

Beat: Politics

CRITICISM OF POLITICAL ZIONISM MUST CONTINUE TO BE ALLOWED

NO SLANDERING OF MUSLIMS!

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Wisuschil - Media & Law - The so-called Anti-Semitism Report 2018 of Austria's former Federal Government followed the repressive lines of right-wing nationalist governments in Europe, which aimed to stigmatize certain population groups and political campaigns by denouncing, defaming, and discrediting them.

With its Islam Law, the preceding coalition government of the Social-Democrats (SPÖ) and the People's party (ÖVP) already set the direction by subjecting certain groups of the Austrian population to special laws. Thereby, the policies of all major Austrian parties impute certain religious or political attitudes, often supplemented by racist cultural attributions, primarily to people of Turkish or Arabic backgrounds. This imputation/ascription is ultimately identitarian because the attitudes and origins of population groups are deliberately constructed and linked.

In addition, the anti-Semitism report also aims to defame, isolate and ultimately criminalize certain political viewpoints. Above all, it targets legitimate criticism of Israeli policies and the much-needed solidarity with Palestinians. People who voice such criticism and practice such solidarity are slandered as "anti-Semites" instead of receiving recognition for a humanitarian and democratic approach that is based on equal-rights-for-all. By means of ahistorical, and fact-free arguments and simplifications, the Austrian Government tries to equate anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism.

This kind of politics has an appalling tradition, particularly in Austria and Germany. Moreover, it is precisely the parties, which never quite separated themselves from the various sorts of fascism and their racist ideas that now accuse others of anti-Semitism. For example, to this day, the ÖVP, whose historical origins are located in the ideological tradition of the "League of Anti-Semites," has the greatest difficulties in removing the pictures of Dollfuss and Lueger from their offices and consigning them to the storage cellars.

The roots of the Freedom Party (FPÖ) lie in German nationalism and National Socialism; their connections to (neo-) Nazis have been demonstrated repeatedly, and more evidence of their disastrous legacy emerges on an almost weekly basis.

This former government and its coalition parties tripped over each other in expressing their solidarity with Israel. On the one hand, they want to rid themselves of their past, and on the other to support like-minded parties in Israel and their influence on fascistic politics in Europe.

The identitarian mobilisation, which oscillates between a cultural and an ethnic orientation, increasingly influences the foundational concept of European states, which is to be shifted from a "democratic state of all citizens" towards a state that privileges a certain group and disadvantages, or totally excludes, others. In the eyes of "identity" politicians, Zionist Israel serves as a model.

These anti-democratic and exclusionary arguments are no longer advanced only by right-wing populist parties, movements, and governments. In Austria, institutions that traditionally were part of left-liberal spectrum now also use accusations of anti-Semitism for purposes of exclusion. Thereby, a national and even Europe-wide consensus is enforced that absolves Israel of all responsibilities under international and human rights law. One example is the Documentation Center of the Austrian Resistance (DÖW), which is commendable for its historical analysis of fascism. Andreas Peham, a long-time staff member of the DÖW and now well-known as an Israel propagandist, is an author of the ÖVP-FPÖ study that absolves the governing parties - the two principal heirs of historical anti-Semitism - and simultaneously supplies the rationale for the government's chauvinist campaign against Muslims, who are declared to be the principal enemy. This strips the post-fascist slogan "Resist the beginnings" of its meaning.

THE ANTI-SEMITISM REPORT USES UNSCIENTIFIC DEFINITIONS AND METHODS

By means of commissioned reports, the state and some of its institutions attempt to criminalize all solidarity with Palestine and simultaneously to incite anti-Muslims racism. The main instrument for accomplishing this is a new definition of anti-Semitism. In March of 2019, the President of the lower (more powerful) house of the Austrian parliament, Wolfgang Sobotka, presented the results of a study (commissioned by parliament), which ascribes anti-Semitic attitudes primarily to Muslim migrants - a result for which the

propaganda of the far-right connected FPÖ has prepared the ground over many years. To obtain its results, the report uses inappropriate methods and unscientific comparisons. For example, the study deliberately used a "supplementary group" of Turkish and Arabic speakers, which - as the authors themselves state and in contrast to the primary sample were not representative. Moreover, the supplementary group was interviewed using a single interview form, whereas with the other participants three different formats were combined.

The study authors themselves state that the samples concerned were not sufficiently dispersed and that representativeness was therefore "not necessarily given." The very definition on which the study is based shows a clear political thrust, which, by means of an inadmissible and ultimately dishonest equivalence, attempts to establish a political position, i.e. that it is anti-Semitic to refuse to accept political Zionism as Jewish nationalism. Thereby, the study adopts Israeli doctrine and renders all political criticism of Zionism taboo.

Simultaneously, the study's results can be used politically to provide a new - supposedly scientific - foundation for anti-Muslim racism: anti-Semitism is made to appear as a Muslim/Arab/Turkish phenomenon. This completes the short circuit to the FPÖ's long promoted "thesis" of "imported anti-Semitism". In response, the former ÖVP State Secretary, Edtstadler, draws the consequences and proposes a counter-measure: Muslims must be obligated to visit the concentration camp Mauthausen, and a "Documentation Centre for Political Islam" must be set up.

THE REPORT'S ARGUMENTS ARE IDENTITARIAN AND THUS FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF ANTI-SEMITISM

The changed meaning and new interpretation of the anti-Semitism definition, whose criteria are synchronized with those of the Zionist Netanyahu regime, follows the classic tradition of anti-Semitism. At its core, it is identitarian, because its ideology is based on a closed, ethnically homogeneous culture whose purity is threatened by the ethnicity, religion and culture of "others", i.e. by Muslims, Arabs, and Turks. State and society would have to be *völkisch* (i.e. uniform in terms of ethnicity, religion and culture) or at least be ruled according to these criteria, i.e. a Christian-Judaic Europe, similar to the "Jewish State" of Israel. Judaism in all its diversity is reduced to a supposedly homogeneous political ideology - political Zionism. Any Jewish opposition to this nationalist ideology is marginalized, isolated, ultimately redefined as "Jewish anti-Semitism" and nipped in the bud.

Criticism of Israel's occupation regime becomes an essential characteristic in this new definition of anti-Semitism, which thereby commingles the interests of the Israeli state with those of the heterogeneous Jewish populations within as well as outside of Israel. It imputes equality between Judaism (Jewish culture and religion) and Zionism, and in politics takes the form of an ethnocentric Jewish nationalism. Jews are thereby implicitly forced to take responsibility for Israeli state policies that are contrary to international and human rights law. Non-Zionist or anti-Zionist Jews are imbued with the aura of treason and are banished to the realm of the "unthinkable". In the tradition of Lueger, this definition ultimately determines "who is a (good) Jew".

THUS THE FORMER GOVERNING PARTIES FAILED TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM THEIR ANTI-SEMITIC AND RACIST HISTORY AND PROJECTED IT ON OTHERS.

In line with these political objectives, the right wing, nationalist and Christian-social parties have succeeded in ransoming themselves from their anti-Semitic history and its continuation in the present. The new definition of anti-Semitism not only immunizes the allied state of Israel against criticism or sanctions (and turns such acts into taboos), but also generalizes and sharpens the propaganda label of "political Islam." It may be that a few years ago Netanyahu's attempt to shift the blame for the Shoah to the Palestinians (keyword "Grand Mufti" of Jerusalem) was still rejected by some in Europe, but by taking the "detour" of "imported anti-Semitism," the European spawn of anti-Semitism can now be shifted to Muslims, Arabs, and Turks. As the former right-right Austrian government took office, ÖVP Member of Parliament, Martin Engelberg, delivered the opening thrust in the pages of the Israeli daily, Ha'aretz.

In defense of his party's coalition with the FPÖ, he wrote that it is wrong to be fixated on the Freedom Party, because "in Austria the real anti-Semitic threat comes from Muslims, and not Nazis." Engelberg celebrated the "right-right" coalition, and maintained that the FPÖ "regardless of its National Socialist roots, has long since become an anti-immigration, populist movement."

He thereby furnishes the rationale for why, in 21st century Europe, both right-wing extremists and the Israel Lobby need a completely new definition of anti-Semitism. The spadework for this was done by commissioned studies whose conclusions could then find their way into legislative proposals.

WE DEMAND THAT:

“€ an open debate about Israel’s Apartheid policies must continue to be possible. The ban on such events in public institutions contradicts the fundamental right to freedom of expression and must be withdrawn.

“€ the stigmatization of Muslims as “hostile others“^[7] in politics and institutions must end.

“€ clearly characterizing the theft of land, expulsion of Palestinians, and repression of their human rights as ongoing violations of international law, as stated by the Geneva Conventions, by the Council of Europe, and the UN Human Rights Council must remain legally permissible.

“€ repressing such criticism of Israeli policies through propagandistic attempts to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism must be rejected.

“€ because of the great hope that major sectors of the severely oppressed Palestinian society place in the non-violent international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, the decision of the Vienna City Council, which denounces this movement as anti-Semitic and thus suppresses criticism of Israel, must be revoked.

Austria, June 2019

Signatories:

Antiimperialistische Koordination (AIK), Austria

BDS Austria

Frauen in Schwarz (Wien), Austria

Antifaschistische Aktion Wien, Austria

Initiative für den Aufbau einer Revolutionär Kommunistischen Partei - IA.RKP, Austria

Jüdische Stimme für einen gerechten Frieden in Nahost e.V., Germany

Steirische Friedensplattform, Austria

Netzwerk Muslimische Zivilgesellschaft - NMZ, Austria

Jewish Network for Palestine, UK

Biosocial Research Foundation, USA

Al-Quds Association, Spain

UK-Palestine Mental Health Network

BACBI - Belgian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel

BDS Schweiz-Suisse

Collectif Palestine 12 - Millau, France

AFPS 63, Association France Palestine Solidarité, France

BDS France, France

Gibanje za Pravice Palestincev, Slovenia

Gruppo Ibriq per la causa e la cultura Palestinese, Italy

Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network, International

Jews for Palestinian Right of Return; Labor for Palestine, USA

Jüdisch-Palästinensische Dialoggruppe München, Germany

Boycott from Within (BFW), Israeli citizens for BDS, Israel

US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI), United States

BDS Berlin, Germany

Institut für Palästinakunde e.V., Germany

University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt/M., Germany

Palästina Forum Nahost Frankfurt/M., Germany

Palästina/Nahost-Initiative Heidelberg, Germany

Antifaschistische Aktion Wien, Austria

Handala, Austria

Palästinensische Gemeinde Österreich, Austria
BDS Florenz, Italy
Gruppo Ibriq per la cultura e la causa Palestinese, Italy
Gibanje za pravice Palestincev, Slovenia
Salaam Ragazzi dell'Olivo Comitato di Trieste, Italy
Diensten en Onderzoek Centrum Palestina, Netherlands
IJAN, International Jewish Anti Zionist Network, Spain
Union Juive Française pour la Paix (UJFP), EJJP and ECCP, France
Iniciativa za spravodlivy mier na Blízkom východe, Slovakia
Palästinensische Gemeinde - MS, Germany
CPJPO, Comité pour une Paix Juste au Proche-Orient, Luxembourg
YANTE - Youth, Art and Levante, Austria
OKAZ, Austria
Arabischer Palästina-Club, Austria
Solidarität International (SI) e.V., Germany
Palästinakomitee Stuttgart, Germany
Duisburger Netzwerk gegen Rechts, Germany
Hände weg von Syrien, Austria
The Palestine Committee of Norway, Norway
AKUBLI - The Norwegian Committee for Academic and Cultural Boycott of State of Israel, Norway

Palestina Solidariteit vzw, Belgium
Verein SOMM, Austria
Initiative für politische Bildung, Austria

Individuals:

Prof. David Klein, California State University Northridge, USA
PhD Les Levidow, Campaign Against Criminalising Communities (CAMPACC), UK
Ronnie Kasrils, Retired Minister South African Government
Na'eem Jeenah, Executive Director, Afro-Middle East Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa
“Dr. Shahid Mathee, Lecturer at the Department of Religion Studies, University of Johannesburg, South Africa
Ofer Neiman, Israel
Mohammed Assaf, Germany
John King, USA
Raymond Deane, composer/author, Ireland
Cristina Soler Crespo, Spain
Cynthia Franklin, University of Hawaii, USA
Paul McDermott, Pasadena Foothills chapter of the ACLU, USA
Prof. Richard Sesford, University of Exeter, UK
Steven Friedman, University of Johannesburg, South Africa
Em. Prof. Herman De Ley, Ghent University, Belgium
Doris Ghannam, Germany
Prof. Rachel Giora, Tel Aviv University, Israel
Birgit Althaler, Switzerland
Ronnie Barkan, Israeli dissident, Palestine/Israel

Jan Ralske, Filmmaker, Germany
Nada Pretnar
Mary Mathai
Michal Sapir, Israel
Prof. James Dickins, University of Leeds, United Kingdom
Jean-Pierre Bouché, France
Hadas Leonov, Germany
Loretta Mussi, BDS Italia, Italy

Anna Farkas, Rete Romana di Solidariet  con il Popolo Palestinese, Italy
 Alfred Almeder, Personenkomitee "Frieden f r die Ukraine", Austria
 Leonhard schaefer, BDS Florenz, Italia
 Amir Ali, Germany
 Vera Macht, Germany
 David Klein, U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, USA
 Ursula Sagmeister, Frauen in Schwarz Wien, Austria
 Heinz Assenmacher, BDS Bonn, Germany
 Elfi Padovan, Germany
 Alex Link
 Henning Kleeblatt
 G nter Schenk, CJACP, Frankreich
 Wolfgang Behr, Germany
 Brigitte G rtner-Coulibaly, Germany
 Claus Stephan Schlangen, Germany
 Claudia Karas, Germany
 Kirsti Aarseth, AKULBI - THE NORWEGIAN COMMITTEE FOR ACADEMIC AND CULTURAL BOYCOTT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL, Norway
 Eva Sievers, Germany
 Dr. Shadi Abu Daher, Austria
 Andreas Wisuschil, Lawyer, Munich, Germany
 Brigitte Neubacher, UN-Bedienstete in Ruhe, Kabul-Vienna, Austria
 G nther Gerstenberg, Germany
 Anja Matar, Germany
 Jean-Guy Greilsamer, France
 Sonia Fayman, UJFP, IJAN, France

Jan Ralske, Filmmaker, Germany
 Nada Pretnar
 Mary Mathai
 Michal Sapir, Israel
 Prof. James Dickins, University of Leeds, United Kingdom
 Jean-Pierre Bouch , France
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 Loretta Mussi, BDS Italia, Italy
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 Alfred Almeder, Personenkomitee "Frieden f r die Ukraine", Austria
 Leonhard schaefer, BDS Florenz, Italia
 Amir Ali, Germany
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 Wolfgang Behr, Germany
 Brigitte G rtner-Coulibaly, Germany
 Claus Stephan Schlangen, Germany
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 Kirsti Aarseth, AKULBI - THE NORWEGIAN COMMITTEE FOR ACADEMIC AND CULTURAL BOYCOTT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL, Norway
 Eva Sievers, Germany
 Dr. Shadi Abu Daher, Austria

Andreas Wisuschil, Lawyer, Munich, Germany
Brigitte Neubacher, UN-Bedienstete in Ruhe, Kabul-Vienna, Austria
Günther Gerstenberg, Germany
Anja Matar, Germany
Jean-Guy Greilsamer, France
Sonia Fayman, UJFP, IJAN, France

Nicole Lefeuivre, France
Irène Steinert, Netherlands
Maria Obispo, Spain
Peter Unterweger Secretariat, Int'l Metalworkers Federation, retired, Austria
Arch. DI. Eric Egerer, Austria
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Dr. Nadia Aroui, YANTE - Youth, Art, and Levante Director, Austria
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Margrith Nagel, Switzerland
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André Rosevègue, UJFP Nouvelle Aquitaine, France
Georges Gumpel, Union Juive Française pour la Paix - UJFP, France
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Dr. Thomas Prader, Lawyer, Austria
Derya Günes, Austria
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Dr. Lisl Rizy, Austria
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Stephan Bartunek, Gruppe42, Austria
Irina Vana, Soziologin, Austria
Willi Langthaler, Aktivist und Autor, Austria
Hans Peter Radauer, Austria
Franz Pöschl, Germany

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Imad Garbaya, tunesischer Linksoppositioneller, Austria
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Renate Häberle, Palästina-Komitee Stuttgart, Germany
Monika Vykoukal, Austria
Nathaniel, United States
Verena Rajab, Palästina-Komitee Stuttgart und Partei Die Linke Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Germany
Attia Rajab, Palästina-Komitee Stuttgart, Germany
Karin Pilz, Aktivistin, Austria
Raimund Boris Lechthaler, Solidarwerkstatt Österreich, Austria
Vykoukal Karl

Johanna Weichselbaumer, Austria
Gordon Leed, Supporter of oppressed peoples around the world, Scotland
Gerhilde Merz, freie Übersetzerin, Austria
Jürgen Jung, Salam Shalom e. V., Germany
Federico Nier-Fischer, free lance journalist
Dr.Edda Egerer, Austria
Mary Pampalk, Frauen in Schwarz Wien, Aktivistin f. Menschenrechte, Austria
Ingrid Sporn
Paul Blank
Dr. Leo Gabriel, World Social Forum, Austria
Robert Reischer, Österreich
Stefan Grasgruber-Kerl, Austria
Angela Krause, München, Germany
Oskar Lechleitner, Austria
Mag. Renate Bursik, Austria

Dr. Leo Gabriel, World Social Forum, Austria
Robert Reischer, Österreich
Stefan Grasgruber-Kerl, Austria
Angela Krause, München, Germany
Oskar Lechleitner, Austria
Mag. Renate Bursik, Austria
Gholamhossein Mashhadi, Austria
Leopold Kroell, Psychotherapeut, Theologe, Austria
Dr. Lieselotte Türkmen-Barta, Austria
Maria Ziesler, Austria
Helmut Seidl, Austria
Elisabeth Lindner-Riegler, Austria
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Karl Helmreich, Mönch, Austria
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Raed Sabbah, Austria
Fritz Edlinger, Gesellschaft fuer Österreichisch-Arabische Beziehungen, Austria
Dr. Doris Höflmayer, Ärztin, Hamburg/Wien, Germany/Austria
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Sohre Abadi, Austria
Patricia Pawelka, Kangaroo Bumerang, Austria
Johan Steinberg, Kommunikationswissenschaftler, Netherlands

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<http://www.antiimperialista.org/en>

Write to the International Political Committee of the Anti-imperialist Camp:
amp@antiimperialista.org

Phone: +43-650-413 46 77

Postal adress:

Anti-imperialist Camp
Gusshausstraße 14/3
1040 Vienna
Austria

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UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
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