

Case study of a transnational campaign

## Anti- Islamophobia Campaign

**COUNTRY:** Uk - Germany

### **BACKGROUND:**

Islamophobia is widespread in Europe in all spaces across the political spectrum. In the UK Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim were the number one target of religiously motivated hate crime in the year ending March 2023. Latest research in Germany shows that almost 1 in 3 Muslims (30%) in Germany state that they have been physically assaulted several times in the past year, with 50% being physically assaulted at least once.<sup>1</sup>

There is a long historic context to anti-Muslim hatred in Europe. From the medieval crusades and religious persecution of the Spanish Inquisition, Europe's more recent history of colonisation (including multiple genocides of Muslim and other populations), to the Bosnia genocide and persecution of Crimean Tartars, the continent has been the site of serious violence directed towards Muslims. This violence is little acknowledged in traditional and institutional histories and narratives of Europe. Today the construction of a white Judeo-Christian identity that dominates mainstream European discourse about who can and who cannot be 'European', often directly but also insidiously, for instance in discourse around 'integration' and migration, contributes to an exclusive, violent and discriminatory space for Muslims and other racialised communities.

In many European societies, Muslims are amongst the lowest income bracket and are overwhelmingly working class. In modern capitalist society, which continues to be structured by an imperialist world order, Muslim populations around the globe are often amongst the most exploited for land and resources. From Bangladesh, where British colonialism and resource exploitation provided the motor for Europe's Industrial Revolution, enriching the continent while impoverishing South Asia, to Iraq, Palestine, Libya and countless other countries invaded and bombed by European powers and their allies for access to land and oil, this imperial world structure has also shaped migration flows to Europe where migrants from majority-Muslim countries and other racialised groups can be exploited for cheap labour.

It is thus useful for the ruling classes of Europe to maintain violent borders and harsh rhetoric and policies against resident Muslim populations and Muslim and racialised migrants. This aids in the continuous economic exploitation of these populations, many of whom live in economic insecurity, and also provides an easy scapegoat for the failings of

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<sup>1</sup> Zick, Andreas, et al. (2023): Muslimische Erfahrungen Und Wahrnehmung Der Muslim- Und Islamfeindlichkeit in Der Gesellschaft. Eine Mixed-Methods-Studie Für Den Unabhängigen Expertenkreis Muslimfeindlichkeit.

nation-states and the EU to create equitable living conditions for all members of the population. The political, social and economic context above have established a broader structure of White Supremacy in Europe and the world. Scholar Francis Lee Ansley defines it as follows:

*By »white supremacy« I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings (Ansley, 1997).*

### **The campaign**

Another Europe Is Possible (AEIP) was founded to campaign against Brexit from a progressive and left-wing perspective. This meant supporting the transnational nature of the EU whilst being critical of its crony capitalist, neoliberal and imperial tendencies, including violent border regimes. It also meant tackling the structural causes of Brexit, particularly anti-immigrant sentiment and scapegoating of migrants for the inequality and economic failures caused by the state.

Noting the rampant Islamophobia amongst the supporters and the rhetoric of the 'Leave' campaign and the far right in the UK and Europe, AEIP decided to launch a transnational anti-Islamophobia campaign, focusing on the UK, France and Germany as key sites of state-led and far right Islamophobia.

### **PROCESS AND ACTIONS**

AEIP is a member-led democratic organisation. It's strategy is decided by the democratically elected National Committee, elected by the membership. A proposal to launch an anti-Islamophobia campaign was put forwards at National Committee and agreed. An anti-Islamophobia working group was established. It was led by members of the National Committee with lived experience of Islamophobia - Seema Syeda and Shaista Aziz, who both have Muslim backgrounds.

An important foundation of any successful anti-racism campaign is that it should be led by those with lived experience; firstly to counter the dominance of white supremacy rather than reinforce it, but also because those with lived experience are by nature best placed to understand the nuances of the issues at play. It was also important as recognition of the fact that Islamophobia could be present and reinforced within our own organisation and progressive spaces alike, as it is a societal problem which few people have had awareness

training and exposure about. Those without lived experience were also involved in the working group as key allies and supporters.

One of the first steps requested by the National Committee was an anti-Islamophobia training session for the committee itself. AEIP lacked financial resources for a formal training at the time, but we did run a public anti-Islamophobia event platforming UK Muslim voices who described the different kinds of Islamophobia they had experienced in progressive, centrist, right-wing and far right spaces alike, as well as the connection between Brexit and Islamophobia.

We then held a transnational event in the run up to the French presidential election 2022 where Marine Le Pen ran her candidacy on a deeply Islamophobic campaign while the incumbent President Macron replicated some of her language and implemented Islamophobic policies, continuing a long tradition of French state attacks on the basic rights of Muslims in the metropole and in the colonies, supported by actors across the political spectrum. At this event we platformed self organised Muslim and migrant-led groups such as the Front Uni Des Immigration et Quartiers Populaire as well as important allies such as Bernard Dreano's IPAM.

### **Funding**

To move the campaign beyond online events, funding was needed. Allies and supporters on the national committee with strong links to funders supported the campaign by finding a funder, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, to enable us to conduct research into Islamophobia across Europe.

### **Research**

The research project was led by a staffer from a Muslim background with lived experience of Islamophobia. Two research reports were produced, one analysing Islamophobia in France and another analysing Islamophobia and the rise of the far-right in Germany. The reports were launched at a fringe event of Labour Party Conference 2022 as well as online.

The success of this collaboration led to further funding to build practically on the report's recommendations.

### **Transnational organising**

Funding was secured from the FES and AEIP for a delegation of all-women Muslim elected representatives and civil society activists to visit Cologne, Germany and meet with various civil society and faith representatives, researchers, NGOs and elected officials, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, to share knowledge, experience and campaigning goals across borders. Organisational, administrative and network contacts in Germany were provided by FES London. A particular focus was tackling Islamophobia within political parties such as the Labour Party and the SPD, as well as progressive spaces in general. The delegation took

place in May 2023 and resulted in the publication of a report with recommendations. The report was launched to a U.K. audience in November 2023 coinciding with UK anti-Islamophobia Awareness Month, and will be launched to a German audience in 2024.

## **KEY OUTCOMES**

### **Outcome 1: Creating a space to for awareness raising about Islamophobia within left and progressive organisations.**

The opening of such a space, led by women activists from Muslim backgrounds, was an achievement in itself. Islamophobia specifically is rarely given attention or discussed within progressive spaces. The 2022 fringe event at Labour Party conference, for instance, was the only one of its kind to explore the issue.

One of the findings of the 2023 delegation was that racism and Islamophobia were inadequately tackled within progressive organisations and spaces, partly due to a belief amongst the leadership and membership of those organisations that they didn't have internal anti-racism or Islamophobia issues because they 'instinctively' had the right politics. The lack of representation beyond token diversity in these spaces indicates that they too replicate the structural problems of racism and discrimination.

With political parties like the Labour Party and the SPD specifically, this is further evident in policies that reinforce violence towards migrants, racialised people and Muslims at home and abroad. The UK space does have some examples of Muslim groups starting to self-organise, as well as 'Black Asian and Minority Ethnic' spaces within the Labour Party. While this is a slightly better landscape than the German context where fewer such spaces/initiatives exist, the delegation was able to discuss some of the opportunities and inadequacies of the 'BAME' approach, as outlined in the report.

The opening up of spaces to discuss these issues was a key change in itself, with German representatives expressing surprise that it was even possible to organise such a delegation. It was the first time many activists had the opportunity to attend a transnational anti-Islamophobia discussion. Groups such as Another Europe Is Possible itself, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the SPD have begun to change internally by simply creating such spaces, though there is much more work to be done.

### **Outcome 2: empowerment of Muslim 'leaders'**

AEIP staffers leading the project augmented their transnational organising and project management skills in a European, party political and civil society context. Delegates on the project also went on to greater leadership positions, one young delegate is now standing in local elections in order to increase Muslim women's representation and another has since founded the 'Anti-Islamophobia Working Group' which lobbies institutions and civil society to tackle Islamophobia. Other leading researchers have expanded the reach of their research to activist and civil society groups outside their home countries.

### Outcome 3: Networks and partnerships

A key transnational network of anti-Islamophobia campaigners acting across left and progressive political spaces has been created. This network shares information and knowledge, providing a base to continue its joint campaigning initiatives in the years ahead. The struggle to tackle Islamophobia is a long-term one that requires many years of commitment.

#### POINTS OF INTEREST

- Centring people with lived experience as leaders and organisers
- Advocating community self-organising
- Engaging allies and supporters in broader campaigning, networking and knowledge-sharing spaces
- Using partnerships and collaborative working to join up local and national grassroots actors across borders, focusing on specific themes relevant to all, e.g. Islamophobia
- Physical meetings are an important complement to online events, in order to build trust
- With anti-racist work, it is important to acknowledge white supremacist and colonial structures can and do exist within progressive spaces. This awareness itself is an important starting point for any constructive and meaningful work to begin dismantling these structures.

On anti-Islamophobia specifically, it must be acknowledged that there is no clear 'win'. Indeed, Islamophobia continues to be on the rise across the UK, Germany and France, with a tendency amongs political parties such as Labour and the SPD to take ever worsening stances on the issue in response to (and reinforcing) the rising popularity of the far right. Reformist approaches grafted onto an underlying structure of coloniality can only go so far - anti-racist campaigning requires clear anti-colonial analysis and action.

**SOURCE:** European Alternatives, Seema Syeda

#### REFERENCES

 [Brexit & Islamophobia - how are they connected?](#)

 [France Presidential Election Reflections](#)

[Report: Uniting Europe Against Islamophobia - Another Europe is Possible](#)

<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/london/19913.pdf>

[19748.pdf \(fes.de\)](#)

Case study of a transnational campaign - Short version

## Anti- Islamophobia Campaign

**COUNTRY:** Uk - Germany



### Background

Islamophobia, deeply entrenched in Europe's historical, social, and economic fabric, remains a pervasive issue across the continent. In response to the alarming rise of anti-Muslim sentiment, Another Europe Is Possible (AEIP), a progressive organization, initiated a transnational campaign to combat Islamophobia. This case study delves into AEIP's strategic approach, actions, outcomes, and crucial lessons learned in the fight against Islamophobia. Europe's history is marred by violence against Muslims, from medieval crusades to contemporary manifestations of discrimination and violence. The construction of a white Judeo-Christian identity perpetuates exclusionary narratives, contributing to the marginalization of Muslims and racialized communities. Economic exploitation, coupled with violent border regimes, perpetuates systemic oppression against Muslim populations.

### The anti-Islamophobia campaign: Another Europe Is Possible (AEIP)

Initially formed to oppose Brexit from a progressive standpoint, AEIP recognized the urgent need to address rampant Islamophobia exacerbated by political rhetoric and far-right movements. The campaign aimed to challenge structural causes of Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments, by emphasizing the importance of transnational solidarity.

Led by a democratically elected National Committee, AEIP established an anti-Islamophobia working group, comprising individuals with lived experiences of Islamophobia. Recognizing the significance of representation, the group ensured diverse leadership, including Muslim backgrounds. AEIP planned and carried out the following campaign actions:

- Organized public events to raise awareness and foster dialogue on Islamophobia, culminating in a transnational event ahead of the French presidential election.
- Conducted a research on Islamophobia in France and Germany (supported by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung) and presented the findings of the research to shed light on the pervasive nature of Islamophobia and its intersection with far-right ideologies.
- Facilitated a delegation of Muslim representatives and activists to Germany, to tackle Islamophobia within political parties and progressive spaces, fostering cross-border collaboration, knowledge exchange, and international solidarity.

### **Key outcomes**

The transnational organizing efforts of the AEIP campaign resulted in the following outcomes

- Raising awareness on islamophobia within progressive organizations, challenging prevailing narratives and promoting inclusivity. Despite initial skepticism, the initiative sparked critical dialogue and reflection within these spaces.
- Empowering leaders from muslim background as several delegates assumed leadership roles in the campaign fostering greater representation and activism within their communities.
- Forming transnational networks and partnerships among anti-Islamophobia activists, facilitating ongoing collaboration and information sharing and long-term commitment to combat Islamophobia.

### **Points of interest**

This campaign is an example of bottom-up transnational organizing and solidarity. Some of the key insights from the campaign are the importance of centering lived experiences of affected people and grassroots groups, developing their leadership and ability to self-organize; engaging allies in dialogue and collaboration in campaign efforts; convening international meetings in-person and online to facilitate dialogue and fostering trust and solidarity among participants; and addressing structural racism by recognizing and dismantling white supremacist and colonial structures to create a more equitable and inclusive Europe.

**SOURCE:** European Alternatives, Seema Syeda