

## Country Report

# Slovakia

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This Country Report offers a detailed assessment of religious diversity and violent religious radicalisation in the above-named state. Published by the GREASE project, this report is part a series covering 23 countries on four continents. Each report in the series has a corresponding Country Profile (issued separately) offering more basic information about religious affiliation and state-religion relations in the given country. Both the reports and profiles are available on the GREASE project website.

### **Countries covered in this series:**

Albania, Australia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Morocco, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

This report was produced by the partners of GREASE, an EU-funded research consortium investigating religious diversity, secularism and religiously inspired radicalisation.

<http://grease.eui.eu>



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### **What is the GREASE project?**

Involving researchers from Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Oceania, GREASE is investigating how religious diversity is governed in 23 countries. Our work focuses on comparing norms, laws and practices that may (or may not) prove useful in preventing religious radicalisation. Our research also sheds light on how different societies cope with the challenge of integrating religious minorities and migrants. The aim is to deepen our understanding of how religious diversity can be governed successfully, with an emphasis on countering radicalisation trends.

While exploring religious governance models in other parts of the world, GREASE also attempts to unravel the European paradox of religious radicalisation despite growing secularisation. We consider the claim that migrant integration in Europe has failed because second generation youth have become marginalised and radicalised, with some turning to jihadist terrorism networks. The researchers aim to deliver innovative academic thinking on secularisation and radicalisation while offering insights for governance of religious diversity.

The project is being coordinated by Professor Anna Triandafyllidou from The European University Institute (EUI) in Italy. Other consortium members include Professor Tariq Modood from The University of Bristol (UK); Dr. H. A. Hellyer from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) (UK); Dr. Mila Mancheva from The Centre for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria); Dr. Egdunas Raciunas from Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania); Mr. Terry Martin from the research communications agency SPIA (Germany); Professor Mehdi Lahlou from Mohammed V University of Rabat (Morocco); Professor Haldun Gulalp of The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Turkey); Professor Pradana Boy of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang (Indonesia); Professor Zawawi Ibrahim of The Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (Malaysia); Professor Gurpreet Mahajan of Jawaharlal Nehru University (India); and Professor Michele Grossman of Deakin University (Melbourne, Australia). GREASE is scheduled for completion in 2022.

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GREASE - Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing Together European and Asian Perspectives

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### 1. Introduction

Slovakia as a modern sovereign nation state is rather young – it became independent in 1993 after a peaceful split of Czechoslovakia into two independent states – the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.<sup>1</sup> Practically since the first day of its independence, Slovakia has pursued the goals of Euro-Atlantic integration, which culminated in its accession to both the EU and NATO in 2004. Slovakia’s legal system, including governance of religion, is, thus, permeated by the EU standards though it retains some features of the former Czechoslovakia.

The uniqueness of the Slovak regime of the governance of religion lies particularly in its strict (one might say, stringent) rules of registration for religious collectivities, which has led to Slovakia being one of the few European states where Muslims do not have a registered Muslim religious organization and are forced to operate (including religious rituals and other activities) through NGOs. Legislation governing religion has prevented also other minority faith communities (particularly those that are new to the land) from registering their religious organizations. Having no religious organizations, these faith communities have been effectively marginalized in the religious market as they may not build temples or own property, nor expect tax exemptions or that the salaries of their

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<sup>1</sup> There, admittedly, was a short-lived period of a semi-independent Slovak state that was closely allied to Nazi Germany around the Second World War. For more, see James Mace Ward. *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

clergy be paid by the state, nor teach their religion to children in public schools, nor seek any assistance from the state. Furthermore, their individual religious rights (dietary, clothing, feast days and similar), though formally guaranteed, in practice are not secured.

Though there are a number of faith communities which are legally deprived of the right to have a religious organization, it is widely believed that the draconian legislation was designed to prevent followers of Islam from institutionalizing their religion in the country as both the country's political elite and the population are decidedly Muslimophobic.<sup>2</sup> And all this against the backdrop of the reality where people of Muslim background make a mere estimated 5,000 souls and no signs of Muslim religious radicalization have ever been reported. Though formally it is not so, in practical terms, the current stance, through both rhetoric and policies, of the Slovak state vis-à-vis Islam and Muslims is markedly negative, making Slovakia, along with the Czechia, if not unique, then still exceptional in the EU context. Slovakia, along with other Visegrad Four countries of Central Europe, namely, Hungary, Czechia, and Poland, is one of the European countries where securitization, both institutional and informal, of Islam has reached unprecedented levels.

Another aspect that makes Slovakia distinctive in the European context is the fact that in the last elections (2016) an extreme far-right political party, Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia (*Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko*), has not only made it for the first time into the Parliament (it received more than 8 per cent of the votes) but is increasingly gaining in popularity and, according to the most recent polls (May 2019), it was already the second most popular party in the country with almost 14 per cent support, with the ruling party enjoying just a little over 19 per cent (*What could*, 2019). In the elections to the European Parliament that took place on May 25, 2019, Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia received over 12 per cent of votes (*2019 European election*, 2019). This party is at the same time nationalist and populist, which translates into its promotion of what it calls 'traditional Slovak values and way of living' as opposed to EU-promoted values and ways of living purportedly led by immigrants and particularly Muslims (Rafa, 2015).

In the following sections, first, ethno-confessional and other social characteristics of the Slovakian population are provided, followed by the overview of the regime of the governance of religion and the analysis of social and political radicalization of Slovaks, which, if unchecked, may lead to violent extremism against ethnic and religious minorities, chiefly Roma and Muslims.

## 2. Current composition of the population and challenges arising from it

Both ethnically and confessionally, Slovakia is rather diverse: while ethnic Slovaks make almost 81 per cent of the almost 5.5 million strong nation (*Table 10*, n.d.), ethnic Hungarians make 8.5 per cent with a third ethnic group, the Roma, possibly making another 9 or 10 per cent, though the official census results put them at just 2 per cent. It is widely believed inside Slovakia<sup>3</sup> that of over 382,000 (over seven per cent) inhabitants

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<sup>2</sup> This is well attested to in the annual European Islamophobia reports available at <http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> Interviews with Slovak experts, Bratislava, May 2019.

who in the census chose not to disclose their ethnic identity, many, if not most, are in fact of Roma ethnicity; likewise, some of Roma may have identified themselves as either ethnic Slovaks or Hungarians. All in all, Roma population of Slovakia may comprise half a million and supersede the number of ethnic Hungarians. All other ethnic groups comprise less than 1 per cent each.

As there has been little immigration to independent Slovakia, the biggest national group of immigrants are Ukrainians (over 20 per cent of the total number of foreigners (over 121,000) in the country) (*Migration in Slovakia*, 2019). Nationals of EU member states make almost half of the foreigners living in Slovakia. Immigrants from Asian countries (mainly Vietnam, China, South Korea, and Thailand) make just seven per cent (less than 9,000) of the foreign population in the country. Though Slovakia is not a primary destination country for migrants, due to its geographical location, it has been serving as a transit country. However, their numbers have substantially decreased since Slovakia's (and neighboring Poland and Hungary's) joining of the EU, when, after becoming an EU frontier state, its border control with Ukraine was significantly enhanced. In 2018, there were less than 3,000 migrants who had crossed into the country illegally. The same year, just 178 applications for asylum were submitted, mostly by citizens of Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and Azerbaijan. Slovakia granted asylum only to five individuals in 2018. Since its independence (since 1993), Slovakia received almost 59,000 applications for asylum, of which it granted 854, while another 746 persons were given subsidiary protection (*Migration in Slovakia*, 2019). Overall, foreigners, including nationals of EU member states, make some 2.2 per cent of the Slovak population, which is one of the lowest percentage in the EU.

According to the latest census figures, three quarters of Slovakia's population are of Christian cultural background (though only a third of the believers attend services monthly (Starr, 2019)), while over 13 per cent self-identify as 'non-religious' (*Table 10*, n.d.). Nominally, the majority of Slovakia's population are Roman Catholic (62 per cent), with followers of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession trailing behind with almost 6 per cent, Greek Catholics with less than four per cent, adherents of the Reformed Christian Church with less than two per cent and Orthodox with around one per cent. Members of all other (Christian and non-Christian) religious communities make just a little over one per cent. There are estimated 5,000 people of Muslim background living in Slovakia (*Europe's growing*, 2017), who make a mere 0.09 per cent of the population. This is one of the lowest shares of people of Muslim background in all of post-communist East Central Europe (Račius, 2018). Incidentally, Slovakia is the only country in Europe that does not have a single mosque (for prayers, Muslims use spaces at their NGO premises).

In view of this ethno-confessional composition of the Slovak population, Slovakia may be seen as one of the most culturally homogenous nations in Europe and described as a rather secular post-socialist society of Western Christian cultural heritage. Therefore, culturally, there are hardly any tensions or cleavages that could threaten the socio-political stability of the country. Nonetheless, as a recent survey revealed, over 54 per cent of Slovaks would not want to have a Muslim as neighbor (*Our European*, 2017).

Socio-economically, however, Slovakia is not so homogenous with ethnic Roma occupying the lowest level of the ladder of the socio-economic stratification. Many Roma (whose

larger concentration is in the eastern part of the country) live in poor conditions, have little education and high rates of unemployment (*Poverty and employment*, 2014). Finally, Roma are generally viewed by ethnic Slovaks with contempt bordering on racism and thus experience constant social discrimination (Machlica, 2019, Aaron, 2013). Roma are seen by Slovak population as the least desired as neighbors – over 62 per cent of respondents in a recent survey did not want to have Roma as neighbor (*Our European*, 2017). Roma have until recently been the primary target group for far-right and nationalist groupings, which have engaged in hate crimes and violent acts against them. There are reports that even government policies sometimes discriminate against Roma (*Slovak authorities*, 2013). This is not exceptional to Slovakia – the neighboring countries (Hungary, Serbia, Romania) all are to a greater or lesser degree in a similar situation.

Presence of the Hungarian minority, who concentrate in the south of the country, along the border with Hungary, though generally not viewed as problematic, is nonetheless perceived by some nationalistically inclined ethnic Slovaks as a potential danger to the integrity of the Slovak state. With revisionist voices and the Hungarian governments' expressed concern for the wellbeing and the rights of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia (something that has in the past made bilateral relations between the two countries sour (Adam, 2008; *Slovak, Hungarian*, 2008; *Slovakia and Hungary*, 2009; Rousek and Gulyas, 2010; *Slovaks retaliate*, 2010; Than and Santa, 2010)), ethnic Hungarian citizens of Slovakia are sometimes suspected by ethnic Slovaks of harboring irredentist feelings. Therefore, far-right and nationalist groupings of ethnic Slovaks have been particularly wary of ethnic Hungarian inhabitants of Slovakia.

### 3. Historical background of state-organised religion relations

Prior to its independence, Slovakia, with a short intermezzo during the Second World War (when it was what some observers call a satellite clero-fascist state of Nazi Germany), for almost 70 years (1918-1939 and 1945-1992) was part of a joint Czech and Slovak state, which itself was born out of ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Prior to the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian state, Slovak lands were part of the Hungarian part of the Empire. Though initially primarily a Western Christian state, gradually Austro-Hungary became a multi-confessional country where, besides, Eastern Christians, Judaist and Muslim minorities (particularly after the occupation (1878) and subsequent annexation of Bosnia (1908)) lived. All major confessions were recognized by the State and centrally controlled. Islam was officially recognized in the Austrian part by an imperial decree (known as *Islamgesetz*) in 1912 to be followed by an official recognition by the Hungarian Parliament in 1916. The Empire facilitated founding of a Muslim religious organization, which was meant to become independent of the Ottoman Shaykh al-Islam and was modelled after Christian Churches with a hierarchical ecclesiastical-bureaucratic structure. Its head was appointed by the Kaiser from among the candidates submitted by the Muslim religious organization. These formal recognitions and founding of a Muslim religious organization based in distant Sarajevo, in Bosnia, however, did not have any effect on Slovakia as there were no Muslim collectivities on its territories at the time.

In the inter-war Czechoslovak Republic, religious freedoms of adherents of recognized religions were generally respected. As there was a nascent Muslim community of converts and expatriates in the Czech part of the country, Muslims sought, however, unsuccessfully, to register their religious organization in the capital city Prague. It was finally registered in the years of the Second World War by the occupying Nazi German authorities. However, as Slovakia then was a nominally separate, this registration did not extend to its territory. In the end, as the leaders of the war-time community had been accused of having (and appear to indeed have) collaborated with the Nazis, their organization was banned in the newly reconstituted post-war Czechoslovakia, and its leadership even prosecuted (Mendel, 1998, pp. 127-141).

With the communist takeover in 1948, religious life of practically all faith communities, like elsewhere in the communist-ruled Eastern Europe, was made very difficult and only the major Christian denominations managed to continue it. Catholic and other Christian Churches adapted to the political reality and even went into tactical collaboration with the communist regime. As there were practically no Muslims or their organization in the communist time Czechoslovakia, it is not possible to talk about state-Islam relations in that period.

#### 4. Current institutional structure for governing religion and religious diversity

Since collapse of the communist regime in 1989, still in the joint state, religious rights were restored, particularly through the Law on Religious Freedom and the Legal Status of Churches and Religious Organizations of 1991 (Zakon, 1991), which superseded a communist-time law on religions of 1949, and communities were once again allowed to publicly engage in religious rituals. New religious communities started forming and seeking to register their organizations. The Law was then inherited by independent Slovakia, which introduced certain amendments. In one of them in 2007, the required minimum number of members, “who have residential address in the territory of the Slovak Republic and who are Slovak citizens” (Art. 11), of the religious community seeking to register their organization was set at 20,000 (Zakon, 2007).

Thus, governance of religion in today's Slovakia stems from its Constitution, the constitutional Bill of Basic Rights and Freedoms, and the Law on Religious Freedom and the Legal Status of Churches and Religious Organizations. The registration of churches and religious societies is further governed by the Law on Religious Freedom and the Legal Status of Churches and Religious Organizations, and the Law on the Registration of Churches and Religious Organizations. As may be expected of a European state, which is a member of the EU, the Constitution of Slovakia (Art. 24) unequivocally guarantees religious freedom: “1. Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief shall be guaranteed. This right shall include the right to change religion or belief and the right to refrain from a religious affiliation. Everyone shall have the right to express his or her mind publicly. 2. Everyone shall have the right to manifest freely his or her religion or belief either alone or in association with others, privately or publicly, in worship, religious acts, maintaining ceremonies or to participate in teaching. 3. Churches and ecclesiastical communities shall administer their own affairs themselves; in particular, they shall

establish their bodies, appoint clericals, provide for theological education and establish religious orders and other clerical institutions independent from the state authorities.” The Law on Religious Freedom and the Legal Status of Churches and Religious Organizations (Art. 1) re-confirms these constitutional provisions, establishing mutual autonomy between the state and religious collectivities and their organizations.

The regime of governance of religion in Slovakia operates on a one-tier principle – all registered religious organizations are treated as equal before the law (that is, there is no formal distinction into ‘traditional’ / ‘historical’ religious communities and others) (Art. 4.2.) but the state “recognizes only those churches and religious societies that are registered” (Art. 4.4.). The Roman Catholic Church, however, has a privileged status, as Slovakia has signed a Concordat with the Holy See.

The government institution charged with supervising the state – religious organizations relations in Slovakia is the Ministry of Culture. In the 1990s, the then Minister of Culture Ivan Hudec established a separate institution to supervise relations between the State and religious organizations. In 2011, however, the then Minister Daniel Krajcer abolished it and since then it is a ministry department that is charged with the task.

In 2016, in the wake of the so-called ‘European refugee crisis’, the Law on Religious Freedom and the Legal Status of Churches and Religious Organizations was amended for the first time in ten years. Though the President vetoed it, arguing that the amendments curtail religious freedoms and rights, his veto was overturned and the amendments were passed by two-thirds in the Parliament in 2017 (*Registration of churches, 2007*). The most symbolic amendment to the Law was the one that raised the minimum number of members for the registration of a religious organization from the hitherto 20,000 to 50,000 members who have to be Slovak citizens permanently residing in Slovakia (Zakon, 2017). Such a requirement is arguably the highest in Europe and it effectively kills off the chances of any new faith communities institutionalizing their religion in the country. The minor faith communities thus are forced to register according to the Law on Civic Associations of 1990 (which, incidentally, explicitly states that the Law does not cover religious collectivities (Section 1, Point 1c)) (Citizens Civil Law, 1990) and operate as NGOs, what strips them of many of rights that registered religious organizations have, including building and owning temples and other property, establishing institutions of religious education, providing pastoral care, lobbying for diet, religious feasts and clothing related rights and other. Passing of the amendments has been widely seen as putting a choker on Muslims so that they do not form a religious organization and institutionalize Islam in the country. Some observers even have labeled the process of the amendment of the law ‘criminalization of Islam in Slovakia.’ (Werleman, 2018).

As of mid-2019, there were 18 registered religious organizations in Slovakia, of which only two were non-Christian – those of Judaists and Bahais, with 2,000 followers of Judaism and just over 1,000 of Bahaim. While Judaism is a historical religion in Slovakia, Bahaim is a recent appearance. Bahais succeeded to attain registration of their religious organization in 2007 after they had managed to collect 28,000 signatures of supporters (the then applicable legislation required 20,000 signatures) (*Government of Slovakia, 2007*). By the way, another tiny religious community, Mormons, also managed to garner support of over 20,000 Slovaks to gain official registration in 2006. Since then, however, no other religious collectivity was registered.

It may be mentioned that Atheist Church of Non-Believers also sought registration in 2006 and even produced the required 20,000 signatures. The Ministry of Culture, however, rejected its application on the basis that the group is not a religious collectivity (Hall et al., n.d.).

## 5. Violent religious radicalisation challenges: brief overview

Religious radicalization among members of non-Christian faith communities has not been observed in Slovakia, though the then chief of the secret service Vladimír Mitro in 2001 is reported to have “described religious sects as among the major threats to national security (Hall et al., n.d.). The Slovak Information Service report that they have “dealt with efforts of harmful sectarian groupings and pseudo-religious communities to acquire new members, infiltrate the education system, make financial profit and psychologically manipulate their membership.” (*Slovak Information*, 2017). Church of Scientology and the like non-registered groups usually fall under the category of ‘harmful sectarian groupings.’

The lone case of Muslim radicalization pertains to an ethnic Slovak convert to Islam who has been tried for plotting a violent act in the Czech capital Prague in which he was resident. Dominik Kobulnický (alias Abdul Rahman), originally from Eastern Slovakia, must have converted to Islam while already living in the Czech Republic and quickly became radicalized to the point where he began reading about and even stockpiling components needed to assemble an improvised explosive device. He was apprehended by the Czech police early in his endeavor and appears to have been acting alone (*Slovák z Prahy*, 2019). He did not have any known relations with the Slovak Muslim community and thus should rather be seen as a (Muslim) immigrant in the Czech Republic and his case of religious radicalization is confined to the Czech territory and the Muslim communities there, not Slovakia.

Slovak intelligence services admit that there is practically no threat of terrorism (understood to be stemming solely from jihadis) to the country. For instance, in its annual report for 2017, the Slovak Information Service admitted that they “did not acquire any intelligence suggesting a real threat to the country or its interests abroad.” (*Slovak Information*, 2017). However, at the same time, they consider that “the threat level had a mild tendency to rise particularly as a result of the number of completed/thwarted individual violent attacks that had been perpetrated largely by jihadists in some European countries.” (*Slovak Information*, 2017).

On the other hand, though the Slovak society is rather secularized, there is a potential for its (or rather some of its segments’) radicalization, first of all, along nationalist lines, in which religious (Christian) identity may play a certain role and religion may be instrumentalized for political purposes all the way to violent radicalization. There are already some signs of certain segments of the Slovak society being radicalized – this particularly applies to paramilitary groups like Slovenskí Branci (Slovak Levies) and others (Turček and Sabo, 2019). Members and supporters of a parliamentary extreme far-right political party Kotleba – People’s Party Our Slovakia have expressed their Muslimophobic (as well as anti-Roma) stance in numerous statements and public protests

(Rafa, 2015). Far-right political radicalism has already translated into violent actions against people perceived to be of immigrant background, and particularly against Arabs/Muslims (Colborne, 2017). Many inside (but also outside) observers are alarmed by the Slovak society's turning increasingly toward nationalist (with its neo-fascist overtones) radicalization (Podrug, 2017).

## 6. Policies and practices addressing / preventing violent religious radicalization

On the strategic level, Slovakia does not see violent religious radicalization among challenges and threats to its national security. The still valid Security Strategy (adopted in 2005) does not mention religious radicalization at all. The closest threat mentioned in the Strategy is terrorism, which, however, is also seen as unlikely on the territory of the country (Ministry of Defence, 2005).

On the other hand, security services like the Slovak Information Service, in their annual reports, do include religious radicalization among (possible) threats. For instance, in its report for 2016, it noted that “[a]lthough Slovakia was not the principal target country for Islamist radicals and foreign fighters, we learnt about persons with links to Daesh who may have crossed the territory of the country. Relevant organisations were notified about high-risk persons linked with radical branches of Islam who could potentially target an important aspect of transport infrastructure in the country and the service proposed adoption of special security measures.” (*Slovak Information*, 2016).

Despite the fact that there have been no instances of Muslim religious radicalization in Slovakia, since the onset of the so-called ‘European refugee crisis’, Islam and Muslims have been increasingly securitized on both social and political level. The then Prime Minister Robert Fico made numerous negative remarks and statements about migrating people, whom he likened to Muslims. For instance, in November 2015, after the terrorist attacks in Paris, Fico publicly announced the Slovak government was “monitoring every single Muslim currently present in the territory of Slovakia.” (Colborne, 2017). Later, in 2016, Fico publicly proclaimed that “Islam has no place in Slovakia” (Colborne, 2017) and that he firmly stood by his objective to prevent “emergence of a united Muslim community in Slovakia.” (Colborne, 2017).

Slovakia initially agreed to accept several hundred refugees within the framework of the EU refugee distribution quota system but very soon decided not to take them in arguing that accepting refugees presumed to be chiefly of Muslim background would increase the country's vulnerability and decrease its national security (*Slovakia*, n.d.).

In 2016, Slovakia passed amendments to its Criminal Code, which now includes extremism as a criminal offence (Criminal Code, n.d.). Though there is no clear-cut definition of extremism and in the Code it is not related to religion, the Code comprehensively describes crimes falling under the broad category of extremism – besides engaging in political violence (terrorism) (Section 419), the Code also criminalizes ‘Supporting and Promoting Groups Aimed at Suppression of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms’ (Sections 421 and 422), ‘Manufacturing of Extremist Materials’

(Section 422a), 'Dissemination of Extremist Materials' (Section 422b), 'Possession of Extremist Materials' (Section 422c). No cases of religious radicalization, let alone violent, have yet been reported and no charges of extremism have been pressed yet.

Besides, Slovakia has already had two Counter-Extremism Concepts (for the periods of 2011-2014 (*Resolution*, 2011) and 2015-2019 (*Resolution*, 2015)). The current one "focuses on current issues, which are prevention, raising awareness within society, efficient training of the police corps and cooperation with neighbouring countries." (Moravčíková, n.d.). It also provides a definition of extremism: "Extremism means actions and expressions resulting from an extreme ideology hostile to a democratic system, which has, either directly or indirectly or within a certain time period, a destructive impact on the existing democratic system and its fundamental attributes. Another typical feature of extremism and related activities is that they attack the system of fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and international human rights documents or they seek to aggravate or thwart the application of these rights by their activities." (Moravčíková, n.d.). Among types of extremism, the Concept mentions religious extremism, although other forms (right-wing, left-wing, and "extremism focused on one issue (the environment, separatism, etc.)" are also mentioned (Moravčíková, n.d.). There is also a separate definition of radicalization, which is described as "a process in which individuals or groups abandon, under the influence of radical political or religious ideology, the value system of a given country and adopt a new system of values that contradict elementary principles of a democratic society such as rule of law, innate human dignity, equality before the law or the universal system of fundamental rights and freedoms." (Moravčíková, n.d.).

The Concept has four strategic objectives: "(1) strengthening the resilience of communities and individuals to non-democratic ideologies and extremism; (2) raising awareness about the seriousness of extremism for society and the consequences of radicalisation; (3) efficiently monitoring and uncovering offences of extremism and prosecuting their perpetrators; and (4) building institutional and personnel capacities for state bodies fulfilling tasks related to the protection of constitutional principles and the internal order and security of the state." (Moravčíková, n.d.). Interestingly, besides setting specific tasks for government institutions, it also sets some to religious organizations, namely, to 'update' the "spiritual scene in the Slovak Republic, focusing on religious communities that demonstrate attributes of religious extremism" (Task 2.7.) and to perform "educational activities for vocational groups, registered churches and religious communities in the area of preventing extremism and radicalisation" (Task 2.8.). (Moravčíková, n.d.).

Rising nationalist, far-right and neo-fascist radicalization with its religious undertones is of increasing concern to the Slovak authorities. As already in the late 2000s, there was a number of extreme far-right, nationalist and neo-fascist groupings and even registered political parties, government institutions sought to ban and prosecute some of them and their members, in some cases successfully (Nociar, 2012). Since the early 2010s, with the rise of the Slovenski Branci and Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia, the situation has even worsened. This is admitted by the Slovak Information Service, which, in its annual report for 2017, claims to have "paid attention to the prominent figures of the far-right

movement in Slovakia as they criticized the government, the Euro-Atlantic structures and the EU migration policy.” (Slovak Information, 2017). The then Prime Minister Robert Fico is quoted as having admitted in 2017 that ‘Slovakia has underestimated the new wave of fascism and extremism.’ (Moravčíková, n.d.). Thus, the Minister of Defense in 2018 submitted a request to the General Prosecutor’s office to investigate Slovenskí Branci, namely, to answer ‘whether the organisation poses a threat to Slovakia’s security and whether its existence is in violation with the country’s laws or not.’ (*Defense Minister*, 2018). The General Prosecutor has also attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to ban Kotleba – People’s Party Our Slovakia (though an earlier party headed by Marian Kotleba was banned a decade ago). (*Far right party*, 2019; *Slovak court*, 2019).

## 7. Concluding Remarks

Though Slovak society is, on the one hand, rather secular and, on the other hand, composed of people professing numerous faiths, the regime of governance of religion in the country favors those religious communities that had been historically institutionalized. The legislation ultimately prevents any newly emergent religious collectivities from institutionalizing unless they pass a suffocating threshold of 50,000 citizen-members. Though the rationale behind such a high minimum is to prevent pseudo-religious groupings (‘dangerous sects’ and business enterprises) from getting recognition by the state, there have been no instances of religious radicalization on the side of new religious communities.

On the other hand, there are clear signs of growing nationalist radicalization on the side of the (Christian) Slovak population which increasingly supports far-right para-military organizations and political parties, some of which present themselves as defenders of ‘traditional national Christian values and way of living’ against both the encroaching ‘Brussels values’ and alien ways of living, represented by immigrants and foremost Muslims.

The governments of Slovakia have realized this growing challenge and started doing what is in their power to check the spread and consolidation of nationalist, far-right ideas and ideologies. Legal attempts to ban dangerous organizations and prosecute their members have been undertaken.

Ironically, when talking about religious radicalization in Slovakia, contrary to many other European states, it is not Muslims who fall under the radar but certain segments of the majority Christian population. In the most extreme cases, Muslims become the target of radicalized Slovak nationalists and neo-fascists. Therefore, the comprehensive analysis of the global trends in religious radicalization needs to take into account the facts that, first, it may be non-Muslims who radicalize and, secondly, Muslims may become the target of non-Muslim (religious) radicalization (by extreme elements of the majority population).

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