

STOP EXTREMISM

IMPACT: Stop Extremism is a Europe-wide initiative demanding a stronger fight against extremism. It wants to introduce a joint EU-wide watch list of individuals and organizations that are labeled as extremists. A number of its proponents and supporters have a history of making discriminatory claims about Muslims and supporting anti-Muslim legislation in the name of defending liberal values.

- The **European Citizens' Initiative Against Extremism (Stop Extremism) was formally registered by the European Commission in June 2017.** In a July 2017 [press release](#), the initiative states its “goal is to achieve an EU directive that closes loopholes in the fight against extremism and establishes effective protection against extremism across Europe, enabling the member states to issue their own national regulations to combat extremism.” The initiative's **founders include Austrian lawyer Sebastian Reimer, German lawyer and author Seyran Ateş, and former member of the National Council of Austria, Efgani Dönmez.** Publicly, the initiative was [initially financed](#) by the German author [Seyran Ateş](#) and former Austrian MP [Efgani Dönmez](#), who each contributed €10,000. Ateş has made a career out of making generalized claims about Islam and “Muslim culture,” often reinforcing the “good Muslim/bad Muslim” trope. Dönmez [joined](#) Sebastian Kurz’s New ÖVP after [leaving](#) the Greens [following](#) his many sexist and racist statements.
- The statutory [representatives](#) of the association are Walter Schnauder and Peter Weinzierl, who have never been publicly visible for the initiative. Both were based in Linz/Upper Austria. [Schnauder](#) is a former political official of the [ÖVP](#) and has been the political coach of the ÖVP in Upper Austria since 2003.
- Stop Extremism calls on the European Commission to draft a bill “to prevent and reduce the negative consequences of extremism.” The main objectives were summarized as [follows](#): “1. use positive motivation to identify and eliminate extremism within the Single Market; 2. use transparency to ensure that financial support of extremism is clearly visible to all citizens and companies; and 3. use employment law and compensatory damages to effectively combat extremism within the Single Market.” The [collection of signatures](#) of support began once the initiative was established in 2017 and ended in June 2018. As of April 2020, it was reported to be under verification. The organizers reported that most [signatures](#) came from Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands.
- The program [calls for](#) “**the introduction of a joint, EU-wide watch list to which individuals and organizations with an extremist background could be added**” as well as for the introduction of an “Extremism-free” certification for organizations and businesses. [According to](#) the **editors of the 2017 European Islamophobia Report, this initiative “seems to target specifically Muslims, not extremists, and to restrain their [Muslims’] scope of activities.”**
- Stop Extremism has **six key demands**: 1) defining ‘extremism’ on a European level to “enable joint legal measures to be set in place and any loopholes to be closed,” 2) **publication of a Europe-wide “warning list and cooperation of the authorities across Europe” that ensures an “unbroken monitoring of extremists in all European countries,**” 3) to “stop financing from abroad,” arguing that “extremists who endanger our society cannot be financed from abroad. Inconceivable sums of money are flowing to Islamist organizations every year in Europe, especially from countries like Qatar and Turkey,” 4) it demanded the stop of ‘propaganda,’ arguing that “extremists infiltrate our society with propaganda in all areas of life.” Hence, they suggested “prevent extremist political and religious content from being spread in our schools, nurseries, through administrative bodies, in court, in hospitals and, above all, on social networks such as

Facebook,” 5) they demanded “easy termination and claims for compensation.” Lastly, they called for an “extremism-free” cachet, arguing that “by introducing a cachet across Europe, it should be easy to recognize organizations and companies that support our European values and basic rights.”

- In 2017, Stop Extremism organized a side event, titled “United In Countering Extremism,” at the Organization for Security & Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) Human Dimension Implementation Meetings (HDMI) in Warsaw, Poland. The HDMI meetings are “Europe’s largest annual human rights conferences,” which “bring together hundreds of government officials, international experts, civil society representatives and human rights activists.” It has been regularly used by the [Counter Jihad Movement](#) to lobby for its anti-Muslim policies. **During the side event, Dönmez and Ateş promoted their initiative arguing that “no state can counter violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism alone: all OSCE member states must cooperate at all levels, this including the engagement of civil groups, governmental and non-governmental organizations.”**
- In October 2017 during the course of the Austrian national elections, ***Der Standard* reported that while Dönmez listed the official budget for the initiative as €20,000, leaks found that the actual money in circulation was much higher.** According to Dönmez, the man in [charge of the initiatives finances](#) was Ingo F., a [political scientist](#) who founded the Austrian Society of Policy Analysis (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Politikanalyse) in 2013. He also previously worked at the University of Abu Dhabi, and today advises the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). **In October 2017, *Der Standard* reported that a contract was signed between the Austrian Society for Policy Analysis and Peter Puller’s PR Agency on July 17th, 2017 for over €180,000.** Puller previously served as the press spokesman of the ÖVP, first in Styria and then for the Ministry of Justice and Science. **However, the agreement was never executed. The contract stated that Puller should [coordinate a campaign against political Islam](#).** The monthly fee of about €15,000 was not paid out and [according to Puller](#), his company has not been compensated for eight weeks worth of work.
- Following these leaks, Stop Extremism [declared](#) to have received a sum of €117,000 from the Austrian Society of Policy Analysis (out of the total budget of €241,000). **These financial relationships lend support to [claims](#) made by the editor-in-chief of the weekly *Profil*, that the UAE could be potentially involved in financing Stop Extremism.** Following a leak of internal communication, the daily *Die Presse* [summarized](#) that Stop Extremism “has engaged in massive public relations against Türkiye, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Qatar, as emails and internal chat logs show.” For example, Dönmez repeatedly promised to badmouth Turkey and Qatar in interviews. **Dönmez also promised to use his political contacts - for example, to try to make representations to ministries on behalf of the initiative.** At one point, he summarized his mission as follows: “Turkey = Bad, Qatar = Bad, Saudis = Good.” Confronted with questions on this, Dönmez said this was just a [joke](#). Dönmez [said](#) that nobody was paid by the Saudis and stressed that he was a critic of Saudi Arabia.
- In May 2018, Member of European Parliament (MEP) Lukas Mandl (European People’s Party) [invited](#) Seyran Ateş, Sebastian Reimer, and Michael Laubsch to speak on behalf of Stop Extremism at the European Parliament. Reimer [reiterated](#) the importance of having “a common EU-wide warning list, on which persons and organizations with an extremist background are listed.” Ateş [argued](#), “we need to look closely at who wants to actively integrate and who wants to change our society.”
- In June 2018, Stop Extremism [announced](#) that it had collected over one million signatures, meaning that by protocol, the European Commission had to address their proposed anti-extremism directive. In March 2019, Stop Extremism was [invited](#) for a plenary session by the European

Economic and Social Committee (EESC) “providing them with a platform at EU level to present the goal of their initiative and their concerns about extremism.” During the meeting, Laubsch said that “the EU needs to tackle the big questions, such as extremism and terrorism, because they can only be solved at European and multinational level.” During the conference, the European Economic and Social Committee reported that “the ECI is calling for both positive and negative incentives: negative motivation would for instance be the proposed watch list to publicly name and shame extremists, while positive motivation would be showcasing the work of people who are dedicated to improving the implementation of fundamental rights.”

- **A number of public figures and politicians who have a history of making generalized and prejudicial statements about Muslims as well as supporting anti-Muslim policies have supported Stop Extremism.** These include Mouhanad Khorchide, Saïda Keller-Messahli, Abdel-Hakim Ourghi, Ralph Ghadban, Necla Kelek, and Ahmad Mansour. Khorchide is the head of the academic board of advisors of the Austrian Documentation Center Political Islam.
- **Stop Extremism’s website includes a number of quotes from these individuals, all of which make Muslims the focal point in the fight against “extremism,” and thus further the trope that the problem of “extremism” is exclusive to Muslims.**
- On the website, Khorchide is quoted as saying: “If you listen carefully to the arguments with which especially young people are being recruited for extremist milieus, the message is: the West is not exporting any democratic values, but rather arms and war. All of us, Muslims and non-Muslims, are challenged by extremism. The borders don’t run according to religious affiliation; they are much more a division between extremists and peace-loving people. This is why I am optimistic: there will now be an arousal of humanist Islam.” Keller-Messahli, who leads the Swiss-based Forum for Progressive Islam is quoted as a supporter of Stop Extremism with the following words: “We are aware that what right-wing extremists would like best is to get rid of us all. However, unfortunately it’s often only right-wingers who address unacceptable issues, even if other intentions are often behind this. For me, however, extreme right-wing ideology is just as totalitarian as that of the Islamist. They are mutually dependent.” Mansour states: “Various levels play a role in clarification for radicalization and terror. We have to talk about sociological and psychological factors, but also about the underlying ideologies. There is an Islamist ideology which is very widespread with Muslims even in Germany. What I mean is, for example, a rejection of Western culture, the demonization of our fundamental rights, specific victim and enemy images that are widespread. The Muslim community is also challenged. It has to conduct a debate within Islam in order to offer young people an understanding of Islam that does not offer any basis for Islamists to construct their radical ideology. They have to find a way to a democratic, humanist Islam that stands behind human rights without any ifs and buts.”