

DOCUMENTATION CENTER POLITICAL ISLAM (Dokumentationsarchiv Politischer Islam)

IMPACT: The Documentation Center Political Islam is a fund of the Republic of Austria according to the Law on Trusts and Funds 2015. It was established in July 2020 by the center-right New Austrian People's Party's (ÖVP), which has instituted a number of anti-Muslim policies. The Center's academic advisory board hosts several experts who hold anti-Muslim views. The Center has usually presented its output alongside the Minister of Integration Affairs.

- In 2019, the coalition government of the center-right **ÖVP** and the far-right **FPÖ** presented an idea of a **monitoring center** that conducts research and tracks, documents, and archives religious extremism. After this coalition was dissolved in June 2019, the Center was finally established in January 2020 under the coalition government of the **ÖVP** and the **Greens**, which both agreed was needed to target religious extremism, claiming that the battle against “political Islam” was a “top priority.”
- The Documentation Center is headed by two directors: Lisa Fellhofer, who previously worked for the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF), an institution that also served the anti-Muslim agenda of the ÖVP, and Ferdinand Haberl, who taught two courses at the University of Vienna. According to the Greens MP Faika El-Nagashi, Lisa Fellhofer was “professionally unqualified.”
- On its website, the Center writes that its “**mandate is the scientific analysis of the phenomenon of Political Islam, associated networks as well as formal and informal structures.**” Further, the Center states it “aims to help prevent extremism and raise awareness about religiously motivated political extremism, Political Islam, its mechanism, methods and dangers to democracy and rule of law.”
- On its website, the Center defines political Islam as “an ideology of supremacy that aims at influencing or changing society, culture, state, politics and/or polity according to such values and norms that are regarded as Islamic by the actors of Political Islam, but are in clear contradiction to the rule of law, democracy, and human rights.” According to an opposition NEOS MP Yannick Shetty, this terminology is a “combat term.”
- On **July 15, 2020**, the Minister of Integration, **Susanne Raab**, introduced the Center to the public alongside two scholars: **Mouhanad Khorchide** and **Lorenzo Vidino**. A July 2020 job ad for the positions of director and deputy director of the Center, states the project is “part of the national strategy of extremism prevention and deradicalization.” **A July 2020 piece in Die Presse revealed the center has an annual budget of €500,000.** During the public launch of the Center, Minister Raab stated the Center allows “for the first time in Austria, (...) to independently and scientifically deal with the dangerous ideology of political Islam and offer insights into the previously hidden networks.”
- During the presentation, **Raab argued the Center was needed “because political Islam is poison for our social coexistence and must be fought with all means,”** and claimed that with the establishment of the Center, “Austria thus becomes a pioneer in Europe.” During the presentation, **Khorchide argued that political Islam is “wrapped with a cloak of democracy,”** and suggested that the proponents of political Islam would engage in

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taqiyya —dissimulation or denial of religious belief in the face of persecution— by **masking their “inwardly” values.** In a 2021 journal article, political scientist Professor Farid Hafez [points out](#): “according to this logic, whatever Muslims do, they cannot be trusted.” An April 2012 [Buzzfeed piece](#) noted that **taqiyya is a widely misunderstood term by non-Muslims, and found that “false interpretation” of this term “has become a bedrock belief among anti-Muslim writers and activists.”**

- The **Center was legally established as a fund.** As the oppositional NEOS MP [Yannick Shetty](#) argued, **by establishing the Center as a fund this institution is “prevented from being under parliamentary control of the opposition [...]** By invoking the limits of the parliamentary right of interpellation in the case of independent funds, the federal minister evades the responsibility to provide information about essential areas of her policy field – as happened in the case of the inquiry about an ÖIF study.”
- The **Center’s academic board of advisors includes a number of individuals who hold anti-Muslim views and have supported anti-Muslim policies** like German political commentator [Heiko Heinisch](#), German Professor of Anthropology [Susanne Schröter](#) and Professor of Islamic pedagogy [Mouhanad Khorchide](#) (who serves as chair of the board), Swiss political scientist [Elham Manea](#), and Italian-American legal scholar [Lorenzo Vidino](#). All of these individuals had previously been invited to speak at events by the [Austrian Integration Fund \(ÖIF\)](#), an institution that also served the anti-Muslim agenda of the ÖVP.
- According to **MP Faika El-Nagashi from the Greens, this was a “tendentiously staffed advisory board” that in part “develops and multiplies exclusionary and defamatory strategies towards Muslim civil society.”** She further argued that the “house and court experts” of the ÖIF were consulted because they had already provided the scientific legitimization for “scandalization, defamation, exclusion, criminalization” of Muslims in the past. MP Yannick Shetty [stated](#) that “some members of the scientific advisory board also show clear overlaps with the thrust of the ÖVP. **Some of the members are united by a one-sided, sometimes sweeping, alarmist discourse on Islam, which has strong negative connotations due to the language used and the topics addressed (extremism, oppression of women, the propensity to violence, Islamic anti-Semitism, ideological infiltration, terrorism, etc.).**”
- During the Center’s launch, Minister Raab said that it was [not directed](#) against Islam as a religion. However, the **Islamic Religious Society, one of Austria’s legally recognized Muslim representative bodies, argued that the Center might become an “institution of surveillance.”**
- The **first report presented by the Center, which dealt with the Muslim Brotherhood, was criticized by Franz Winter**, a Professor of religious studies at the University of Graz. According to Winter, **the study is based widely on an older report written by Lorenzo Vidino, and that “ the basic problem with this work is that it primarily quotes the many rumors that have been circulated in various Austrian media over the years, takes them up affirmatively and leaves them in the room without further background or additional evidence.** There is often a lack of substantiation for the allegations and, in many cases,

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accusations, some of which are very old, are reiterated without consideration.”

- On **July 15, 2020**, Minister Raab **said** that the Center would publish an annual report on extremism as well as the “creation of an overview map of problematic networks and associations in Austria that can be attributed to political Islam. The aim is to make visible structures, actors, and goals of the representatives of this dangerous ideology. Financial, organizational and ideological connections (abroad) are also to be investigated and disclosed.” In addition, the Center would present a “detailed analysis of the individual networks operating in secret.”
- On **May 27th, 2020**, the Center together with Minister Raab and Khorchide presented a digital Islam Map that revealed the addresses of **623 mosques and Muslim associations, which were now presented under the umbrella of ‘political Islam’ and thus deemed potentially dangerous.** The map was criticized by anti-racist NGOs like SOS Mitmensch, and even some MPs from the coalition partner. **SOS-Mitmensch speaker Alexander Pollack argued that “fomenting a general suspicion against religious minorities is not a contribution to pointing out or even solving concrete problems, but rather promotes division and alienation.”** According to MP El-Nagashi, the map was “counterproductive” and “the opposite of how integration politics and dialogue should look like.” The president of the University of Vienna prohibited the use of the institution’s logo that was on the Islam map’s website, since it was developed by University Professor Ednan Aslan. **The Council of Europe called the map “hostile to Muslims and potentially counterproductive.” After taking the website offline for two weeks, it was put online again.**