

EDNAN ASLAN

IMPACT: Ednan Aslan is a Turkish-German Professor of Islamic Religious Education at the University of Vienna in Austria. Aslan is frequently interviewed by mainstream media as an expert on Islam and a critical voice on Muslims. He has been a vocal supporter of the Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz's anti-Muslim policies, and also served in the Documentation Center Political Islam, a federally funded center that monitors, surveils, and maps Muslims in Austria.

- Ednan Aslan was born in Turkey and moved from Germany to Austria in 2003. As a young man, he was fascinated by the Islamic Revolution in Iran. A 2017 piece in *Die Presse* noted that there are rumors that he had been a follower of the militant Kaplan movement, which was banned in Germany in 2001. Aslan strongly denies these allegations. Following his Ph.D. in 1996, he became a **Professor of Islamic Religious Education at the University of Vienna in 2006. From 2013-2017, he was the head of the research platform, Institute of Islamic Studies, and from 2017-2019, he was the head of the Institute of Islamic Theological Studies.** It has been reported that Heiko Heinisch, a German political commentator who supports numerous anti-Muslim policies and promotes conspiracy theories about an "Islamist" threat, worked with Aslan at the Institute of Islamic studies.
- In a 2012 piece for *Die Presse*, **Aslan is described as somebody who thinks that "the Islamic theology of today is outdated because it cannot provide answers to the questions of the present."** In a 2015 interview with the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF), **Aslan argued that "all Muslim organizations share the goals of Daesh to create an Islamic state" and that "all Islamic theological faculties outside of Europe are teaching the theology of Daesh."**
- Problematizing so-called 'political Islam' in Austria, Aslan argued in an interview in 2017 that "clubs and associations, who want to isolate the Muslims living here from everything European and want to focus theologically entirely on Islamic states, are to be pushed back. This control of Austrian or German Islam from abroad is fatal."
- In November 2014, **Aslan gave a training course for 180 teachers, and presented a list of markers for identifying extremist pupils in schools. According to Aslan, frequently using Arabic expressions, such as subhanAllah (Praise be to God), mashAllah (as God wants), ya'ani (non-religious terminology for 'so to say'), munafiq (hypocrite), kafir (disbeliever), mushrik (idolater) and akhi (brother) are indicators of extremism.** Most of these terminologies (except kafir and mushrik) are part of everyday language, even for non-religious people. During a 2016 training session for teachers organized by the local police in Graz, Aslan claimed that from a theological point of view, "Ramadan is unacceptable for children in Europe."
- On December 9, 2015, **Aslan presented a report on a study on alleged radicalization in majority Muslim pre-schools in the city of Vienna**, which at the time was governed by the Social Democrats and the Greens. Although the Viennese governors denied the allegation of the spread of extremism in majority Muslim pre-schools, **a consequence of the debate was that officials undertook profiling of kindergartens with Muslim personnel. Pre-school personnel said they were interrogated by officials regarding whether children would be taught to pray, whether they were taught the Qur'an, which language they spoke, if they would celebrate Santa Claus and Christmas, and told that they had to celebrate Christmas because it was part of Austrian tradition.** However, the educational plan of the Viennese

government does not mention anything like “Austrian values” or “tradition.” The report received harsh and substantive critique by scholars such as Andrea Schaffar and Susanne Heine for not being scientific in its methodologies and analysis. The social scientist Andrea Schaffar published a critical analysis of the interim report, which noted that Aslan based his assessment on “speculations” and used rather generic terms like “qualitative-empirical” without defining his exact method.

- The so-called **“Pre-school Study” had long-term impacts on the political and media discourse related to Islam.** According to the tabloid press *Kronen Zeitung*, Aslan’s report served as proof that 50 percent of majority Muslim pre-schools should be closed. It published titles such as “Headscarf, Radicalization. Everyday Life in Kindergartens.” The daily newspaper *Österreich*, claimed it had a “list of schools, which, according to Gudenus, are under suspicion of jihad.” The FPÖ stated that Aslan, the author of the study, should be commissioned to carry out a similar study for Viennese kindergartens.
- A turnaround in the debate on majority Muslim pre-schools was brought about by a leak in the weekly investigative *Falter*. In an article, ***Falter* showed that officials from the Department of Integration and Foreign Affairs (whose then-minister was ÖVP leader, Sebastian Kurz) substantially changed the content of the word files of Aslan’s report on the pre-schools.** It was reported that the change in text was approved by Aslan. The *Falter* wrote: “In the first version, which Aslan delivered in January 2016 as a word file, the academic praised the parents who want their children to go to Islamic kindergartens to be educated ‘independently, respectfully and lovingly.’ Kurz’s officials – as the correction mode of the document shows – simply distorted the sentence into its opposite: that parents want to ‘protect their children from the moral influence of the majority society.’” In the context of this research, a former co-worker and student of Aslan, Rami Ali, said that Aslan has “tried again and again to push his ideas on the employees and tried desperately to move in a certain direction, even if this direction does not correspond to reality.”
- **Following this highly contested research, a follow-up study was conducted by a team of academics, who announced different findings, which did not support the alarmist views** that were used by the then-ministry of Sebastian Kurz from 2015 to 2017. Rather, they problematized that “since its controversial report and the resulting stigmatization, religion is being forced out of the kindergartens – especially those with a connection to Islam.” In contrast to Aslan’s study, which had only examined a few institutions, 698 pre-schools voluntarily participated in this study.
- In 2016, foreign and integration minister, **Sebastian Kurz demanded a full-face veil ban after thirty French municipalities had forbidden the burkini, a swimsuit covering the whole body. Aslan supported this policy**, which finally led to the ban in 2017. According to Aslan, Muslim women would be reduced by the full veil “to a single role, that of sex object. The burqa and niqab exist solely to fulfill a man’s claim to power [...] The full-face veil is a sign of oppression and simply inhuman.”
- In December 2019, the daily *Der Standard* reported that Aslan had to step down from his position as head of the Islamic Theological Institute at the University of Vienna. The reasons why the rector made this move were not made transparent. Some insiders argue that it was due to “fundamental misconduct, not least in personnel management” ranging from mobbing to a bad atmosphere within the team. Aslan rejected these allegations.

- In an op-ed published in December 2019, **Aslan criticized the Islam-related policies of the Austrian government coalition of the ÖVP and FPÖ. He argued that it was the government's goal to prevent ideological indoctrination in majority Muslim pre-schools, check textbooks for Islamic religious education in public schools, fight the radicalization of Muslim youth, and close down radical mosques. According to Aslan, not a single one of these goals had been achieved**, as he alleged more imams from abroad had entered Austria, and more schools founded by several states for the training of imams had been opened. While Aslan welcomed that the government was open and clear about not wanting a “radical Islam,” he argued that they did not say which form of Islam they wanted to support. He especially criticized the government for failing to supporting an “Islam of European imprint.” **Aslan is a vocal supporter of Islam Act of 2015, which changed the legal regulation of the Islamic Faith Community in Austria (Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich), putting it under greater state control.** Aslan argues that further steps be taken in this direction to manage Muslims in Austria.
- In May 2021, the Documentation Center Political Islam, a federally funded center for monitoring, surveilling, and mapping Muslims in Austria, relaunched the Islam Map, a project that had previously been run by Ednan Aslan. **Along with Mouhanad Khorchide, Elham Manea, and Minister of Integration Susanne Raab (ÖVP), Aslan presented his Islam Map, which included 600 mosques and the names of their legal representatives and, in some cases, their private addresses.** The publication of the map drew great criticism from Austrian Muslim civil society. Tarafa Baghajati from the Initiative of Muslim Austrians said, “imagine if a similar map was drawn up for Judaism or Christianity.” The ÖVP and the far-right FPÖ applauded the relaunch of this project, while the ÖVP's Green coalition partner criticized the initiative.
- According to Professor of International Studies Dr. Farid Hafez, “people such as [...] Ednan Aslan are key figures in the dissemination of these [Islamophobic] views via central political institutions alongside political leaders such as Minister of Integration Susanne Raab from the conservative governing party ÖVP.”