

A newly formed civil society coalition against anti-Muslim racism speaks out on the recently announced 'anti-terrorism package'.

A group of civil society actors calls out anti-Muslim racism and warns against undermining fundamental democratic values.

Last Friday, May 7, 2021, the government surprisingly presented the final draft of the 'anti-terror package'. At the time, media coverage righteously geared towards recent femicides in Austria and their systemic causes and corruption scandals in Austria. Thus, a critical examination of the 'anti-terror package' was largely absent. The government's 'anti-terror package' and its chosen course of action have prompted the new civil society coalition against anti-Muslim racism to begin its public relations work.

Only parts of the announced 'anti-terror package' are accessible so far (May 12, 2021), which hinders a critical analysis by civil society and represents a questionable approach to ensuring democratic participation. We support Amnesty International Austria's demand to reject the introduction of the new criminal offence "religiously motivated extremism". The Independent Commission of the Terrorist attack on the November 2 identified deficits within the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counterterrorism and not in the existing legislation. Nonetheless, the government plans to introduce a new criminal offence and expand security services surveillance powers. Meanwhile, plans to establish a democratic and independent body overseeing those institutions that failed to provide security are absent. While the security forces and the police are to receive more taxpayers' money amounting to 125 million euros, a comparatively small sum of 8 million euros has been announced preventative measures. In addition to the concrete work to prevent extremism, prevention should include a broad-based social and educational policy. The 'anti-terror package' itself and the accompanying political discourse have a divisive effect on society and contribute to further enshrining antimuslim racism.

The civil society coalition publishes a critical analysis of anti-Muslim racist tendencies in current political discourse and the implementation of counter-terrorism measures. Examples of such actions include the establishment of the Documentation Center Political Islam; the implementation of Operation Luxor; and the 'anti-terror law package'. The way these measures are developed, implemented and publicly discussed frames Muslims as the enemy and has chilling effects on the everyday lives of Muslims and those perceived to be Muslims.

The initiators include representatives of the [Dokustelle](#) - Islamfeindlichkeit und Antimuslimischer Rassismus (Documentation Center - Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism), [the IDB](#) - Initiative for a Discrimination-Free Education System, [#jugendstehtauf](#), the [Muslim Youth Austria \(MJÖ\)](#), [the Muslim Civil Society Network \(NMZ\)](#), the association [ZARA - Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit](#) (Civil Courage and Anti-Racism Work), as well as a number of individuals with academic or practical expertise on critical race theory. The coalition is supported by [Assisting Children Traumatized by Police \(ACT-P\)](#) and [Black Voices Volksbegehren](#), among others.

Statements by individual organizations:

Dokustelle Austria: *"With the establishment of the Documentation Center Political Islam, the 'Anti-Terror Package' and 'Operation Luxor' we observe how Muslims are put under general suspicion and criminalized. While otherwise, the presumption of innocence applies, these practices show that Muslim*s, until proven innocent, are considered guilty."*

IDB: *"From the reports to the IDB following the November 2020 terrorist attack, it became apparent that Muslim students were often sweepingly labelled as terrorists and decisively asked to disassociate themselves from militancy. It can be assumed that the 'anti-terror package', as it is still being planned and will be implemented, will lead to further criminalization of Muslim students and create a basis for the increase of discrimination."*

MJÖ: *"The Turquoise-Green government is creating with the criminal offence of "religiously motivated extremism" a new, tragic culmination of racist policies. The latest amendments to the law are deeply discriminatory and criminalize Muslim life in Austria. They are the seamless continuation of Islamophobic policies that we have been observing with concern since 2015."*

NMZ: *"That anti-Muslim racism is part of Austrian politics is shown yet again by the recently presented anti-terror package. In fact, this is a restriction of the fundamental rights of Muslim*s. In order to divert attention from the conditions of the BVT, the security of the country is supposed to be ensured with a discriminatory package of laws. Now all Muslim citizens are to pay for the incompetence of the authorities."*

ZARA: *"After the attack at the beginning of November, ZARA recorded an increase in reports of people directly affected by anti-Muslim racism. Of the 3,039 reports received by ZARA in 2020, anti-Muslim racism accounted for a quarter, twice as many reports as the year before. We, therefore, call for the implementation of the National Action Plan against Racism already announced in the government program, which must include measures against the devaluation, exclusion and homogenization of people perceived as Muslim."*

The coalition considers its commitment as an interdisciplinary contribution to a climate critical of racism and the strengthening of social, political and religious rights of Muslim*s and people read as such.

Read more about the coalition here: www.diekoalition.at

A detailed analysis of anti-Muslim racist tendencies in current political discourse can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3uc8XsM>

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