

# SWEDISH ISLAMISM AS A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ASPECT IN THE FORMATION OF AN ETHNO-CONFESSIONAL PARALLEL SOCIETY

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*A new actor in the European geopolitical space — an ethno-religious “parallel society” — is transforming the social and political fabric of Sweden. An institutionalised Muslim parallel society is emerging in vulnerable areas, such as marginalised immigrant districts of Swedish cities, through the efforts of Islamist political, social, and economic structures adhering to the religious and political doctrine of the Muslim Brotherhood (this organization is banned in the Russian Federation). Committed to maintaining the Muslim identity, these organisations seek gradual Islamisation of the Swedish population through ideological influence on immigrants with a Muslim background. These efforts thwart cultural assimilation attempts and hinder the implementation of Swedish integration policy. The lack of research into the peaceful Islamisation of Swedish society and the related problems of Islamophobia, anti-Muslim racism, and radicalisation of Muslim youth lends urgency to investigating the influence of Islamist organisations on the Swedish Muslim immigrant community. This study analyses the literature, sources, and statistics on the essential aspects of Swedish Islamisation to provide a holistic picture of the formation of an ethno-religious parallel society in Sweden. The findings help evaluate the effectiveness of the national policy on confronting parallel societies, as well as of measures to promote democratic values as the foundation of a united Swedish society.*

## **Keywords:**

Islamism, political Islam, parallel society, vulnerable area, Muslim identity, immigrants, Muslim Brotherhood, national security of Sweden

## **Introduction**

Religion is a factor that significantly contributes to the transformation of the modern world order. Ideological influence of Islamist organizations on ethno-religious immigrant communities leads to the formation of Muslim “parallel societies” on the territory of European national states. As a political ideology, Islamism,

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or political Islam, bases its legitimacy on a particular interpretation of Islam. According to Sara Khan, the Lead Commissioner of the British Commission for Countering Extremism, Islamism is a modern politicized movement that is ideologically based on religion as a guide for political action and a certain system of belief in God [1, p. 52]. The wide range of diverse Islamic political parties, social organizations and movements spells the need to study them in the context of their social and political environment.

In Sweden, Islamist organizations focus on the formation of “Muslim identity” as a way to protect and preserve the cultural and religious traditions of Swedish Muslims. At the same time, this contributes to the development of an opposition between the positive image of “Swedes” and the negative image of immigrants with “Muslim background”; the latter are associated with Muslim radicalization and are thus perceived as a source of threat to Swedish democratic society and national security. Thus, the desire of Islamist organizations to increase their influence on the Swedish Muslim community and preserve the religious aspect of the identity of its members leads to such negative consequences as Islamophobia, the enclavization of immigrant areas in Swedish cities and the formation of a “parallel” social and political sector. The lack of sufficient knowledge of these processes in the context of Swedish social and political system as well as the need to find solutions to political, cultural, social and economic problems of the segregated Swedish immigrant suburbs (“vulnerable areas”)<sup>1</sup> determine the relevance of this research.

## **Theory and Method**

A significant share of contemporary research focuses on the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood, an umbrella Islamist organization, in Europe. Despite this, there is a lack of studies of Islamism as a phenomenon of Swedish social and political reality. In the Swedish security policy discourse, “Islamism” as a concept is strongly associated with extremist activities. According to a report of the Swedish Ministry of Justice on violent political and Islamist extremism, “In most cases, the word “Islamism” is used to describe the view of Islam as an all-encompassing and ideological model of a country’s governance, in contrast to the view where Islam is seen as a religion”<sup>2</sup>. This has led to the recommen-

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<sup>1</sup> *Rätt insats på rätt plats-polisens arbete i utsatta områden, 2020, Startside Riksrevisionen, S. 16, available at: [https://www.riksrevisionen.se/download/18.7546977617592429b913d517/1604927340756/RiR%202020\\_20%20Anpassad.pdf](https://www.riksrevisionen.se/download/18.7546977617592429b913d517/1604927340756/RiR%202020_20%20Anpassad.pdf) (accessed on April 7, 2021).*

<sup>2</sup> *Våldsbejakande extremism i Sverige, nuläge och tendenser. Justitiedepartementet, 2014, Startside Riksrevisionen, S. 22, available at: [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/departementsserien/valdsbejakande-extremism-i-sverige--nulage-och\\_H2B44](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/departementsserien/valdsbejakande-extremism-i-sverige--nulage-och_H2B44) (accessed on April 7, 2021).*

dation to replace the term “Islamism” with the term “Muslim extremism”<sup>3</sup> in order to shift the emphasis from Islam as a religion in manifestations of Islamic radicalization.

According to Aje Karlbom, a Swedish anthropologist and an expert on Islamism and multiculturalism, Islamism as the social and political phenomenon should be distinguished from violent extremism of the neo-fundamentalist Salafi movements [2, s. 7]. Due to terrorist attacks by radical Muslims in Swedish society over the past few years, modern Swedish social and political discourse has begun to differentiate “peaceful” Islamism from radical extremist activities. This position in relation to Swedish Islamist organizations determines their non-involvement in terrorist acts in Europe. These Islamist organizations do not officially recognize their membership in the Muslim Brotherhood, but they are guided by its ideological principles and follow a “peaceful” political course in a European democracy like any other social democratic actors [3, p. 3; 4, p. 30]. At the same time, such religious and political structures regard the “peaceful” Islamization of the Western world as a way to radically reorganize the global world order on the principles of political Islam [5, c. 194]. Therefore, Islamist organizations in Sweden are focused on the long-term gradual introduction of their religious and political ideology into the Swedish society. This becomes possible mainly through their work with the immigrant Muslim communities.

In this study, we have used data from the following sources:

1. Swedish university-based and state-funded research projects on Islamism and extremist activities;
2. police reports on the “vulnerable areas”;
3. studies of Islamophobia and Muslim racism in Swedish society commissioned by the Swedish Muslim organizations;
4. research projects on the activities of the Islamist organization the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe;
5. charters of Swedish Islamist organizations;
6. Danish and Swedish legislation on “parallel societies”;
7. statistics on the composition of the Swedish Muslim population.

The research methodology involved a comprehensive analysis of the literature and sources, which helped identify specific features of the formation of the Muslim “parallel society” in Sweden. Thus, the paper focuses on the study of the impact of public and political activities of Swedish Islamist organizations on the Muslim immigrant community in Sweden. The research reconstructs the factors

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<sup>3</sup> Våldsbejakande islamistisk extremism i Sverige, 2010, *CVE* — *Center mot våldsbejakande extremism*, S. 28. available at: <https://www.cve.se/download/18.62c6cfa2166eca5d70e2160/1547452379244/S%C3%A4po%20V%C3%A5ldsbejakande%20islamistisk%20extremism%202010.pdf> (accessed 07.04.2021).

of the formation of an ethno-religious “parallel society” in Sweden. Based on these data, the article assesses the prospects for the Swedish state policy to counter the “parallel society” as a potential threat to national security.

### **Religious and political ideology of Swedish Islamist organizations**

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The Muslim Brotherhood first began to ideologically influence Swedish society and the immigrants arriving in Sweden from Muslim countries in the 1980s through propaganda leaflets about Islam [6, s. 8]. These contained a call to “submit” to religion as a comprehensive system of values and norms of everyday life. The system was setup in such a way that it would separate Muslims from secular society and oblige them to further disseminate these ideas under the guise of religious duty. Thus, the strategic approach of the Muslim Brotherhood to the formation of an Islamic state relies on the gradual indoctrination of the population. According to the group’s beliefs, the personal life of Muslims should be subordinated to the state and governed by the Sharia law [6, s. 7]. This approach has alienated the Muslim Brotherhood from the Western society and contributed to a negative perception of Western social norms and democratic values in Muslim communities.

The Islamic Association in Sweden was established in Stockholm in the mid-1990s. This organization denies its affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, but some researchers believe that the Islamic Association in Sweden controls the activities of Swedish Muslim organizations<sup>4</sup> and promotes the ideological principles of the Muslim Brotherhood [6, s. 14]. Those who study Islamism often note that the followers of religious and political ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood refuse to openly admit their involvement in this organization [For example: 7, p. 137]; the reason being the reluctance to provoke rejection of Islamist ideas among the non-Muslim European population who often associate Islam with negative manifestations of religious extremism. The Muslim Brotherhood has adapted its social and religious structures to the Swedish social and political system and organized a multifaceted economic structure [6, s. 10] with access to financial resources. This allows it to spread and strengthen its ideological influence among Muslims as well as to teach them about the features of Swedish society and ways of interacting with it. With the Muslim Brotherhood being a “clandestine network”, organizations under its auspices can exist without disclosing their membership to the Swedish public.

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<sup>4</sup> According to the 2016 *Muslimska Brödraskapet i Sverige* (the Muslim Brotherhood in Sweden) research project, the most influential Swedish Islamist organizations are the Islamic Association of Sweden, the Islamic Aid, Ibn Rushd Study Association and the Young Muslims of Sweden [6, s. 12–14].

Another strategic aspect of the Muslim Brotherhood's activities in Europe is that it assumes leadership over all European Muslims. In other words, it has arbitrarily taken the role of a representative, or a "gatekeeper" between the "Muslim civil society" and the European political elite [6, s. 18]. The Swedish expert on Islam Jan Hjärpe posits that, unlike Islam with its "personal religiosity and experience <...> the religious tradition in all its complexity", Islamism is an "invocation of the religious tradition to political actions. The assertion of religion as a social order" [8, s. 12]. Hjärpe's opinion echoes the argument of political scientist Bassam Tibi on the importance of distinguishing Islam as a religion from political Islamism: "Islamism grows out of a specific interpretation of Islam, but it is not Islam: it is a political ideology that is distinct from the teaching of the religion of Islam" [9, p. 1]. While Tibi does not deny the relationship between these two concepts, he sees Islamism as an "invention of tradition" which has been the result of social and political changes in the Middle East over the last century [9, p. 1].

One of the most famous "inventors" of Islamist ideology is Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. He generalized the understanding of Islam as a unified system of values and norms for the state and civil society. Khalil al-Anani, an Islamist movements expert, describes al-Banna's views on religion as "a comprehensive creed that should encompass all aspects of human life" [10, p. 56]. According to the University of Malmö professor Anne Sophie Roald, the fact that al-Banna's ideas have spread so widely in Europe since the 1970s is a consequence of the Muslim Brotherhood missionary activities [11, p. 260]. These have contributed to the consolidation of Islamic understanding of Islam in the public perception. Al-Anani notes that this strategy is still employed by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, "the Brotherhood does not differentiate between religion and politics. It [MB] views Islam as an inclusive system, it extends to all life's spheres, it encompasses politics, economics, society, culture, and so on." [10, p. 65].

Al-Banna's religious and political position has served as the ideological basis for the development of political views of Islamist organizations in Sweden [12, s. 20]. This fact is confirmed by the Swedish expert on Islam Jonas Otterbek in his study of the journal "Salaam" publications in the 1986—1998. Otterbek notes that the authors contributing to the journal often referred to the Muslim Brotherhood visionaries, specifically — to Hasan al-Banna [13, s. 179]. Therefore, Swedish Islamists borrowed the concept of Islam as a religious and political ideology covering all spheres of life from authoritative Islamist ideologists. One of the most widely circulated guidelines for Swedish Muslims on how to understand Islam is

Att förstå islam (“To understand Islam”)<sup>5</sup>. The document has been drafted under the leadership of the chairman of the Federation of Swedish Muslims Mahmoud Aldebe with the support of the Swedish Immigration Service. According to the guidelines, “Islam provides people with the specific instructions for all life situations. These instructions are comprehensive and include moral, spiritual, social, political and economic aspects of being”<sup>6</sup>.

This approach contributed to the development of discussions in the Swedish social and political discourse about the possibility of the emergence of an institutionalized Islamist “parallel society” [14, p. 500] acting similarly to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Still, the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliated organizations have faced a significant obstacle to building a Muslim civil society in Europe. In Egypt, the “parallel” social and political sector has become an alternative source of welfare for those deprived of the state support; a promise that is rendered ineffective in the context of the democratic European states. Thus, in “non-Muslim countries, the public narrative of the Muslim Brotherhood is focused more on Islamising the individual and community than the state”<sup>7</sup>. The call for immigrants to preserve “Muslim identity” and religious traditions is not a sufficient reason to avoid assimilation into the Swedish civil society in modern social and political realities. The development of “Muslim identity” in the Swedish society is an ambiguous and multi-vector process. This is one of the key factors in the segregation of immigrant residential communities and their transformation into the ethno-religious “parallel societies”.

### **Features of the “Muslim identity” development in the Swedish society**

Sweden lacks statistics on religious self-identification of its citizens. Moreover, “in Sweden there is a strong reluctance if not an outright hostility to asking about and to measuring and collecting data on anything that has to do with religion, ethnicity, language and race” [15, p. 14]. *Utländsk bakgrund*, or “foreign

<sup>5</sup> Att förstå islam, 2002, Docplayer.se, available at: <http://docplayer.se/4787087-Att-forsta-islam-2002-06-04-www-islamiska-org-2-81.html> (accessed 07.04.2021).

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem. S. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Muslim Brotherhood Review: Main Findings, 2015, *Reuters News Agency*, available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/486948/53163\\_Muslim\\_Brotherhood\\_Review\\_-\\_PRINT.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486948/53163_Muslim_Brotherhood_Review_-_PRINT.pdf) (accessed 07.04.2021).

background”, is the only term used in Sweden to officially describe immigrant populations.<sup>8</sup> The category encompasses anyone who was born outside Sweden or whose parents were both born in other countries.

In Sweden, such population groups as “Swedes” and “immigrants” are juxtaposed in the massive public debate concerning the officially published documents on countering the ethno-religious immigrant “ghettoes” in the neighboring Denmark. In the context of this social and political discourse, the notions of “immigrant” and “migrant” have become synonymous with “problems” or “threats” to the Swedish nation [16, s. 60]. In public opinion, an image of an “immigrant” is associated with crime, unemployment, social problems and undemocratic authoritarian values, whereas a positive image of a “Swede” represents a law-abiding, trustworthy and democratic citizen.

In 2018, representatives of the Swedish Muslim community prepared an alternative report in response to rising racism and Islamophobia in the state. The report emphasized promotion of the stereotype of Swedish Muslims as a threat to “Swedish” values and the idea of “Swedishness” [15, p. 8]. The social and political discourse of “Swedish” values mainly focuses on newly arrived migrants from countries with the predominantly Muslim population and Muslims who have already settled in the Swedish suburbs. Based on this situation, the representatives of the Swedish Muslim community have stated the inability of the Swedish government to effectively solve the problem of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism against the Swedish Muslims [15, p. 8].

In recent years, the concept of “diversity” has dominated in the Swedish social and political discourse [6, s. 24]. This term replaced the European policy notion of “multiculturalism” discredited in relation to migration problems. Postmodern connotations of “diversity” mean that it brings more “identities” into the picture of cultural and religious pluralism in the Swedish society. These identities form a unified society and include not only immigrants, but also, for example, sexual minorities. Therefore, social “diversity” implies the existence of a well-established value system and defines the attitude of the Swedish citizens towards minorities. This means a tolerant attitude towards representatives of minorities and respect for their rights to a different way of life.

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<sup>8</sup> Hur många i Sverige är födda i ett annat land? 2020, *Migrationsinfo.se*, available at: <https://www.migrationsinfo.se/frago-r-och-svar/hur-manga-utrikes-fodda-sverige/> (accessed 07.04.2021).



These democratic values contribute to successful integration of various population groups into the unified society. At the same time, they constitute an ideological “structure of opportunities” for Islamist organizations. In secularized Europe, the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliated organizations cannot openly proclaim the building of a state based on religious and political ideology, but they can and do advance their Islamist project within the framework of multiculturalism focused on social “diversity” and the recognition of Muslims as a “European religious community” [6, s. 24]. Within this approach, those sharing the Muslim Brotherhood ideas identify themselves with the “global Muslim ummah”, but not with any nation [6, s. 14]. This complicates the process of integrating Muslim immigrants into the Swedish society significantly. In the context of globalized Islam, the term “Muslim” has acquired a “neo-ethnic” meaning and implies identity rather than religious affiliation. This has constructed a new generalized “ethnic group” [17, p. 124–143] that also embraces the concept of “cultural Muslim”, understood as a “secular (non-religious) person who, having a Muslim origin (and living in a non-Muslim country), still identifies with Muslim culture or religion, while not practicing Islam” [18, p. 144]. Thus, European understanding of this new “Muslim identity” implies that all people who are in any way associated with Islam also share Muslim culture regardless of their background or social status.

Based on this neo-ethnic discourse, the Islamist organizations construct their modern identity politics as representatives of ethno-religious communities of immigrants “with Muslim background”. In connection with this, the political sociologist Hazem Kandil recalls the al-Banna’s seven-step model for various phases of social changes [19, p. 110], which details the initial steps of gradual Islamization — the creation the Muslim individual, the Muslim family and the Muslim government that reflects the perfect Muslim society. Therefore, the process of Islamization in modern Swedish society is based on the Muslim identity.

The proclamation of the Muslim Association of Sweden is an example of an Islamic project in the context of a multicultural discourse (“all people as a single whole despite their differences in race, religious beliefs and language”) and its desire “for a multicultural society based on the cornerstones of human values, equality, respect, tolerance, mutual integration, objectivity and welfare”<sup>9</sup>. At the same time, the Association aims “to promote, protect, preserve and strengthen

<sup>9</sup>Sveriges Muslimska Förbund, 2020, *SMF Islam — Sverige Muslimska Förbund*, available at: <http://smf-islam.se/vision/> (accessed 07.04.2021).



the members' religious identity"<sup>10</sup>. In this context, the political sphere is an "important source of knowledge" that calls for more active participation of the Muslim minority in the Swedish society. However, the emphasis on preserving and strengthening the religious identity of immigrants contributes to the political and social polarization of the Swedish society and reinforces the opposition between "us" (Muslims) and "them" (Swedes).

In modern Sweden, the concepts of "Islam" and "Muslim" are simplified and interrelated. This has contributed to the emergence of new term "racism without races", meaning racism based on cultural and religious affiliation rather than race [20, s. 20–21]. These simplifications have caused the emergence of such concepts as "cultural clash" and "religious dialogue" in the social and political discourse, wherein both culture and religion are perceived as something monolithic and static [21, s. 78–79]. Thus, any attempt to protect Muslims from the influence of Western society values (freedom of conscience, gender equality, modern views on "non-traditional" sexual orientation) by creating a "parallel" institutionalized Islamic sector in the form of "Muslim civil society" can have a negative impact on the integration process of segregated Muslim communities into the unified Swedish society. Moreover, it can lead to the radicalization of Muslims who will move to Sweden in the years to come.

### **From a "vulnerable area" to an ethno-religious "parallel society": transformation factors**

Migration flows from the Middle Eastern and African Muslim countries to Sweden will keep their intensity in the coming years due to the new refugee and family reunification programmes. At the same time, the "parallel" immigrant sector in Sweden will be able to expand and function as a competitive social and political structure. Therefore, cultural Islamization of the Swedish population by Muslim social structures can provoke an escalation of social and political tensions within the state. This raises the question of the actual number of Muslims in Sweden and of their ability to really pose a threat to the welfare of the Swedish society and the state's territorial security.

Modern Sweden lacks research on the number of Muslims, but the number of people with "Muslim background" in 2014 was estimated at 450,000 people, 110,000 of whom were members of the six most reputable Swedish Muslim organizations [22, p. 144]. According to other estimates, the number

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

of Muslims reached 1,022,850 or 10.2% of the Swedish population in 2017<sup>11</sup>, and 8.1% in 2016<sup>12</sup>. However, these estimates only consider immigrants and refugees from countries with predominantly Muslim population and disregard Muslims with Swedish background or immigrants from the EU, the former USSR and the Americas. Looking further back, “over the period from 1990 to 2018, the share of Muslims in Sweden’s religious population increased by 4.6 times. Today Muslims account for almost 14% of the religious population in the country, and according to our calculations, Sweden is home to 950,000 Muslims” [23, p. 92].

Researching Swedish social services’ work with immigrants from disadvantaged areas has revealed the persistence of many “colonial stereotypes”; thus, immigrants with “Muslim background” are often labeled as “traditionalist”, “irrational”, and “authoritarian” [24, p. 558–560]. This model of perception of immigrants with non-European background by their cultural identity is one of the factors in the growth of Islamophobic sentiments in society. This significantly complicates the integration of Muslim population into the Swedish society.

Among the Nordic states, only Denmark and Sweden officially publish government reports on disadvantaged immigrant areas. The Danish position is based on statistical data [25, p. 64–65], while the Swedish system is focused on the generalized experience in the perception of these areas. For example, the Swedish police reports<sup>13</sup> refer to the “parallel” social structures and violent religious extremism in segregated Muslim areas, but they do not indicate the source of their data.

Swedish social and political discourse often labels segregated Muslim Immigrant areas (where up to 95% of residents may have foreign background) as “suburbs” (*förorter*), “immigrant areas” (*invandrarområden*), “excluded territories” (*utanförskapsområden*) or “vulnerable areas” (*utsatta områden*) [15, p. 20]. This reinforces the negative perception of the residents of such areas in the Swedish society.

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<sup>11</sup> Hübinette, T. 2017, Hur många muslimer finns det i Sverige? *Aktuellt Fokus — Oberoende nyheter för vanligt folk*, available at: <https://aktuelltfokus.se/hur-manga-muslimer-finns-det-i-sverige/> (accessed 07.04.2021).

<sup>12</sup> Europe’s Growing Muslim Population, 2016, *Pew Research Center: Religion & Public Life*, available at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/> (accessed 07.04.2021).

<sup>13</sup> Utsatta områden — sociala risker, kollektiv förmåga och oönskade händelser. Nationella operativa avdelningen, Underrättelseenheten, 2015, *Polisen*, S. 19–20, available at: [https://polisen.se/siteassets/dokument/ovriga\\_rapporter/utsatta-omraden-sociala-risker-kollektiv-formaga-och-oonskade-handelser.pdf](https://polisen.se/siteassets/dokument/ovriga_rapporter/utsatta-omraden-sociala-risker-kollektiv-formaga-och-oonskade-handelser.pdf) (accessed 07.04.2021).

According to a report by the Swedish National Police Operations Directorate, “vulnerable area” (*utsatt område*) is “a geographically isolated area with a low social and economic status, where the criminals have an impact on the local community”<sup>14</sup>. At the same time, an “especially vulnerable territory” (*särskilt utsatt område*) implies the existence of parallel social structures, extremism, persons who are leaving the country to participate in hostilities in conflict areas, and high concentration of criminals. A “vulnerable area” that does not meet all these special criteria is considered a “risk zone”.

Most of the Swedish suburbs that fall under the definition of “vulnerable areas” emerged in 1965–1975 due to the Million Programme (*Miljonprogram*)<sup>15</sup>. This programme was designed to solve the housing shortage in Swedish cities. However, already in the early 1970s the lack of housing in such residential areas turned into its oversupply. Gradually, their population changed to include socially marginalized residents and immigrants with low financial resources. According to the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, today these areas are predominantly populated with the youth, people with “foreign background” and families with low income<sup>16</sup>. In addition, closed-off layout of these territories helped create internal residential areas with local social infrastructure and no carriageway. Around the perimeter, these areas are “fenced” by apartment buildings and the adjacent roads. Closed layout, overpopulation, social and economic issues characteristic of the Million Programme suburbs contribute to the criminalization of these areas and hinder effective police work.

Today in Sweden, there are 60 areas classified as “vulnerable areas”; 32 of which are “especially vulnerable” or “risk zones”<sup>17</sup>. The number of “especially vulnerable areas” increased from 15 in 2015 to 22 in 2019<sup>18</sup>. In 2020, criminal groups in these areas were able to organize a curfew in the Stockholm suburb of Tensta and establish checkpoints for entering cars in the Gothenburg districts of Hammarkullen and Hjällbo [26, p. 1]. In addition, “especially vulnerable areas”

<sup>14</sup> Kriminell påverkan i lokalsamhället — En lägesbild för utvecklingen i utsatta områden. Nationella operativa avdelningen, Underrättelseenheten, 2019, *Polisen*, S. 4, available at: [https://polisen.se/siteassets/dokument/ovriga\\_rapporter/kriminell-paverkan-i-lokalsamhallet.pdf](https://polisen.se/siteassets/dokument/ovriga_rapporter/kriminell-paverkan-i-lokalsamhallet.pdf) (accessed 07.04.2021).

<sup>15</sup> *Utsatta områden — sociala risker, kollektiv förmåga och oönskade händelser*, 2015, Nationella operativa avdelningen, Underrättelseenheten, S. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Trångboddheten i storstadsregionerna, 2016, *Boverket*, S. 15, available at: <https://www.boverket.se/globalassets/publikationer/dokument/2016/trangboddheten-i-storstadsregionerna.pdf> (accessed 07.04.2021).

<sup>17</sup> Åtgärder för utsatta områden, 2019, *Riksdagens öppna data*, available at: <https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/1CC11ADE-EE49-410A-9AB3-A71FB162C76A> (accessed 07.04.2021).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

contribute to the strengthening of Islamist radicalization [27, s. 40]. This trend is most pronounced in the Stockholm districts of Rinkeby and Angered, as well as in the Malmö suburb of Rosengård [28, s. 213]. Most of the people subject to radicalization are immigrants in the first and second generation, but radicalization can also affect “ethnic Swedes” with no previous relationship with Islam. [29, s. 85]. In Sweden, the number of people involved in various aggressively-minded extremist groups has increased from several hundred to three thousand over the past few years [30, s. 35].

The political vector of fighting terrorism in Sweden has put the problems of social, economic and political marginalization of the Muslim population in the same category with the fight against violent extremism. As a result, the Swedish social and political discourse has begun to consider almost all Muslims as “suspects” [31, p. 71]. According to one study on racial and ethnic profiling as a method of combating crime in Sweden, “as a Muslim, it is enough to be in the same place as a supervised person to raise suspicion” [32, p. 25]. On the other hand, the Italian expert on radical Islam Lorenzo Vidino believes that European agents of the Muslim Brotherhood are spreading this anti-Muslim narrative focused on emphasizing and exaggerating Islamophobic incidents [3, p. 3]. This is done to strengthen the conviction of Islamophobia and hostility of the surrounding society among Muslims. Thus, a combination of Islamist ideology with an anti-Muslim narrative can contribute to radicalization of some Muslims. Nevertheless, the Swedish National Police Operations Directorate believes that “currently, there is no area in Sweden where a parallel social system fully exists, but vulnerable areas have elements of this”<sup>19</sup>.

Swedish liberal integration policy is aimed at countering “parallel societies” and strengthening democratic values. As in Denmark [25, p. 61], in Sweden the integration of Muslim immigrants into the unified Swedish society is focused primarily on children and school as the main social institution for their socialization. In this regard, “independent religious schools” are especially dangerous: “We want to put an end to new independent religious schools. <...> Instead of becoming a bridge to society, the school risks to turn into an enclave that isolates children from the rest of society and opposes equality and equal treatment of girls and boys”<sup>20</sup>. Political, social and economic problems associated with immigration and the emergence of Muslim independent schools have been widely discussed since the early 2000s [33, s. 267], which has led to several issues related to Islamist activities and Islamophobia.

<sup>19</sup> *Utsatta områden — sociala risker, kollektiv förmåga och oönskade händelser*, 2015, Nationella operativa avdelningen, Underrättelseheten, S. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Avci, G. 2019, Liberal integrationspolitik. Stärk individen — motverka parallellsamhällen, *Riksdagens öppna data*, S. 4, available at: <https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/575BDE5E-4DF0-4F77-A6BC-664AE949D94C> (accessed 07.04.2021).

At present, there are 7,000 schools in Sweden; 66 schools are religious and only 11 of those are Muslim<sup>21</sup>. These Muslim schools have been heavily criticized and presented as “religious schools” in the Swedish social and political discourse, even though such category of schools is prohibited by Swedish law for non-compliance of their curriculum with the Swedish educational standards. Nevertheless, the opponents of religious Muslim schools regularly demand their closure. A case broadcasted on the largest TV network in Sweden concerning separate seating for boys and girls on a school bus in Stockholm provides an example of negative treatment of such schools in Swedish public discourse [15, p. 37]. On the part of Swedish society, this situation is a violation of the democratic order, while the Muslim community considers this to be an instance of Islamophobia in Sweden.

Swedish integration policy aims to “reduce segregation and create equal conditions for growing up and living and good life chances for all”<sup>22</sup>. However, one of the most serious stumbling blocks on the road to understanding between the government and the Swedish Muslim community is the issue of removal of children from Muslim families recognized as disadvantaged. According to the statistics from the child protection system in Sweden, annually about 30,000 children live under the care of various government institutions<sup>23</sup>; 65% of them as well as 83% of children from boarding houses have foreign background. At the same time, the children and youth with foreign Muslim background account for 35% of the total number of the Swedish young generation [15, p. 16–17]. Thus, the representatives of the Swedish Muslim community believe that this system covers an unjustifiably wide audience. This increases the dissatisfaction of the Swedish Muslim population with government activities and contributes to polarization between the Swedish society and the Muslim immigrant community.

These facts indicate the need for urgent measures by the government to prevent further development of an unfavorable situation. The Swedish authorities are seeking to prevent the development of a Muslim “parallel society” on the territory of the state. For example, in December 2020 the National Board for Health and Welfare received an annual budget of 250 million Swedish kronor for the period 2021–2023 in social initiatives to prevent crime in the “vulnerable territories”<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Lista: Sveriges religiösa friskolor. Skolvärlden, 2017, *Skolvärlden*, available at: <https://skolvärlden.se/artiklar/lista-sveriges-religiosa-friskolor> (accessed 07.04.2021).

<sup>22</sup> Lagercrantz, H. (Red.) 2019, Segregation i Norden — om inkludering, unga och politik, *Nordens välfärdscenter*, S. 19, available at: <https://nordicwelfare.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Segregation-i-norden-webb1.pdf> accessed 07.04.2021).

<sup>23</sup> Statistik om socialtjänstinsatser till barn och unga 2019. Socialstyrelsen, 2020, *Socialstyrelsen: Startside*, S. 1, available at: <https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/globalassets/sharepoint-dokument/artikelkatalog/statistik/2020-8-6871.pdf> (accessed 07.04.2021).

<sup>24</sup> Sociala insatser i utsatta områden, 2021, *Regeringskansliet*, available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2021/02/sociala-insatser-i-utsatta-omraden/> (accessed 07.04.2021).

However, the current situation in Sweden indicates that these measures are insufficient to effectively counter increasing segregation of immigrant Muslim communities. On the one hand, Islamist organizations promoting the formation of “parallel societies” in Sweden do not have ideological instruments to oppose the radicalization of Muslim youth in “vulnerable areas”. Moreover, the tendency of the Muslim Brotherhood to adapt its religious and political ideology to the democratic structure of European states leads to a discrepancy between its practice and the general message of the Quran. This causes intensification of Salafi extremist activities [34, s. 60]. On the other hand, state integration policy uses rather contradictory methods of cultural assimilation of Muslim youth and provokes the Swedish Muslim community into discontent.

## **Conclusion**

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Despite the wide coverage of the social and political activities of the Islamist movement in Europe, there is still no sufficient knowledge of the phenomenon in Sweden. However, the actions of “Muslim extremists” over the past decade and, consequently, the Islamophobic and anti-Muslim discourse in the Swedish society have contributed to the rising relevance of research into the problems of Islamism and the segregation of Muslim immigrant communities.

Based on the religious, political and social ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood, Swedish Islamist organizations are exerting an increasing ideological influence on immigrants with “Muslim background”. This has largely predetermined the territorial enclavization of immigrant residential areas. Today, this group of Swedish residents constitutes from 10 to 14% of the population. In order to prevent polarization of the Swedish society, the authorities have attempted to rehabilitate the discredited policy of multiculturalism by introducing a new concept of ‘diversity’. However, Islamist organisations have used the policy of ‘diversity’ as a structure of opportunity to adapt the ideological attitudes of the Muslim Brotherhood to the specifics of the Swedish democratic society. The formation of the religious identity of representatives of Muslim minorities has hindered external criticism towards social and political activities of these organizations.

As an intermediary between the Muslim community and the state, Islamist organisations counter cultural assimilation of Muslim immigrants through the formation of a special “Muslim identity”. This neo-ethnic approach prevents the effective integration of immigrants from Muslim countries into the unified Swedish society. In addition, within the immigrant communities it contributes to the development of a “parallel” political, social and economic sector with its own “parallel” structures: schools, social services and economic infrastructure that

function in accordance with Islamic norms and values. At the same time, the growing influence of the Danish rhetoric about the need to counter the “parallel” immigrant “ghettos” on the Swedish social and political discourse gives rise to the “anti-Muslim racism” in society.

Inability of the Swedish state integration policy to regulate the current situation has been reflected in the Swedish police reports on the emergence of new ‘especially vulnerable areas’ since 2015. This is further confirmed by low efficiency of the Swedish social services’ work with immigrants, and the contradictory state policy in relation to children with “Muslim background”. The lack of effective countermeasures to “parallel” structures in “vulnerable areas” is a concomitant factor in the rise of violent extremism as a threat to national security. At the same time, the situation is exacerbated by the activities of Islamist organizations. Despite the desire of the Muslim Brotherhood to isolate itself from violent extremism, widespread dissemination of a politicized version of Islam in Muslim European society contributes to radicalization of young people who consider the methods of “peaceful” Islamization insufficient for qualitative changes in the European society. Therefore, violent Muslim extremism is a problem for both the Swedish state and Islamist organizations, despite their different social and political impact on the Swedish Muslim community. Both sides joining effort in solving this problem would be possible by constructing a new identity of Swedish citizens with “foreign Muslim background”. This identity must be consistent with both the ideas of a democratic Swedish society and the aspirations of Islamist organisations to preserve the cultural traditions and religious identity of immigrants from Muslim countries.

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