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THE MUSLIM DIASPORA IN CONTEMPORARY NORWAY: HISTORY, CHALLENGES AND DANGERS

Petriaiev Oleksii,

Post-graduate student

National Institute of Strategic Studies

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6561-2647

The article examines the problem of increasing influence of Muslim migrants in the Kingdom of Norway. Particular attention is paid to the issue of social policy of the country in relation to Muslims, as well as the issue of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, which pose a threat to the national security of the country. Anti-Muslim views began to develop very strongly in Norwegian society after 2010, and especially after the migration crisis in the European Union in 2015–2016. Part of the population of Norway believes that there is a slow takeover of their country by Muslim migrants, who are gradually and systematically building a parallel society. Various statistical studies conducted in Norway over the past few years show the increasing dynamics of the development of Islamophobia among the indigenous population of Norway. Muslim migrants began to arrive in the country during the economic growth in the sixties as workers. In the second half of the seventies, some workers from Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Turkey and Morocco began to move their families and received citizenship. Later, during the conflicts in the Middle East, Africa and the former Yugoslav republics, war refugees began to move to Norway. The country attracted them with its high standard of living and developed social system. Gradually, a problem with their integration arose. Today, many migrants have a poor knowledge of Norwegian and do not have a higher education, which most often becomes the reason for the inability to find a job with good pay. They are forced to live in poor areas and engage in small-scale entrepreneurship. Also, young Muslims cannot integrate and experience a sense of renunciation, which is used by various Islamic extremist organizations such as the Islamic State, pushing them to commit terrorist attacks in Norwegian cities. At the same time, a feeling of hatred and Islamophobia is growing in Norwegian society, which is expressed in open discrimination on religious, cultural, linguistic and ethnic grounds, and also contributes to the increase in the influence of right-wing Norwegian political parties that build their strategy on populist slogans.

Key words: Norway, Islam, Islamophobia, terrorism, migration.

Петряєв Олексій. Діаспора мусульман у сучасній Норвегії: історія, виклики та небезпеки

У статті розглядається проблема посилення впливу мусульман мігрантів у Королівстві Норвегія. Особливу увагу приділено питанню соціальної політики країни щодо мусульман, а також питанню ісламського фундаменталізму та тероризму, які становлять загрозу для національної безпеки країни. Антимусульманські погляди стали дуже розвиватися в норвезькому суспільстві після 2010 р., особливо після міграційної кризи в Європейському Союзі в 2015–2016 рр. Частина населення Норвегії вірить, що відбувається повільне захоплення їхньої країни мігрантами-мусульманами, які поступово та планомірно будують паралельне суспільство. Різні статистичні дослідження, проведені в Норвегії за останні кілька років, показують зростаючу динаміку розвитку ісламофобії серед корінного населення Норвегії. Мусульмани-мігранти стали прибувати до країни під час економічного зростання у шістдесятих роках як робітники. У другій половині сімдесятих років частина робітників із мусульманських країн, таких як Пакистан, Туреччина та Марокко, стали перевозити свої сім'ї та отримували громадянство. Далі під час конфліктів на Близькому Сході, Африці та в колишніх республіках Югославії біженці від війни почали переїжджати до Норвегії. Країна приваблювала їх високим рівнем життя, а також розвинутою соціальною системою. Поступово виникла проблема з їх інтеграцією. Сьогодні багато мігрантів слабо знають норвезьку мову, не мають вищої освіти, що найчастіше стає причиною неможливості знайти роботу з хорошою оплатою праці. Вони змушені жити у неблагонадійних районах та займатися дрібною підприємницькою діяльністю. Також молоді мусульмани не можуть інтегруватися і відчують почуття зреченості, чим користуються різні ісламські екстремістські організації, такі як Ісламська Держава, підштовхуючи їх до здійснення терористичних атак у містах Норвегії. Водночас у норвезькому суспільстві зростає почуття ненависті, ісламофобії, яке виражається у відкритій дискримінації за релігійною, культурною, мовною та етнічною ознаками, а також сприяє збільшенню впливу правих норвезьких політичних партій, котрі будують свою стратегію на populistських гаслах.

Ключові слова: Норвегія, іслам, ісламофобія, тероризм, міграція.

Introduction. Since September 11, 2001, the social structure and security in Norway has gradually changed. In 2015–2016, many refugees from the Middle East arrived in the country. This factor played an important role in changing the social, economic and political structure of Norway. Muslim migrants have created pressure



on the country's social system. The weak integration of Muslim migrants and their social vulnerability makes them victims of Islamic fundamentalist propaganda, pushing them to aggressive actions against the state. As a reaction to this, Norwegian right-wing political movements have intensified their policies, which often also leads to aggressive actions against Muslim migrants, expressed in hate speech, discrimination, as well as attacks and even murders.

The purpose and objectives of the study: to study the problem of national security in Norway and the threat posed by Islamic fundamentalism.

Recent literature review. The topic of the Islamic factor in Norway has been studied by such scholars as Katrine Fangen, Cora Alexa Doving, Maria Gabrielsen Jumbert, Kristin Bergtora Sandvik, Mathias Hatleskog Tjonn, Junaid Khan, Vibeke Moe Bjornbekk, Gilang Mahadika, Oddbjorn Leirvik, Jorgen S. Jacobsen and others.

Research methods: Research was conducted using number of scientific approaches such as comparative, historical, comparative and critical methods.

The main research material. As in many European countries, Muslim migration to Norway began in the 1960s. The first waves of Muslims were represented by cheap labor needed for the rapidly growing economy of the country, after which they were replaced by the arrival of their relatives and family reunification, and later by refugees from wars in the countries of the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia.

Until 1975, the bulk of migrants were from Turkey, Pakistan and Morocco who came to the country to work. In 1975, the Norwegian government introduced restrictions on the employment of citizens of other countries, except for workers from neighboring Scandinavian countries. There were two ways to migrate to Norway, family unification, or as refugees. Although Norway is not a member of the European Union, the country has signed the Schengen agreement and the agreement on labor migration [1, p. 4–5].

In 1980, Norway first counted the number of Muslims living in the country. They numbered 1,006. Although the exact figures could be much higher. In the nineties, the number of Muslims grew rapidly. In 2005, there were 120,000 official Muslims. By 2009, the number had risen to 163,000 [2].

In 2015, when the migration crisis began in the countries of the European Union. The number of asylum seekers, especially refugees from Afghanistan and Syria, was 31,145. After that, the number of migrants began to fall. In the first quarter of 2016, 942 asylum seekers were registered in Norway. For the whole of 2016, 3,460 people arrived in Norway. This was due to the general tightening of migration rules in the countries of the European Union [3].

According to statistics, in 2025 it will be 197,390 people. This is 3.4% of the total population of Norway [4].

The majority of Muslims living in the country live in large cities such as Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim and Stavanger. Migrants try not to settle in rural areas. This is due to the way of life, which implies close interaction of the Muslim community to solve various social problems. The Muslim community is not homogeneous in the countries from which migrants came, as well as in the direction of Islam. Two groups of Muslims can also be distinguished: those who came to work and those who came as refugees. The first group includes immigrants from Pakistan 39,000, Turkey 20,500 and Morocco 11,400. The second group includes refugees and those who asked for asylum in Norway. These include Somalis 33,800, Iraqis 30,600, Iranians 21,300, Bosnians 17,900, Kosovo Albanians 15,200, Afghans 14,600 [5, p. 459–460].

Muslims in Norway form their own diasporas and live separately from the indigenous population of the country, forming a separate society. Children of Muslim migrants attend Norwegian comprehensive schools. They also have the choice of attending Arabic language and Quran classes at mosques. There are also Islamic online schools offering education via the Internet. One such school is the Iqra Quran School. This is a daytime Islamic school that conducts lessons via the Zoom application. Lessons are held in Norwegian or Urdu. The school's educational program includes the study of Arabic, the history of Islam, Islamic philosophy, readings of the Quran, and the basics of Islam [6].

Also on weekends, various mosques offer lessons for Muslim children. For example, in the city of Stavanger, there is a mosque called Sandnes, which offers classes in Arabic, the Koran and the basics of Islam. Classes are taught for girls on Saturdays and for boys on Sundays. The children are aged from 6 to 16. The school aims to educate young Muslims. The school proclaims its goal to educate young Muslims so that they can understand Islam and lead an Islamic way of life.

Muslims face various problems in Norway when it comes to housing. Owning a home is one of the key factors for successful integration into Norwegian society. According to Statistics Norway, an organization that researches statistics in the country, only 60.4% of migrants live in their own homes. This is also due to the Islamic approach to obtaining loans for housing. In the Islamic banking system, it is forbidden to receive



money at interest. The bank must buy the property itself, after which it must resell it to the client with added value. These processes do not allow many Muslims to buy housing in Norway. Statistics also show that migrants from Asia and Africa live in overcrowded housing. The most overcrowded housing is found among migrants from Pakistan. The best housing situation is among Bosnians. The housing situation is primarily affected by low socio-economic status, as well as a cultural element. Simply put, poverty is the main obstacle to acquiring good housing. For example, 55.7% of Bosnians own their own home, among Turkish migrants 35.3% own their own home. The lowest rates are among Somalis 11.4% and Syrians 6% [8, p. 355–400].

Muslim migrants find it difficult to find work in the country. This is due to their poor knowledge of the Norwegian language and low level of education. There is also a problem of unspoken discrimination against Muslims by the indigenous population of the country in order to create problems with finding work. Thus, Muslim migrants are forced to engage in small-scale entrepreneurial activity, expressed in small street business, workshops, hairdressers, etc. Quite often, the entire family and relatives work together, forming a family business [9].

In Norway, the Islamic infrastructure includes 126 facilities, consisting of prayer rooms, apartments, closed factories and other buildings. 40 of the facilities are concentrated in Oslo, the others are located in other cities. In the capital of Norway there are four mosques that were built with the assistance of the Pakistani diaspora in Norway [10, p. 490].

The political interests of Muslims in Norway are represented through the public organization Islamic Council of Norway. The organization was founded in 1993 with the aim of representing the interests of the Muslim population of the country. The organization includes a network of mosques, charities, and Muslim student associations. The organization includes 70,000 people who live all over Norway. The organization's website states that its main goal is to ensure that Muslims can live in Norwegian society in accordance with Islamic teachings and to contribute to the formation of a Norwegian-Muslim identity [11].

Muslim migrants share the ideas of multiculturalism and vote for left-wing political parties in the country. The reason is that left-wing political parties adhere to a liberal ideology. Muslim migrants are interested in liberal parties because they promise to provide more extensive rights for migrants. In 2012, for the first time in Norway, a Muslim woman from a family of Pakistani migrants, Hadiya Tayik, became the Minister of Culture. She held this position for one year. After that, between 2021–2022, she was the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs of Norway [12].

Islamic terrorism has become a real threat to Norway's national security. In recent years, jihadism has become a problem for the Kingdom of Norway. While Islamic fundamentalism was previously a problem for countries with a colonial past, such as Great Britain, France or Belgium, today the threat of jihadism can be found in all countries of the European Union. Norway is no exception. Over the past thirty years, several terrorist attacks have occurred in Norway, which were attributed to Islamic extremist organizations.

As in many countries in the Western world, Islamic terrorism began to manifest itself after the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. In July 2006, Arfan Bhatti, one of the key leaders of the Islamist organization Ummah of the Prophet, opened fire in a synagogue in Oslo, planned to blow up the US and Israeli embassies, and at the same time he shot up the house of Norwegian journalist Nina Johnsrud. Arfan Bhatti's plans included building an Islamic society in Norway and establishing Sharia law [13].

In 2009, Norwegian police arrested 25 Islamists who were planning a terrorist attack in Oslo [14].

In 2010, Kurdish Islamist and jihadist Faraj Ahmad Najmuddin threatened to assassinate Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg. He was charged with terrorism [15].

In 2014, Norwegian intelligence prevented a terrorist attack planned by the Islamic State. The attack was planned for July 24, the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr, but thanks to coordinated actions by the Norwegian secret service and the police, the tragedy was prevented [16].

In 2017, an attempted terrorist attack planned by a 17-year-old man who sympathized with the Islamic State was foiled [17].

In 2021, Norwegian police thwarted another attempted terrorist attack planned in Oslo by a 16-year-old Syrian teenager who considered himself a jihadist and sympathized with the Islamic State [18].

In 2022, an Iranian man opened fire at an event held by LGBTQ activists in Oslo, organized by the Norwegian Organization for Sexual and Gender Diversity. Two people were killed and 21 others were injured. The terrorist, Zaniar Matapour, was a supporter of the Islamic State [19].

Terrorist attacks in Norway do not occur as often as in other countries of the European Union. Also, thanks to the effective work of the country's special services and police, they are prevented. Also, most potential terrorists are supporters of the Islamic State, who are not active members of this organization, but act under the influence of propaganda.



The Norwegian Armed Forces, as part of the Western coalition, have taken part in various conflicts in Muslim countries. It is important to note that from the point of view of political logic, the country has shown solidarity with the general policy of Western countries in the Muslim region, and has also sought to preventively reduce future threats to its national security. At the same time, such a political approach has had negative consequences, not only for Norway, but also for all Western countries, North America and the countries of the European Union. From the point of view of Islamic fundamentalism, Norway has conducted wars of conquest in the countries of the Muslim region, and the response of supporters of Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism, is a justified response as a continuation of the war against the countries of the Western world.

Following the September 11, 2001, attacks, NATO coalition forces began military operations in Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban regime, destroy the terrorist base, and build a democratic society in the country. Norwegian troops arrived in Afghanistan in December 2001. Norwegian special forces participated in special operations as part of the military operation «Enduring Freedom». Norwegian sappers were also tasked with clearing mines at the airports of Kabalu and Kandahar. Norwegian troops left Afghanistan during the general withdrawal of NATO troops from the country in the summer of 2021. During the twenty years of the presence of the armed forces of Norway in Afghanistan, ten people were killed [20].

In 2011, during the Libyan civil war, the Norwegian Air Force took part in the bombing of Colonel Gaddafi's forces between March 24 and August 1. In total, the Norwegian Air Force dropped 588 bombs. The military intervention by Norway and seven other countries helped rebel forces toppling the Gaddafi regime, but at the same time plunged the country into permanent chaos of civil war, which created permanent security problems for the European continent due to its close geographical location [21].

In August 2014, the Norwegian government passed a royal resolution on the participation of the Norwegian Armed Forces in the international coalition in the fight against the Islamic State. In March, the government gave permission for the deployment of armed forces to Iraq to train Kurdish armed groups and Iraqi security forces to improve their combat readiness to counter the armed groups of the Islamic State [22].

The Norwegian military contingent in Iraq numbered 70 people, and a small group in Jordan. The Norwegian government also provided financial and humanitarian aid to Syria. Norway's task was to assist the anti-terrorist coalition in the fight against the Islamic State, which posed a threat to national security for all countries of the European Union [23].

Due to factors such as Muslim migration and Islamic fundamentalism, feelings of xenophobia and Islamophobia have developed in Norwegian society. Islamophobia is expressed in such manifestations as negative attitudes towards religion and culture, discrimination at work, and is also expressed through the use of violence.

Islamophobia began to emerge in Norway in the seventies with the large migration of Muslims. At that time, right-wing populist parties in Norway began to use the factor of the growing number of Muslim migrants for their political purposes. Norwegian populists use five narratives to discriminate against the country's Muslims and create a negative attitude towards them on the part of the indigenous population of Norway. First, migrants can appropriate limited resources, such as jobs and housing. Second, migrants create pressure on the social system, in particular due to the high level of unemployment, thereby allocating resources for their maintenance that could be used for other needs. Third, this is a factor of increasing crime and social instability. Fourth, these are foreign cultural customs that may in the future displace the cultural norms of the indigenous population. Fifth, this is a threat to liberal values [24, p. 1–14].

A survey of the Norwegian population conducted in 2024 showed that 31% of citizens have a negative attitude towards Muslims. People believe that Muslims want to take over Norway and all of Europe. Half of the citizens believe that Muslim values are incompatible with their life and cultural principles and seem alien to them. Also, almost a third of citizens said that they distance themselves from Muslim migrants and try not to contact them [25].

There are several racist, nationalist, neo-Nazi and anti-Islamic organizations operating in Norway. These include Vigrid, Pegida, Stop Islamization of Norway. These organizations aim to combat Islamization of Norway and protect Norwegian religious, social and cultural values.

Norway's most famous attacks were also carried out by people motivated by anti-Islamic motives. The danger of the country's Islamization prompted Anders Behring Breivik to commit an attack that took the lives of 77 people. Also in 2019, Philip Manshaus shot Muslims in the Al-Nur Mosque in the suburbs of Oslo [26, p. 278–280].

One of the solutions to the problems that have arisen with Muslim migrants in Norway is their integration into society, which can prevent various social problems in advance. The main goal of integration is to help



migrants participate in society, learn Norwegian, and also to help them obtain education, skills and qualifications that will enable the migrant to get a job, which will help improve integration.

The Norwegian government believes that successful integration depends on the level of education. Various integration programs are offered by both government agencies, such as the Department of Integration, and non-governmental public organizations. Firstly, it is critically important that the migrant learns the Norwegian language, as well as learns more about the country's history, culture and values. Then the migrant must receive a vocational education, which will help him find a job, which should improve his social status. It is also very important to protect migrants from negative extremist information, such as Islamic fundamentalism, which can be used to push migrants to illegal activities [27].

Conclusion. The study showed that the number of problems associated with the increase in the Muslim population of Norway, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism have acquired a dangerous character over the past decade, which threatens the national security of the country. It should be noted that the policy of integrating Muslim migrants shows positive results, but at the same time, issues such as housing and work remain not fully resolved. Also, the Norwegian authorities do not pay enough attention to working with Muslim youth, who may be susceptible to the influence of Islamic fundamentalism. In connection with the development of Islamophobia, terrorism from the indigenous population has begun to develop in the country, which also negatively affects the democratic foundations of Norwegian society. Attacks on Muslims by Norwegian right-wing extremists contribute to the development of mutual hatred, and also destabilize society from within.

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