

Press Release

Expressing the Stance on the Headscarf Ban Proposal in Austria

(Translated)

On 22 November, 2018, representatives of Rosenkranz of the Austrian Freedom Party and Nehammer of the Austrian People's Party submitted independently an application to the Austrian National Assembly to change Article 495 (a) of the Schools Act. The request reads as follows: "To ensure the best possible progress and development for all pupils' personalities, they are prohibited from wearing clothing with an ideological or religious nature that cover the head, until they finish the school year in which they complete the age of ten. This would serve the social integration of children according to local customs and traditions, preserve the fundamental values guaranteed by the Constitution and achieve the fixed goals of education in the Constitution, as well as the equality between men and women." The request was referred to the Education Committee for further deliberations on this draft law.

The Khimar (headscarf) ban bill is an episode in a series of measures aimed at restricting Islamic life in Austria to the point of distortion. The present request was preceded by the prohibition of niqab (face cover) which was issued in 2017, as well as the agreement between the federal government and the governorates regarding the basic education procedures in kindergartens for the years 2018/2019 to 2021/2022. Article 13, paragraph 1, of this Agreement provides for "the prohibition of wearing clothing with an ideological or religious nature ... which would cover the head". This agreement was drafted in the form of a law passed unanimously by all parties in the National Assembly (Austrian Parliament) on 21 November 2018.

The wording of the current request to change the school law alone is sufficient to incite against Muslims. Thus, they make wearing clothes influenced by religion or belief "contrary to the best possible progress and development for pupils' personalities." It appears from the text of the explanation of the draft law the insistence on supporting the prevailing narrative in the Western circles that the Shari' dress of women is a symbol of ignorance and backwardness. It was stated in it: "The goal of education in Austrian educational facilities is to enable children to develop mental, spiritual and physical abilities to their fullest potential and to give them the ability to make judgments independently." In addition, they justify this blatant denial of the constitutional right to exercise "freedom of religion" by "protecting security and public order", and "protecting health and morality and protecting the rights of others". The representatives of the people portray the Khimar as a multifaceted threat, as if it has the potential to completely tear the Austrian Republic apart.

This inflammatory introduction to the draft law is followed by a statement of the political agenda and the real purpose behind it, where it is stated in the explanation of it: "This would serve the social integration of children according to local customs and traditions, preserve the fundamental values guaranteed by the Constitution and achieve the fixed goals of education in the Constitution, as well as the equality between men and women". This planned legal change confirms the intrinsic nature of the adopted integration policy, namely, the elimination of any other culture that may arise in society, and it exposes the new right-wing ideology behind it, which aims at creating a monolithic Austrian culture. This proposal reflects, in an intensive form, a three-dimensional populist harmony in which a repressive policy against Muslims has been practiced for nearly two decades: provocative narratives, demanding Muslims to cultural and civilizational adaptation, and then pour all of this into enforceable legislative forms. On the one hand, they applaud the Austrian constitution as creating the traditional framework for a multi-ethnic society, particularly regarding the safety of small ethnicities in the light of the history of the Austria's Habsburg empire, while the current policy of integration undermines this claim.

The State of Austria must address the current challenges and developments correctly rather than insisting on a reactionary view that limits the recognition of the right to preserve identity to small deeply rooted ethnicities that are no different from the dominant culture. Thus, confronting the growing number of Muslim nationals with a redux monolithic culture is a sign of forgetting the facts of history, and this will lead to a new crisis in the country that threatens to undermine society as a whole. The rise of nationalism at the end of the 19th century was the root cause of the downfall of the (Austro-Hungarian Empire) and subsequently the fall of the entire continent in the abyss.

Under all this, Hizb ut Tahrir in German-speaking countries warns the Austrian government that it is necessary to take lessons from history and to recall the fact that migration movements, demographic changes and the diversity of societies are historical constants that cannot be eliminated by repressive measures - neither now nor in the future. Therefore, we call for the end of all forms of this policy of assimilation and the establishment of a model of successful community policy based on the acceptance of different ways of living, and provide everyone with a reassuring community life free of conflict.

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in the German-Speaking Countries**