

# SUSANNE RAAB

**IMPACT:** Susanne Raab is the current Minister of Women and Integration of Austria. She joined the government of Sebastian Kurz of the Austrian People's Party, which was responsible for many anti-Muslim legislations that have meanwhile been rescinded by various courts. Raab has been a key figure in supporting anti-Muslim policies in Austria.

- Susanne Raab (born Knasmüller in 1984 in Vöcklabruck, Upper Austria) has been **Minister of Women, Families, Integration, and Media since January 2022**. She joined the Austrian government as a member of the Austrian People's Party (Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP) under the leadership of Sebastian Kurz in January 2020. Prior to this, she was in charge of integration politics in the Ministry of Europe, Integration, and Foreign Affairs during Sebastian Kurz's tenure. She has a Ph.D. in legal studies.
- In 2019, the Kurz government in coalition with the far right FPÖ, implemented a hijab ban for pupils in elementary school. When Sebastian Kurz formed a new government with the Greens in January 2020, **Minister 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**. In defense of the government's proposal, **Raab argued that “every girl who is forced to wear a headscarf is one too many.”** During a January 2020 interview, she also stated, “We do not want to have children wear a headscarf in Austria. Especially in schools, we want to give girls a free space to develop.” **On January 14, 2020, Raab said she could imagine introducing a Hijab ban for teachers in school**. According to her, there was a “broad consensus” in the coalition, a claim that was refuted by Werner Kogler, the Vice-Chancellor and chairman of the Green party. Meanwhile, Austrian Muslims were legally challenging the 2019 hijab ban, and the case was being heard by the country's constitutional court. With this development, a journalist asked Raab if she was confident that the ban would stay, to which she replied: “From my point of view, the ban was absolutely the right step. We have received a lot of positive feedback from the teaching staff and also from Muslim women, who are happy to have support on this issue.” Raab also claimed that Muslim mothers would support her. The ban in elementary school was finally rescinded by the constitutional court, which declared it as unlawful in December 2020 and no expansion was sought by the government.
- In **her capacity as head of the section on integration in the foreign ministry, Raab participated in numerous panel discussions**. One such event titled “The Influence of Political Islam” was held on January 23, 2018 and featured Mouhanad Khorchide, a Professor at the University of Münster in Germany who has supported anti-Muslim policies including hijab bans, and Nina Scholz, a political scientist and author who has published numerous articles with German political commentator, Heiko Heinisch. During the panel, Scholz argued that Muslim women wearing the hijab while positioning themselves as feminists “would mostly be in close relationship with the conservative Islamic associations and the Muslim Brotherhood.” Scholz and Heinisch have repeatedly claimed that Muslims who are politically active or critical of the government are aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood. In January 2022, both were recalled by the Graz Appellate Court as expert witnesses in the case regarding Operation Luxor, the largest peace-time police operation in contemporary Austria.

- In January 2020, Raab **stated** that she considered it a high priority to establish the **Documentation Center for Political Islam** within the first 100 days of the party's governance. In an interview with *Der Standard*, Raab defined political Islam as follows: **“This is an ideological, extremist current that wants to infiltrate our society, democracy, the rule of law, and our constitutional values such as equality between men and women. However, it must be clearly distinguished from Islam as a religion.”** *Der Standard* journalist Barbara Coudenhove-Kalergi criticized the way this term is used, noting that it “subliminally targets the world religion of Islam as such. But groups (...), which advocate the rule of law and gender equality, are also part of political Islam. And Christianity is also political. The pope is political. The Gospel is political. The Ten Commandments are political (...) Do we really have to watch helplessly as (...) girls who wear headscarves of their own free will and out of pride in their identity are forced to, as they say, ‘undress’?”
- On July 15, 2020, Raab introduced the **Documentation Center Political Islam** to the public alongside Khorchide and Lorenzo Vidino, an Italian American legal scholar whose research promotes conspiracy theories about the Muslim Brotherhood. The Center **is** “part of the national strategy of extremism prevention and deradicalization” with 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.” She **stated** 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.”** Raab also stated that the center would be responsible for regularly informing the public by producing an “annual report on extremism,” detecting the “early warning signs for parallel societies,” and creating an “overview map of problematic networks and associations in Austria that can be attributed to political Islam.” She further stated that the “the aim is to make visible the structures, actors, and goals of the representatives of this dangerous ideology. Financial, organizational, and ideological connections (abroad) are also to be investigated and disclosed.”
- On May 27th 2021, Minister Raab alongside the Center and Khorchide **presented a digital Islam Map** that revealed the addresses of 623 mosques and Muslim associations in Austria, which were presented under the umbrella of “political Islam” and thus deemed **potentially dangerous**. The map in fact included all mosques and Muslim associations existing in Austria. **A 2021 piece in Politics Today stated** that the map **“stirs up prejudices and puts all Muslims under general suspicion.”** It was reported that the association for Jewish Austrian Students in Austria also sharply criticized the map, and the Catholic church rejected the map, with the head of the church stating that the map puts Islam “under general suspicion.” **The Council of Europe called the map “hostile to Muslims and potentially counterproductive.”** It was reported that **after the publication of the map, anti-Muslim hate crimes surged in Austria**. After taking the website offline for two weeks, it was put online again. Raab defended the Islam map saying it manifested “a common fight against political Islam as a hotbed of extremism.”
- In her support of the Documentation Center Political Islam, Raab regularly assured the public that she is making “a clear distinction between the religion of Islam and the dangerous ideology of political Islam.” However, according to Amina Baghajati from the Islamic Religious Community (IGGÖ), Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Minister Susanne Raab “represent the (far-right) FPÖ in a smarter way.” According to the author of the annual Austrian Islamophobia Report, political science Professor Farid Hafez, Raab is a central figure in the Austrian Islamophobia network, as she has

supported most of the anti-Muslim legislation that was implemented during the leadership of Kurz as Chancellor of Austria. **Raab and Kurz both frame the discrimination of Muslims as an attack only on political Islam and claim to defend and save Muslims from the negative impact of political Islam.**

- On **October 28, 2021, Minister Raab invited several countries to participate in the inception of the “Vienna Forum on Countering Segregation and Extremism in the Context of Integration,” an annual conference established to intensify cooperation in the fight against “political Islam.”** Raab invited the Integration Ministers of Denmark (Mattias Tesfaye) and Flanders (Bart Somers), as well as the Deputy Minister for Citizenship in the French Interior Ministry (Marlene Schiappa), to the event, along with 100 experts, including Lorenzo Vidino. **Raab stated her goal was to “make Vienna a center in the fight against political Islam.”**
- In August 2020, Raab introduced a mandatory unit on antisemitism for refugees in the Austrian Integration Fund’s integration courses, which are required in order to qualify for asylum and subsidiary protection beneficiaries. **She serves on the supervisory board of the ÖIF that has been key in the support of the anti-Muslim policies under Sebastian Kurz’s leadership of the Austrian People’s Party’s (ÖVP).**
- After a shooting in November 2020, Raab declared that she would close two mosques, which were later opened again as the associations won their appeals in court.