By gathering 39 local scholars, experts, and civil society activists specialized in racism and human rights, the fourth edition of the European Islamophobia Report addresses a still timely and politically important issue. All 34 country reports included in this book follow a unique structure that is convenient, first, for comparing country reports and, second, for selected readings on a particular topic such as politics, employment, or education with regards to Islamophobia across Europe.

The present report investigates in detail the underlying dynamics that directly or indirectly support the rise of anti-Muslim racism in Europe. This extends from Islamophobic statements spread in national media to laws and policies that restrain the fundamental rights of European Muslim citizens. As a result, the European Islamophobia Report 2018 discusses the impact of anti-Muslim discourse on human rights, multiculturalism, and the state of law in Europe.

This fourth edition of our report highlights how European societies are challenged by the rise of violent far-right groups that do not only preach hatred of Muslims but also participate in the organization of bloody terror attacks. The rise of far-right terrorist groups such as AFO (Action of Operational Forces) in France or the network Harribal in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland confirms EUROPOL’s alarming surveys on the growing danger of right-wing terrorism.

This year, SETA worked in cooperation with the Leopold Weiss Institute, an Austrian NGO based in Vienna dedicated to the research of Muslims in Europe. In addition, the European Union has funded the European Islamophobia Report 2018 through the program “Civil Society Dialogue Between EU and Turkey (CSD-V)”.

About SETA
Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) is a non-profit research institute based in Turkey dedicated to innovative studies on national, regional and international issues. SETA is the leading think tank in Turkey and has offices in Ankara, Istanbul, Washington D.C. and Cairo. The objective of SETA is to produce up-to-date and accurate knowledge and analyses in the fields of politics, economy, and society, and inform policy makers and the public on changing political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. Through research reports, publications, brainstorming sessions, conferences and policy recommendations, SETA seeks to guide leaders in government, civil society, and business, and contributes to informed decision making mechanisms.
EUROPEAN ISLAMOPHOBIA REPORT 2018

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

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Executive Summary

The *Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit und antimuslimischer Rassismus* (Office for documenting Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism) recorded an increase of approximately 74% of anti-Muslim racist acts in its report for 2018; 540 cases of Islamophobia were recorded in 2018 compared to 309 cases in 2017.

After the ÖVP and the FPÖ formed a coalition in December 2017, several anti-Muslim laws were introduced and Islamophobic policies were implemented in 2018. First, the government implemented a hijab ban for children in kindergarten. This act was legitimized by presenting it as a measure against so-called political Islam. The symbol act was also presented as a measure to fight “political Islam.” Third, the government attempted to close mosques and the Arab Islamic Community of the Islamic Religious Authority (IGGÖ). Most of these attempts were made based on the proclamation to fight “political Islam,” while they are in fact against Muslims in general and especially against organized Muslim civil society. The general secretary of the governing ÖVP even demanded to ban fasting in school for pupils. Particularly striking is the attempt by the state-related Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) to produce knowledge in order to legitimize the anti-Muslim policies of the government.

There was little to no protest by the political opposition and civil society against Islamophobia in 2018. On the contrary, most of these measures and laws were discursively supported even by the majority of the political opposition parties.

The dehumanization of Muslims as a central characteristic of anti-Muslim racism has become even more apparent in public speaking, as can be seen in public discourse and the governing FPÖ’s discourse. The aggressive devaluation of Muslims is also reflected in public space.

In contrast to politics, media gave more space for critical intervention, although some media outlets very strongly supported the government’s anti-Muslim legislation.
Zusammenfassung


Die Entmenschlichung von MuslimInnen als zentrales Charakteristikum von anti-muslimischem Rassismus ist im öffentlichen Sprechen noch deutlicher zutage getreten. Die aggressive Abwertung von MuslimInnen findet sich auch im öffentlichen Raum wider, wo zahlreiche abwertende Schriftzüge gegen MuslimInnen auffindbar waren.

Im Gegensatz zur Politik waren in den Medien neben der Unterstützung von Regierungspositionen auch Gegenstimmen zu vernehmen.
Country Profile

**Country:** Republic of Austria  
**Type of Regime:** Representative democracy  
**Form of Government:** Semi-presidential representative democracy  
**Ruling Parties:** Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP, centrist-right) and Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ, right-wing)  
**Opposition Parties:** Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), The Greens, NEOS, Liste Pilz/Liste Jetzt!  
**Total Population:** 8.8 million  
**Major Language:** German  
**Official Religion:** No official religion (Secularism). Federal constitution recognizes 13 churches and religious communities. Islam has been legally recognized since 1912.

**Statistics on Islamophobia:**

**Statistics on Racism and Discrimination:**

**Major Religions (% of Population):** Catholics 57.24%, Protestants 3.3%, Muslims 8%

**Muslim Population (% of Population):** 700,000 (8%) according to estimations made by the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF).

**Main Muslim Community Organizations:** Islamic Religious Authority in Austria (Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich, IGGÖ), with the new Islam Act of 2015, all major Muslim organizations are part of the IGGÖ.

**Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia:** SOS Mitmensch, Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit und antimuslimischer Rassismus, ZARA, Gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft.

**Far-Right Parties:** FPÖ

**Far-Right Movements:** Identitarian Movement, Info Direkt

**Far-Right Terrorist Organizations:** N/A

**Limitations to Islamic Practices:**

- **Hijab Ban:** In kindergartens, since 2018.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** Partly banned.
- **Minaret Ban:** In the counties of Carinthia and Vorarlberg.
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** Yes, since 2017.
- **Prayer Ban:** No
Introduction

The year 2018 can be summarized as the first year of a coalition government with a clear anti-Muslim program. With the FPÖ and ÖVP forming a coalition government, several anti-Muslim laws were introduced and Islamophobic policies were implemented in 2018 such as the prohibition of headscarves in kindergartens, and the closure of mosques and the Arab Islamic Community of the Islamic Religious Authority (IGGÖ). The government also declared its intention to extend the hijab ban to the elementary school in the coming year and also to introduce a law against what they called “political Islam.” Many of the newly introduced acts were legitimized by presenting them as measures against so-called political Islam. Also the symbol act and the demand to ban fasting in school were presented as measures to fight “political Islam,” while they are in fact against Muslims in general and against organized Muslim civil society.

As we can see in this report, many of the debates and laws from media to the Internet were strongly informed by the new government’s positions vis-à-vis Muslims.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

The Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit und antimuslimischer Rassimus recorded an increase of approximately 74% of anti-Muslim racist acts. They recorded 540 cases of Islamophobia in their report for 2018 compared to 309 cases in 2017. Most attacks occurred on the Internet (53%) and the primary victims were women (83%).

Figure 1: The graffiti “MOSLEMRATTE” (Muslim Rat) appeared in January in the third district of Vienna.1

A Viennese district councillor from the Green Party, Barbara Neuroth, revealed that several institutions that are based on solidarity – from work on the streets to schools and social services – were vandalized with the letters “Moslems raus” (Muslims out). Streetwork Wieden in Vienna also revealed that stickers with racist content were placed on their doors.
The Al-Sunnah Mosque that was publicly criticized by the government and nearly closed for allegedly spreading radical messages was subsequently graffitied with the words “Muslims out – Stay Behind” (see below).

Figure 3:

Figure 4: The graffiti “Muslims Out – Stay Behind” on the front door of a mosque, Vienna, June.

On 9 May, an 18-year-old conscript in basic military service, Mario S., fired a gun in front of a school. A pupil with an Arab background was injured, while the police excluded a racist motive.  

On 27 March, a historical Viennese building was graffitied with the words “MOSLEMS RAUS” (Muslims out) (see below).

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The words “MUSLIME RAUS” (Muslims out) were also seen on a local Viennese tram (see below).

On 23 December, the following photo was taken of a wall with graffiti based on a traditional Christian rhyme; it stated “Advent Advent ein Moslem brennt” (Advent Advent a Muslim burns).
ISLAMOPHOBIA IN AUSTRIA

On 23 December, the following photo was taken of a wall with graffiti based on a traditional Christian rhyme; it stated “Advent Advent ein Moslem brennt” (Advent Advent a Muslim burns).

Figure 7: Graffiti with the words “Advent Advent a Muslim burns”, 23 December.

Figure 8: Graffiti with the words “Muslims out”, Photo: M. Rahimi, 20 March, 2018, Vienna.
Employment
The Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit und antimuslimischer Rassismus several incidents of discrimination at the workplace. One is with three women working as security services in Salzburg. Another case of a security firm in Lower Austria reveals that the management of the security service was not sending Black people and women wearing a Hijab to do their job at the train station. They were asked to take off their Hijab while working at a stadium and were transferred to another site. Another case revealed by the Dokustelle reveals that a woman was told that she would not fit in the company with her Hijab. Another woman with a Hijab is denied to work at a civil institution for being a religious person in Vienna.⁵

Education
The Christian conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the right-wing Freedom Party (FPÖ) have been criminalizing Muslim educational institutions for some time now. Following the campaign of Sebastian Kurz to problematize kindergarten institutions that are administrated by Muslims, this trend continues. The ÖVP especially focuses on criticizing the Viennese social democratic government that is home to most of these educational institutions. The Austrian federal government has used institutions like the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) to produce knowledge about the Muslim other to legitimize their policies. One of their invited experts, the German Ahmad Mansour, who is also program director of the Brussels-based European Foundation for Democracy, which systematically tries to exclude (supposedly bad) Muslim voices from the public sphere,⁶ supported the government’s claims in an interview with Der Standard.⁷

Also, far-right politicians regularly argue that Islam was often the reason for violence in schools. According to Maximilian Krauss (FPÖ Vienna), it is no more possible to teach evolution, the human body, or have swimming lessons due to “radicalized pupils” with “Sharia arguments.” Party whip of the Viennese FPÖ argued that the Viennese government was tolerating and funding Muslim “parallel societies.”⁸ He calls for a ban to distribute the Qur’an, the evaluation of Muslim kindergartens and schools, and the establishment of the German language as the compulsory spo-

ken language during breaks in school. Dominik Nepp (FPÖ Vienna) frames Muslim associations as radical and not worthy of subsidization.9

The youth branch of the FPÖ in Upper Austria published a calendar for pupils with racist content and disseminated it in schools. It read, “You are the first generation that has to fight for their own homeland and identity. The wrong immigration policy has navigated Austria and Europe into a state of emergency.”10 The Greens and the Social Democrats protested against this publication.11

Susanne Wiesinger played a central role in education issues in 2018. A longtime teacher, working for the social democratic teacher’s union, Wiesinger published a book titled Kulturkampf im Klassenzimmer. Wie der Islam die Schulen verändert. Bericht einer Lehrerin (The Clash of Civilization in the Classroom. How Islam is Changing Schools. A Report by a Teacher). The publishing house Edition QVV - Quo Vadis Veritas Redaktions GmbH is newly founded by the media and Red Bull-empire of Dietrich Mateschitz and was once called by Süddeutsche Zeitung “(right-wing, FH) Breitbart from the Alps?”.12 Part of Mateschitz’s media network is also Quo Vadis Veritas Foundation, to which belongs Edition QVV, Addendum13 and Talk im Hangar from broadcast Servus TV. In an interview with Lisa Nimmervoll (Der Standard), Wiesinger says, “The school is the venue for cultural, religious and national quarrels. More and more often these are violently fought. Muslims make the biggest problems.”14 And further, “Many Muslim children are torn inside. On the one hand, they are persuaded by the community how superior and special they are because of their faith, on the other hand they are confronted with their academic failure. Of course, this causes inner turmoil, tremendous tensions.”15 The tabloid press Kronen Zeitung also interviewed Susanne Wiesinger, giving her a lot of space for her ideas. She said, “We are powerless because the proportion of Muslim students is growing and because we, as teachers of the majority society, are simply in

10. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
the minority."16 Wiesinger positioned herself as a leftist, who addressed the “problem of Islam.” Her approach was not only welcomed by politicians, especially from the governing ÖVP and FPÖ, but also from the press. Samuel Schirmbeck17 and Lisa Nimmervoll supported her thesis in Der Standard. According to Nimmervoll, “Islam is changing the schools in non-acceptable way.”18 A director in a school was interviewed to support Wiesinger’s views and the claims of the federal government, claiming that there were four problems regarding the integration of Muslims, one of them being “conservative Muslim values.”19 Some newspapers also gave space for a critical perspective.20

The then president of the Islamic Religious Authority (IGGÖ), Ibrahim Ol- gun, criticized the fact that “all Muslim children are under general suspicion”21 and that “policies are made on the back of our children.”22 Alternative investigations by journalists in daily newspapers also allowed a more differentiated view on the issue.23

The Viennese branch of the ÖVP presented an “8 Point Program against Radicalization and Islamization in the Classroom” on 19 September, 2018. The program contained various assimilationist, anti-Muslim claims arguing at the same time that the presented measures were against racism. One amongst many was the argument that “parents must make a commitment to the constitution, values, and social order when they register their kids in school.”24 But even the social democratic and Green-led government in Vienna succumbed to the discursive pressure. Mayor Michael Ludwig

22. Ibid.
countered many of the Islamophobic claims made by the conservatives, but still argued that the problems, which were made public by Wiesinger, are an effect of “social plus ethnic issues in combination with the emergence of a conservative Islam.”

Minister of Education Faßmann (ÖVP) announced his intentions to conduct a survey done by political consultant Kenan Güngör to ask school directors “what challenges they face through religious-political developments.” Güngör had also argued that religious education in public school should be revoked from the IGGÖ, since the IGGÖ would present a vision of Islam, which does not fit in a liberal society. Later, Wiesinger became “Ombudsman for Questions of Value and Cultural Conflicts,” a newly established position in the Ministry of Education, while still arguing that she was a leftist. The establishment of a new Department for School and Integration was announced for 2019. Wiesinger also became a columnist for the tabloid press Kronen Zeitung.

A representative of the Vienna Child and Youth Welfare Service, a department of the Viennese government, Ercan Nik Nafs further exploited fears of Islamization in the education sector. He argued that no “reasonable human can advocate hijab for small kids.” According to Nafs, around 3,000 children are visiting private Qur’anic courses during the summer holidays, which for him is problematic. Far-right politicians speak of “Sharia schools.” An education institution of Muslims that trained imams, which was contested in 2017, reopened again to train both chaplains and imams.

29. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
The Ministry of Education published a newsletter, in which it explained the educational principle of “Equality and Diversity Management.” The publication contained much Islamophobic content, especially regarding the hijab.

Academia is regularly used to legitimize political claims made by the federal government. Government-financed surveys allow the institutions to substantiate their views on certain topics. The highly controversial Ednan Aslan was commissioned by the city of Graz to conduct a study on “Religious and Ethnic Orientations of Muslim Refugees in Graz,” surveying 288 people. The study was presented on 11 January, 2018 at the City Council. According to Aslan, a Shia majority might emerge in Graz, which could lead to a structural support by Iran. A Graz’s city councilman then argued that one had to fight anti-Semitism with Muslim associations and support women, given the findings of Aslan’s study, while being quiet regarding the stark anti-Semitism of the coalition partner FPÖ, which is also governing in Graz with deputy mayor Mario Eustacchio, a hard-line right-wing politician, who had originally embraced the Identitarian Movement. While the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution did not document one single incident of anti-Semitism by Muslims, it did record 41 anti-Semitic and 28 Islamophobic acts. Meanwhile, the federal government intentionally plays down anti-Semitic acts, while focusing on Islamized anti-Semitism.

Following the highly contested “study” on Islamic kindergartens compiled by Ednan Aslan, a follow-up study was conducted by a team of academics. They announced different findings, not supporting 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 remotely, 698 kindergartens voluntarily completed the questionnaire.
The Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF), which is financed for the most part by the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs (BMEIA), plays a central role in imparting knowledge about otherized Muslims. The many events organized by the ÖIF reveal a tendency to bring people – especially from Germany – who have a clear anti-Muslim agenda. The ÖIF organized multiple panels to allow people with anti-Muslim views to disseminate their positions. To mention but a few, a panel on “The Influence of Political Islam” featured Mouhanad Khorchide, Nina Scholz, Oliver Henghel, and Susanne Raab. 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.”

A publication by the ÖIF was presented with articles by the Swiss Islamophobe Saida Keller-Messahli and Seyran Ates as well as law scholar Katharina Pabel (leader of the expert council on Integration at the Ministry of Foreign and Integration Affairs) and others. Keller-Messahli was profoundly criticized on her piece on Islam in the Balkans. Florian Bieber, professor at the University of Graz and director of the Center for Southeast European Studies, argued that her publication was a “scandal [...] badly researched, written sloppily, by a person who has no idea about the subject.” A panel took place entitled “What Role Mosques Play for the Integration of Muslim Immigrants in Austria” featuring Heiko Heinisch, Susanne Schröter, and Constantin Schreiber, journalist and author of the book Inside Islam - What Is Being Preached in German Mosques. Kamel Daoud and Anne-Catherine Simon talked on the panel “Dangers of Islamism and the Lack of Awareness of the West.” At the panel “School and Islam: Challenges of Integration,” Berlin-based journalist Düzen Tekkal stated that the reasons for the lack of integration of Muslim students are “anti-Semitism, ethnic-religious conflicts, stereotypes towards classmates, overburdened teachers who have little authority, and students from non-educational backgrounds with a high proportion of migrants.”

Minister for Europe, Integration & Foreign Affairs Karin Kneissl opened the meeting of the integration advisory board to discuss amongst other things “Integration and Identity – Girls

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43. Ibid.
and boys in the context of traditionally role models” and “Integration in Schools.” The Islamophobe Zana Ramadani presented her views at events organized by the ÖIF in the cities of Salzburg and St. Pölten together with the Islamophobes Seyran Ates and Saida Keller-Messahli. In June, Seyran Ates was also invited by the ÖIF, where she supported the state policy regarding the hijab ban during a panel on “Equality, Islam and Patriarchy.” She stated, “If you put a headscarf on girls, you take their childhood and sexualize them. They urge them into the role of a sexual object and restrict their development, which for me is child abuse.” Ates was also invited to give talks on 30 July and 3 October by the ÖIF. Other ÖIF panels featured Michael Fleischhacker, as journalist for Addendum.

The publications and events of the ÖIF are used to legitimize the policy of the federal government. According to the Kronen Zeitung, a report by the ÖIF that allegedly shows that several Viennese municipal districts are home to so-called parallel societies shows the gap between cultures in Vienna. ÖVP General Secretary Karl Nehammer argued, “The poison of political Islam must not endanger our society […] Violent clashes, territorial conflicts and parallel justice are on the agenda according to executive officials and judges.” On 29 November, the Integration Advisory Board of the BMEIA met under the leadership of ÖIF director Franz Wolf. Senior Fellow of the European Foundation for Democracy Lorenzo Vidino presented a talk on “Political Islam in Austria.”

Minister of Interior Herbert Kickl organized an EU conference entitled “Values, Constitutional State and Security,” which discussed the security situation of Jews in the EU. According to Kickl, there is a new threat of anti-Semitism coming from political Islam. Susanne Schröter declared that “political Islam is a fundamental threat

48. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
to freedom and security and our democratic societies as a whole, as it always seeks to seize power.”

According to Kickl, he wants to save Muslims from political Islam. Several ‘experts’ argued that one should not talk to the wrong partners, meaning the official representation of Muslims in Austria. Also Chancellor Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP), who was awarded the “Jerusalem Navigator” prize by the European Jewish Congress, organized a conference entitled “The Struggle against Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism.” In this context, Kurz tried to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, which the Middle East expert John Bunzl analyzed as an attempt to normalize the Israeli government’s relations with the FPÖ.

**Politics**

The political debate regarding Islam/Muslims has increasingly deteriorated under the ÖVP-FPÖ government. Anti-Muslim laws such as the ban on headscarves in kindergartens, the closure of mosques and an institution of the IGGÖ as a measure against so-called political Islam, the symbol act, and the demand to ban fasting in school for pupils are concrete policies and political demands that pretend to fight so-called political Islam, but are, in fact, against Muslims in general and against especially organized Muslim civil society.

The ban of the hijab was presented by the Austrian government at an early stage in 2018 and was especially promoted by the vice-chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache (FPÖ). According to Strache, this was to assure integration. For Strache, the headscarf “plays into the hands of political Islam, which has already created dangerous parallel societies in diverse structures of associations.”

This initiative found little opposition. Journalists, amongst them from the liberal *Der Standard*, supported the ban of the hijab in kindergartens, which was especially

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57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
welcomed by Strache. It was supported by foreign and integration minister, political consultant Kenan Güngör, who called for a ban up to 11 years of age, and scholar Mouhanad Khorchide. On 4 April, a hijab ban for kindergarten was commissioned to “allow all girls equal chances to develop,” said Kurz and to protect them from “political Islam.” The minister of education was originally sceptical to install any dress regulations, but later declared that the IGGÖ would be included in the drafting of the law, which did not happen. Originally, the government urged the opposition parties to support the act, since legislation of school affairs need a majority of two thirds.

Other experts on school from the conservative political milieu, who at first were against a law to prohibit the hijab, became staunch public supporters.

Only a few people such as the president of Austria’s municipalities (Gemeindebund) and the president of the Catholic Women Orders were against the ban, while the opposition leader of the NEOS, Matthias Strolz, was sceptical.

Strache argued on 5 April on Servus TV that a hijab ban should finally be extended to the whole public school, university, and public offices, which was support-
ed by Sebastian Kurz. State Secretary of the Ministry of Interior Karoline Edtstadler (ÖVP) also embraced this idea. Scholars of law argued that there could not be a ban only of the hijab while allowing other religious garments such as the kippah. The president of the Constitutional Court argued that all religious communities have to be treated the same way. IGGÖ President Olgun announced that he would go to court against this discrimination, which according to FPÖ party whip Johann Gudenus was an “Islamist statement.” The chief of communication of the Viennese archdiocese, Prüller, criticized Gudenus.

The old-time Viennese mayor Michael Häupl (SPÖ) argued that the hijab “enriches the urban image.” The Viennese ÖVP integration spokesperson Caroline Hungerländer called for the installation of an advisory body for women, who want to take off their hijab, which was rejected by the Viennese government. People such as Ahmad Mansour and teachers against the hijab were invited to present their ‘expertise.’ According to Mansour, the hijab is “pervasive and an abuse.” General Secretary of the Viennese SPÖ Barbara Novak argued to extend the ban on all schools, not only in kindergarten; however, she was criticized by her own party and thus retracted her statement.

Since the opposition parties did not support the envisioned “Child Protection Act,” the federal government enacted a so-called 15a-agreement, which allows the federal government to draw contracts with the nine Länder (states) and gives the responsibility of implementation to the state level.90 Many of the Länder representatives were not informed about these plans, especially the ones that are led by the SPÖ like Vienna, Burgenland, and Carinthia. The federal government only approached the Länder after making its plans public.91

The main arguments on behalf of the government were to protect girls from “early sexualisation.”92 The opposition parties SPÖ and NEOS argued that the hijab ban was nothing but a symbolic act to distract from other policies.93 Even ÖVP-lead Länder argued that the hijab ban did not make sense, since there are no cases of hijab-wearing girls at that age in the kindergartens.94 At the same time, government officials clearly declared that they had to fear that the ban would be litigated at the Constitutional Court.95 Following the public objections, the federal government declared that the funding of kindergartens would be attached to the condition of the hijab ban.96 The 15a-agreement then declared to “prohibit children from wearing ideological or religious clothing that aims at the early sexualization of children and thus sexual segregation, and thus are incompatible with the constitutional values and educational goals of the Constitution, especially gender equality.”97

By not explicitly referring to the hijab, the government tried to protect itself from being easily litigated at the Constitutional Court. Still, many scholars of law argued that this law would not be constitutional.98 On 24 October, the federal gov-

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97. Ibid.
ernment presented the agreement as a final act and also withdrew from a first proposal to cut funds for the Länder, but still contained the hijab ban, which was finally agreed by all nine Länder. The IGGÖ declared that it was not involved in the policy-making process.99 In Styria, the SPÖ even argued that it wants to extend the hijab ban up to 14 years of age, drawing on Susanne Wiesinger’s debate.100 While the IGGÖ criticized the law,101 the Association of the Catholic Family contested it.102 On 22 November, the new agreement was enacted.103

The FPÖ also declared that this would include the turban of the Sikh, but not the Jewish kippah. According to their logic, wearing a religious sign would exclude them from the rest of the group and would thus discriminate them. Against the objection that there are no reliable numbers available, the government argued that every single case was one too many.104 Austrian Sikhs objected and argued that the turban was part of their identity105 and stripping them of the turban would make them feel naked.106 But for the FPÖ, this hijab ban was a symbol of “hardcore Muslims.”107 While the hijab ban paves the way for an extension of a hijab ban in other spheres, many only criticized it as a symbolic measure.108

According to the polls, 55% said the hijab ban was “very right,” 24 percent said “rather right,” and only 16 percent considered it was wrong. In April 2018, only 45

percent thought that a hijab ban was “very right,” while 23 percent considered it “more right,” and as many as 28 percent thought it was wrong.

The government pretended to fight “political Islam.” Chancellor Kurz, his deputy Strache, Interior Minister Herbert Kickl (FPÖ) and Chancellery Minister Gernot Blümel (ÖVP) announced during a press conference that eight mosques would be closed to fight “political Islam.” They decided that the Arab Religious Community of Austria, part of the IGGÖ, and a mosque of the Turkish nationalists should be dissolved. In addition, expulsions of 40 imams of ATIB (Turkish-Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Cooperation in Austria) mosques are planned.  

Kurz marketed this initiative in social media as follows, “Due to violations against the Islam Act, we will dissolve the mosque of the grey wolves as well as those of the Arab Religious Community and will deport 40 Imams from ATIB due to violations against the ban of foreign funding”.

Chancellor Kurz framed the government’s initiative as a means to protect common Muslims from political Islam.  

Sanctimoniously, Blümel (ÖVP) argued


that it was “no contradiction to be a believing Muslim and a proud Austrian.” According to Blümel, the mosques were home to Salafi people, who would not have a “positive attitude towards the state and society.” Hence, he believed that the Arab Islamic Community with its seven mosques and the grey wolves mosque had to be shut down.

While the president of the IGGÖ was later criticized for collaborating with the government on this issue, which ultimately lead to his removal half a year later, Vice-President Memic declared that the Arab mosque in Carinthia was not part of the IGGÖ. This quarrel lead to internal frictions within the IGGÖ that did not only affect the then president Olgun, but also his predecessor Fuat Sanac, who enabled the government to interfere in internal religious affairs with the Islam Act of 2015. The Islamic Theologian Mouhanad Khorchide supported the government by arguing that the mosques broke the law. He argued that the Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia had already successfully realized the threat of political Islam and systematically closed down mosques of the Muslim Brotherhood, while Austria missed the problem.

The political opposition parties – NEOS, the Greens, and Liste Pilz welcomed the measures of the government. The general secretary of the SPÖ de-

111. Ibid.
113. Ibid.
clared it to be the first “reasonable measure” taken by the government.122 According to MP Efgani Dönmez (ÖVP), the government’s press conference was held on the last Friday in Ramadan shortly before Kurz’s trip to Israel to give a signal of fighting Islamism.123 Only few scholars of law softly criticized the measure.124

While the mosque of the alleged grey wolves was reopened shortly after the press conference following a visit by the IGGÖ and state officials,125 the representatives of the Arab Islamic Community of the IGGÖ litigated against the government’s attempt to dissolve the institution.126 The Vienna Administrative Court had declared the decision’s non-suspensive character (which would have suggested to immediately implement it without any possibility of making an appeal) as unlawful and announced a final verdict for the case for the spring of 2019. Thus, all mosques of the Arab Islamic Community of the IGGÖ were back in operation. The religious lawyer Stefan Schima pointed out that “if the complainant alleges that the decision interfered with fundamental rights,” the Constitutional Court could be brought to the case.127

One of the five pillars of Islam, fasting during the month of Ramadan, which is part of the fundamental religious practice of Muslims, was also challenged. The tabloids128 and the right-wing media129 began to report about allegedly grotesque situations during Ramadan narrated by teachers. Subsequently, ÖVP General Secretary Karl Nehammer demanded a ban on fasting for pupils. The measure was framed as a struggle for the well-being of children. Nehammer said, “It must not be that children’s health is risked and educators can no longer teach students. I call for a prohibition of fasting for pupils who are clearly weakened and can no longer follow the lesson. If the

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guardians are not clear about this, there must be stricter rules in the respect. We do not tolerate irresponsibility with children.”

In the political realm, the minister of interior installed a new troop to protect the borders, which made a patrol border exercise based on a route called “mosque route” referring to young Muslim men. FPÖ politicians further framed Islam as a political ideology rather than a religion. Efgani Dönmez was excluded from the ÖVP after tweeting about a Berlin politician with a Muslim background that she only got her jobs by referring to “take a look at her knees” (which was widely understood as her giving a blowjob). He has since been in the national parliament as a politically non-affiliated MP. Dönmez defended his sexist suggestions by arguing that the German politician has been giving space to reactionary Muslim institutions. Following his exclusion, he has explicitly embraced the FPÖ’s politics especially regarding migration and Islam-related issues.

The Symbol Act was proposed in October 2018 to ban not only the symbols of DAESH and Al-Qaida, but also symbol of the Grey Wolves, which is a symbol of a legal political party in Turkey, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Following the publication of a report on the Muslim Brotherhood in Austria by the Ministry of Interior, there is reason to believe that the act was designed to target Muslim civil society actors. While white nationalist groups such as the Identitarian Movement are not part of this law, only organizations with a link to other countries such as the PKK terrorist organisation, Hamas, and others are mentioned in the act. People, who use these logos have to pay up to 10,000 euro, while symbols of National Socialism are fined with a maximum of 4,000 euro. FPÖ party whip Gudenus announced that a new

132. Ibid.
act that forbids political Islam will be launched in mid-2019. He urged Minister of Justice Josef Moser (ÖVP) to do something in this regard. Some journalists already embraced this initiative without any detailed information having been made public.

Restrictions regarding halal slaughter were another critical case in 2018. Following a debate on attempts to restrict kosher and halal slaughter in July 2018, which was called a “negative Aryan Paragraph” by the president of the Jewish Community (IKG) and a backpedaling by the responsible bureaucrats in the state of Lower Austria, a similar debate started in autumn, but this time on a federal level focusing on Muslims. While the measures to restrict kosher meals by creating lists of Jewish consumers was harshly criticized by politicians of different colors, the federal government also pedaled back claiming to secure Jewish life, while not even mentioning Muslims once. On 12 August, shortly before the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice, the federal government implemented a new rule to abolish “illegal backyard mosque slaughter.” The decree, which was published by the Ministry of Social Affairs to become effective on August 15, aimed to end animal torture and the killing of 25,000 sheep per year. Contrary to the debate on kosher slaughter, the public debate was comparably limited.

Media

The government was very professional in planning its communication with the media. It pre-planned when to deliver what information to which journalist to be able to shape the public discourse along its interest. Many media platforms followed the government’s strategy, not contesting its selective approach in dealing with the media. The wide political approval of anti-Muslim laws is also reflected in media coverage, although the media gave a larger space for dissent views, critical commentaries, and also some Muslim voices.

The Oberösterreichischen Nachrichten (Upper Austrian Daily) reported to be shocked that mosques were still open, thus blindly following the government’s propaganda. Some journalists argued not only to ban the hijab in kindergarten, but also for teachers, since the hijab can “question social achievements.” The Kronen Zeitung argued that a mosque belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood, which was not true. The author Necla Kelek also supported the government’s hijab ban.

Scholz defended the government in Der Standard and argued why a ban of the hijab was necessary, while the ban of the Jewish kippah was not.

Other media outlets such as Biber gave a voice to Muslims, showing the kind of discrimination they are suffering under the current circumstances. Mosaik interviewed teachers to give a picture contrary to the one spread by Susanne Wiesinger. Also political scientists, Muslim and Christian theologians, religious studies

scholars, anthropologists, scholars of law, historians and a scholar of Jewish philosophy were given space to dissent with the widespread anti-Muslim policies. People working in culture, political activists, as well as journalists from Kurier like Niki Glattauer and Helmut Brandstätter, from Die Presse like Erich Kocina, from Salzburger Nachrichten like Manfred Perterer published their critical perspectives on the government’s anti-Muslim politics.

The Kronen Zeitung had to correct some of the false information it spread about an imam and a mosque after the concerned people litigated.

167. Ibid.
Also, there are many right-wing media that disseminate the most racist anti-Muslim views. Martin Lichtmesz (Martin Semlitsch) argued on Info-Direkt that Islam would destroy the European culture by the great replacement, meaning that Islam would replace European culture. Former ÖVP MP Efgani Dönmez also published an article in Info-Direkt, where he argued, “In fact, the majority of Muslims will not be up to date even in the next 50 years if foreign influence, be it from Qatar, Turkey or Saudi Arabia, is not contained.”

Another right-wing media outlet Wochenblick published several articles on an alleged Islamization of the society. They drew on expertise by “radical leftist” people like Thomas Rammerstorfer, who criticized “Islamist activities within social democracy.”

Justice System
Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff, a central figure in the global Counter Jihad Movement, was convicted at the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) for her statement that Prophet Muhammad was a pedophile. She had given two seminars on the basics of Islam at the FPÖ’s political academy back in 2009. She was convicted in 2011, but appealed to the ECHR.

The minister of interior announced that 63 organizations affiliated with the ATIB would be reviewed. He wanted to see if the local authorities are already running legal proceedings against the associations and if there were legal opportunities to dissolve the associations in case of violations of the Association Act. In 2018, however, nothing happened. According to Kurier, ten imams from the ATIB received a negative decision and had to leave. According to the ATIB, three imams had to leave in 2018, following another 32 before, which leaves 35 mosques without an imam.

171. Info Direkt, 18, p. 19
177. Interview with ATIB representative.
The Alevi Community, the *Föderation der Alevitischen Gemeinden in Österreich*, filed a complaint, because they were not allowed to organize religious gatherings because of the Islam Act of 2015, which claims that the Alevi Community in Austria (*Islamisch-Alevitische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich*, which now is only the *Alevitische Glaubensgemeinschaft*, since it dropped the name Islam) was recognized as the only religious institution of Alevism.\(^{178}\)

Around 100 tourists from the Gulf were fined in the tourist region of Zell am See in Salzburg because of the Anti-Coverage Act of 2017 that bans the covering of the face.\(^{179}\) A case was brought to the court, where a 48-year-old had posted on Facebook that Muslims were “human trash, worthless minors.”\(^{180}\)

The mosque, which was defaced in Graz in 2016, led to first charges. The public prosecutor’s office Klagenfurt announced that four persons in the district court of Graz-West were charged with the downgrading vilification of religious teachings and property damage. Three people were from a local right-wing extremist party and one was from the intelligence service of the Ministry of Defense.\(^{181}\)

The FPÖ lost a case against the Austrian Muslim Youth (*Muslimische Jugend Österreich*), which had been called “Islamist,” and the FPÖ was fined and had to publish a counter statement.\(^{182}\) Martin Sellner, a spokesperson of the Identitarian Movement, was not allowed to enter Britain.\(^{183}\)

**Internet**

While the ÖVP-FPÖ government had announced new regulations to challenge online hate, the FPÖ went online with a racist video. A commercial, which was taken off the same evening due to critics, presented foreigners as social parasites. The secretary general of the FPÖ argued that it was “a fact” that primarily “immigrants and foreigners are abusing our social system,” hence the video featured a stereotyped and sinisterly laughing cartoon character named Ali, who could no longer abuse the

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social welfare system due to the new regulation that shows a photo of the person on
the insurance card. The video also includes a statement from Social Affairs Minister
Beate Hartinger-Klein (FPÖ). Chancellor Kurz called the video “unacceptable.”

Politicians, especially from the FPÖ, regularly used social media to spread their
anti-Muslim stereotypes. Member of the City Council in Linz, Markus Hein (FPÖ),
posted a photo on Facebook with the title “Ist der Islam ein Teil Österreichs? Nein! Und er darf es auch niemals werden!” (Is Islam part of Austria? No! And it shall never become!) (see below).

Figure 10: A screenshot taken from the advertisement by FPÖ TV featuring Ali, 23 April.

Figure 11: A social media advertisement, 25 March, 2018, Screenshot.

Gottfried Waldhäusl, a member of the Council of the State of Lower Austria, advertised his fanpage with the slogan “Islamisierung stoppen!” (Stop Islamization!) (see below).

Figure 12: A social media advertisement, 23 December, 2018, Screenshot.

Another ad by the same councillor shows a picture with a Muslim pupil saying: “Ramadan in School. No Eating. No Drinking. No Learning.”

Figure 13: A social media advertisement, 22 May, 2018, Screenshot.

FPÖ politicians also make use of Instagram to reach a younger audience, e.g. the minister of interior affairs used a picture in front of pages of the Qur’an saying, “Whoever puts Sharia above our law has to come before the court.”

After a yellow press article discussed Muslims praying in congregation at a playground in Lower Austria, Gudenus (FPÖ) posted on Instagram, “A playground is not for Muslim prayer. Islam is not part of Austria!”

Figure 14: A social media advertisement, 15 August, 2018, Screenshot.

Figure 15: A social media advertisement, 30 October, 2018, Screenshot.
The right-wing union posted an ad to support the government’s new measures to cut financial support for children living abroad by showing a Black Muslim girl.

Figure 16: A social media advertisement, 30 November, 2018, Screenshot.

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network
Most of the people actively supporting Islamophobia in the last years, have been active in 2018. The ÖIF as an institution close to the state plays a central role in the dissemination of knowledge to legitimize anti-Muslim legislation. People like Seyran Ates are regularly invited to these events. Ates even argued that Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia were financially supporting women to wear the hijab. New people who had previously not been known publicly also emerged to support the government’s anti-Muslim claims. Several Islamophobic books were published such as those by Gerhard Weinberger, Wolfgang Rinner, and Shams ul-Haq from Germany, who was given huge media coverage for his investigative undercover research in mosques.

Also, the daily *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten* reported about a planned tour by right-wing extremists with stops in Vienna, Salzburg, and Linz amongst others organized by the Canadian *The Rebel Media* with Ezra Levant, Daniel Pipes Katie Hopkins, and Tommy Robinson.\(^{191}\) Since the far right is now in power in Austria, Austria's anti-Islam politics also become more interesting for the international New Right and white supremacists. FPÖ politician Elmar Podgorschek gave a talk at the German right-wing AfD advising them how to gain power.\(^{192}\)

Former ÖVP MP Efgani Dönmez, who has a long history of Islamophobia and publishing in right-wing media, invited fellow party members to a discussion organized by the Wage Union, which is an alliance of Eastern European politicians and aims to stop Western emigration and increase the East's wage levels. The Committee of the Wage Union includes persons from the extreme right-wing Jobbik party from Hungary and Márton Gyöngyösi, who became known due to his anti-Semitic statements and was invited as a speaker at the event mentioned. Other members of the committee include right-wing extremist Croatian politician Frano Circo, an Estonian politician who praised Nazi economic policies, Jaak Madison, and a Latvian politician from the extreme right-wing All for Latvia party. His then-fellow ÖVP MPs withdrew from the event.\(^{193}\)

### Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

- The *Dokustelle Muslime* published an annual report documenting anti-Muslim racism.
- After the FPÖ went online with the advertisement showing a figure named Ali as a social parasite, social activist Muhammed Yüksek organized an “Ali Demonstration” in Vienna to protest against the racism of the FPÖ.\(^{194}\)
- When blogger Asma Aiad returned from a trip to Istanbul and made a video of the ill treatment of a veiled woman by Austrian police on the border who was asked if she was married against her will back in Turkey, the video went viral\(^{195}\) and created debates in the media. This led to a meeting with the

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police, who made assurances about ending such treatment.

- The art installation *ADHINA* by Werner Puntigam and Klaus Hollinetz presented an artistic collage of city sounds and Muezzin calls during Advent time to create an awareness that Islam and Christianity are religions of peace. Their aim with the art project was to present a harmonious interplay of aesthetics.¹⁹⁶

**Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

Given the hegemony of the anti-Muslim discourse in a country governed by two parties that have fully institutionalized anti-Muslim political claims, the lack of anti-racist initiatives is most outstanding. Hence, what is needed first and foremost is a civil society and a political opposition that recognizes the problem of Islamophobia and is ready to challenge it. Beyond the detailed recommendations given in the last years, this seems incredibly urgent and it is only the media, where interventions against this trend can be observed. Especially the political hegemony of Islamophobia has to be contested. Most important, the new laws that have been implemented since the coming to power of the ÖVP and the FPÖ, have to be challenged:

- The Islam Law has to be amended in order not to be in conflict with the Austrian Constitution. This is of utmost importance, since the new law is used to crack down on the organized Muslim community.
- The 15a-agreement that includes the hijab ban has to be appealed.
- The organized anti-Muslim network has to be uncovered.
- Training on racism, especially Islamophobia, should be offered to journalists, lawyers, and police (security officials) by qualified personnel.
- Muslim civil society has to be empowered with tools to combat Islamophobia, especially in the creation of a consciousness towards the illegality of hate crimes.
- Educational institutions and stakeholders have to work towards creating an alternative narrative of Muslims in Austria which will work to dispel the widely accepted negative image of Islam.

**Chronology**

- **04.04.2018**: The hijab ban for kindergartens was commissioned to “allow all girls equal chances to develop” and protect them from “political Islam,” according to Chancellor Kurz.
- **14.05.2018**: ÖVP General Secretary Karl Nehammer argued that fasting in Ramadan should be banned for pupils.

• **09.05.2018:** An 18-year-old conscript in basic military service, Mario S., fired a gun in front of a school. A pupil with an Arab background was injured, while the police excluded a racist motive.

• **08.06.2018:** The government proclaimed in a press conference that the Arab Religious Community of the IGGÖ and one Turkish mosque would be closed in an attempt to fight “political Islam.”

• **17.07.2018:** A debate was ended that attempted to restrict kosher and halal slaughter, which was called a “negative Aryan Paragraph” by the president of the Jewish Community (IKG).

• **12.08.2018:** Shortly before the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice, the federal government implemented a new rule to abolish “illegal backyard mosque slaughter.” The decree, which was published by the Ministry of Social Affairs to become effective on August 15, aimed to end animal torture and the killing of 25,000 sheep per year. Contrary to the debate on kosher slaughter, public debate was nearly absent.

• **19.10.2018:** The Viennese branch of the ÖVP presented an “8 Point Program against Radicalization and Islamization in the Classroom.”

• **22.11.2018:** The new agreement to ban the hijab for kindergarten pupils was enacted.

• **29.11.2018:** Senior Advisor of the European Foundation for Democracy Lorenzo Vidino, who is also program director of the program on extremism at George Washington University presented a talk on “Political Islam in Austria” at the Foreign Ministry’s Integration Advisory Board meeting.

• **16.12.2018:** FPÖ party whip Gudenus announced that a new act to outlaw political Islam will be prepared for 2019.