

# MOUHANAD KHORCHIDE

**IMPACT:** Mouhanad Khorchide is professor of Islamic pedagogy at the University of Münster in Germany. He has authored several books on Islam and is a frequent media commentator on Islam and Muslims. Khorchide is a member of several political initiatives calling for the reform of Islam and he supports discriminatory state policies, including the hijab ban. He heads the advisory board for Austria's Documentation Center for Political Islam—a project that monitors movements that do not pose a security-related threat and is “part of the national strategy of extremism prevention and deradicalization.”

- Mouhanad Khorchide was born in Beirut, raised in Saudi Arabia, and is of Palestinian descent. He migrated to Austria at eighteen, where he completed a doctorate in sociology at the University of Vienna in 2008. In 2004, he obtained an online degree in Islamic theology from a university in Beirut, Lebanon. From 2007 to 2009, Khorchide taught at the Muslim Teachers Training College in Vienna. In July 2010, he became professor of Islamic religious pedagogy at the Centre for Islamic Theology at the University of Münster in Germany.
- Khorchide is presented as an expert of Islam in Austrian and German media outlets and is a frequent commentator. Journalist Johanna Grillmayer once described him as the “soft face of Islam.” Khorchide has authored several books that present Islam as compatible with European society and he advocates against a literal interpretation of the religion. His books include: *Scharia - der missverstandene Gott* (Sharia—The Misunderstood God, 2014), *Islam ist Barmherzigkeit* (Islam is Mercy, 2015), and *Gott glaubt an den Menschen - Mit dem Islam zu einem neuen Humanismus* (God Believes in Men - Towards a New Humanism with Islam, 2019). In this latest book, Khorchide writes he “understands Islam in a radically new way and presents it as a modern and current religion, a necessary source of a global humanism.” His most famous book, *Islam is Mercy*, has been reviewed critically from different angles. An assessment by scholars at the Coordination Council of Muslims in Germany (Koordinationsrat der Muslime in Deutschland) viewed his thesis as weak: “Particularly regrettable is his unobjective and dismissive attitude toward many believers who hold other positions and embody a different understanding of Islam than he does.”
- Khorchide is also engaged in interreligious dialogue and scholarship. In 2018, he co-authored *Der Andere Prophet. Jesus im Koran* (Jesus in the Koran) with Klaus von Stosch, a professor of Catholic theology. In 2021, he co-authored *Umdenken! Wie Islam und Judentum unsere Gesellschaft besser machen* (How Islam and Judaism Make Our Society a Better One) with a Rabbi and theologian. In 2016, he published ***Zur Freiheit gehört, den Koran zu kritisieren* (Criticizing the Koran is part of Freedom) alongside anti-Muslim polemicist Hamed Abdel-Samad.** The book is presented as a “constructive intellectual debate about Islam in our society” with promotional materials describing it as “two prominent Islam experts argue without mincing their words.”
- In his 2020 book, *Gottes falsche Anwälte: Der Verrat am Islam* (God's false lawyers: The betrayal of Islam), Khorchide argues that Islam today is a “corrupt version of its original intention. . .The religion of Islam became and is becoming more and more a political issue, an instrument of power, an instrument of taming.” Khorchide presents his version of an “enlightened Islam” in the conclusion. In September 2020, the University of Münster's Professor of Arabic and Islamic studies, Thomas Bauer, criticized Khorchide's argument for its one-sided interpretation of Islamic history. Bauer wrote, “In order to make the history of the following 1300 years appear as bleak as possible, not only are facts arbitrarily picked out, but, largely without recourse to historical and Islamic studies literature, they are also interpreted in a highly idiosyncratic manner...In his depiction of history, the author spares no one. Not a single ruler, theologian or literary figure appears in a positive light: everywhere only scoundrels and villains, no one to whom one could refer

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today.” As **Bauer notes**, the book is primarily an attack on what Khorchide calls “political Islam.”

- Khorchide is **one of the founders of the Muslim Forum Germany (Muslimisches Forum Deutschland, MFD)**. The chairman of MFD is Ahmad Mansour, a writer who presents himself as an “ex-Islamist” expert on the “radicalization” of Muslims. **MFD was established as an initiative of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, KAS), a political foundation connected to Germany’s current ruling party, the Christian Democratic Union** (Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands, CDU). Officially, KAS may only appear to share the values of CDU, but unofficially the foundation is an extension of the party. The Forum claims to work to “create an understanding of Islam that goes hand in hand with the basic values and German reality.” Its founding document states that its members “stand for democracy and human rights and want to give a voice to the majority of Muslims in Germany, who have not been represented yet.” **The Forum has been criticized by numerous German Muslim organizations for its affiliation with the governing political party.** Aiman Mazyek, head of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland, ZMD), called the MFD another “politically backed think tank.”
- The **Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF), which supports the anti-Muslim policies of the Austrian People’s Party’s (ÖVP), has also frequently featured Khorchide on panels.** In January 2018, Khorchide participated in a panel titled, “The Influence of Political Islam” alongside Nina Scholz, Oliver Henhapel, and the Minister of Integration, Susanne Raab. During the panel, **Khorchide made a generalized claim that “mosques far too often propagate a one-sided interpretation of Islam that rejects any contextualization of the faith to societal changes and often leaves young Muslims with the choice of being a good Muslim or a European.”** He went on to call on Muslims in Europe to “deal with how an Islam can be developed and lived that does not contradict the values that apply in Europe and everyday life in Austria.” “Political Islam” is a vague term that the government has been unable to define, but has generally used the term to criminalize Muslim practices and silence Muslims who express political opinions criticizing the government.
- In **April 2017, conservative German CDU politicians Jens Spahn and Julia Klöckner called for the introduction of an Austria-like Islam Act in Germany.** The **Islam Act has been criticized as a discriminatory act that singles out Muslims**, treating the community differently than other religious communities, manifesting a general suspicion towards Muslims, and placing them under more state control. **Khorchide, along with Abdel-Samad, supported the initiative.**
- **Khorchide supported the European Citizens’ Initiative against Extremism, which was founded on December 29, 2016, and recognized on June 7, 2017, by the European Commission.** This initiative was cofounded and financed by Seyran Ates, a German-Turkish lawyer and author who uses her personal experiences to make generalized claims about Islam and “Muslim culture,” and ÖVP-MP Efgani Dönmez. Supporters include Khorchide along with individuals who have a history of supporting anti-Muslim policies such as Abdel-Hakim Ourghi, Ralph Ghadban, Saïda Keller-Messahli, and Necla Kelek. **The initiative calls for “the introduction of a joint, EU-wide watch list to which individuals and organizations with an extremist background could be added” and the introduction of an “Extremism-free” certification for organizations and businesses.** The 2017 European Islamophobia report noted, “The initiative, which came under criticism when leaks by the weekly Falter revealed that more than €20,000, the budget specified by the EU Commission, could potentially be used to restrict Muslims’ religious activities.”

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- Khorchide has **frequently supported anti-Muslim legislation presented by the Austrian government.** In 2018, during the tenure of the coalition between the far-right [Freedom Party of Austria](#) (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party (Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP), the government introduced a ban on the hijab. [According](#) to then-vice-chancellor [Heinz-Christian Strache](#), the headscarf “play[ed] into the hands of political Islam, which has already created dangerous parallel societies in diverse structures of associations.” Khorchide supported this ban; *Die Presse* paraphrased him [stating](#) that “children would not decide themselves (to wear the Hijab), but the parents. He (Khorchide) knows from personal conversations that many children do not want to wear a headscarf, but they do it for their parents.”
- In a **June 2018 press conference, Austrian chancellor Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP), vice-chancellor Strache (FPÖ), Interior Minister Herbert Kickl (FPÖ), and Chancellery Minister Gernot Blümel (ÖVP) announced that eight mosques would be closed as part of the government's efforts to fight “political Islam.”** Chancellor Kurz [framed](#) the government's initiative as a means to protect the Muslim community from “political Islam.” [According](#) to Blümel, the mosques were home to Salafi people, who would not have a “positive attitude towards the state and society.” **Khorchide supported the government by arguing that the mosques broke the law.** In a June 2018 [interview](#) with *Der Standard*, **Khorchide stated, “I think it is right that mosques are closed when applicable laws are violated.” He went on to make claims about the threat of “political Islam,” arguing that “Austria [had] slept through political Islam for decades and gave too little thought to who the conversation partner was on the Muslim side,” and often chose to work with “the wrong people.”** When the interviewer notes that the government has only placed restrictions on the Muslim community with regards to foreign funding, Khorchide responds, “it would not have come about if the Muslims had made sure that foreign financing did not lead to clear dependencies on foreign political agendas.” In the end, the Austrian government did not close the mosques, as the Austrian Court of Administration [repealed](#) the government's decision.
- In the same [interview](#) with *Der Standard*, the interviewer mentions the burqa ban and debates around a ban on fasting for school children. **Khorchide acknowledged that the “many bans suggest an Islamophobic attitude on the part of the government,” but then shifted the focus to the Muslim community, asking, “But why don't we Muslims become active ourselves and try to educate people? Why do we wait for someone else to come and criticize it? Same with fasting. There are repeated calls and complaints from teachers that children are collapsing or completely unable to concentrate. We Muslims have to clean up our own homes ourselves.”**
- In his latest publication, *Gottes falsche Anwälte* (God's false lawyers), **Khorchide focuses on “political Islam,” alleging that “we are now confronted with a much more dangerous ideology: that of political Islam. It is more dangerous because it attempts to subtly infiltrate society... the follower of political Islam shows himself to be well integrated, is usually well educated, fashion-conscious, if he is a man, not infrequently wears a suit, speaks of integration...He distances himself from Salafism and extremism, even actively participates in actions and projects against extremism, and not infrequently shows civil courage.”** Thomas Bauer [notes](#) in his critique that such a description means that “it is not the Salafist with the goatee who is dangerous, but the Muslim paediatrician in a suit who is running for the Integration Council. What is the purpose of such a blanket suspicion, which can easily lead to conspiracy theories? And doesn't it already do so here, even if it is immediately followed by Khorchide's warning that political Islam is striving for world domination?”
- On July 15, 2020, the Austrian government [launched](#) the Documentation Center for Political Islam with an annual budget of €500,000. The Documentation Center was presented to the [public during a press conference featuring](#) Minister of Interior Susanne Raab, [Lorenzo Vidino](#), and Khorchide. The Center is

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directed towards monitoring movements that do not pose a security-related threat. According to Minister Susanne Raab, the Center is “dealing independently and academically with the dangerous ideology of political Islam and gives insights into yet unknown networks.” It is designed to be preventive and informative and is “part of the national strategy of extremism prevention and deradicalization.”

- In **November 2020**, former ÖIF employee, **Lisa Fellhofer** became director and **Khorchide** became the head of the scientific advisory board for the Documentation Center for Political Islam. The advisory board has eight members including well-known anti-Muslim authors like Susanne Schröter, Lorenzo Vidino, and Heiko Heinisch. **During the presentation**, **Khorchide** argued that **“political Islam” is “wrapped with a cloak of democracy.”** He further suggested that the proponents of political Islam would engage in taqiyya—dissimulation or denial of religious belief in the face of persecution—by masking their “inwardly” values. According to political scientist Farid Hafez from the University of Salzburg, the Documentation Center for Political Islam is an “institutionalization of a general demonization of Muslims, reminiscent of Joseph McCarthy’s witch-hunt of Black and leftist groups under the banner of anti-Communism.”
- In the July 2020 interview with *Der Standard*, Khorchide defined “political Islam,” as a “term [that] describes an anti-human ideology that seeks domination in the name of Islam. Religion serves as a means to manipulate believers. Political Islam is directed against all of us and is much more dangerous than Jihadism and Salafism because it appears much more subtly, namely in a tie and suit. Many politicians I talk to do not yet see through this.” In a September 2020 interview, **Khorchide** argued that **“terms like Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism have become combat terms of political Islam.”** An August 2020 piece by journalist Elias Feroz argued that the notion of political Islam is useless for a factual debate.
- In **December 2020**, along with Lorenzo Vidino, **Khorchide** authored the first report published by the Documentation Center for Political Islam, titled **“Der Politische Islam als Gegenstand wissenschaftlicher Auseinandersetzungen und am Beispiel der Muslimbruderschaft”** (“Political Islam as the Subject of Scholarly Debate and the Example of the Muslim Brotherhood”). Protestant theologian Franz Winter criticized the report, stating that when it comes to claims about the Muslim Brotherhood, the report “primarily cites and affirmatively absorbs the many rumors that have been spread in various Austrian media over the years and leaves them in the room without any further background or additional evidence. There is often a lack of support for the allegations and in many cases very old allegations are taken up again without weighing up.” This **report appeared only five weeks after a government raid targeting alleged members of the Muslim Brotherhood.**
- In October 2020, **Khorchide** signed an open letter with the title **“Five Proposals for Strengthening the Free Democratic Basic Order in the Face of Political Islam”** alongside well-known anti-Muslim authors Seyran Ateş, Ahmad Mansour, Susanne Schröter, Necla Kelek and politicians Winfried Bausback (CSU), Carsten Linnemann (CDU), and Christoph de Vries (CDU). The **letter claimed** there are **“segregated Muslim communities” in Germany** and **“Islamic extremism is enthusiastically taken up by young people.”** It also claimed that **“refus[ing] handshake for a woman can already be an indication”** of **“religious extremism.”** Additionally, the letter said, **“It is high time to face the problems of the immigrant society openly and not to be intimidated by unfounded accusations of alleged Islamophobia, “Islamophobia” or “anti-Muslim racism.”** The statement included five recommendations for Germany including, “the establishment of a Documentation Center for ‘Political Islam’ based on the Austrian model, in which the structures, strategies and financing of political Islam are analyzed and disclosed,” the establishment of ten university chairs dedicated to analyzing the structures of “political Islam” in Germany, as well as “the

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establishment of an expert group on ‘Political Islam’ in the Federal Ministry of the Interior, which would draw up recommendations in the fight against political Islam based on the findings of academia and the offices for the protection of the constitution (secret service) and report regularly to the federal government.”

- In December 2020, Khorchide appeared in *Al-Hurra TV*, where he claimed: “Unfortunately, Islam has turned into an anti-Western identity. When we are unable to define Islam from within, we turn to the ‘other.’ We need the ‘other’ so that we can say he is the enemy. We determine for the Muslim that he must fight the ‘other,’ overcome him, and get rid of him. Muslims need a hostile image of the ‘other,’ so they build this image for themselves.”

Bridge Initiative Factsheet