HEINZ-CHRISTIAN STRACHE

IMPACT: Heinz-Christian Strache is the former Vice-Chancellor of Austria and leader of the right-wing Freedom Party of Austria (FPO). During his youth, he was affiliated with Neo-Nazis and under his leadership, the FPO has promoted Islamophobia. Strache is also widely connected to right-wing parties across Europe.

- During the 1980s and 1990s, **Strache was part of a wide network of <u>neo-Nazi organizations</u>**. In 1989 and again 1990, he was put in custody by German police for his activities with neo-Nazi organizations.

- Strache was **elected leader of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPO) in 2005**. In **December 2017, he <u>became Vice-Chancellor</u> in a coalition government** with the Christian-Democratic People's Party (OVP) led by current (since December 2017) Austrian Chancellor, Sebastian Kurz.

- Under his leadership, the **coalition government has defined Islam as a problem**, as the word appears a total of 21 times in the government's <u>coalition program</u>. In 2017, the coalition government **passed numerous anti-Muslim laws, including a h<u>ijab-ban</u> for <u>children in kindergarten</u>, the <u>closing of mosques</u> (later <u>revoked</u> by the courts), and the banning of <u>symbols of political Islam</u>.**

- Strache has r**epeatedly shared posts on his official Facebook page from the <u>Identitarian Movement</u>, a far-right, white nationalist movement that opposes non-white immigration, primarily Muslim**, as they claim it threatens Europe's identity and will <u>replace</u> the white native population. An article in *TRT* <u>found</u> that in 2015 "photos emerged showing Strache and members of the Identitarian Movement at the same table." Strache has also <u>stated</u> the "replacement of population" was a reality.

- On July 16, 2007, **Strache participated in a demonstration against the construction of a mosque in Cologne,** which was organized by a [<u>radical</u>] <u>right-wing party</u>, Pro Cologne. Strache gave a speech at the demonstration, <u>stating</u>, "Henryk Broder [a widely published German journalist] said the following, which I also wanted to say: The difference between Islam and Islamism is the same as the one between terror and terrorism. He put it straight."

- In 2007, **Strache <u>stated</u>, "Islamism is the Fascism of the 21st century," and <u>claimed</u> that Islam is not a religion but "legal and social totalitarian system."**

- In 2008, he <u>**co-founded** </u>**the "European City Alliance Against Islamization,"** a loose affiliation with other right-wing parties such as Filip De Winter's Belgian <u>Vlaams Belang party</u>, and Markus Beisicht's regional German right-wing party, <u>Pro Cologne</u>.

- In a <u>press release</u> on July 12, 2007, **Strache claimed that imams (Muslim spiritual leaders) in the military would pose a "security threat,"** explaining that when an imam participates in a meeting of a military commando, "confidential data and a state's secrets could fall in the false hands."

- Strache changed the course of his party (the FPO) from a <u>historically anti-clerical</u> political party to embrace the concept of a [<u>defensive Christianity</u>] to [preserve the spiritual foundations of the Occident]. According to Strache, "these foundations are <u>primarily endangered</u> by a fundamentalist radical Islam and its encroachment in Europe."

- After his party promoted a <u>computer game "Bye Bye Mosque"</u> as a political ad for their local elections in the Austrian county of Styria, Strache had to distance himself, but still <u>argued</u> that one has to "<u>guarantee</u>

that there will be no Muezzins in Austria." The game involved shooting Muslim believers reciting the call to prayer (Muazzin).

- Strache calls the Social Democratic party an "Islamist party," arguing that the social democrats would not support women but support the coercion of the Muslim veil.

- In October 2010, **Strache participated in a meeting titled "Patriots of the World, Unite!" with representatives from numerous European far-right parties** such as the Danish People's Party, the Belgian Vlaams Belang, the Italian Lega Nord, the Slovak National Party and the Sweden Democrats. The **meeting was organized to counter the "threat of Islamization" in the region.**

- In December 2010, **Strache was part of a European delegation to Israel, which included Austrian anti-Muslim activist Elisabeth Sabbaditsch-Wolff and Filip De Winter, the leader of the Vlaams Belang, high-ranking members of the German Die Freiheit (Freedom Party), and the Swedish Democrats**. The trip culminated in the signing of the Jerusalem Declaration, which says: "We stand at the vanguard in the fight for the Western, democratic community" against the "totalitarian threat" of "fundamentalist Islam."

- In Israel, the European delegation met with Ariel Shomer, the former chief of cabinet of Ezer Weizman. The delegation was given a tour by Gershon Masika, the head of the Regional Council of the settlers in the West Bank. During the tour, Masika stated that the members of the delegation were fighting against Islamic extremism and the spread of terrorist organizations in Europe, while explicitly defending Israel. He said that European states have to understand that without Israel, there would be nobody who could prevent the Islamic world from undermining Europe and that without Judea and Samaria (West Bank), Israel could not exist.

- **Strache mobilizes against an alleged "replacement and Islamization" (Überfremdung und Islamisierung), which FPÖ Fails, an NGO monitoring the FPÖ's racism, has argued mirrors the anti-Semitic rhetoric used by the Nazis to mobilize against an alleged "replacement of German life by Jews".**

- In 2018 Strache and party had to revoke imputations against Islamic institutions in Austria that they are part of extremist institutions.

- On **18 May 2019, Strache announced his resignation as Vice-Chancellor of Austria and leader of the right-wing Freedom Party of Austria**, following leaked videos that "purported to show...[him] promising government contracts in exchange for political donations from a woman posing as a member of a Russian oligarch family."

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