

# MARIO KUNASEK

**IMPACT:** Mario Kunasek is a member of the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and is the current Governor of Styria. From December 2017 to May 2019, he was the Austrian Defense Minister under a coalition government of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and his own FPÖ. Kunasek has a long history of tying Muslims to terrorism, fearmongering about “radical Islam” and “Islamism,” and supporting anti-Muslim policies.

- **Mario Kunasek has had a long career in the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ).** From 2004 to 2006, he was the district chairman of the FPÖ’s youth organization RFJ (Ring Freiheitlicher Jugend). In 2005, he joined the state party in Styria. From 2005 to 2018, he was the local party chairman of the FPÖ in his former home municipality of Gössendorf, where he was also a member of the municipal council from 2010 to 2015. After the municipal council elections in 2015, he served as vice mayor there until December 2017. At the state party conference in 2007, he was elected state party secretary of the FPÖ Styria and has since been active in the state party presidium.
- **From April 2007 to February 2019, Kunasek was district party chairman of the FPÖ for Graz-Umgebung. Since 2013, he has been deputy federal party chairman of the FPÖ.** From 2008 to 2015, he was a member of the National Council. From 2015 to 2017, he was a member of the Styrian State Parliament and the party’s parliamentary club chairman. From 2017 to 2019, he was the Federal Minister of Defense.
- **On November 26, 2024, Kunasek and his FPÖ won the state elections with 34.8%, entitling them to appoint the Governor. Kunasek became Governor and formed a coalition with the centrist-right Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP). It was the second time in the history of Austria that the FPÖ ruled a state** after Jörg Haider (1989 - 1991 and 1999 - 2008). Kunasek has gathered a loyal team of confidants to support him.
- **Kunasek has a long history of making prejudicial statements about Muslims and supporting anti-Muslim policies.** In July 2011, as FPÖ state party secretary and member of the National Council, he raised concerns about the existence of Islamic infrastructure, tying the gathering of Muslims to terrorism, in Styria. He stated: “In 17 prayer houses and 17 associations, Muslims of various origins meet. The possibilities for control by the state office for the protection of the constitution and counter-terrorism are extremely limited!”
- An April 2014 press release of the FPÖ stated: “Media reports claiming that the Muslim Brotherhood plans to move its headquarters to Graz are causing headaches for Mario Kunasek, state party secretary of the FPÖ Styria...Graz increasingly becoming a playground for radical Muslims is unacceptable. Unfortunately, in recent years, we have observed radical Salafists distributing promotional material in Graz, the jihad flag being waved at Graz’s main square, and even an Islamic teacher exploiting his students for a pro-Mohammed Morsi demonstration. Moving the Muslim Brotherhood’s headquarters to Graz would further encourage these radical tendencies. We must do everything in our power to prevent this relocation.” The claim that the Muslim Brotherhood intended to relocate its office to Graz was made solely by anti-Muslim platforms such as the Middle East Forum. Conspiracy theories about the Muslim Brotherhood infiltrating Europe were later revealed as a smear campaign orchestrated by the private detective firm Alp Services with ties to Austria’s intelligence service. This smear is often used as a strategy to delegitimize Muslim civil society and frame them as a threat.
- In **November 2014, Kunasek, together with then-party chairman Heinz-Christian Strache, convened a special session in the National Council under the theme “Security instead of Islamization and asylum chaos,” using the conspiracy of an alleged Islamization that warns of a Muslim takeover of Europe.**
- In **March 2018 while serving as the Defense Minister, Kunasek said that Islam was “obviously part of Austria.” Following criticism, he clarified on his Facebook page: “Islam is represented in Austria, but it is neither historically nor culturally rooted. We expect people who want to live in our country to accept our values, culture, and democratic principles. We will not stop demanding this of them. It is unacceptable for some to isolate themselves from us in a**

**parallel society.**” In a piece from 2004, Arno Widmann [stated](#) that “the attempt to stop parallel societies is a characteristic of the authoritarian state.”

- In **January 2020, Kunasek addressed a report by the author of the book *Culture Clash in the Classroom*. He [stated](#): “Another issue that the FPÖ has consistently raised is religious fanaticism in schools.** Due to the uncontrolled and unchecked immigration policies of ÖVP and SPÖ over the years, political Islam is now brutally taking hold in educational institutions. **It is finally time to take determined action against the excesses of increasing Islamization.** Value transmission and democracy promotion must be the focus of education. Increased monitoring of Islamic religious education is also indispensable.”
- In July 2020, following the publication of a so-called [mosque study](#) published by the [Austrian Integration Fund \(ÖIF\)](#), Kunasek [claimed](#) that the City of Graz’s charter for coexistence had failed, calling for a new integration framework. He [said](#), “Integration is primarily the responsibility of immigrants. If people are unwilling to adhere to our societal and value systems, they must be made to understand that they are not welcome in Austria.” According to Yannick Shetty, MP from the liberal NEOS, the study [reveals](#) “Islamophobic tendencies.” Scholar of International Law, Wolfgang Benedek, also [criticized](#) the study for its methodology.
- In August 2020, Kunasek [scandalized](#) the mention of the [Islamic Cultural Center Graz](#) in the notorious Qatar Papers, a report penned by two French authors, Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot, who spread the allegation that Qatar is financing the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe: “The documents that have now surfaced confirm what we freedom-minded people have always warned about. We have always suspected that significant donations from abroad were involved in the establishment of the cultural center ... In 2016, investigators from the State Criminal Police Office already warned about the growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists.”
- **A day after the raids known as *Operation Luxor* on November 9, 2020, Kunasek [stated](#): “As reported in two major newspapers today, yesterday’s raids against the Muslim Brotherhood and their connections have also brought the Islamic Cultural Center (IKZ) in Graz into focus.** This religious institution has long been portrayed as a model project. Prominent politicians from the ÖVP, SPÖ, and Greens visited the IKZ Graz and were photographed there. Now, investigative authorities reportedly suspect criminal activity. **This demonstrates a significant structural problem with political Islam in Styria, especially when an institution that has been praised for years by politicians is now the subject of such investigations.”** **Operation Luxor was an Islamophobic police operation based on an unlawful investigation by a State Prosecutor that led to a wide intimidation of Muslim civil society.** When the investigation against the Islamic Cultural Center Graz was [dropped](#) in October 2023, Kunasek and his FPÖ made no statement.
- **One month after *Operation Luxor*, in December 2020, Kunasek [said](#): “All Islamic teachers must immediately undergo a security review. From our perspective, it is no longer justifiable for teachers to be selected by the Islamic Religious Community. We have to tighten control of Islamic religious education.** ...Politics must finally abandon its romantic tolerance and act swiftly. The immediate suspension of suspects should go without saying and should not require a political call to action. Furthermore, it must be determined how many children have potentially been indoctrinated with Islamist theses over the years.” One year after the unlawful Operation Luxor, Kunasek and the MP Hannes Amesbauer in charge of his party’s security agenda, criticized the security services for doing too little against Islamism, [repeating](#) the lie that “25 million Euro were found” during the illegal raid.
- In January 2021, Kunasek felt [vindicated](#) by the Styrian Chief of Police about the dangers posed by the “Islamist scene.” He stated, “The Office for the Protection of the Constitution is monitoring 23 threats and 14 unconstitutional mosque associations in Styria. The FPÖ demands more personnel and powers for security authorities.”

- In **October 2021**, the anti-racist civil society NGO, **SOS Mitmensch (SOS Fellow Human)**, **criticized the “pogrom-like atmosphere against Muslims on the Facebook page of the Styrian FPÖ leader.”** Alexander Pollak from SOS Mitmensch stated: “Kunasek took the discussion about building a second mosque in Graz as an opportunity to describe all mosques as ‘cultural declarations of war’ and ‘symbols of political Islam,’ calling for a ban on constructing Muslim places of worship. Under Kunasek’s Facebook post, anti-Muslim hatred erupted among some of his followers, including calls to ‘tear down all mosques’ and to ‘remove Muslims from Austria.’ These pogrom-like calls have remained undeleted on Kunasek’s Facebook page for two days.” **SOS Mitmensch further highlighted the inflammatory remarks on Kunasek’s Facebook page, noting that “some users openly suggested discriminatory measures against Muslims, including calls for deportation or violence. Despite their explicit and aggressive tone, these comments were not removed, raising concerns about their tacit endorsement by Kunasek or his team.”**
- In March 2022, Kunasek stated in a press release: “The federal government must finally address Islamist activities with the necessary seriousness and decisively confront radical Islam along with its terrible excesses!”
- In April 2022, Kunasek criticized the asylum policy of the ÖVP-Green coalition government: “Already last year, the asylum situation worsened drastically, and tens of thousands of asylum seekers from predominantly Islamic countries were allowed into Austria—without even taking the current Ukraine situation into account. If this development continues this year and is further exacerbated by the war on the European continent, asylum costs will explode, and new accommodations will likely need to be opened almost daily.”
- In **October 2023**, Kunasek argued that the Styrian state government had “**ignored the danger of Islamism for too long**” and introduced a “**motion against Islamism in schools.**” The FPÖ-Styria proposed a motion for the “**establishment of a security advisory council, the implementation of an Islamism report,**” and the “**creation of a branch office for the Documentation Center for Political Islam.**” The criticism continued: “The Styrian government program did not dedicate a single line to Islamism, which shows how little awareness of the problem exists within the ÖVP and SPÖ. Overall, a major deportation campaign is needed against Islamist threats and their supporters.”
- After an attack in November 2023 on the Israeli flag displayed at Graz City Hall, Kunasek claimed this demonstrated that “Graz is a hotspot for Islamism” and added: “Even the most deluded tolerance romantics must now recognize that radical Islam represents an ongoing threat to our value system, our way of life, and our security.”
- In **February 2024**, Kunasek stated: “**The Freedom Party vehemently supports a law to ban Islamism—Green soft justice cannot solve the Islamism problem.**” A month later, Kunasek criticized the ÖVP in Styria as follows: “The ÖVP has governed at both the state and federal levels for the past five years, and here is the result: ongoing mass migration from predominantly Islamic countries, escalating youth violence with a significant proportion of foreigners, a healthcare crisis in the Green province, including department closures, record debt, an unprecedented wave of inflation, politically induced climate hysteria, and an increasingly difficult economic situation caused by the People’s Party’s burden policies.” In May 2024, Kunasek reiterated his demand for legislation to ban political Islam.
- **During the campaign for the Styrian state parliament, Kunasek declared his intention to “drain the swamp of radical Islam in Styria as quickly as possible.”** In June 2024, Kunasek posted on Instagram after the tabloid Krone headlined, “Parents complain about another ‘kneeling before Islam’: schoolwork canceled due to Ramadan”: “Enough bowing to #Islam and enough preemptive obedience! We native Austrians will not let the education of our children be stolen!”
- **During Ramadan in March and April 2024, Kunasek posted on Instagram: “Whoever votes for the ÖVP gets no Austrian culture but the ‘one-leading culture’ in the form of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, and mass immigration.”** In another post, he stated: “Instead of addressing the real concerns of

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the native population and fighting the still unbelievably high inflation, the SPÖ, Greens, and ORF are outdoing themselves with #praises for the end of Ramadan.” **In another post, he added: “While thousands of illegal #migrants storm our borders every month and native Austrians suffer from record inflation, the #Greens have nothing better to do than outdo each other with #Ramadan messages!”**

- In September 2024, Kunasek issued a press release raising concerns about Islamic religious education in public schools: “Islamic religious education was recently conducted at 166 school locations in Styria; time and again, Islamic teachers are suspected of spreading radical Islamist theories... The numbers clearly show that Islamic religious education seems to be increasingly spreading in this country. In Graz, Muslim religious students already make up the majority, as ÖVP education councilor Werner Amon recently admitted. This is certainly a cause for concern, as individual Islamic teachers are repeatedly suspected of spreading radical Islamist ideologies... The Muslim faith is clearly becoming an increasingly significant factor in our society, thereby significantly endangering local value transmission. The content taught in Islamic religious education, which is sometimes questionable from our perspective, is absolutely incompatible with our Christian-based value culture. Particularly in light of the increasing Islamist activities, effective countermeasures must be taken against the developments occurring in Styrian schools.”
- **Kunasek formed a government with the conservative ÖVP in December 2024 after two weeks of negotiations and became the Governor of the State of Styria on 18 December 2024. The coalition agreement included the establishment of a Documentation Center for Political Islam on a state level similar to the federal institution established by the ÖVP-Green-coalition in July of 2020. It also included making the German language mandatory during recess in school. **The coalition agreement also includes the banning of religious clothing for state employees, specifically targeting the hijab.****