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“ 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

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