

# HEIKO HEINISCH

**IMPACT:** Heiko Heinisch is a German political commentator and writer on Islamism. Heinisch is often presented as an expert on Islam and Islamism by the far-right Austrian government and the Austrian media. He serves on the academic advisory board of Austria's Documentation Center for Political Islam, a federally funded center for monitoring, surveilling and mapping Muslims in Austria.

- **Heiko Heinisch is a writer and commentator with a master's degree in German history. He was born in 1966 in the city of Offenbach am Main and has published books on antisemitism, the Holocaust, and Islamism.** While now associated with many institutions related to the centrist-right [Austrian People's Party \(ÖVP\)](#), **Heinisch has a past with the far-left unknown to the public; a 1991 newspaper edition of the TABlatt, characterized as leftist-extremist by the secret service, lists Heinisch as a supporter of conscientious objection to military service.** His research and publications include a 2001 ([unpublished](#)) collaboration with Nina Scholz on antisemitism in Vienna's interwar clergy, a 2003 article on antisemitism in the Christian tradition in Heimo Halbrainer's "[Feindbild Jude](#)". [Zur Geschichte des Antisemitismus](#) (On the History of Historical Antisemitism), and the 2005 book [Hitlers Geiseln. Hegemonialpläne und der Holocaust](#) (Hitler's Hostages: Hegemonic Plans and the Holocaust).
- Heinisch is currently an academic advisory board member of the newly established [Documentation Center for Political Islam](#), which is financed by the Austrian Ministry of Integration. The center is headed by a former employee of the [Austrian Integration Fund \(ÖIF\)](#). Its advisory board is headed by [Mouhanad Khorchide](#), and counts [Lorenzo Vidino](#) as a member. **Its aim is to monitor and surveil what it calls "political Islam," criticized as "political activism" by Catholic theologian Franz Winter.**
- Heinisch previously [wrote](#) for the Ludwig-Boltzmann Institute for Historical Social Sciences in Vienna and the Institute for Islamic Studies at Vienna University. The latter was headed by [Ednan Aslan](#), a strong [advocate](#) of the Austrian government's anti-Muslim policies who regularly conducted studies to support the government's claims. **Heinisch was also a member of the Expert Forum for Deradicalization and Prevention of the City of Vienna (Expert Forum Deradikalisierung und Prävention der Stadt Wien), which was established in 2015. In November 2016, the forum published recommendations that included the creation of "minimum standards for private courses on religion and Koran."**
- **Most of Heinisch's publications have been coauthored with Nina Scholz, and while neither have expertise in Islam, Islamic history or Muslims in Europe, Heinisch has turned to writing primarily on these topics.** In 2012, they coauthored a book titled [Europa, Menschenrechte und Islam - ein Kulturkampf?](#) (Europe, Human Rights and Islam—A Culture War?). Local bureaucrat Ercan Nik Nafs and well-known anti-Muslim writer [Ahmad Mansour](#) [launched](#) the book. Another book talk [featured](#) the authors with award-winning anti-Muslim author [Necla Kelek](#) and a former politician. Their most recent publication is the nonfiction book [Alles für Allah](#) (Everything for Allah), published in March 2019.
- In April 2017, Heinisch and Scholz coauthored "Combat Term 'Islamophobia'—'Science' in the Service of Political Islam?" for an Austrian think tank called [MENA WATCH](#). MENA WATCH focuses on Israel, antisemitism, and Iran, and has featured [content](#) by anti-Muslim authors such as [Hamed Abdel-Samad](#). In their piece, Heinisch and Scholz [argued](#) that Islamophobia is **"a combat term that is consistently used to ward off criticism of Islam or of problems and human rights violations within Muslim communities and to label it as 'anti-Muslim racism.'" They also claimed that anti-**

# HEIKO HEINISCH

racist organizations like the Collective against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) are part of the **“European network of the Muslim Brotherhood.”**

- In 2019, Heinisch and Scholz published an [article](#) in the *German FAZ* titled “*Die europäische Mission des politischen Islam*” (The European Mission of Political Islam). **Heinisch claimed that so-called Islamists use a strategy of “legalistic Islamism,” which is setting “out to transform our society from the inside, [and] while some take up arms to force their utopia, others embark on the famous march through the institutions.”** They declared that “legalistic Islamists pursue the same utopia as militants by non-violent means: Abolishing democracy and establishing a worldwide Islamic state under a caliphate.” **The article was [shared](#) by anti-Muslim websites such as [PI-News](#).**
- In July 2011, following the anti-Muslim terrorist attack by [Anders Behring Breivik](#) in Norway, Heinisch published a response to Austria’s most famous leftist author, Robert Misik. Misik [called](#) to “isolate the mental arsonists.” In his reply, Heinisch [criticized](#) Misik for connecting critics of Islam with Breivik’s terrorism: **“The mere fact of having been quoted by the perpetrator in his ‘manifesto’ [...] does not delegitimize criticism [of Islam].”**
- Heinisch has commented substantially on the Muslim Brotherhood. In March 2015, he published an [article](#) in the daily *Kurier* titled “*Im Dunstkreis der Muslimbruderschaft*” (“In the haze of the Muslim Brotherhood”), in which he **argued that Muslim religious teachers in Austrian public schools may be influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood.** In May 2019, Heinisch participated in an [interview](#) for the media outlet *Fisch+Fleisch* on the Muslim Brotherhood titled “*Wir werden Europa erobern, ohne zum Schwert zu greifen*” (“We will conquer Europe without taking up the sword”). **Heinisch claimed that the Islamic Religious Community in Austria (Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich) was established by influential Muslim Brothers, one of many [false claims](#).** Heiko Heinisch frequently draws on the work of [Lorenzo Vidino](#).
- **Heinisch’s [false claims](#) also include declarations that “the Muslim Brotherhood had infiltrated the party leadership of the Greens in Sweden” and that “Qatar is financing chairs universities globally in prestigious Western universities who then employ sympathizers of members of the Muslim Brotherhood.”** For Heinisch, even the murder of the Saudi journalist Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate could be attributed to a conflict between Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood. Heinisch [claimed](#) that “Khashoggi was close to the thinking of the Muslim Brotherhood and had good contacts with it both inside and outside of Saudi Arabia.” In September 2017, Heinisch was interviewed by the Austrian Public Radio Ö1 and, when [asked](#) by the journalist if the Muslim Brotherhood “pursues the political goal to create an Islamic state from Austria,” answered: **“That’s a long-term goal, of course. The short-term goal for them is a propagandistic clear separation into Muslims and non-Muslims.”**
- Shortly before the national parliamentary elections in 2017, the [Austrian Integration Fund \(ÖIF\)](#) [published](#) a report on the role of the mosque in integration. The byline listed Heinisch, Imet Memedi, and a mysterious “et al.,” which normally refers to other authors, but in this case were never listed. **The research results were summarized with [claims of the existence of “fundamentalist tendencies in many institutions,” “clear rejection of Austrian values,” “strong separation by ethnic groups,” and “German sermons as an exception, \[and\] usually no room for women.”](#)** From 2015 to 2017, Heinisch [studied](#) alleged “Muslim kindergartens” with Ednan Aslan. As the investigative weekly *Falter* [demonstrated](#), officials from the Department of Integration

# HEIKO HEINISCH

and Foreign Affairs—whose minister at the time was current Austrian chancellor [Sebastian Kurz](#)—substantially changed the content of the document files written by the researchers. **The “research” laid the basis for Kurz to later claim that “the Muslim study confirms my position. We urgently need a reduction of migration and must prevent parallel structures like Islamic kindergartens from emerging.”**

- Based on these state-sponsored studies, Heinisch has become a frequent commentator and expert on many Austrian media outlets. The Austrian version of [Breitbart](#), *Addendum*, gave Heinisch space to disseminate his conspiracy theories. **These ranged from a takeover of Austrian Muslims by Ankara to an op-ed claiming an alleged domination of Austrian Muslim institutions by the Muslim Brotherhood, which he equated with violence, terror, and infiltration of Austria.** In the op-ed, he [argues](#), “the goal of the Muslim Brotherhood is an ideal Islamic world community united under one caliphate—the ‘rule of God in the whole world.’” In an *Addendum* article that [named thirteen teachers at public schools](#) allegedly related to the Muslim Brotherhood, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, or Milli Görüs, Heinisch served as the expert to analyze these supposed institutional relationships. Heinisch has also participated in several debates of *Servus TV*, which belongs to Red Bull-owner Dietrich Mateschitz’s [media network](#), the Quo Vadis Veritas Foundation. The network also owns *Addendum*. Heinisch participated alongside the former far-right leader [Heinz-Christian Strache](#) in a June 2017 panel titled “Muslims in Austria: What Is the Problem of Living Together?” In July 2017, Heinisch participated in a debate on *Servus TV* titled “Islamic Kindergartens: Really Just a Scare?” alongside the anti-Muslim former MP of the Green, Efgani Dönmez.
- The ÖIF, which [plays a major role](#) in supporting the anti-Muslim policies of the [Austrian People’s Party’s](#) (ÖVP), has not only financed research conducted by Heinisch, but has also included him on panels. Following the publication of his 2017 [report](#), the ÖIF organized a [panel](#) titled “What Role Mosques Play for the Integration of Muslim Immigrants in Austria.” The event featured Heinisch, [Susanne Schröter](#), and Constantin Schreiber, journalist and author of the book *Inside Islam - What Is Being Preached in German Mosques*. **During the discussion, Heinisch claimed: “In more than a third of the mosques we investigated, the integration of Muslims into society is actively counteracted. We see fundamentalist tendencies, open nationalism and a rejection of the Austrian majority society and its values.”** During a January 2019 panel at the University of Vienna that discussed the newly implemented hijab ban for pupils in primary school, where all panelists supported the claim that young girls should not wear a hijab, Heiko Heinisch [called](#) for a general ban in schools. He argued that Muslim pupils—not the ban—constitute the real problem in schools. **Heinisch claimed that there was “Hijab-mobbing” by peer groups and pressure on young girls who do not wear a Hijab or do not fast during Ramadan.** The editor of the weekly Catholic *Furche*, Otto Friedrich, [criticized](#) Heinisch for his pro-government position in defending the Hijab-ban. In addition to this position, Heinisch frequently mobilizes against religious freedom. In a tweet in September 2017, he [wrote](#) “#Hijab is the flag of the Islamists. When will Turkey make it obligatory?” (#Kopftuch als Flagge der Islamisten. Stellt sich die Frage, wann es in der #Türkei Pflicht wird).
- Heinisch has written for a variety of fringe media outlets such as the [far-right European](#). Although his leftist activism is in the past, he has written for the [leftist-extremist Junge World](#) as well, where he usually [writes](#) about the threat of Islamism. In the [European](#), he wrote that “many Muslim countries and associations distance themselves from the cruelties of Daesh. But there is unfortunately more calculation behind this than moral conviction,”

# HEIKO HEINISCH

accusing countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar of both financing terror and a violent reading of Islam. **Heinisch's writings have been quoted by right-wing circles like the Neo-Nazi Netzwerk Germanica Imperii, social media websites such as AntiTodenhoefer, and a right-wing conspiracy theorist in the German military named Hermann Mitterer.**

- At the same time, Heinisch has also been interviewed by liberal media outlets such as Der Standard. **In these outlets, Heinisch has presented his anti-Muslim positions as a defense of liberalism.** In an April 2016 interview on the headscarf ban in kindergarten and elementary school, he argued: “The school should be a headscarf-free room. At least for the female students I would argue for a ban for one simple reason: There may be a lot of girls who voluntarily wear a headscarf, but there are probably more who do not wear it voluntarily. We only hear less from them because they are not in the media, simply because a girl who is forced to wear a headscarf can hardly give an interview to a newspaper. There is only one way to protect these girls: no headscarf at school. Then girls have the opportunity to experience life without a headscarf—at least in this protected space.”
- In September 2019, Heinisch participated on a panel of the non-profit *WerteInitiative. jüdisch-deutsche Positionen* (Value Initiative. Jewish-German Positions) titled “Islamism: Threats to Jewish Life in Germany and Dangers for Liberal Democracy!” alongside Naila Chikhi of Terre des Femmes Michael Fischer, head of the Secret Service Berlin; Benjamin Strasser, MP from the German Freedom Party, FDP; and Christoph de Vries, MP of the Christian Democrats, Internal Affairs Committee.
- Following the killing of four civilians on November 2, 2020, in Vienna by a sympathizer of Daesh, two Austrians of Turkish descent saved the life of a policeman. **Heinisch denounced them as Erdogan-sympathizers and Turkish nationalists.**
- Heinisch and Scholz were invited by the state prosecutor as experts for a report on the Muslim Brotherhood that was the catalyst for a November 9, 2020 raid on alleged “Muslim brotherhood and Hamas terrorists.” **The raid, unconnected to the November 2 attack, was deemed “racist disciplining of Muslim by the state” by leftist activist David Albrich and had devastating repercussions also for families and children.**