
BULGARIAN MUSLIMS CONDEMN ISLAMOPHOBIC ATTACKS

-

08.07.2019

Balkan Insight (5 July 2019)

Maria Chereseva

Sofia

Bulgarias Grand Muftis Office called on the police on Friday to investigate an attack on its office in the capital, Sofia, as a hate crime.

The windows of the building in central Sofia were smashed with stones by an unknown person on Thursday, three days after swastikas and other hate symbols were scratched onto a mosque in the central town of Karlovo on July 2.

This is a typical hate crime. Unfortunately in Bulgaria no one is being convicted of such crimes. They are always declared as [the work of] drunks or hooligans, Jelal Faik, spokesperson of the Grand Muftis office, told BIRN.

He added that the attack was recorded by security cameras, which showed the perpetrator taking stones out of a bag and throwing them at the window, which he said was a clear sign that this was a planned and deliberate act.

Faik said the presence of the nationalist United Patriots union in the GERB-lead coalition government, had encouraged anti-Muslim attitudes among some people.

If we neglect this act, it means that we are closing our eyes to far more serious national phenomena where everyone different can be targeted, he said, recalling that the synagogue in Sofia also was attacked with stones in January.

Rights groups say Bulgarias failure to tackle hate crime is fuelling violence and prejudice against minority groups, including asylum seekers, migrants, Muslims and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

A 2015 report by Amnesty International warned that, despite existing legislation, authorities in Bulgaria have consistently failed to identify and adequately investigate hate crimes. They also not do they collect or publish data on such crimes.

Bulgarias biggest rights group, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, included in its 2018 annual report a number of attacks committed against religious sites around the country, and warned that hate speech against certain religious communities had continued to spread with impunity.

Ruslan Trad, a Bulgarian journalist and member of the Muslim community, said fear was widespread among Bulgarian Muslims. There is fear. The Muslim community * actively discusses those events [the recent attacks] and views them as [part of] an anti-Muslim policy on the state level, he said.

Muslims are a significant community in Bulgaria and are mostly descended from ethnic Turks, or from Slavs who converted during several centuries of Ottoman Turkish rule.

According to the 2011 census, Muslims make up just under 8 per cent of the population, but some more recent estimates put the figure at 15 per cent.

Unlike the migrant communities of Western Europe, Bulgarian Muslims show little interest in religious extremism.

A 2011 study by a Turkish paper showed about 40 per cent never even go to mosques.

<https://balkaninsight.com/2019/07/05/bulgarian-muslims-condemn-islamophobic-attacks/>

Kaynak/Source: