

KARL NEHAMMER

IMPACT: Karl Nehammer is the current Chancellor of Austria. Three days prior to being sworn in as Chancellor on December 6, 2021, he became the managing chairman of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). Previously, he served as the Minister of the Interior from 2020 to 2021, General Secretary of the ÖVP from 2018 to 2020, and a member of the National Council from 2017 to 2020. He has been a key figure in supporting anti-Muslim policies.

- Karl Nehammer is a **member of the Catholic Austrian Students' Corporations Sonnberg Perchtoldsdorf within the Mittelschüler-Kartellverband, a Catholic male-only lifelong fraternity**. A July 1991 journal article by Wolfgang C. Müller and Delia Meth-Cohn found that the **fraternity serves as the most important milieu of recruiting for the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP)**. When Nehammer became the Minister of Interior, his wife Katharina became speaker of the Ministry of Defense but soon left the position for the private sector.
- Under the leadership of Sebastian Kurz (Party Chairman of ÖVP and Austrian Chancellor from 2017 to 2021), **Nehammer first became General Secretary of the ÖVP from 2018 to 2020, and then Minister of the Interior from 2020 to 2021**. After Kurz stepped down as Chancellor and then as party leader of the Austrian People's Party in **December 2021, Nehammer was sworn in as Chancellor of Austria on December 6, 2021**.
- **Nehammer served in critical positions supporting the anti-Muslim policies of the New Austrian People's Party under the leadership of Sebastian Kurz**. During the Islamic holy month of Ramadan in 2018, the tabloids and the right-wing media published reports claiming Muslim children who fast are "completely weak" and have problems in the classroom. **On June 18, 2018, Nehammer called for a ban on fasting for school-age children citing these reports in the media**, arguing that "if religious rituals - regardless of religion - endanger the health of children, that is clearly going too far." Nehammer further stated, "I call for a prohibition of fasting for pupils who are clearly weakened and can no longer follow the lesson. If the guardians are not clear about this, there must be stricter rules and respect. We do not tolerate irresponsibility with children."
- Following this policy proposal, **the Islamic Religious Society (IGGÖ) in Austria "strongly" rejected the ban, and stated that "It is too obvious that the welfare of the child is not at stake here. Rather, one would like to serve resentments against Islam and Muslims - which one had previously fanned constantly."** Further the organization stated that it had received reports from parents that "their children were forced to drink water or eat food in a humiliating way at school."
- On the last Friday in the month of Ramadan in 2018, **the Austrian government closed seven mosques in an attempt to fight what it called "political Islam."** The Viennese Court of Administration later declared this move unlawful. **Nehammer defended the government's actions, which was led by Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache, stating, "anyone who dismisses the latest measures against political Islam as symbolic politics ignores and downplays possible dangers of parallel societies...Anyone who criticizes the federal government's approach, sides with Erdogan."**

- In March 2019, the Constitutional Court ruled in favor of the expulsion of two imams from ATIB mosques that were financed by the Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs (DIYANET). Following this decision, both Nehammer and the far-right party whip Johann Gudenus (FPÖ) published a common press release supporting the decision, stating “the highest authority in our country supports the federal government's fight against political Islam.”
- According to a 2018 report authored by Heiko Heinisch and Nina Scholz for the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF), several Viennese municipal districts are home to so-called parallel societies that are “rejecting the current state legal system.” **Nehammer used the coverage of the report by the tabloid press to argue that “the poison of political Islam must not endanger our society.” Nehammer described the non-existent issue of political Islam, as “violent clashes, territorial conflicts, and parallel justice are on the agenda according to executive officials and judges.”**
- After the **president of the Islamic Religious Society in Austria (IGGÖ) said that it would be good to have one mosque in every major capital city of Austria's nine states, Nehammer responded saying that integration was more important than the construction of a mosque in every state of Austria.** He further argued that “the IGGÖ must not take Muslims further away from our society, but must help improve their integration. This requires joint efforts and a commitment to our catalog of values instead of false fantasies with mosques. **Of course, we are not against mosques per se, but I see the outlined approach of one large mosque per federal state as critical, because that does not contribute to the integration of Muslims, but has the opposite effect.**”
- In the first week following the inauguration of a new government coalition of the ÖVP and the Greens **in January 2020, when Nehammer became the new Minister of Interior, the new coalition government announced a Hijab ban for pupils in secondary school (10- to 14-year-olds).** Austria's integration minister Susanne Raab stated that the ban of the hijab for pupils up to 14 years old was a “top priority” to be implemented within the first 100 days of governance. **Nehammer, who was the new Minister of Interior, stated that the ban was “a decisive step toward better integration and a reduction in discrimination,” and argued “we are thus ensuring that the integration opportunities of young girls increase.”**
- The **coalition program of the ÖVP and the Greens was presented in January 2020.** **According to Williams College's International Studies Professor Farid Hafez, “the ÖVP-Green government agreement is in seamless continuity with that of ÖVP-FPÖ” that sees Muslims as a social and political threat.** In response to this coalition program, the Islamic Religious Society stated that “the hostile attitude towards Muslims, which runs like a red thread through the government program, represents a smooth transition to the populist-racist attitude of the former ÖVP-FPÖ government.” The society also stated that, “the completely undifferentiated use of the term “political Islam” is stigmatizing and criminalizes all Muslims living in Austria. The documentation center even branded political Islam as a threat to the state.”
- **Minister Nehammer replied saying that “religious freedom is important and therefore remains untouched, of course. However, it is absolutely clear that political Islam is a danger.”** He further defended the intent to have an annual report on so-called political Islam and expanding measures of Countering Violent Extremism saying, “By creating our own extremism report, as well as a nationwide expansion of prevention and deradicalization measures in the fight against extremism and the strengthening of the Office of Cultural Affairs through a clear legal

mandate, we want to consciously counteract this.”

- On **November 9, 2020, Minister Nehammer was in charge of Austria’s largest-ever peacetime police raids involving 930 police forces (referred to as Operation Luxor by the government) that targeted 70 Muslim individuals and NGOs.** Following the Higher Court of Graz’s decision that the raids were unlawful, Nehammer’s office released a statement stating, “we do not comment on decisions of the free and independent judiciary.” According to a report by ACT-T and CAGE the raids “raise very serious questions about state corruption, a growing Islamophobia network within the Austrian state enabling abuses of the law, and how the government of Sebastian Kurz sought to exploit ISIS attacks in Vienna to target Austria’s Muslim population.”
- **According to former MP and investigative journalist Peter Pilz, Operation Luxor served the interests of foreign intelligence services, namely Egypt and Israel.** Pilz noted that “in the most elaborate operation in the history of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution [Austria’s intelligence service], the judiciary and the police attempted to support Israeli and Egyptian authorities [...] At no point during the action, which lasted more than a year, was there a terrorist threat against Austria. [...] No weapons, no violent actions, no terror in Austria. But against whom was the large-scale action by the public prosecutor and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution directed? The answer is simple: The “Luxor” operation was about terror against Egypt and Israel - and not against Austria.” **An investigative documentary by Al Jazeera also suggested that several countries were involved in this operation.** Lorenzo Vidino also played a crucial part in legitimizing this operation as a witness and as an expert writing on political Islam. In July 2021, an Austrian Court ruled that the raid was unlawful, while the investigations are still ongoing.