notwithstanding, it is encouraging that when polled, two-thirds of British Muslims disagreed when asked if they would like their children "to go to a Muslim state school" if given the choice¹⁰.

A shift away from traditional multicultural approaches is necessary to meet the challenge of finding common ground between communities from different backgrounds. States must develop notions of universal rights and responsibilities that transcend all faith and belief systems. Multi-faith societies must also ensure that no citizen is favoured or discriminated against on the basis of their religious identity and should promote shared rather than sectarian values.

8 – What are the main gaps and obstacles (legislative, political, administrative, or financial) to fill at national/local level to counter discrimination based on religion, belief and/or ethnic origin in practice? How can such gaps be tackled at EU level?

This has been addressed in more detail in other answers. Member states and civil society should play a leading role. The role of the EU should include:

- Fostering civil society by protecting free speech
- Ensuring member states are compliant with relevant equality and human rights directives and conventions

9 – What role could leaders, including religious and community leaders, play in proposing social representations and a narrative which are inclusive, based on common values and mutual understanding? Which are the most effective practices taken that have effectively evidenced a positive impact and a potential for replication, in particular at local level and amongst and by young people? What could be the role of the media in this respect?

As mentioned above, a significant strategy of anti-Muslim/anti-Jewish groups is to represent the Muslim/Jewish communities as monolithic and separate from modern Britain/Europe. To counter this there needs to be a greater recognition of the diverse, liberal and secular voices within these communities. Civil society has a role to play in ensuring that these voices are heard.

¹⁰ http://comres.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/BBC-Today-Programme_British-Muslims-Poll_FINAL-Tables_Feb2015.pdf

Governments should be especially wary of believing that self-appointed 'community leaders' are representative voices – and the media should be more cautious about portraying them as such.

10 – What type of discriminatory obstacles Jewish and Muslims experience most frequently in the field of education and employment?

The United Kingdom has developed a strong equality and anti-discrimination framework which means people are not allowed to discriminate in employment or the provision of services, harass or victimise another person on the grounds of certain "protected characteristics" which include Marriage and civil partnership, Race, Religion and belief, ex and Sexual orientation.

This mean's people's religion and beliefs are being accommodated, so far as is reasonable and competing demands are being balanced. The boundaries of 'reasonable accommodation' may continue to evolve.

Where there are specific concerns these can be addressed with improved communication and a greater understanding of individuals' and organisations' rights and responsibilities.

However, it is important that schools are not allowed or compelled to compromise children's education by tailoring curriculums to pander to religious sensitivities.

Whilst parents should be given broad discretion to raise their children as they wish at home, the independent interests of the child should always be the first priority at school. This means that pupils' right to a broad and balanced education about religions and beliefs should be protected, as should their right to age appropriate sex and relationships education and knowledge about scientific theories and facts that may clash with their parents' religious beliefs.

Clearly from a child's rights perspective, the presence of these key aspects of education should not be regarded as 'discriminatory obstacles'.

Likewise, where there are legitimate security concerns, legal identification requirements, or a reason why the ability to communicate unhindered is considered paramount, the right of public institutions to implement polices restricting face coverings should be supported.

In the interest of protecting young girls from being compelled to wear face coverings, it should be regarded as appropriate to prohibit the wearing of the burka/niqab in schools. Such prohibitions should not be regarded as unreasonable 'barriers'.

11 – How could the society adjust to an increasing diversity? What is the society at large ready to accommodate for a better "living together"?

The Europe of the future will be increasingly religiously diverse and increasingly non-religious. The Muslim population is forecast to increase and may well increase in diversity.

"Living together" requires a celebration of diversity to be matched with a celebration equality, and respect for democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. The basis of the secular state which protects the rights of all citizens and shared civic spaces - from schools to high streets - should be protected.

13 – Which further initiatives could Member States, EU institutions and international organisations take in order to promote common values and mutual understanding and counter stereotypes in the educational sphere (e.g. citizenship education; education about the EU history, its fundamental values and EU rights; intercultural workshops in school, training for teachers, guidelines for educators, etc.). What are already existing best practices in this respect?

"Interfaith" work is worthy but usually attracts a self-selecting group and almost always fails to engage the people in most need of interfaith dialogue and engagement – for the reasons explored above.

The confusion between "religious rights" and the rights of religious individuals is becoming dangerous. Religions or groups must not be accorded "rights" any more than should political ideologies. We must not extend rights beyond those for individual people and they should be universal. We regret the attempts to undermine the universality of Human Rights, for example in the "alternative" Cairo declaration in which rights are subject to sharia.

There is a need for honesty about the range of factors involved in the upsurge of anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic attacks in Europe – including the resurgence of religious fundamentalism. It should be recognised that the victims of anti-Muslim/anti-Jewish bigotry are not immune from being perpetrators of the same or similar bigotries.

We emphasise that the following background contextual comments that follow are perceived contributory factors, not a comment on the validity of the factors themselves.

There is a perception that both Islamic and Jewish practice in the UK has become more orthodox, visible and separatist – this perception masks a more complex situation however and risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Twenty years ago veiling was rare and many Muslim families would not feel uncomfortable for their daughters, who would be dressed largely as others of their age, to accompany non-Muslim families on excursions, even to swimming pools. Twenty years ago there were no state funded and few private Muslim schools – there are now a growing number.

Veiling of women has not only become much more prevalent, perhaps more prevalent even than in some Muslim majority countries, and the age at which veils are being worn has become very much younger – with many school-age children wearing 'modest' dress.

Meanwhile, according to a 2007 study by Dr Yaakov Wise at the University of Manchester, strictly-orthodox Jewry in Europe is expanding more rapidly than at any time since before the Second World War¹¹. In Britain - home to the largest Haredi community in Europe - almost three out of every four Jewish births are in the Haredi community. If current trends continue, the strictly-Orthodox will constitute the majority of British Jews by 2050.

An example of Jewish separatism from the community as a whole is found in the London suburb of Stamford Hill, where a thousand Orthodox Jewish children are unaccounted for by the education authorities and are attending (and possibly not being educated in a conventional sense) unregistered "Yeshiva" 'schools' which prioritise religious over secular teaching.¹²

The reality and perception of separateness is increased by geographic, community and educational segregation.

In England some Muslim preachers have been employing hate speech at mosques¹³, and in lectures at universities and this has been known to the authorities but reportedly generally not the subject of legal action. An attempt was even made to prosecute a TV company for seeking to expose this¹⁴. No attempt was made to tackle the hate speech. Not only was this a perversion of justice but the miscarriage of justice fuels resentment in the wider community.

Islamist terrorist attacks and violence committed in the name of Islam are contributing to the problem. Saudi funded Wahhabiism in schools and mosques is mentioned to us repeatedly when we speak to Muslims, particularly Muslim women's

¹¹ <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/article/?id=2932>

¹² <http://hackneycitizen.co.uk/2014/07/15/illegal-yeshiva-schools-operating-in-stamford-hill-dispatches/>

¹³ <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2015/02/university-of-westminster-islamic-society-to-host-homophobic-preacher>

¹⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2008/aug/22/channel4.islam>

groups, as a source of ever greater orthodoxy and rejection of universal/'Western' values over the last twenty years. This needs careful analysis and tackling head-on as a root cause.

With the threat of ostracism and even violence looming large, many moderate Muslims are understandably frightened to express moderate views, which has the unfortunate effect of erroneously making it appear that the Muslim community does not oppose such activities. Ways need to be found to enable them to express such views openly and in so doing, offer positive leadership.

For more information, please contact:

Keith Porteous Wood

Executive Director

Kpw@secularism.org.uk