

ELHAM MANEA

IMPACT: Elham Manea is a Yemeni Swiss political scientist, writer, and activist based in Switzerland. Manea has served as an advisor to several governments, including Austria, on issues related to the surveillance and criminalization of Muslims. Manea has also worked with anti-Muslim organizations in Europe and the United States, including the Clarion Project, the AHA Foundation, the European Foundation for Democracy, and the Secular Policy Institute. Manea presents herself as a formerly “radicalized” person with “insider” knowledge on “extremism,” particularly “non-violent extremism,” “Islamism” and “political Islam.”

- **Elham Manea is a professor (Privatdozentin in Switzerland) in the Department of Political Science at the University of Zurich. Her research centers on the Arabian peninsula with a focus on Yemen and Saudi Arabia, legal pluralism and Islamic law, and gender and politics in South West Asia and North Africa.** Manea’s bio also states that she consults for a “number of” Swiss government agencies and “international human rights organisations” and was appointed to the Federal Commission for Women Affairs in 2010 by the Swiss Federal Council.
- **Manea presents herself as a “formerly radicalized” person.** According to Manea, she became “radicalized” in school at the age of sixteen. **Manea educates the public on the so-called “deradicalization” of Muslims, and facilitates workshops for governmental institutions such as the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF, Österreichischer Integrationsfond).** In a May 2015 interview, Manea argued for a “foundational reform of Islam.”
- **Manea is a senior fellow at the at the Brussels-based think-tank European Foundation for Democracy (EFD), an organization that works to defame Muslim civil society organizations and exclude them from the European political field.** EFD is also connected to the conservative Washington, DC-based think tank Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD).
- **Manea is also a senior fellow at the Washington, DC-based Secular Policy Institute (SPI). SPI has promoted her argument that “combating militant Islamism is a very important concern, but non-violent Islamism shouldn’t be ignored either.”** As British researcher Shenaz Bunglawala has argued, this argument is often used in the US-led War on Terror and countering extremism programs, which broadened the notion of terrorism to encapsulate non-violent extremism. Political Scientist Farid Hafez argues that the term “non-violent extremism” is used “to exclude Muslim organizations from the field of civil society” by targeting Muslims and Muslim associations that work within the Western democratic political order and reject violence. **The term “non-violent extremism” implies that non-violent Muslim groups share the same goal as violent ones and differ only in method.** Another SPI fellow, Australian philosopher Russell Blackford, has promoted the claim that Islamophobia is “as a stick to beat people who are attempting to engage in genuine dialogue about the nature of Islam, particularly its more radical and/or political forms.”
- **Until July 2017, Manea was listed as a member of the advisory board for the Clarion Project, a US-based organization that advances anti-Muslim content through its web-based and video production platforms.** Clarion is closely linked to American anti-Muslim figures such as Frank Gaffney and Daniel Pipes, as well as organizations that advocate pro-Israel positions. Other advisory board members have included Zuhdi Yasser, who advocates increased surveillance of Muslim

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communities in “Western” societies, and Raheel Raza, a Pakistani Canadian speaker who has stated that former US President Trump is “right” about “radical Islam” and advocated for a ban on immigration from Muslim countries.

- **Elham Manea has collaborated with the AHA Foundation, a US nonprofit founded in 2007 by Ayaan Hirsi Ali that advocates against “honor killings,” forced marriages, and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C).** Hirsi Ali is a Somali American public figure with a long track record of inflammatory statements against Muslims and Islam, including advocating violence against Muslims. In 2007, Hirsi Ali claimed that Islam is “a destructive, nihilistic cult of death” and must be “defeated.” **During the spring of 2018, Manea delivered a four-part lecture series organized by the AHA Foundation’s Critical Thinking Unit Campus Programs.** According to the foundation, Manea “spoke at four U.S. campuses about her personal experience of radicalization as a youth in Yemen, her journey out of Islamism, and why it is important to address non-violent extremism – the basis for violent extremism.” **In her lecture at Portland State University, “From Radical to Rational,” Manea argued that “Islamism” is a “totalitarian ideology” that is slowly eroding “the major achievements of Western societies – the liberal and universal norms and values that protect the dignity and rights of the individual.”**
- **In July 2020, Manea joined the scientific advisory board of the newly established Documentation Center Political Islam (Dokumentationszentrum Politischer Islam), an Austrian government institute.** According to political scientist Farid Hafez, this institution is the **Austrian government’s “latest step in surveilling Muslims and pushing Muslim civil society organizations to the margin” after its Hijab-ban and closing of mosques, supposedly implemented to counter “political Islam.”** The scientific board, which is headed by Mouhanad Khorchide, also counts Lorenzo Vidino, Susanne Schröter and Heiko Heinisch as members.
- **In Switzerland in November 2004, Elham Manea established the Forum für einen fortschrittlichen Islam (FFI, Forum for a Progressive Islam).** The president of FFI is Saïda Keller-Messahli, one of the most prominent voices mainstreaming Islamophobia in Switzerland. Manea is a board member of the FFI, which claims to represent the “silent majority” of Muslims, who are not organized in Muslim associations. Other FFI members include former Swiss politicians and non-Muslims. **In November 2015, following the terrorist attacks against the French Bataclan theater, the FFI called on European imams to issue a Fatwa against Political Islam and called for the ban of the Islamic Central Council in Switzerland, a Salafi organization mostly made up of Swiss converts to Islam.**
- In a 2019 talk organized by the ÖIF in the city of Wels, Manea called for the expulsion of teachers who belong to Turkish Islamic organizations such as Millî Görüş. She said that these teachers should not be permitted to teach religious education in schools, claiming that they have “totalitarian views” and are inspired by “political Islam” (a term that originated in “Western” scholarship to describe “movements representing modern political mobilization in the name of Islam” in the late twentieth century, often used by anti-Muslim authors to criminalize Muslim civil society in “Western” and Muslim-majority nations). In Wels, the conservative newspaper Volksblatt titled an interview with Manea, “I Have No Problem with the Headscarf Ban’ Muslim Political Scientist Elham Manea Warns of the Excesses of Political Islam.”

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- **Manea also supports the Austrian far-right government's hijab ban that was later lifted by the Constitutional Court and has spoken disparagingly of the hijab and by extension those who wear it, saying of the ban:** "It is not discriminatory. ... There must also be the possibility to prevent certain phenomena of religious excesses." **She also supported the ÖVP's position to ban "political Islam," stating in an October 2018 interview that the goal of non-violent Islamists was "no democratic pluralist society, but a totalitarian project."**
- From 2014 to 2017, Manea wrote nearly two dozen op-eds for the Huffington Post. In December 2017, **she argued that then-US President Donald Trump's Muslim and African Ban was "discriminatory" but "not a Muslim Ban,"** on the basis that "citizens of Muslim faith of the other countries are allowed to enter the country." Manea has published three op-eds on non-violent Islamic extremism. This idea of expanding countering violent extremism (CVE) programs to include "non-violent extremism" is promoted by many anti-Muslim institutions and people such as Lorenzo Vidino. **To effectively counter non-violent extremism, Manea argued in 2014, there must be a reform of Islam, "a long-term project ... to tame the religion and bring it back to the private spiritual domain of the individual. It is an indispensable step for the separation of state and religion."** Manea further claimed "that non-violent extremism set the stage for violent extremism." **For her, "the absence of real reformation has paved the ground for the re-Islamisation process and the rise of political Islam, and from its womb ISIS."** In a January 2017 op-ed, Manea welcomed the Women's March, the worldwide protest of women following the inauguration of president Donald Trump, but criticized the "iconic Shepard Fairey poster" of a Muslim woman wearing an American flag headscarf: **"I was alarmed by some posters used for your campaign, namely the posters showing a woman wearing the American flag as a headscarf (veil)," arguing that the hijab is a "controversial symbol."**
- In an article published in October 2018, Manea criticized US philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler's arguments that laïcité disparages and promotes the exclusion of Muslims (laïcité is the French model of secularism, or separation of church and state, developed during the French Revolution, in which public expression of religion is legally prohibited and socially shunned). **According to Manea, such arguments are "toxic postcolonial, postmodern discourse[s]" that essentialize or reduce "Muslim women into only their covering," and are therefore a "racist way of seeing a person."**
- Manea is also the author of several books. Her latest book, published in 2018 by Random House Germany, is entitled *Der Alltägliche Islamismus* ("On Everyday Islamism"), which is translated on her faculty page as "On-Non Violent Islamism."