

WIENER AKADEMIKERBUND (WAB, VIENNESE ASSOCIATION OF ACADEMICS)

IMPACT: The Wiener Akademikerbund was established in 1957 and was affiliated with the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). In 2011, it was formally banned from the ÖVP for questioning the 1947-Prohibition Act that prohibits Holocaust denial and belittlement of Nazi atrocities. The Wiener Akademikerbund presents itself as a right-wing conservative think tank that defends neoliberalism and Christian values. It is one of the major proponents of anti-Muslim sentiment in Austria and is well-connected with the international, anti-Muslim Counter-Jihad Movement.

- The Wiener Akademikerbund (WAB, Viennese Association of Academics) was founded in 1954 by economist and then Minister of Finance Reinhard Kamitz. **Today, its members position themselves as champions of freedom of speech and fight what they call 'political correctness.'** According to WAB, "Politically correct' is what does not contradict multiculturalism, the delusion of equality, and historical discrepancy. Anti-discrimination laws, religious criminal law and old and new laws restricting freedom of expression form the basis of a threatened judicial system."
- One of the leading members of the WAB, Christian Zeitz, calls Austria a "democratic dictatorship." **After the WAB was banned from the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) in 2011, many far-right individuals were invited to give talks at the WAB's regular lecture series.** Amongst its invitees have been Martin Lichtmesz, a leading author of the New Right in Germany and Austria; the anti-Muslim author and sympathizer of the Identitarian movement, Michael Ley; the long-time ideologue of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), Andreas Mölzer; and the anti-Muslim polemicist Amer Albayati.
- In more recent times, the former Minister of Interior from the far-right FPÖ, Herbert Kickl, has spoken at the WAB, while Petr Bystron, German far-right politician from the Alternative for Germany, anti-Muslim born-again Christian Sabatina James, and more mainstream politicians such as MEP Lukas Mandl from the European Peoples Party were invited.
- One board member of the WAB is Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff, who visited Israel in 2010 as a correspondent for the anti-Muslim blog Gates of Vienna and joined a delegation of far-right parties comprised of Vlaams Belang, the FPÖ, the Swedish Democrats and the German Die Freiheit (Freedom Party). Sabaditsch-Wolff is also represented in numerous other anti-Muslim institutions, such as Bürgerbewegung Pax Europa (BPE), "Mission Europa Netzwerk Karl Martell," and ACT! for America, where she serves as the European representative.
- In March 2018, WAB invited anti-Muslim author Daniel Pipes. Another speaker appearing on behalf of the WAB next to Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff during this event was Henrik Clausen, who also represented the International Civil Liberties Alliance (ICLA), **an international network of individuals and organizations from 20 countries that calls for the banning of the term Islamophobia.**
- **The WAB regularly participates in the "March for the Family" in June of each year to protest against LGBTIQ rights and queer feminist demands.** The WAB is also a member of "Platform Family," which is made up of radical opponents of abortion and Christian fundamentalist groups such as "ProVita," as well as other well-known anti-feminist, homophobic, and far-right groups and individuals like the "Verein Okzident," "PEGIDA Österreich" and FPÖ politician Ursula Stenzel.

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- In 2006, the WAB published a position paper on Islam, which was one of the earliest attempts in the political discourse to contest religious freedom for Muslims in Austria. **The WAB called for an “immediate termination of the granting of new citizenship or residence permits to Muslim foreigners as soon as the proportion of Muslims would exceed 9.5% of the total population.”**
- **Two years later in 2008, the WAB released another outline of policy called “15 Demands on Austrian Muslims.”** According to these demands, Muslims should be comprehensively surveilled by the state. **Among the demands made by the WAB were a “certified translation of the Koran,” a ban on “trading and selling slaughtered (halal, BI) meat, a ban of the “burqa and chador in public spaces,” and the registration of all fatwas made by imams in Austria into the Ministry of the Interior.** The short program argued that “teachers, including those who practice Islamic religious instruction, have to distance themselves from Koranic verses that propagate discrimination against women, corporal punishment and violence against other believers.”
- The WAB further demanded that when Muslims are granted citizenship, they have to have **exceptional criteria and “knowledge of the Christian-humanistic foundations of our social order must be checked in a binding manner.”** Point No. 14 specifically stated: “Refusal of integration: Immediate termination of all public measures that favor a refusal to integrate (separate cemeteries, Islam-oriented special treatment in hospitals, offering social benefits in the languages of the countries of origin of migrants, etc.)”
- In November 2008, the WAB co-organized a panel discussion with the Political Academy of the ÖVP (POLAK) titled “Is there a Euro-Islam?” Until 2011, the WAB used to be affiliated with the ÖVP, one of Austria’s two largest political parties. **After it questioned the 1947-Prohibition Act that prohibits Holocaust denial and belittlement of Nazi atrocities in 2010, the WAB was formally banned from the ÖVP.** As some critics have said, the anti-Muslim agitation of the WAB was no problem for the ÖVP.
- Several anti-Muslim proposals pushed by the WAB have entered the larger political discourse in Austria and were later even implemented to some extent. The FPÖ, under the leadership of Heinz-Christian Strache, was at the forefront of coopting these proposals. In the negotiations for the Islam Act of 2015, the government initially wanted an authorized translation of the Koran, as proposed by the WAB. In 2017, the ban of the full-face veil was implemented in the Integration Act. Both acts were applied in the era of the Social Democrats (SPÖ) governing with the Peoples Party (ÖVP).
- When the FPÖ joined a government coalition with the ÖVP under the leadership of Sebastian Kurz in December 2017, the government enacted numerous anti-Muslim policies. The coalition government defined Islam as a problem, as the word appears a total of 21 times in the government’s coalition program. **The government also passed numerous anti-Muslim laws, including a hijab-ban for children in kindergarten, the banning of symbols of political Islam, and the closing of mosques, which was later revoked by the courts.**
- In June 2012, the WAB initiated a local chapter of the Identitarian Movement in Vienna. Invitees were welcomed to a talk in the rooms of the WAB geared towards a “group of youths” that was “patriotic, critical of Islam, anti-racist and conservative,” and at the same time, unsatisfied “with the complacent politics of the ruling class.” In February 2013, the WAB announced the establishment of the national organization Identitarian Movement

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Austria (IBÖ) and said that they were well connected to the Identitarian Movement Germany (IBD) and the Génération Identitaire in France.

- **The WAB is part of the transatlantic Counter-Jihad Movement.** The Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) served as one of the most important venues for the movement. It offered a platform that legitimized their ideology in a formal conference atmosphere. In 2009, Counter-Jihad activists first attended the OSCE's Human Dimension and Implementation Meeting (HDIM).
- The annual HDIM is Europe's biggest human rights conference, submitting papers and hosting side events. The 'Counter-Jihad conference' usually takes place at the same time when the annual OSCE HDIM event is held in Warsaw, Poland, allowing for overlapping participation. The WAB has participated in numerous activities of the Counter-Jihad Movement at the OSCE since the first time in July 2009, as the list of participants of side events and the documentation of interventions in talks by civil society organizations shows. **In September 2018, the WAB asked the OSCE to abandon concepts such as hate crime and asked the member states to also abandon legislation that considers the criminalization of hate crime.**

Bridge Initiative