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Mentors: Nedžma Džananović and Reinhard Heinisch

**How the rise of right wing populism has changed Austria's and  
France's Islam politics**

Amer Čekić

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## **Topic**

In the early years of the twenty first century, the mainstream politics in the West has been seriously challenged by the phenomenon of populist uprising, which is rapidly gaining important political points and attracting large amount of voters in the West. In an integrated, interdependent world, nationalist demands on immigration, hostility towards neoliberalism and preserving of national traditions seem to be a winning formula for many Western political parties in the last decade. Populist leaders are accentuating the interests of the nation and the culture, but when speaking of the nation and the culture; they are underlining the “us,” “regular people,” “true people”. Using this kind of rhetoric, they are pledging to give the voice to the people that have been allegedly depreciated by the elites, endeavoring to spectacle how distant and corrupt these same elites are. It is crucial to understand that this phenomenon is far from anti-elitist only. It is much more complex and intertwined, which makes it hard for a researcher to make generalizations. Despite some universal characteristics, the substance of populism is community/country-specific. Populism in Austria is different from populism in France, or populism in France is different from populism in the United Kingdom or the United States. As already stated, it is not only anti-elitist. This modern populism appears in form of anti-globalization, anti-immigration, anti-multiculturalism and predominantly anti-Islamic (not anti-Islamization, which is the key point that I will explain later).

Although there cannot be generalization, these are the common grounds for populists all over the world, but especially in the West. The key in differentiation between these movements is the social and political milieu that is navigating which questions are crucial for the time being for the population and which questions are the most fertile ground for gathering electoral victories and votes. Populist leaders across the Western European countries are calculating and differing in the levels of anti-globalization, anti-immigration or anti-Islamic politics from one another.

## **Research question**

How has the rise of right wing populism changed Austria's and France's Islam politics?

## **Theory and argument**

After the institutionalization of Islam in Austrian (Austro-Hungarian at the time) territory by the Islam Act that was conducted in 1912, which has been the direct consequence of the Austrian Hungarian Empire's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, Islam, Muslims, and later the Islamic Religious Community, formed in 1979, were on equal footing with other religious denominations and practitioners. Such milieu remained intact until January 2012, when Sebastian Kurz, the then state secretary of the Ministry of Interior, alongside the populist propagators united in these endeavors, declared the aim of amending the Islam Act from 1912. Provisions in the law complied with general state norms and their pre-eminence against internal religious societies or doctrines, which according to Potz (2014), cannot be found in any other religious law. The Austrian Constitution is obliging the treatment of every religion in the same manner under the law. Minister of Cultural Affairs at the time, Josef Ostermayer, clearly neglecting the Constitution, asserted that the state law is above the religious law, but ironically, such amendments to the Islam Act were against the state law. Indeed, every advocate of this shift in the Islam politics of Austria was offending the state's Constitution. According to Hafez (2016), the discourse that this law has been built upon is the Islamophobic stereotype of the disloyal Muslim citizen, which has to be resocialized in order to keep up with the "real people". Hafez and Heinisch (2017) claim that the populist uprising and the political discourse that comes with it framed Islam and Muslims in Austria as something alien that has to be closely monitored.

In France, the questions of compatibility of Islam and Muslims with the Republic were even more vigorous, due to the larger and longer historical connections of France and Islam, and the larger number of Muslims that immigrated to France in the historical cycles. According to Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre (2018) from the 1990 to 2016, irrelevant of the left-right alignment, French governments have endeavored to control, organize and modernize Islam in France. As in Austria, the questions of compatibility of the Muslim population with the "real French people" have been raised, and interesting enough, as with the offense of the Austrian Constitution, the 1905 law which defined the concept of *laïcité*- French secularism law has been offended, since the policies of organizing, controlling and modernizing Islam have been conducted.

There is significant evidence that Islam was treated as an exception both in Austria and France when it comes to law complying, and follow the same pattern of dehumanization, securitization and politicization of Islam as a religion for the populists in their Machiavellistic power seeking endeavors.

I will try to argue that the populists in Austria and France are using the same recipe, emphasizing the anti-Islam politics and endeavoring to dehumanize Muslim population in Austria and France, portraying them as incompatible, barbaric and different from the notion that populists are using “us- the real people”. Politicization and securitization of Islam in these countries have brought relative electoral success to populists in Austria and France as I will show later, but the question remains- how has it changed Austria’s and France’s Islam politics?

In my opinion, it is because of the complexity of populist movements, which populist leaders in Austria and France used as leverage, making a symbiosis between migration, terrorism and Islam. Terrorism has paved the way for the populist uprising, whereas populist leaders are successfully using the weapon of fear and securitization of migration to manipulate the voters, with fear stoking mechanisms. With the securitization of migration, they are securitizing and politicizing Islam, because the majority of the population that is arriving and has arrived in the recent years in Austria and France are either Muslims or coming from states with the majority of Muslim population. Regardless of the fact that there is no organic link between terrorism and immigrants, terrorism has immense consequences on immigration and Islam politics- this is the milieu I was referring to in the beginning. Frequent terrorist attacks in the European Union countries that received large proportions of immigrants created an artificial link between immigration and terrorism, which has led to the generation of negative public opinion towards migrants, associating migrants with terrorism, reflecting on the demand for even more restrictive immigration policies, with populist leaders providing the supply.

The milieu of fear and insecurity, especially regarding the linkage of terrorism and immigrants leads to the perception of Islam as the “source of evil” which the populist leaders are skillfully exploiting and even more skillfully enkindling. For example, the unfortunate terrorist events in France created a breeding point for the electoral success of the right-winged party, that has a long standing history of xenophobic and racist legislative initiatives, such as the National Front (FN), which based their electoral campaigns on restrictive immigration policies, and the carrying into effect the legislations that would have negative influence on the

immigrants was just a matter of time. This was clear in the rhetoric of Marine Le Pen, the National Front (FN) party leader, where she claimed that she would “protect France with a vow to suspend immigration and defend the country against the threat of savage globalization” (Independent, 2018). She also announced the plans for a moratorium on immigration, with the goal to cut net migration to 10,000 people a year. Terrorism incidents and more than 200 people killed in France’s newer history have put the country’s security at the heart of her electoral campaign. I argue that Austria’s and France’s right-winged parties have used the increasing terrorist threats and the state of uncertainty and insecurity in the majority of their population, in order to securitize immigration and to classify immigration and attributing Islam as the religion of this immigration as the themes of national, cultural and internal security. By doing so, they have managed to collect large amount of votes and success in their electoral goals. These political parties in Austria and France have managed to construct the process of securitization by manipulating the images of migrants and combining them with the phenomenon of insecurity anxieties among the population in Austria and France. This included discriminatory approaches, xenophobic and racist sentiments, which was all part of their populist campaigns. It is puzzling in the Austrian case how securitization was so successfully conducted, since unlike France, Austria did not suffer any terrorist attacks.

Comparing the discourse of the right wing parties with the general discourse in these countries will determine whether there was a general policy shift towards Islam in these countries, which I will try to argue. There is also a question if this shift occurred in a response to demand-side factors from the population or whether this was limited to the right-winged parties. I argue that this is the mixture of both. Although the beginning of this shift was limited to the right-winged parties- with the securitization of immigration and Islam, the artificial link between Islam and terrorism was created, right-winged parties’ leaders have stoked fears for the public to have an advantage in the electoral arena- and that is the focal point for the populist agenda, that the large masses gradually started accepting. Although the shift has not occurred from the demand-side factors from the population, it evolved with the demand-side factors, and the electoral successes of parties such as the Freedom Party of Austria and the National Front in France in the last few years are facts that are favoring this assertion. Parties such as the National Front and the Freedom Party of Austria could not rely solely on their ideologies, which were very much labeled as unacceptable by the majority of the population in advanced democratic societies that Austrian and French society are, and people were more likely to distance themselves from those parties- speaking both from the mainstream politics and the voters sides. Realizing the electoral ineffectiveness of their

ideologies when relying on ideology solely, they have changed their parties' behavior, with voter seeking as their ultimate goal. Fear stoking, securitization and presenting the 'outside threat' that they have emphasized have become their route to success in the electoral arena, and considering the votes they attracted and the fact that everything mentioned above is imminent to their ideology, it was a win-win situation for the right wing. Later, under the realization of the benefits and the amount of votes that the right wing is attracting with such mechanisms, the mainstream started adopting their rhetoric and leaned to the right. Although with no ideological basis, the mainstream adopted xenophobic agendas exclusively in voter seeking endeavors. Once the masses started to respond to this fear-stoking by the right wing and later the right-leaned mainstream, thankful to the 'right milieu' of terrorist crisis inside the European Union that only got worse throughout the years, and is getting worse up to this day, the shift in Islam politics occurred. The shift in the Islam politics evolved with the demand side from the population, although initially it was limited to the right wing. Because of this evolution of the demand side from the population to more restrictive, xenophobic policies, the mainstream later responded in a right-wing manner, responding to those demands because of this voter seeking party behavior mechanisms. Consequences of this are that the mainstream parties started evolving themselves, which in the end meant adopting populist discourse and policies.

From 10 percent of the votes in 2002, the Freedom Party of Austria reached to 26 percent of the votes in 2017 Austrian legislative elections. The National Front followed similar ascendance, from almost an all-time low of 4.3 percent of the votes in 2007 to 13.2 percent of the votes in 2017 French legislative elections. I argue that the reason behind this increase in votes is because of the successful securitization of Islam and fear stoking mechanisms conducted in voter seeking endeavors, initially from the right wing, and later with their new partners from the mainstream. That is unambiguously presented in Austria, since the mainstream Conservatives cooperated with the far-right FPÖ and created a coalition government. On the other hand, it is far less clear in France, since the National Front remained insulated, and Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron were two complete opposites.

But what I think is interesting, and favors the assertion about the mainstream adopting the right wing rhetoric and agendas, is the post-election behavior, since Emmanuel Macron and the mainstream tackled immigration almost in the manner that Marine Le Pen would do, toughening up the stand on immigration, hoping to lure voters away from the National Front, and to get their votes, and after the immigration law that was passed in 2018, Macron presented even a tougher stance, cutting immigration with quotas and restricting access to

healthcare. Considering the evidence from the public polls, that even among those that have not voted for the National Front, a majority of the population agrees with their core policies, such as the need to defend traditional French values from ‘them’, ‘the others’, referring to Muslim ‘intruders’, increasing police powers, cutting immigration and believing that Muslims inhabiting France have been granted too many freedoms and rights, and that the change is necessary. This is what I implied with the demand side from the population, which I argue Emmanuel Macron is slowly adopting with the new law that is cutting immigration, and I would say that this is just the beginning of these responses. Considering the argued shift in Islam politics, the steady rise of the right wing populism has brought up constitutional violations, and abandoning of the institutional path dependencies in Austria and France, with both countries violating human rights with the burqa bans, and treating Islam other than other religious denominations.

The rise of the right wing in these countries has led to changing attitudes towards the Muslim population, with rising negative sentiments towards Islam by the public and the majority of the population in Austria and France. And probably the most worrying consequence of this rise of the right wing is the shift of the mainstream to the right, adopting the populist narrative. This was more clearer in Austria than in France, as I will show, but I argue that the mainstream in France, although not explicitly as in Austria with the new Islam Act, has turned to the right treating Islam differently from other religions, and tackling immigration in restrictive manner, because in the eyes of the public, which was initially directed by the right wing leaders, immigration equals Islam and Islam equals terrorism- and they had to respond to that. I would argue that the burqa ban in these two countries, the new Islam Act in Austria and the new restrictive immigration laws in France are favoring these assertions. The notion that Islam is the religion of immigration and terrorism, which is all interconnected, has become widely accepted both in Austria and France. In both of these countries, due to this populist uprising, with its steady evolution and dissemination effects, in the last decade, the governments in Austria and France have endeavored to create “Austrian and French Islam”, denying the compatibility of Islam in its current, authentic form with their countries, intervening inside the Islamic religious communities in a securitization manner, and treating Islam as a religion differently from other religious denominations, violating human rights with the newly imposed bans and clearly violating the states’ constitutions.



## **Hypotheses**

The more the right wing parties have securitized Islam and stoked fears in Austria and France, the more votes have they got.

The more votes the right wing parties in Austria and France have got, the more has the mainstream in these countries shifted to the right.

The more the mainstream in Austria and France has shifted to the right, the more has the Islam politics in these countries changed, which included constitutional violations and restrictive immigration policies targeting the Muslims.

## **Concept definition**

Securitization “implies the transfer of the issue from low to high politics in order to protect a fundamental piece of the state (territory, population and government)” (Umansky, 2016, p.3). According to the Copenhagen School, the securitization process takes place through a speech act, which frames the issue in security terms. In order for it to be successful, the speech act should imply a security language, and the speech must be embraced by the audience (Baele and Sterck, 2015).

Populism is an ideological construct consisting of ambivalent claims propagated by political actors to question the status quo in order to depose the elites and allow the “true or forgotten people” to take power. Populism is a “thin ideology in its own right, based on three core values: 1) an attempt to make the popular will heard and acted on; 2) the call to defend the interests of the plain, ordinary people; and 3) the desire to replace corrupt and distant elites” (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018, p.78).

## **Empirical investigation**

In this research, qualitative analysis will be conducted, comparative analysis of two case studies, Austria and France, since these two countries have both significant and institutionalized Muslim communities, which is the consequence of a large influx of Muslim immigrants throughout their histories. But when it comes to research design, Mill’s method of agreement will be used- the most different case design: “If two or more instances of the phenomenon under investigation have only one circumstance in common, the circumstance in which all the instances agree, is the cause (or effect) of the given phenomenon” (J.S. Mill). Austrian and France experiences with Islam are largely differing, since the institutionalization of Islam happened under different circumstances. The mentioned influx of the Muslim population into France is the consequence of the French colonial history and has initially turned the Muslim problem into an Arab problem, turning immigration into a race issue. On the other hand, the Austrian experience with Islam is the direct consequence of the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Austria Hungarian Empire, whose population was predominantly Muslim. After the collapse of the Austria Hungarian Empire, Austria has welcomed “guest workers”, low-paid blue-collar workforce from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey, which implicated large influx of the Muslim immigrants, creating large Islamic communities. Austria and France differ on a major point regarding terrorism, since the number of terrorist attacks and the number of casualties that occurred from these terrorist attacks in France is the highest in the European Union. On the other hand, in Austria, there

were no terrorist incidents nor related casualties, which is indeed puzzling for this research, since the shift in Islam politics is more drastic and clear in Austria than in France, as I am about to show. Also, one huge point of difference between Austria and France is that Austria is Catholic, and in France there has been a history of laïcité- secularism, which meant the absence of a state religion.

The instance in which these two different cases agree is the securitization of Islam, which in both cases has implicated abandoning of the institutional path dependencies, treating Islam different from other religious denominations and endeavored to create “Austrian and French Islam”. This has led to constitutional violations in both countries such as the burqa bans and made the mainstream turn to the right and adopt populist narratives, realizing how beneficial populism actually is in the electoral arena.

This research is going to incorporate a variety of sources, attempting to develop a comprehensive analysis of this phenomena, such as parliamentary debates, public speeches, party documents, polls and most importantly, laws that were imposed that are showing this shift regarding Islam politics in these countries, such as the already mentioned burqa bans, the new Islam Act in Austria and the new restrictive immigration laws in France.

### **Reshaped Western politics**

Although populism and the rise of the right wing seemed as precipitous, the politics in the West has been reshaped by lasting deep-rooted trends and societal alteration that is buttressing the revolt and rising levels of concern for large numbers of Western population. Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin (2018) are referring to the historic shifts as the “Four Ds”. “The first is the way in which the elitist nature of liberal democracy has promoted distrust of politicians and institutions and fuelled a sense among large numbers of citizens that they no longer have a voice in their national conversation. Liberal democracy always sought to minimize the participation of the masses” (Ibid, p.21). Mapped by surveys and other data, the levels of distrust are on the rise, caused by the distance that the leading politicians are creating from ordinary citizens. According to the Pew Research Center (2017), only 18% of Americans today say they can trust the government in Washington to do what is right “just about always” (3%) or “most of the time” (15%) (2017).

These levels of distrust are not only regarded to the mainstream parties, but also of institutions like the US Congress and the European Union. For example, the policies drift between the voters’ ideal points and the actual output of the European Union policy making is

one of the explanations of rising euroscepticism, which is also one of the today's populist tools, if we take a look at the Brexit campaign. "There was never a golden era when political systems represented everybody in society, and in recent years important steps have been taken to ensure that historically marginalized groups like women and ethnic minorities have a louder voice in legislatures" (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018, p.21). This has led to the perception of the key groups as insulated, underrepresented, voiceless in their own country, as some populists would purport it. "The second is how immigration and hyper ethnic change are cultivating strong fears about the possible destruction of the national group's historic identity and established ways of life" (Ibid, p.22).

There can we see the effect of this controversial political narrative that generated the perception that the immigrants in Austria and France, which come in large numbers from Muslim countries or are Muslims themselves are an enormous threat for the Christian identity and the way of life in the Austrian and French societies, and denoting Islam as a religion as something illiberal and barbaric, therefore there should be no room for those people in "our" societies. "The third is the way in which neoliberal globalized economics has stoked strong feelings of what psychologists call relative deprivation as a result of rising inequalities of income and wealth in the West and a loss of faith in a better future" (Ibid). This generated the common feeling that the immigrants are "stealing away" jobs of native citizens and their children, thus finding refuge in the xenophobic agendas of populist parties throughout the West.

The fourth "D" as Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin purport is de-alignment, the weakening bond between the traditional mainstream parties and the people, which makes political systems across the West fragmented and unpredictable. "Together, the Four Ds have carved out considerable room for national populists, or what we call the pool of potential-large numbers of people who feel that they no longer have a voice in politics, that rising immigration and rapid ethnic change threaten their national group, culture and ways of life, that the neoliberal economic system is leaving them behind relative to others in society, and who no longer identify with established politicians" (Ibid, p.23).

One of the most dangerous things when speaking about populism and the right-wing is their unstructured nature, which makes them unpredictable, impossible to generalize on the larger scales, that is as well the reason I am prone to the accentuation that there is no such thing as two or more same kinds of populism. It can be looked at more as a style than ideology. "It is the prerogative of the right to have a world view that is not as mechanistic, structured, and globalizing as that of the left. The right is based on certain number of attitudes. It is more

attuned to style than to ideology. The 'driving images' underpinning its outlook are fleeting lightning flashes that determine its pivotal ideas. There is nothing more alien to the right-wing mentality than the idea of sticking to a system" (Camus and Lebourg, 2015, p.77).

One of the key arguments of this thesis is that the narrative of the populist leaders in Austria and France is much dependable on Islam, and the way they politicize Islam in order to get votes and succeed in their endeavors of changing their countries' Islam politics. Here is the key concept of wording Islamization and Islam, which I will further elaborate, where populist leaders connote radical Islamism with Islam as a religion, especially in their public speeches during their campaigns, which is all part of a broader manipulation of the masses. When referring to Islamism they try to force the word Islam as much as possible, to put them in the same context, and vice versa. Marine Le Pen has certainly mastered this in her campaign, which I will show later.

Also, what makes this megatrend of populist, right wing uprising so hazardous is the hiding under the veil of democracy. Although it is unambiguous that the populist movements are the direct response to the dynamic spread of liberal democracies in the nineteenth century, the promotion of some liberal values that did not seem crucial, but are now among the most crucial values, especially if you ask the millennials, such as the defense of women's and LGBT rights.

It is puzzling that the national populists, especially in Austria in France, since populists for example in the Eastern Europe are not taking the same trajectory, in their direct revolt against liberal democracies, use some of the same mechanisms that make liberal democracies what they are today, in their promotion and exhortation of equality among sexes, encouraging same sex marriages and protection of LGBT rights in general. It is also interesting that the populists in Austria and France court Jewish votes, making an effort in drastically punishing anti-Semitism in these countries, while at the same time ferociously attacking another religion.

The reason for this ambivalence, defending women rights and LGBT rights, punishing and preventing anti-Semitism, which are all democratic, neoliberal values that have to be defended, while at the same time doing something that is completely the opposite from democratic, neoliberal values- attacking a certain religion and stigmatization of its practitioners, is because they do not want to abandon the democratic etiquette. With the portraying of Islam as incompatible for liberal democracies, attacking Islam does not come with the costs of being illiberal, and with this ambivalence of defending some liberal values

while attacking the other at the same time, they attract both the voters with the liberal and the xenophobic, radical background.

Therefore, under the veil of liberal values, they diminish them simultaneously, which makes many voters myopic, and unaware of the situation of rapid democratic decadence and deficit. We have a good example of this again with Marine Le Pen in France. “Marine Le Pen actively presented herself as a twice-divorced single mother who was successful in her own right as a lawyer. But she also argued that the creeping influence of ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ is ‘rolling back women’s rights’ and voiced her worry that the refugee crisis has swept through Europe since 2015 will trigger ‘social regression’ and could signal the ‘beginning of the end of women’s rights’, arguments that were inspired by Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands” (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018, p.72).

The biggest detriment for democracy in the West and what I would argue is more important than electoral victories per se, is the potential for a negative spillover. The biggest fortitude of this populist uprising is not the fact that they attract a large number of voters, but the effect that they have on Western mainstream parties. This negative spillover is affecting the Western mainstream parties in a way that they are steadily shifting towards the extreme right. They are aware that these populist victories all around the West are not a coincidence, and they are ready to tighten up their policies in a populist, right-wing manner in order to come closer to the populist voters since they see that these numbers of votes could have a crucial impact on the outcome of the elections.

“While their social-democratic rivals have been troubled by how to respond to national populism, many conservatives in Europe have been willing to adopt aspects of the national populist agenda. This is partly because they are closer ideologically than the center-left on key issues and so find it easier to build a bridge to voters who have concerns about law and order or immigration. Social democrats are yet to come up with an entirely new approach and put themselves in uncomfortable territory. Conservatives, in sharp contrast, can just turn up the volume, adopting varieties of national-populist-lite programs and rhetoric, though ones that mainly focus on immigration and ethnicity” (ibid). Evidence of this mainstream drift towards the right could be found in the study of Markus Wagner and Thomas Meyer (2017).

Wagner and Meyer have studied more than 500 manifestos from nearly seventy parties in seventeen Western democracies and found strong evidence that the mainstream parties have absorbed right winged agendas, putting liberal issues aside, and emphasizing issues such as immigration. “Facing national populists who in some cases have become more radical, the mainstream not only talked more about issues like immigration but moved further to the right” (Ibid, p.33).

The far right body of thought is standing in the diametrical opposition to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment movement, which endeavored to replace submission to above all authorities, and then religious belief and obedience to tradition with the emphasis on the independence of the individual, importance of rationalism and of course, freedom.

Far right thought revolves around four principal themes: the land, the people, life and myth. Each of these (and sometimes several at the same time) can be attributed to the forefathers or other members of this anti-Enlightenment bloodline” (Eltchaninoff, 2017, p.32). In France, the hostility towards immigrants represented an election-winning recipe for the National Front. Addressing immigration which brings the population that allegedly do not belong to the indigenous population, referring to them as the ‘others’, which are going to threaten ‘us’, ‘the real people’, the indigenous population and steal away the jobs for them. Constantly raising security concerns is a dangerous recipe, which does not always bring results, as we can see in the electoral outcomes of a party such as National Front in their early history. There are a lot of ups and downs; their electoral success is dependent on the milieu in, but especially out of France. That is the reason why this intermixture of real and imagined terrorist threats, mass immigration, and renationalization of the Western countries is potentially boosting and buttressing the electoral success of such leaders and such parties. “The success of the National Front from the 1980s was built on hostility towards immigrants. In a pseudo-scientific schema, Le Pen now elaborates his basic message (immigration = insecurity + unemployment) into a broader exposition. According to him, mass immigration follows on from the demographic revolution. One only had to identify the probable consequences in the decadent world we know to understand what would happen in due course. The strength of the National Front is that it concentrated its activity from the outset on issues that would become topical years later” (Ibid, p.37).

Perception of Muslims as a security threat to the society is manifested through the endeavors of the Ministries of the Interior in many Western European countries, but once again especially in Austria and France, where the attempts of institutionalizing and

nationalizing Islam discussed vigorously issues of Islam, emphasizing the words extremism and inclusion, as if the former is inherent to Islam, and the latter is impossible per se, so some changes have to be made. It is puzzling that Austria, since we are comparing Austria and France, has not suffered any terrorist attacks- unlike France, which suffered more casualties from terrorist attacks than any European Union member state, but still reached high levels of securitization, with their domestic populists using terrorist attacks in other Western countries as some sort of warning for the Austrian population, and as an excuse for stopping immigration and turning to the far-right policies.

The wisdom of the day in these endeavors was the establishment of the specific Austrian Islam and French Islam, which is compatible with the republics, since allegedly current Islam is incompatible with the values of these countries. “By influencing how Islam should look, national governments aim at creating the institutional conditions for the emergence of a French or German Islam, rather than just tolerating Islam in France or Germany” (Laurence, 2011, p.65). Jonathan Laurence shows that in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 9/11 European Countries have gradually taken ownerships of their Muslim populations because it eventually granted them unique influence over organizations and leadership. When speaking of European governments efforts to regulate religions, special attention has been given to Islam, and the state-mosque relations have been established and institutionalized. “This reflects two aims of these states: i) to free Muslims and disconnect them from an allegedly foreign policy agenda, especially from the influence of the embassies of their origin countries, and ii) to moderate those Muslim organizations that have a transitional link to Islamist movements. Many authors share the observation that states want a domesticized, “democratic European Islam” in the context of debates about Islam as constituting a threat to “security,” “integration,” and “European values,” while others also problematize the racial dimension that structures these attempt” (Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre, 2018, p.3). Fetzer and Soper (2005) in their comparative study on the accommodation of Islam in Germany, France and Britain draw on social movement theory. “Historically built church-state relations pre-structure the accommodation of Islam” (Ibid, p.56). This is confirming the path dependency approach that is imminent for the institutionalism theories, and many other authors agree that the Islam politics in many Western European countries has relied on the path dependency.

On the other hand, Loobuyck et al. (2013) criticized this approach of Fetzer and Soper (2005), where in their case analyses in Belgium, France, Germany and the United Kingdom argue that “several states have abandoned their traditional methods when dealing with the



institutionalization of Islam” (Loobuyck et al, 2013, p.122). They observed a trend that “transcends disparate regimes and relies mostly on other factors such as acknowledgement of Islam, security and integration policy” (Ibid).

What could favor these claims is the specific timing, and the milieu that I have already mentioned couple of times regarding the notion of Islam. As Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre (2018) remark, the debate and state policies targeting Muslims reached a new level after the 9/11 attacks. Increasing surveillance around everything that is somehow related to the religion of Islam has become a general trend in the Europe. “Increased surveillance and police activity around Muslim actors and organizations, banning of groups and deportation of radicals and greater limitation on the religious practice of Muslims, such as the minaret, headscarf, halal slaughter and male circumcision bans” perfectly describes this European trend (Cesari, 2012, p.17). The 9/11 incidents could be considered as a turning point for many European countries policies regarding Islamic religious activities. “In the post 9/11 era the laissez-faire approach of many European countries vis-à-vis Islam and Muslims has been replaced by policies that monitor Islamic religious activities and by recognizing representative bodies that claim to speak in the name of all Muslims” (Yukleyen, 2009, p.22).

### **How the rise of right wing populism has changed Austria's Islam politics?**

#### **Islam in Austria**

In 1908, Austria Hungarian Empire annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, following the decisions that were made by the great powers during the Berlin Congress in 1878. Three years after the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, country that was prior under the Ottoman Empire for over four hundred years and whose population largely adopted Islamic values (before Islam, majority of its population belonged to ‘Crkva Bosanska’, Bosnian church which was not recognized by the Vatican, but was Christian in nature), Austria Hungarian Empire declared Islam Act of 1912. This was a rational sequence of events, since this was the first country with majority of Muslim population under the Empire, so there was an urge for the institutionalization of Islam. In 1979, the Islamic Religious Community was established. It served as a corporate and general body, since it was established for representing the religious interests of all Muslims that are living in Austria. “Based on the recognition of Islam as a state religion in 1912, Muslims established a legally recognized public body in 1979, which is now one of 16 legally recognized churches and denominations” (Hafez, 2017, p.4).

Since the legal recognition of Islam during 1912, Austria has been characterized as a country with high levels of inclusion of the Muslim population and served as a positive example for many Western countries that have discriminated and made no effort in the inclusion of their Muslim population. Contrasting to the other Western European countries, there have not been any restrictions or parliamentary debates on national level, which were characterized with the purpose of limiting Muslims' freedom of religion (Gresch and Hadj-Abdou, 2009). Muslim rights were guaranteed as for one of 17 legally recognized churches and religious communities since 1912. We can consider Austria as liberal country regarding the nondiscrimination and inclusion of Muslims from 1912 to 2015. This historical, longstanding consensus that was not questioned for many decades on the integration of Islam and its inclusion in a constructed 'us' of the national identity within the ruling political elite (Hafez, 2014) was immediately challenged when the right-wing populist Freedom Party (FPÖ) split from the ruling center-right coalition of the Conservatives (ÖVP) and Jorg Haider founded his right-wing populist Bundnis Zukunft Österreich (Alliance for the Future of Austria, BZÖ) (Hodl, 2010). What this has produced is the initiation of the rally race to become the most Islamophobic group in Austria, not only radicalizing people on the far right but also producing a spillover effect on the parts of the political center and the left to adopt same Islamophobic discourse strategies whose protagonists are the above mentioned parties (Hafez, 2010). Great example of this dissemination and contagious effect of the far right, moving parties from other political spectrums closer to them is the mosque and minaret construction ban that was implemented in Carinthia and Vorarlberg by a party located in the center.

What is the most interesting is the discursive shift of Sebastian Kurz, the current conductor of headscarf ban and the modern populist prototype, who openly criticized the discrimination of Muslim population and attempts of banning the headscarf. At the beginning of 2011, Sebastian Kurz, who was the state secretary of the Ministry of Interior during that period, presented the "Dialogue Forum Islam" as a tool for improving "coexistence and increase the sense of belonging of Muslims" (Kleine Zeitung, 2012). "This seemingly inclusive mode of speech, which superficially opposed discrimination and called for the improvement of the lives of Muslims, was used to support this new institution. But soon it became clear that this initiative attempted to introduce a new Islam Politics that differed from the state's approach to other legally recognized religious communities and churches" (Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre, 2018, p.5). This initiation has been conducted by using an ambivalent discourse, which on the one hand is clearly directed against the racial

generalizations about Muslims, while on the other hand praises notorious right wing concepts such as counter-society, a concept that has been developed from that of a parallel society (Hafez, 2011).

### **Treating Islam differently from other religions in Austria**

Treating Islam differently from other religions, unambiguously transmitted a message of not belonging inside the Austrian society, and in order to make it compatible, there ought to be some amendments. This means that the creation of Austrian Islam which is the acceptable version of Islam was on the agenda. In the beginning of 2012, Sebastian Kurz made it explicit that he wants to amend the Islam Act of 1912 and draft a proposal for the Federal Government (Der Standard, 2012). Sebastian Kurz's endeavors were vigorously criticized because of the discriminatory nature and unconformity with the law by legal scholars. "After national elections in 2013, when the coalition of Social Democrats (SPÖ) and Conservatives (ÖVP) returned to power, the intention to amend the Islam law of 1912 became part of the new government's program of work" (Hafez, 2017, p.2). After a few months of intense debates, the Islam Act was accepted by the legislative organs of the Republic, on 25 February 2015 by the Austrian National Council (Nationalrat) and on 12 March by the Federal Council (Bundesrat). Austria is a bicameral parliamentary system, thus is constituted from these two chambers. The most authoritative of the two chambers is the National Council which is directly voted for, while the Federal Council is indirectly elected by the nine provincial assemblies (Altwanger and Zogernitz, 2006). They constitute the most important, core institutions of Austria's democracy, because parliaments are democratically constituted for a political deliberation, legislation, problem solving and decision making (Ilie, 2010: 1). Hafez (2015) points out that a number of articles in the law were legitimized inspired by Islamophobic narrative. Indeed if we take a look at the paragraph 2.2, which stresses that, the Islam Act comply with the general state norms as well as their pre-eminence against internal religious societies or doctrine, we clearly see details that cannot be found in any other law regarding religions (Pötz, 2015).

Not only this law is discriminatory per se, but it is also legally unacceptable, since according to the Austrian Constitution, every religion has to be treated the same way. This legislative exception and constitutional negligence regarding Islam cannot be seen differently from discriminatory and illegal, and it was well served as the portraying of Muslims as citizens that do not belong and are not welcome in the Austrian society. This discourse has been systematically and steadily built upon those Islamophobic stereotypes that are

characterizing the figure of the disloyal Muslim citizen, which is differing from the real Austrian people (Hafez, 2015). For Sebastian Kurz and his supporters, the German language was of focal importance. Translation of Qur'an in German language and the mosque sermons in German was among the essential amends for Sebastian Kurz, and he did not hesitate to purport it occasionally in his speeches. "The emphasis in the German language expresses two things: On the one hand, othering is used to draw a line between Muslims and the rest of the society, while a potential inclusion is made possible by the acceptance of the German language. On the other hand, with the intention of Germanization, the Muslim figure is subject to transparency, as is not the case with other churches and religious societies like the Greek or Bulgarian Orthodox church or the Arab speaking Coptic Church" (Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre 2018, p.6).

Although many religious groups among Muslims directly opposed the new Islam Act and pressured the Islamic Religious Community to act against it and to make an announcement for the public were they openly criticize the draft, the leaders of the Islamic Religious Community (IGGiÖ) accepted and agreed to the draft. What this meant, is that the Islamic Religious Community literally and ironically gained support from the same people that were initializing this Islamophobic and discriminatory draft, meaning that the smaller religious groups among Muslims that were opposing this Islam Act lost their independence putting them under the IGGiÖ's modus operandi. In other words, the Islam Act is offering a subordinate role to the good Muslim, who will enjoy the recognition on the part of the state, and undeniably have privileges over other Muslim subjects, who are now under the IGGiÖ's supervision and that are no longer standing directly only as associations under the state's sphere of influence. The new Islam Act means the abolishment of any organized group based on the law of association, hence forced to be part of the Islamic Community. The compulsory hierarchy imposition, to simplify, presents an end to any Muslim civil society. Having on mind that the Islamic Community is an institution affiliated with the state and that their teachers are paid by the Ministry of Education could be the rational explanation and the reasoning behind the decision for Islamic leaders in Austria to accept the discrimination of that religion. Austrian Muslim Youth (MJÖ) and the Muslim Civil Society Network (NMZ) vigorously opposed and criticized the leaders of the Islamic Community, the latter more than the former, which was clear after the final outcome of the saga with the Islamic Community letting the new draft pass. "The NMZ never called for the president (of the Islamic Community) to step down and continued to use the Islamic Council's structures towards bringing about a change" (Hafez, 2017, p.12).

After the draft of the new Islam Act was presented, Austrian government purported that they have reviewed it and negotiated with Muslims in a respectful dialogue (Ostermayer, 2014). On the other hand, the president of the Islamic Community stated that he was against certain articles and that he already has had protested (ÖRF, 2015). That was still unacceptable for the Austrian Muslim Youth and who blamed the Islamic Community for such outcome of the draft. This has led to a series of protests in the months that followed, with MJÖ as the loudest protestors. “The MJÖ argued that security issues and an Islamophobic atmosphere would lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy in creating new extremism” (Hafez, 2017, p.7).

We should again come back to the most disputable article of the draft. This assertion of the Austrian Muslim Youth about the origination of Islamophobic surroundings was closely related with the already mentioned section 2.2 of the Islam Act that states “Islamic Religious Societies enjoy the same legal protection as other legally recognized Religious Societies ... as long as these do not conflict with statutory provisions”. This basically means that Islam is considered as a religion whose fundamental values are contrasted and contradicting the Austrian national law. “This was criticized because no other law of religion contained such a clause and because this general rule was already in the national constitution. So why include it explicitly in the Islam Act alone but not in the law governing any Christian, Jewish, or Buddhist denomination?” (Ibid). The discriminatory nature of the new Islam Act reached another levels in March 2017, with the Anti-Face Covering Act, restricting women from wearing a face veil and punishing them with fines up to 150 euros if they do not comply with this new act. This headscarf ban is especially interesting since its main propagator used a completely different rhetoric in 2010, which favors the hypothesis that the populist uprising has changed Austria’s Islam politics.

In 2010, Sebastian Kurz was accusing headscarf ban initiators of being populist, and had a strong stance in opposing such ideas. Seven years later, headscarf ban became trademark of his agenda. “While in 2010, Sebastian Kurz had argued that he was against a headscarf ban, and condemned such a demand as populism, which does not serve the integration of Muslims, he now became the champion of this ban” (Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre, 2018, p.7).

What such changes of Islam politics mean, is that the creation of an Austrian Islam is necessary, because only such Islam with such amendments imposed by the populist leaders could be suitable for the community, contrary to the general Islam that is dangerous, unsuitable and foreign for the Austrian society. The point I would like to make is that the far

right-wing agendas and rhetoric is not the biggest problem here. Far right-wing parties have always been far right wing parties for a reason and they do not change in their core, although during some periods they may seem more vehement than in others.

What is the biggest problem here is how attractive have they become to the other political actors pulling the centrist parties to the right, and making them adopt populist discourses because it seems as a legitimate and remunerative stroke which can guarantee a significant amount of votes. The change in Austria's Islam politics has not occurred because FPÖ is more radical in their moves than before, although we might consider this as a valid argument because of their more frequent and more severe racist and discriminatory agencies, especially if we take a look at their newly upgraded Islamophobic discourse. But xenophobia, racism, chauvinism even fascism at the beginning have always had been part of their narrative, so the volume of their racism vary with the "right" circumstances as I have already stated such as the period after 9/11, then humanitarian catastrophe in the Middle East that generated the largest scale immigration in Europe, even larger than the immigration after and during the Balkan atrocities in the 1990's. So this kind of milieu created a breeding point for a party that has racism, xenophobia, chauvinism and hatred in their DNA to openly act in a more vigorous manner than before regarding their opposition to Islam.

### **The FPÖ effect on the mainstream**

From the very start of their political endeavors in 1956, the Freedom Party was intriguing for Nazi profiles and gained large sympathies from them, advocates of a political and cultural unification of Germany. "From the start, the FPÖ vehemently opposed the party-political hegemony of the Social Democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs; SPÖ) and the (Christian) conservative Austrian People's Party (Österreichische Volkspartei; ÖVP). Nonetheless, the FPÖ remained a rather marginal opposition party shut out from the levers of power at the federal and state levels. In terms of religion, the FPÖ was historically rather anti-clerical and particularly anti-Catholic. It clearly never saw itself as a defender of Christian or Catholic traditions" (Hafez and Heinisch, 2017, p.10).

From 1986, the Freedom Party started their great expansion, increasing their electoral share by 1999 for more than 20 percent's, and making their share of seats in parliament 10 times larger. "By the end of the 1990s, the Freedom Party had also greatly expanded its power at the regional and local levels, emerging as the second biggest party in five (including the capital of Vienna) of Austria's nine provinces and the dominant party in one province" (Ibid).

They have accomplished all of this largely because of their expansion into industrial centers and Catholic rural areas, where the politics of welfare chauvinism and anti-internationalism (Heinisch, 2002). The questions of drawing borders, identity-orientation, and xenophobic drive have attracted large numbers of the electorate, which can be assigned to the leadership of Jorg Haider. “Since Haider’s leadership starting in 1986, the FPÖ has advocated a nationalist discourse that creates a collective identity by drawing borders and mobilizing people” (Hafez, 2017, p.6). They slowly began to defend Catholic traditionalism and moved closer to conservative groups in the Catholic Church (Heinisch and Kristina, 2016). They have suddenly become, or at least described themselves as the defenders of the Christian “Occident” (Heinisch, 2002).

Although Islamophobia did not play a major role during the coalition of the FPÖ and ÖVP from 2000 to 2005 (Heinisch, 2003), a shift came with Haider’s split from the FPÖ and the creation of a new party, the BZÖ (Bundnis Zukunft Österreich). When the FPÖ went into opposition again in 2005, it became dominated by its far-right camp, while the ‘liberal camp’ had shrunk enormously (Luther, 2007). In 2006, first parliamentary elections have taken place in which Bundnis Zukunft Österreich now with Haider on the top and the new Freedom Party that was now led by Strache where at the opposite course, in direct competition. This was a competition where the two parties both wanted to position themselves as the most right-wing political parties in the country.

Strache wanted to continue the rightist legacy of the Freedom Party, while Haider wanted to make a point out of his xenophobic image with his new party, pretending to become the ruler of the right-wing discourse. “While the FPÖ was in government as the small coalition partner of the conservative ÖVP, the former had no reason to combine its anti-elitist discourse with Islamophobic ideology. This changed, however, as soon as the FPÖ was forced into opposition in 2005 and, in order to stave off collapse in the face of an existential political crisis, had to appeal to its radical political base” (Hafez and Heinisch, 2017, p.11). The BZÖ with a proven figure such as Haider regarding the right-wing rhetoric presented a hazardous option for the Freedom Party, threatening their number of seats in the parliament and attracting the same voters’ profiles. This has generated a great Islamophobic race, as I would call it, for the number one right-wing party in the country. This required even larger movement to the right, with Islamophobia as the perfect apparatus for doing so, for both parties. This need of becoming more racist, xenophobic, anti-immigration, anti-establishment in a relatively short period of time in order to compete and beat the other party that has and relies on similar features created this gargantuan Islamophobic uprising, that has never been recorded in the history of this country.

This thematic emphasis on Islamophobia in the election campaigns could be seen by paying attention at various slogans of regional, national and supranational elections, being unscrupulous and using blatantly racist speech (Hafez, 2010). So, we can say even the right made some changes making them even more right. But the change that is the most visible and the most severe in consequences is the shift of other political actors to the right, which are starting to adopt their Islamophobic manners and obsession with Islam. “This constant attention placed on Islam in election campaigns made a lasting impression on other parties, especially the ‘centrist’ Conservatives (ÖVP) and Social Democrats” (Hafez, 2017, p.6). “As a result, defending the Islamic community or an all-too-open advocacy of acceptance of Islam in Austria was not seen as a winning issue in the Austrian political marketplace by the Social Democrats. This meant that the center-left no longer decisively countered populist messages” (Hafez and Heinisch, 2017, p.13).

Not only have the centrist stopped opposing populist messages, they have also taken control of the issues that usually belongs to the far-right, becoming the main protagonist of the Islam Act in 2015. “As a co-governing party, they were able to implement several of their policy demands and thus had an advantage over the FPÖ in opposition, which could do little more than “talk” about issues. As such, the ÖVP became the primary driving force behind the creation and implementation of the Islam Act of 2015” (Ibid). The argument that is the most popular about the reconsideration of the Islam legal status is that the Islam of immigration should not enjoy the same rights as autochthonous Bosnian Muslims during the times of the Habsburg Monarchy (Hafez, 2009b; 122).

This is the apologetics of the legal shift in the case of Islam politics, that the law that is old and functioned more than 100 years is not applicable to the Muslim population that they consider as ‘immigrant population’ because they do not consider Islam as something that could possibly be characteristic to Austrian population (let’s come back to the rhetoric of ‘us’, the ‘real people’), so the ‘real people’ could not in any way be of Islamic religious denomination. But it is perfectly fine if the annexation of another country forced the ‘real people’ to have liberal Islam laws. “The Christian-democratic ÖVP relies on a narrow image of Austrian culture that simultaneously embraces Muslims in an ambivalent way. Some programs already reveal the impact of Islamophobic discourse strategies. Terms such as *Parallelgesellschaft* (‘parallel society’) or ‘hate preacher’ that originate from FPÖ discourses



on Islam had already found their way to the election manifesto by 2008. Sebastian Kurz, who was head of the Young Conservatives (JVP) at the time and would later become a central figure in creating the new 2015 Islam law, demanded that German be the basis of Austrian society and taken for granted in everyday life, that Islamic belief become transparent and more open, that the Austrian Islamic Council (IGGiÖ) stop considering mosques with minarets in every capital city, that imams speak German and understand their situation in Austria and that integration should be enhanced. All of these Islamophobic claims were openly stated by the FPÖ before (Hafez, 2009b).

In 2010, Laura Rudas, the executive secretary of the SPÖ, publicly declared that the headscarf was a “symbol of oppression”, and that although it could not be forbidden, it must be an important goal to drop the headscarf (Nowak, 2010). “This clearly shows the difficulty for Social Democrats in dealing with difference and including Islam in the public sphere against the backdrop of a conflict between secularity on one side and anti-racist positions on the other” (Hafez, 2017, p.7).

When we take a look at the mainstream parties’ attitudes towards Islam before this populist uprising, Muslim communities were in a politically secure situation, with high levels of tolerance from the Austrian political elites, and as well the public discourse being sympathetic towards Islam at the time. A study conducted at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Islam Act confirmed the inclusion and recognition of Islam in Austria (Hafez, 2014). Even after the rising tensions around Islam after 9/11, the Austrian model of good relations between the state and Islam served as an example to other Western democracies. To portray the drastic shift of the mainstream that occurred with this populist uprising, Andreas Khol, then president of the national parliament, during the first Austrian Imam Conference stated that “Austria knows no clash of civilizations... Our Muslim citizens are an important part of our society... Let’s continue with the good Austrian tradition of different cultures and religions living together in peace. Austria is a model for many states in this regard and we can be proud of that” (NR. 309). By 2008, the inclusion and tolerance was replaced with invoking terms such as “Parallelgesellschaft” (parallel society) on ÖVP election manifestos, provoking security and cultural concerns regarding the Muslim population in Austria. The parliamentary debates on the new Islam Act, which indeed is directed by the far right, showed that the far right discourse became widely accepted and implemented by the mainstream, and got into the rhetoric of political parties such as the Social Democrats that have longstanding history of anti-racist policies.

The fact that the FPÖ racist mantras have been repeated by other parties, speaks of this dissemination and contagious effect that the general atmosphere in Europe regarding Islam and immigration has inflamed and made attractive for the voters and adherent of discriminatory policies, which has basically led to the legalization and discursive normalization of Islamophobia and racist sentiments. This negative atmosphere regarding Islam was helped by the series of terrorist attacks in the European Union member states, although Austria did not suffer any terrorist attacks, the artificial link of immigration, terrorism and Islam and successful securitization and politicization of these issues led to the negative perception inside the country, that resulted with the demand-side from the population for more restrictive policies, which the far-right already advocated, but made the mainstream realize that they have to turn to the right. By the end of 2016, 56 of Austrians reported that their personal sense of security had worsened due to the refugee crisis (Hajek and Siegl, 2016). Also, in polls conducted between 2015 and 2017, critical citizens' judgment towards Islam and immigration was clear, with almost 61 percent of the respondents perceiving the living next door to the Muslim migrants as "bad" (Hajek and Siegl, 2017). Again, considering the perception that the security has worsened because of the immigration, and realizing that Islam is seen as the religion of the immigration, explains the well exploited securitization process carried out by the right, and the demand side from the population that the mainstream found inevitable to respond to, aligning to the right.

### **Contextualizing Islam and Islamism**

One of the crucial aspects and methods that I have mentioned in the beginning is the wording and the placement of the word Islam in context with Islamism, radicalism and Islamic Fundamentalism, as if the religion itself has a symbolic and imminent connections and are congruently portrayed with the horrors of radicalism and Islamic Fundamentalism, which are political movements that violently desecrate everything that has to do with the word Islam. As Hafez (2017) presents in his work, stressing the narrative of FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache, the Islam law should have been an "Anti-Islamism law" to counter "radical Islam" and "Islamic Fundamentalism" (NR 2015, 144). He regrets that although there are "threatening developments" in Islamism, the Islam law fails to provide an answer to these "radicalisms" (NR 144). "Dangerous radicalisms" and "dangerous Islamization (NR 145) are two phrases repeatedly used by Strache. While he stated that "not all Muslims are to be put under general suspicion ... when radical Islamism refers to Islam, then it has something to do with Islam (NR 145).

Compounds like these have the effect of transferring the meaning of one term (radical) to the other (Islam) and vice versa (Hafez, 2017). “This vagueness of meaning clouds the real relationship between the two terms and keeps the reader in a state of uncertainty as to whether the problem lies with Islam or with a political and radical interpretation of it” (Schiffer, 2007, p.11). This is perfectly exemplified with the statement of a MP from ÖVP that “500,000 Islamist are living in Austria” (NR 170). This is clearly referred to the whole Muslim population living in Austria, half a million of them, which are pretentiously being called and labeled as Islamist, knowing what consequences such act generate to the public, and how it affects the perception of the average voters. Another argument considering the alleged incompatibility of Islam with Austria is the assumption that Muslims are not capable of following the national law of a modern, democratic country such as Austria because they only follow the sharia law.

Also, I have already mentioned the emphasis regarding the German language, which has become central to the OVP as the main indicator of Austrian identity. (Hafez, 2010: 101), so that “one can hear what is taught” (NR 197). Although it might seem as a normal regulation, to speak a native language in a country where they are practicing their religion, this is done under populist auspices. There is no other explanation, making exceptions that are affecting one religion, while the other religions are good to go, not being forced to have their practices in a German language. The other, more important thing is that by making such assertions that German is needed in order to hear what is said, is immediately incriminating these religious masses, labeling them as suspicious, which in the end generates the feeling of suspicion towards Muslim by the ordinary citizens. “The idea of legitimate surveillance is realized with the help of different strategies. The strategy of nomination, identifying ‘material of the Islamic State’, allows surveillance of generally suspicious and mistrusted Muslims. With ‘we have to be attentive’ the speaker does not speak on his behalf, but on behalf of a group based on justified claims of truth (strategy of argumentation)” (Hafez, 2017, p.14). The big contradiction and hypocrisy is that the new Islam law “was presented as an initiative to give Islam a home in Austria, as if Islam law had not already existed for 103 years (Ibid).

If you ask Kurz, Islam law “is an opportunity for Islam to develop in Austria on its own, without dictation and pressure from foreign countries” (NR 162). Sebastian Kurz succeeded in his endeavors to portray the foreign funding as a potential way of having influence on social and political life in Austria, threatening the domestic institutions and public life. Creating a bigger issue than religion itself, with the securitization of Islam, supported by the terrorist threats and negative sentiments that linked immigration, terrorism

and Islam labeled as their religion in the whole European Union, was probably the crucial reason for the support of the new Islam law in the public debate. This is also one thing that is exceptional regarding Austrian stance towards Islam, since for the example, Greek orthodox church and the Mormon religious community are highly dependent on foreign funds, and would probably be unable to give the accomplish the quality of their programs that they would prefer, and there are no incentives nor they ever were to cut off their sources of financing for whatever reasons. Empirics show that Austrian Constitutional law that views all legally recognized churches and religious societies- KuR (gesetzlich anerkannte Kirchen und Religionsgesellschaften) as equal and is based on the principle of equality (Gleichheitssatz) and the principle of parity (Paritätsprinzip) was neglected and infringed with the new Islam act, but these infringements have been passed with impunity.

”The creation of special (*lex specialis*) general religion law specifically for Islamic religious societies is a shift in Austrian law” (Dautovic and Hafez, 2018, p.22). This also means that the tradition of political culture of inclusion and nondiscrimination in Austria is imperiled. “The Islam act of 2015 is the manifestation of a new form of politics for Islam introduced as a response to claims made by the far-right political camp and breaks with the traditions of a political culture of consensus, the incorporation of Islam based on constitutionally guaranteed rights, and the prohibition of discrimination” (ibid). With the reintroduction of Islam as a political and security question, the party realignment and competition came into play as it usually does regarding any kind of politicization, but especially speaking of something this sensitive as a religion is.

In addition to that, Islam is today connoted with terrorism, and widely accepted as such, so it probably cannot get any more politically inflammable. In order to explain the populist uprising, we must understand, as Bale (2003) has shown, especially referring to Austria that the center-right parties are regularly engaging in immigration related question because they are on the same page with the right-wing parties, initiating restrictive immigration policies. Odmalm (2011) is arguing that in order for a party to tackle immigration issues, they have to be able to handle and negotiate a number of opposing ideological positions successfully. For the center-right parties, this opposition is market liberalism against the value conservatism, while for the center-left parties; this opposition is the international solidarity against the welfare state (Ibid). Centrist parties are in such occasions facing a serious dilemma, whether to tackle the immigration issues in a populist manner, which would secure them from a potential backlash with the supporters of the radical right, which means

losing a significant amount of voters, or having a more liberal stance, which would lead to less controversies and in some way, conditionally speaking, save the reputation of the party.

Many authors state that having ambivalent stances, indefinite positioning in the issues are strategies that are futile, but Rovny (2012) argues the contrary. He has shown in his cross-sectional analyses of 132 political parties in 14 Western European party systems that the blurring of one's position can be a beneficial strategy if it is applied to the appropriate issue dimension, of course, with the ultimate goal of attracting a broader section of the electorate. Hafez and Heinisch (2017) argue that the center-right's engagement in the issue of Islam, where (Christian) Conservatives compete with the far right, came about after Islam had been successfully introduced as a divisive political issue. In the summarization of their argument, Hafez and Heinisch claim that Islam was "assigned by political actors to the consociationalist institutionalist framework established in Austrian postwar politics, as this was the standard approach for dealing with societal cleavages. This would be evidenced by the establishment of representative institutionalist bodies, the recognition of such bodies as formerly equal negotiating partners, the granting to these bodies of some veto capacity over new rules that are binding to the members of their community, and finally the mutual adoption of rules designed to resolve cleavage-related conflicts" (Ibid, p.5). Introducing Islam as a wedge issue, according to them, has allowed the political actors in Austria to use it successfully in party competition, with which I absolutely agree with.

### **Change in Muslim religious education and the creation of the "surveillance system"**

What also goes along with the changing discourse towards Islam has occurred regarding the Muslim religious education. Legally recognized religious denominations in Austria are enjoying religious education within the Austrian public-school system, and there was no difference with the Islamic religious education, since the Islamic Religious Community has established and introduced Islamic religious schooling in 1981-82 (Ibid). "In 2010, 430 teachers taught 57,000 students. This system is fully funded by the Austrian Ministry of Education and administrated by the Islamic Religious Community. Due to the fact that the Islamic Religious Community initially had no trained teachers, many were brought in from Turkey. In 1998, the Islamic Religious Community established its own institution of higher learning and founded the Muslim Teachers Training College (IRPA), which now educates students to become teachers with a bachelor's degree. According to the second president of the Islamic Religious Community, setting up these new institutions was a

straightforward affair as far as the government was concerned, which originally supported the entire process. Within only two weeks, the legal formalities were completed” (Ibid, p.17). Funding was provided for the Islamic Religious Community in order to have more supervisors for the religious schooling of the Muslim children. So there was no difference in the state’s behavior regarding the Islamic education within the public schooling, as there were no problems with the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox communities either.

But from 2008, the milieu regarding the “Islamic schools” as it is frequently used by the populist started slowly to change, consequential to the populist agenda and going along their endeavors of incrimination of everything regarding Islam. In 2008, the FPÖ requested that Islamic schools and religious classes have to be monitored (Hafez, 2009). Again, the same context was used, implying that the Islamic textbooks are in their content anti-Austrian, anti-democratic, anti-Christian. Other religious denominations were not targeted and were not under any kind of suspicion or surveillance. “According to the FPÖ, textbooks needed to be evaluated in relation to their potential anti-democratic content. The FPÖ’s policy claims were directed uniquely at Muslims and did not affect KuRs” (Hafez and Heinisch, 2017, p.18).

The public in Austria was triggered by the work of a sociologist that supported FPÖ claims, who was a teacher at the Muslim Teachers Training College, who investigated Muslim teachers in the public schools and their beliefs, being affirmative to the claims that Islam is non-democratic in its context. A comparative analysis of this investigation and later the public discussion regarding the Austrian Values Study, revealing prejudice in public discourse when it comes to Islam (Hafez 2015a; 2015b).

What contributed largely to the FPÖ rhetoric is the fact that the Austrian Values Study opened many questions and reflected upon many problematic spheres of the Austrian public, but this was almost neglected where everything that mattered and was actually labeled as an issue was Islam. This flamed the public, and the FPÖ claims were something that started to be considered as perfectly valid, and resulted in a growing political pressure. Ministry of Education had to tackle the issue publicly amidst the growing tensions. “After a high-profile meeting between the president of the Islamic Religious Community and the minister of education, they publicly announced a five-point program to tackle the issue. The centerpiece of this program was that no teacher of any religion or subject would be allowed to make any statements that could be constructed as being critical of democracy” (Hafez and Heinisch, 2017, p.18).

What this in practice meant, is that the Muslim religion teachers were obliged to sign new contracts of employment in which democratic values, human rights and the Austrian constitution are contractual. Also, great command of German was something that was also obligatory, and in the case of not providing this command of German language, the ministry was not positioned as hesitant when it comes to the dismissal, so the teachers clearly had the pressure from many sides.

The surveillance system that was created around everything that had any connections to Islam, with the loyalty to the Constitution under huge question mark when it comes to the Muslim teachers, German language proficiency and political correctness presented a contrast to other legally recognized religious denominations.

In Vienna, although the initial messages were that the Viennese education authority is not going to make any changes in their stance to Islam and make any distinctions from other denominations, and that no special regulations will be applied for the Muslims, new tests have been created tendentious to be applied only for the Muslim teachers. “These changes clearly marked a shift in Islam-related politics by establishing a special political regime and institutionalizing a different pattern of interaction between the state and Muslim organizations in comparison with other churches and religious denominations” (Ibid, p.19). When the Islamic Religious community made a declaration that all female students should wear headscarves during Muslim religious classes in Austrian public schools, large controversy was created in the 1980s and 1990s in the Austrian public sphere, where many responses were in a critical manner, accusing the Islamic Religious community of repression of Muslim women, and in some way same comments, although undeniably smaller in their quantity and effect about the incompatibility of such practices that are related to the Muslim community with the Austrian way of life. But in this case, the Minister for Education Erhard Busek from the ÖVP pointed out that no matter the differences, multiculturalism means the acceptance of others (Hafez, 2012).

What this means is that the Islamic Religious Community was left alone in their decisions and their autonomy was de facto confirmed with such actions from the authorities. But this affirmation and freedom that was granted to the Islamic Religious Community did not last as it should be and as it is the case with other religious denominations which are let alone in their freedom and decision making regarding their religious practices and one of the most important aspects for every of these denominations, and that is the religious education.

“After 2005, this institutional pattern vis-à-vis KuRs changed, and far-reaching regulations were imposed on the Muslim community, its representative body, and the education system. In April 2017, the ruling Viennese SPÖ even accepted a proposal to create a blanket ban of the headscarf for pupils in elementary schools” (Hafez and Heinisch, 2017, p.20).

From being one of the most praised and the most liberal societies and regimes in terms of the headscarf acceptance and regulations in Europe, Austria has slowly started to transform into this rigid, conservative, closed to differences society that is not befitting to their rich liberal history and essence. This is accomplished through the process of mainstreaming the anti-Islam rhetoric in the Austrian public spheres, Islam as a religion has been connected only to radical, fundamentalist, Islamist, even to say terrorist networks in the eyes of the public, and bearing in mind the electoral success of the main propagators of this process- the Freedom Party, average voter in Austria is highly likely to connect Islam to the all above mentioned epithets. Relationship with the Islamic institutions, above all the Islamic Religious Community has also been affected, depicted as a breeding point for the fundamentalists and extremists. Islamic Religious Community had been discredited and put in the same sentence with organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood (Hafez 2010a; 2010b, Vilimsky, 2016).

From media in Austria that were writing things such as “If Allah wills, we will soon also have a muezzin in Vienna, who calls the believers to prayer” in the times when the first mosque was constructed, and reflected the general public milieu and political discourse of Austrian elites, when the Islamic Religious Community was seen as a soft-power tool for Austrian foreign policy (Hafez, 2016), to the demonization of everything related with Islam was a complex process that was steadily carried out by the political groups and individuals that waited for their chance in their power seeking quest, and waited for the right timing to present their ideas and beliefs.

Negative connotation of Austrians with Islam is something that was unprecedented in the Austrian history after the World War II. “Although Austrians and even the Austrian elite may have lacked concrete personal contact with Islam, the religion and its community did not have negative connotations in public discourse. Even after a Palestinian commando raided OPEC’s headquarters in Vienna in 1975, and following another attack by Arab terrorists at Vienna International Airport in 1985, there were no noticeable attempts in Austria to frame these developments in sociocultural terms or to link national security to a particular ethnic or religious community in Austria” (Hafez and Heinisch, 2017, p.21).



Even after the 9/11 attacks, the situation has not changed, even when fearing Islam started to develop as a global trend, and Islam as a religion was globalized, but globalized in a negative connotation. General trend was that the Huntingtonian clash of civilizations and Islam against the West or the Rest against the West became in some sense prophetic, and large masses started to believe so, but the Austrian tradition of acceptance of different culture and peaceful non xenophobic model was not disrupted during that period of time and some years later.

It was in 2006 that the elite discourse was shifting towards anti-Muslim populist discourse. The reason behind that was that the FPÖ emphasized anti-Islam campaigns in order to compete with the BZÖ, with slogans such as “Vienna will not become Istanbul”; “No home for Islam”; “The sound of church bells instead of muezzin song” (Hafez, 2009; Heinisch and Hafez, 2017). The securitization of Islam steadily started to disseminate towards other parties, which was evidently in the later years with other parties accepting such discourse. “This shift in elite discourse is also indicated by the fact that in the public debate on the ban of mosques and minarets in two regional Austrian parliaments the Conservatives picked up all but the most extreme arguments of FPÖ politicians” (Hafez 2010a; 2010b). Centrist parties have noticed that the securitization and hate preacher were attracting large amount of voters, so they have begun to invoke FPÖ rhetoric and added a populist dimension to their core, which earlier, was not the case.

### **Drastic rhetoric shift**

The main protagonist of the 2015 Islam Act, Sebastian Kurz has become Conservative party leader, and opted for the increase of transparency amongst the Muslim population and their religious leaders, to start speaking German instead of Arabic and to circumscribe any possibility that the mosque could be built with minarets. The behavior of the Muslims and their faith was successfully presented as something that is not compatible with the Austrian constitution, and sharia law was starting to get attention, as antithetical to the Austrian constitution, as if the sharia law was ever conducted before in the history of the Austrian Muslims. FPÖ hate speech and slogan were transformed into the mainstream, and has become acceptable and trendy for the other parties to start invoking with the same thing. “Following a period of incendiary anti-Islamic rhetoric delivered by the Freedom Party, discourse also shifted among the centrist parties, especially the Conservatives, in which leading politicians have repeated many of the claims that had been made earlier by the FPÖ (Hafez and Heinisch,

2017, p.23). From the Austrian case, that confirms research that has been done by Bale, we can see that the center-right parties are using securitization and engaging in immigration as much as the right-winged parties do (Bale, 2003). By doing so they are taking the advantage of the situation in order to acquire cheap political points and electoral success.

As I have stated in the first hypothesis, the more you tackle immigration and Islam with the securitization mechanisms, the bigger will your electoral success be, even in the bastions of liberty that Austria and France stand for.

From the long lasting pluralism, acceptance of social and religious diversity and coexistence, Austrian political elite accepted the framing and inflammatory narrative led by the FPÖ of alienation of Islam. Austria's Islam politics, which was based and shaped for so many years on consociationalism, no longer is. It has drastically shifted and is now characterized by the competition of the far right and the center that has turned to the right on securitization of Islam and immigration, with the political left being unable to stand to this anti-Islam, xenophobic and blatantly racist rhetoric, knowing that in these times today, in the dramatic deterioration of democracy in the whole Western Europe, it certainly is not something that can get you votes or any kind of political success, so we will probably not hear from them much in the years and the elections that are about to come.

Combating anti-Islam rhetoric will in my opinion, in the next years is going to be even more unpopular than it is today, since the electoral successes of populist parties and leaders all around the globe are just creating this united, globalized populism that is encouraging slogans such as "No home for Islam", since indeed, those slogans are not bringing any risk anymore, for the matter for it to be worse, it is even guaranteeing electoral success for the parties across Europe that were before not even slightly relevant in the decision making processes. This rhetoric became their only way towards their power quest and acquiring of the major, important political positions on the political tops of the Western European countries, but not only in the Western Europe, we can just take a look at the United States. If we look towards the Central and Eastern Europe, we will see the hardcore versions of Hungarian and Polish populism. The times have drastically changed, and this clearly shows us the dangers of this populist uprising that has become globalized and unfortunate to say, a trend.

## **How the rise of right wing populism has changed France's Islam politics?**

### **Islam in France**

The aftermaths of immigration related to the questions of social and political memberships have provoked inflammatory, intense and politicized public debates in France, probably like nowhere else in the Western Europe. This could be easily explained because this immigration has made France the Western Europe's highest estimated Muslim background percentage of residents with almost 10 percent, predominantly from North Africa, because of their colonial history. Also, France is amongst the first Western European countries that have accepted the notion that immigrants and their descendants could become full members of the nation state; while for example; Germany has long resisted and strongly opposed such idea (Brubaker 1992; Noiriel 1996).

However, if France absolutely relied on its Republican model, where every citizen should be able to develop same orientations and values, participate in public debates and be active in public institutions, this large influx of Muslim population throughout time should have not posed a significant issue. The reality is much grimmer, because France is built on a tension between the Republican model, which sounds almost utopian, and the way of organization of religion-minded population that inhibits France. "This direct, sustained contact between the state and the individual underwrites the dual capacity to live together and to deliberate in rational fashion, because everyone lives and reasons starting from the same first principles. On this view, intermediate institutions such as voluntary associations, private schools, and religious practices are to be discouraged, lest they nourish divergent values and create social divisions" (Bowen, 2009, p.7). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, although propagated that the general will of the citizens form their ultimate identity, which should be expressed and reproduced through state and its institutions, also propagated that forming voluntary associations, which reflect diverse interests of the citizens is one of the crucial aspects of the society. In comparison with Austria, the contextual experience of France with Islam is different, since Islam in France is the aftermath of a longstanding colonial history, which generated large scales of immigration, and in Austria the experience with Islam was the aftermath of the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

After the era in which state escaped the religious realm in the first few years of the twentieth century and abolished the subsidizing of the religions, with the focus on private associations rather than religious associations, under huge resistance and pressure, things

quickly turned back to The Catholic Church's favor. Under this pressure, state introduced new laws, which were subsidizing religious buildings and religious schools. "These compromises never fully satisfied those who saw religious institutions as compromising Republican unity. Struggles for women's rights during the 1960s and 1970s were waged against a Church unwilling to allow freedom of control over women's bodies. State support to religious schools continued to excite passions on both sides well into the 1980s" (Ibid).

Analogous to the Austrian path dependency institutional path that I have showed, beginning much later than in Austria, in the 1980's, Muslims have tried to replicate the example of other religious associations, religious buildings, requesting the same treatment from the state as the state treated Catholic associations. But as I will show later on, this institutionalist path dependency was abolished, since Islam not only emerged as one more religious body that is potentially compromising the Republican unity, but it emerged on more severe and more threatening scales to the French society- it emerged as the global movement that is presenting a huge threat to the West. "The French specificity thus cuts both ways: a longer familiarity but a sharper set of obstacles in the way of Muslims seeking to create an Islamic way of life. Muslim religious innovators in France have been pushed harder and farther to find ways to simultaneously satisfy Islamic and Western ways of life than have their counterparts in Britain, Germany, Italy, or for that matter, the United States. Some of the French Muslim innovators today are looking for patches of convergence, if not explicit agreement: areas where at least some versions of Islamic norms overlap with at least some notions of French ones" (Ibid, p.10).

This large immigration of Muslim population is the consequence of imperialistic, colonial history of France. African territories with Muslim inhabitants were taught French language, French way of life and have gotten familiar with the French culture. After the colonial empire collapsed, nothing was left behind in these countries, which were absolutely impoverished. So it was a normal causality that this population would seek their quest for better lives for them and their families in a country whose language they speak, with whose population they are familiar with, and with whose culture they can cope with. At the very beginning, the question of compatibility has been raised. The mentioned overlaps of Islamic norms with the French norms have been seen on the matters of legal interpretation and the question of enforcing the Islamic marriage contracts in French civil courts. "Others are overlaps achieved through tacit accommodations and through nuanced ways of speaking- how

an Islamic biology teacher approaches evolution while wearing a headscarf, or how a municipal official finds a way to help build a mosque while proclaiming secularist principles” (Ibid, p.11).

The crucial questions were raised from the very start, and they are being asked up to this day, as I have shown in Austria, and now I am endeavoring to show it in France – it is being raised, overthink, and over politicized. These questions are the Muslim coexistence with the others (which already implies and notes the “drastic” difference of the Muslim population with the others), their assimilation and integration, and could it ever become some sort of privatized religious form such as Christianity in the West. The first influxes of large Muslim population to France were the Algerians.

By the 1870s, Algeria became a part of France, not as a colony. “During the first half of the twentieth century, the French government and private companies brought Algerian men to metropolitan France whenever unskilled labor was needed. During the Great War they were imported to replace French factory workers called up for active duty, and to serve in the military themselves. Labor migration continued during the interwar years, but it was the rebuilding of France after the Second World War that led to the most massive efforts to encourage labor immigration, much of it, again, from Algeria” (Ibid, p.16).

The reasons behind this massive immigration were first most because of the economic downfalls in Algeria during the Algerian War from 1954 to 1962, but political repression is something that is also worthwhile mentioning. This massive trend of Algerian immigration to France continued until 1974, the year France suspended labor immigration. But by this year, not only the Algerians have immigrated in large numbers. The Moroccans and Tunisians were joining them, especially after their countries became independent. “By 1974, more than 260,000 Moroccans and 140,000 Tunisians lived in France, with students and professionals adding to early streams of industrial workers” (Ibid, p.17).

This was also followed by the large immigration from West African countries, Mali, Senegal and Mauritania. The Turks that immigrated to France were the only ones that have no historical ties with France, but speaking in numbers, they were the smallest among the Arab and West African Muslim population that immigrated to France. “By the 1980s, the children of North African immigrants were seeking equality and respect as new members of the French political community, as had European immigrants before them. They called themselves the Beurs, a term that comes from the slang transformation of Arabs. No longer thinking of

themselves only as Algerians, Moroccans, or Tunisians, they have developed a sense of sharing a North African identity, in large part through their everyday interactions with others” (Ibid, p.21). But their main goal was to gain economic and social equality above all.

They started forming associations and became more active in the realm of French public life. “The growing sense that true Islam could provide a third possibility for constructing a subjective identity, beyond the undesirable North African and the unattainable French, also led some Muslims in the late 1980s to demand that they be allowed to practice their religion in a public way, by building mosques, carrying out collective rituals, and dressing in an Islamic way. These public actors were largely of North African origin or heritage and also included some French converts to Islam” (Ibid, p.22).

These groups started to actively initiate projects of constructing large mosques with minarets, which was of course, not warmly welcomed by the other French residents, and also triggered the Far Right to play the card of cultural difference that is so visible, that these activities of the Muslim residents are unacceptable. Large amount of people have seen the activities of building large mosques as incompatible with the French culture and their built landscape, and in the 1970s one mayor has bulldozed the buildings that were used by the Muslims for practicing their prayers.

### **Far right use of Laïcité**

“Rancor toward Islam runs yet higher because its arrival inflames old passions that have long simmered beneath the surface of Laïcité. Laïcité refers to the uneasy compromise that French people have made between the letter of the Law of Separation of State and Churches and its peculiar implementation within French culture. Quite paradoxically, when passed in 1905, the law’s primary intention was not to champion religious freedom per se in France. Rather it was to weaken Catholic influence by outing Catholicism on an equal footing with religious minorities within the public domain” (Cesari, 2002, p.1). That would in practice mean that religious beliefs are to be held in the private sphere.

“Ideally speaking, conformity meant and still means extirpating homage to religious values from all spheres: personal, familial, social, cultural, and political. Through the decades, major religious groups- Christian and Jewish- have made uneasy peace with laïcité by relegating religious expression to private domains. Muslim settlement in France has disrupted that peace. It has introduced new confusion over boundaries between public and private space and led to renewed controversy over religious freedom and political tolerance” (Ibid).

The “Islamic headscarf” affair in the 1989 is something that can reflect on the sayings of Yazbek, and is exemplifying this controversy. “It entangled one Muslim girl who wore her hijab to school in a legal crusade that sought to liberalize interpretations of laïcité by asserting her right to display a religious symbol in public. Since 1989, that crusade has repeatedly gained from the Council of State re-affirmation that the public display of a religious symbol- whatever it is- does not break the law. Each re-affirmation has highlighted the shallowness of French religious tolerance and inflamed animosity toward those Muslim newcomers who would edify a people who prides itself on Equality, Fraternity, and Liberty” (Ibid, p.2).

This was well used by the Far Right to further inflame and politicize the animosity towards the Muslim population, and momentum was certainly on their side, with the wider public left in fear and uncertainty regarding Islam. As the Muslim presence largely grew, state was left to respond to these new and rising demands. State could not rely on the former colonial administration of Muslims since the questions of citizenship and the role of the state in controlling Islam were never actually resolved. “The ambiguity in French colonial policy toward Islam and toward French Muslims has left its traces in most recent policies, making the French rules of the game difficult to pin down. Islamic institutions remain a matter of both domestic and foreign policy. When in the 1920s France built the Great Mosque of Paris, it did so as a state project, developed through private associations (to avoid violating the 1905 law on secularity) and with active participation from Morocco and Tunisia. Today, Algeria appoints its director, but the French state seeks funds for its maintenance from foreign states” (Bowen, 2009, p.26).

Integration questions, increased anxiety that surrounded Islam were generating the state endeavors to somehow manage Islam. The anxiety never stopped through decades. In 2002, the then Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy created the Islamic Council, to avoid foreign interference related to the Muslims in France, but had the opposite effect. “The Algerian, Moroccan and Turkish consulates saw the 2003, 2005, and 2008 council elections as opportunities to ratchet up control over their constituents by promoting slates associated with each of the home countries, and they did indeed mobilize these residents of France to vote for their slate” (Ibid).

For every initiative of building later mosques in France, the Far Right would immediately rise up and propagated to stop the projects and immediately have got the public space and media attention. Mosque initiatives were their only way to get that kind of attention, or even more, get their popularity from. In the French landscape of Islam, mosques are having a crucial say. It is contrasted with Austria, because of course, in Austria mosques are crucial as well for what they represent and mean, but there is not a single mosque in Austria- they are rather rented public spaces that are used as mosques, not special buildings as mosques should be according to the Islamic tradition. They are simply a way of shaping that Muslim presence and identity, and that is the main reason so many people are opposing it.

They are irritated by that sense of presence that these buildings are symbolizing. The narrative that the Muslim communalism and their way of living are not compatible to French Republicanism is very often used by the people who are either closely attired to the right, or tending to do so, as the mainstream started doing in the last period. Political rhetoric is such that headscarves are symbolizing in their eyes the oppression of women, and making perfect example of the Islamic barbarism, inadmissible for the French way of living. But that has not been the case with such magnitude before. “We have seen the roots of an alternative in the socially pragmatic styles of reasoning advocated by some in France. These forms of reasoning are not multicultural; rather, they extend and adapt established French legal and moral categories to include Muslims. For years, some French civil servants have seen it as a requirement of the legal and moral norm of equity that Muslims, like Christians and Jews, be able to worship in decent surroundings, be able to find food that meets their religious requirements, and be able to organize their everyday lives in ways that satisfy their conceptions of piety. Until Parliament passed the law of March 15, 2004, the State Council had consistently upheld the right of Muslim girls to wear headscarves, on the ground that those girls considered that form of dress to be part of their religious life in society” (Ibid, p.197).

Of course this was loudly and continuously opposed and contradicted by the Far Right. That still did not stop mayors all over France to be devoted in their help towards Islamic associations to build mosques. French laïcité guaranteed that the state will even-handedly manage religions, and religions obligations for the Muslims should have been compatible with the French law, treating Muslims not as a special group, but equally with other religious organizations. Treating Muslim’s trajectory as similar to those that were once followed by the



Catholics and the Jews could make the projects of Muslims and their leaders in France seem less like exotic, it can make it look less dangerous when observed from the outside. “If dominant ways of thinking about laïcité and about integration shift away from an ideal of value-monism and toward an ideal of shared respect for a common legal and political framework, then that discovery might be made” (Ibid, p.198).

### **Rejecting the institutional path dependency**

It seemed that following that institutionalist pathway would make life easier in France for the Muslims, not only for them, but for the French authorities as well, but the reality, just as the case was in Austria was much grimmer, as I would try to elaborate. The institutional pathway was abolished, and the Far Right took advantage of the momentum in their power seeking endeavors. “From 1990 to 2016, French governments of both the left and right wing created several official structures in order to organize, control, and modernize Islam in France. Although these different policies do not constitute together a monolithic and coherent organization of Islam, they produced an intertwined set of mechanisms that all aim to control and influence- from the top- the way Muslims practice their faith in France” (Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre, 2018, p.15). The complex dispositive at the first glance seemed as an answer to the “Consular Islam”, regarding the management of Islam to Algeria, Morocco and Turkey, for the large amount of migrant workers that have come to France (Galembert, 2001). The other part about modernizing Islam is heavily relying on the former colonial discourse, which promotes the domestication of the “good Arab” (Hajjat, 2014).

In France, the Minister responsible for faith affairs is obtaining the function of the Interior Minister. This clearly implies the relation based upon security and control, even though such mechanisms are contradicting the core principle of French secularism, the already mentioned concept of laïcité that was developed in the 1905 law (Jouanneau, 2009). On the paper, this supposed to mean that there is a strict separation between the State and any kind of religious organizations, so it indeed seems a bit ironic that a person that is among the heads of the state’s security is managing religious affairs. By the end of the 1980s and in the beginning of the 1990s, the massive influx of immigrants that were predominantly Muslims and from Muslim countries, French authorities endeavored to control and as promptly as possible modernize Islam. This period is characterized by the transformation of the “Arab immigration problem” into a “Muslim problem” (Hajjat, 2014). “Although this semantic shift implied new policies (such as the top down organization of Islam discussed here), these new measures relied on an old and ongoing French post-colonial dispositive towards North African

workers and families established in the national territory” (Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre, 2018, p.15). This has been conducted in segregating manners, which were later on materialized in law, where these immigrants were relegated to suburbs, subaltern jobs, no civic participation and large limitations on social rights. The French authorities have defined the immigrants from North Africa and Turkey as the “other”, those who are different from the French people and do not deserve the chance to enjoy the fully legitimate living in a country that is France (Hajjat, 2014).

As I have already mentioned, at the beginning of this demographic shift in France, state assisted the Arab-origin French visibility in the public sphere. But what this generated is the rise of the Far Right that answered to this in a racist manner. As the far right party “Front National” created their campaigns on segregation, racism, xenophobia and were successful with it, especially in 1984 European Elections, where they acquired 11 percent of the votes, then in 1986 Parliamentary elections where they got 10 percent of the votes and the 1988 Presidential elections with 14.4 percent of the votes (Chombeau, 2006).

The pressure on the immigrated population with enormous tensions surrounding them and their families was on the rise. In such milieu, the “Arab immigration problem” has shifted and has evolved into a “Muslim problem” by the end of 1980s. This was buttressed by the electoral success of Islamic Salvation Front’s victory in Algeria, and the consecutive civil war in 1990-1991. It has all culminated with the exclusion of three girls that were wearing headscarves in Creil secondary school in the north of France (El Karoui, 2016).

The ground was laid set for the change in France regarding its Islam policy. “In March 1990, the Interior Minister and socialist Pierre Joxe launched the Consulting Council on Islam of France (Conseil de Reflexion sur l’Islam de France- le CORIF)” (Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre, 2018, p.16). By doing this, Pierre Joxe became the first Minister that was targeting the organization of Islam in France since decolonization (Jouanneau, 2009). Interior Ministry of France was advised and being given propositions by the six French Muslim members of the Council. “Although this Council does not seem to have left a great impact on the structure of Islam in France, it constituted the first attempt to control and influence the Muslim faith in France by the state” (Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre, 2018, p.17).

What this meant is that a particular narrative about Islam was being built, which was marked by securitization, nationalization and modernization of Islam, which implies that Islam as such religion is not modern enough to be practiced in a modern country such as

France, and that changes are necessary to be conducted if the faith is going to be continuously practiced in a French Republican milieu. Pierre Joxe declared that his mission is to fight development of savage mosques with radical, intolerant and violent imams (Jouanneau, 2009). He endeavored to do so with the creation of specialized institutions in which the potential French imams are going to get their training and education.

Pierre Joxe was not the only public figure that was openly expressing this kind of narrative. Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who was also the Interior Minister from 1997 to 2000, has stated “I have analyzed carefully previous political efforts for integration Islam into the national community. I share the same goal: supporting the rise of a French Islam (Islam Française)” (Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre, 2018, p.17).

This again means that Islam itself is not compatible and modern enough for France, so the modernization of this religion is creating a French Islam that would only then be acceptable on the French territory. Can you see the similarity with Austria? It is exactly the same case. The creation of Austrian Islam that is modernized and the creation of French Islam that is modernized is sending the exact same message. Islam in its authentic forms is not compatible with the “modern” Austrian and French societies; it is thus incompatible and unacceptable by the “modern” majority of these states, so the reforms are necessary.

This narrative is so well structured and placed to the public that there is no wonder why the populist machinery is building their entire political campaigns regarding this issue. It is such a sensitive topic, and is being responded so chauvinistically, xenophobic and racist, unscrupulously but yet so nonchalantly that it gets so well accepted both by the mainstream public and private actors. After Jean-Pierre Chevènement, Nicolas Sarkozy was obtaining the function of the Interior Minister until 2005, and responded in a similar manner that “clandestine Islam is a threat, because radicalism comes from clandestine networks while civic participation leads to integration and then to a form of normalization” (Religioscope, 2003). Bernard Cazeneuve continued the well-established practice of Interior Ministers in France to openly incriminate and connect Islam to radicalism and terrorism. His main goal was to “produce a Republican Islam; every Muslim- alongside the whole French people- get engaged in the total defense of the Republic against terrorism, Salafism, because the Republic is their first affiliation” (Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre, 2018, p.17).

We can see from the case of Austria, and now from the case of France and knowing the electoral successes of such kind of rhetoric, how effective is putting the notion of Islam

and radicalization and terrorism in the same sentence. Although they are far from being careful when it comes to offending the Muslim population, they are never directly mentioning that all Muslims are radical or that all Muslims are terrorists. But what this does, by mentioning Islam in the same sentence with radicalization and terrorist threats so often, is implying to the public and could be easily misunderstood as such. Having so much media attention on the questions of Islam and radicalism, and the symbiotic mentioning of Islam and political Islam, where people cannot tell the difference from Islam and Islamism is creating such pathways for the electoral successes of racist political parties and leaders. As Daniel Kahneman once said: “A reliable way to make people believe in falsehoods is frequent repetition. Familiarity is not easily distinguished from the truth”. So is this narrative of Islam being radical Islamist not easily distinguished from the truth.

By adding the lack of education on Islam in these countries, you have a turbulent combination that is favoring leaders such as Sebastian Kurz and Marine Le Pen. France’s second attempt to organize Islam was initiated by the Gaullist Charles Pasqua. Pasqua’s policy was orientated towards the Algerian network, and the Great Mosque of Paris. Institute for the education and training of the religious scholars was created, and nomination of seven regional Grand Muftis was initiated. But this has not been successful due to the departure of Moroccan representatives.

The reason of their leaving was the hegemony of the Algerian network, and they have claimed that the say of Moroccans has been neglected and that the Moroccan Muslims have been marginalized inside the Muslim community where the Algerian Muslims have the final say. “The third important attempt came from the socialist Jean-Pierre Chevenement (1997-200) who organized discussion platforms (the *istichara*) that included a large scope of French Muslim trends” (Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre, 2018, p.17). The main mission was encouraging Muslim communities in France to organize in a state-written, state-defined framework. “As an example of the state’s intervention, the Interior Minister imposed upon French Islamic federations, non-affiliated mosques and prominent figures, the signature of a charter as a prerequisite for their participation in the consultation process. Through this charter, the state revealed its agenda on Islam: respect for the French law, the 1905 secular principles, French language, the fight against radicalism, equality between men and women, and respect of apostasy in Islam. In brief, Islam was perceived as a threat to French principles even before the beginning of the policymaking process” (Ibid).

This has set the ground for creation of the Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), which was supposed to present a milestone when it comes to the organization of the Muslim religion by the state. Nicolas Sarkozy was amongst the main protagonists of this process, and the Council of the Muslim faith was officially created on 28 May 2003. “The Council of the Muslim Faith aims to be the interlocutor of the French State on every issue relative to Islam and Muslim worship in France through a national council and regional councils. Council of the Islamic Faith presents a pyramidal structure in which French Muslims elect delegates (the number of delegates is determined by the size of the mosque), that then elect a national board, which elects a directional board and this latter elects a President (Ibid, p.18).

The reasons for creation of this council is the enormous pressure from the Interior Ministry in France, since the three main French Muslim federations were not united, nor were there any chances of that. As I have already mentioned, the National Federation of the Muslims of France that was guided by the Moroccans was accusing the Great Mosque of Paris, which is guided by the Algerians for marginalization, and we also had the third major Muslim actor in France that was the UOIF (Muslim Brotherhood). With the creation of the French Council of the Muslim Faith these three main actors allied, again, of course because of the Interior Ministry’s huge initiation. Sarkozy openly claimed that the distinctions and the division inside and between these three actors were neither the matter nor the business of the Republic, but on the other side, he was the one that has directly nominated Dalil Boubakeur, who was the president of the Grand Mosque of Paris- France’s most recognized and relevant Muslim community as the head of the French Council of the Muslim Faith.

Not only that the controversy was again raised that he will only represent the Algerian interests, but formally speaking, his score was rather low in the organization’s elections. He has also indicated that the imams have to use French language in sermons and every kind of religious courses. In Sarkozy’s opinion, without that, Islam cannot be integrated in the Republic, so that explains his rigorous interventions in the elections for the Council. “His discourses focus on the role of imams and the use of the French language in sermons and religious courses. Therefore, though a liberal appearance, Sarkozy clearly promoted state interventionism into Muslims’ affairs” (Ibid).

In the last decade, with the increase of terrorist attacks in France and the response to radicalization with the hard secular discourse (but it is important to mention that hard discourse on laïcité is only used when addressing Islam topics, since other religious denominations have never been addressed in the same context) has generated many laws that were directly targeting Muslim citizens. Current French president, Emmanuel Macron has defined the state's position towards Islam; it is defined by three major fights that he presented attending the CFCM's organized iftar (Ramadan dinner) on 21 June 2017. First major fight includes "a fight of thought and faith, especially towards young generations". Second fight is "against a certain practice of Islam that organizes segregation within the Republic". And the last one is emphasizing imams' training; "they should be trained in France, suitable with Republican values". "Security, identity, and imam training... These issues have been the privileged tools to shape the "good Muslim" for 30 years" (Ibid, p.20).

So, what do such messages imply? They simply imply that everything that has to relate with Islam is in some way barbaric, inappropriate and symbiotic to radicalization, incompatible with the liberal value of the Republic. Teaching imams' the Republican values means that if they lack such training, they would propagate anti-republican, anti-French, anti-Western values in Arabic, which is immediately offensive by some chauvinist playbook many political leaders and parties put forward as an argument.

That is the reason behind this kind of obsession with the German language in Austria and French language in France, that the political top is imposing and enforcing the religious gatherings and sermons to be conducted in these languages, abandoning their practices with Arabic. Perhaps that would not be a problem at all, if all other religious denominations with their communities were treated like that. Neither in Austria nor in France have the authorities claimed such requests with Orthodox or Jewish communities, for example. In the Russian orthodox cathedral in the center of Paris, just across the Eiffel Tower, mass is being organized in Russian. Basic information and posters near the church are being written in Cyrillic. There were never special requests that the mass should be conducted in French. I have already showed that in Austria the same method has been used.

Only the Muslim communities were targeted with newly imposed laws that were allegedly universal, but never actually affected any other community. As I have already argued in the Austrian case, for the populist leaders, nothing is more sensitive than the subject of immigration, especially in the falsely and aggressively formed populist narrative that with

immigration barbaric Islam is coming, and with Islam, as such, terrorism is inevitable. This case perfectly applies for the champions of populism in France, National Front and Marine Le Pen continuing the populist and xenophobic legacy of her father. By renouncing the anti-Semitism and conservative misogyny of her father, the National Front evolved and began to attract more people than ever. “The basso continuo of the party is the fight against immigration, a permanent and serious phenomenon. And it is not likely to get any better with terrorism and the migrant crisis. This preoccupation often goes hand in hand with xenophobic sentiments; attending a few FN meetings and hearing the remarks of those present is enough to confirm this” (Eltchaninoff, 2017, p.109). The revival and the evolution of the right wing in France which slowly started attracting the mainstream’s attention has led to the passing of the law that was prohibiting the wearing of the face-coverings in public places, and also applied to the tourists that were likely to visit France. The burqa ban has become constitutionally valid in 2010, and in a poll by Pew Research Center (2010), 80 percent of the French voters were agreeing with this new law.

### **The role of the National Front**

The populist discourse of the National Front in France is built on the basis where they need enemies. They yearn for the enemies so that they can present France and the true French people enslaved by the others, threatening their very existence. In this populist legacy, the National Front has been known on their anti-Semitic politics, accusing the Jewish minorities for being the bank masters controlling the financial markets and making detrimental decision for the ordinary, non-Jewish people. In their minds, the Jew’s aim was chasing the ordinary people away from their jobs and homes, subjugating the politicians by money and negating the French identity. But what Marine Le Pen has realized that in the social context of today’s world, anti-Semitism is no longer beneficial, but as always, the National Front needed a scapegoat. She abolished the anti-Semitic practice, and in the more “appropriate social context” of today, having Muslims as the scapegoats is perfectly fine and rewarding in political terms. “The FN’s new, much more clearly delineated target for hostility is Islam- a line imposed by Marine Le Pen, who sees nothing but profit in it. Her farther had an ambiguous relationship with Islam, fighting against immigration while anti- Arab xenophobia thrived during his party presidency, but his pre- independence support for Algerians in France forced him to exercise a degree of moderation” (Ibid, p.118).

Marine Le Pen has realized that in order to attract votes, she needs to change the party's behavior mechanisms. Fear stoking inside the French society was her ultimate recipe towards that goal. One of the crucial words when it comes to politicization of Islam to the modern populists is occupation. Portraying the state where the indigenous people are occupied is causing panic and when the large masses are in the state of panic- that is the perfect milieu for manipulating them and causing them to feel threatened by the things they would not otherwise have been- the argued fear stoking. To draw an analogy of the term occupation, Marine Le Pen's father, Jean-Marie Le Pen had claimed that "the German occupation had not been particularly inhumane" (Rivarol, 2005). Five years later, Marine Le Pen used the word occupation for describing Muslim street prayers "occupation without tanks or soldiers, but an occupation all the same" (The Independent, 2009) comparing Muslims in their religious rituals with the Nazi horrors. Her narrative was constantly shaped by the idea that the real French people are under the attack, describing headscarves, ways of worshipping, height of the minarets and the special food that is characteristic for the Muslims are the new weapons of today in these attacks against the French. "Secularization marked the end of the war between the Church and the Republic following reciprocal concessions, but this is not the concept that Marine Le Pen sets out to defend. For her, religious expressions in the public domain, above all if they are Islamic, are to be considered as a violation of secularization" (Eltchaninoff, 2017, p.121).

Her point is that street prayers are not in accordance with the 1905 law, but according to the law, religious expressions are to be banned only if it is posing a threat for the public order, which is not the case. That is the reason why Marine Le Pen is portraying the street prayers as a threat for the public order, but in reality, her proposals of the enforcement of the *laïcité* is actually meaning the transformation of the *laïcité*, where only one religious denomination ought to be targeted, as was the case in Austria with the new Islam Act. Also one of the similarities when it comes to the Austrian case is that question of financing has been very often brought and ought to be solved. Foreign investments and financing the work of the Islamic communities or when it comes to the potential mosque building is a sensitive topic for the French populists as well. The scenery is the same as in Austria: various religious denominations are openly and publicly financed by their countries or communities of origin, something that is perfectly reasonable and acceptable.



But when it comes to the funding of the Islamic communities, it is threatening the Austrian and French societies, it is anti-Austrian and anti-French, or to say anti-Western in general. The vision of secularism for Marine Le Pen, followed by many prominent populists is the unequal treatment of religions. She is openly saying that some must have more rights than the others; therefore her version of secularism has to protect Christianity, because Christianity is inherent in the French tradition, whilst Islam is something strange and atypical for the indigenous population. So the 1905 legislation that is adapted to favor one religion over the others is not a contradiction in any way, because the national motto that is “Liberty, equality, fraternity” is actually something that in her mind was derived from the Christian tradition. In Marine Le Pen’s endeavors to portray the National Front as the only defender of secularism, she managed to transform this fringe group party to one of the major forces in French politics. (The Independent, 2017). The theme of identity is used by Marine Le Pen in propping up anti-Islamic messages. “In reality, this term was introduced by the theorists of the Club de l’horloge, the New Right’s think tank that brought together senior civil servants. From their perspective, ethnic mixing and cosmopolitanism were viewed as serious risks to European civilization” (Eltschaninoff, 2017, p.125).

The notion of national identity was so explicitly related to the issue of immigration, in threatened and negative terms of course, so that the whole narrative of Islam as something incompatible and subversive to the Republic could be built. Also, as I was mentioning in the Austrian case, the wording play is also one of the populist mechanisms that are proven to be very successful. Marine Le Pen openly condemns islamization in France, what is of course perfectly normal and every public political figure should talk about. But, in the targeting of the regular Muslims, after such condemnations of islamization, she is directly linking the issue of islamization and giving attributes of it to the regular practices of ordinary Muslims, such as prohibition of pork, observing the holy month of Ramadan and wearing of the headscarf.

In this proven populist mechanism, populist leaders of Marine Le Pen’s caliber are putting radical and normal, everyday Islam in the same context and the same sentence. This is generating the widespread confusion in the public opinion, and creates a state where an average person could not distinguish politicized, radical Islam that has nothing to do with Islam as a religion and set of practices and beliefs from Islam as a religion, and the everyday worshipping practices of Muslims.

I have been talking about the abandoning of the institutional, path dependent framework when it comes to religious denominations in Austria and now in France. But what the populist in France have realized, is that they, if the state is already abandoning the institutionalist framework, why should they not follow the well written recipe and take advantage of state's indolence when it comes to issue solving of such sensitive, religious questions? Why not taking advantage of that, as I have stated: timing and the elections are crucial for the populists. Everything is about timing- mobilizing millions of voters based on the fear from the barbaric Muslim invasions and attacks are something that could have been done probably only since 9/11 and onwards with the immigration crisis and terrorist crisis. Add to that academic work from Huntington and the clash of civilizations that has gotten into people's mind, with the thesis on "the Rest versus the West" or "Islam versus the West" which has elevated Huntington to messianic, prophetic levels, where the civilizational differences have been emphasized and really generated wide range of thought that some things are not going well together.

### **Evolution of the populist agenda**

Everything in the last two decades slowly generated the false taught that Islam is not something that could go along in the West, or at least not in a positive context. This was clearly not the case before 2000, nor before and after the Great Wars. But there was always a scapegoat for agitators of populist policies. We have perfect examples of that in France. The scapegoats varied in the Republics. What were the Jews in the Third Republic, as I have mentioned in the work above, invasive alien culture as described by the French far right's political lineage, that are the Muslims in the fifth, described almost the same by the same political lineage, as barbaric, occupying incompatible culture with the French modern, advanced society. This Third Republic alleged Jewish invasion in the eyes of the far right chauvinists is perfectly described with the words of Charles Maurras, royalist theoretician of Action française nationalist movement: "From the first steps that I took in Paris, on the morning of 2 December 1885, I had been struck, moved, almost hurt by the material obstacle of these beautiful streets and grand boulevards adorned from ground floor to roof with a multitude of foreign-looking signs, bearing those names beginning with K, W, Z, which our print workers wittily call the Jewish letters. Were the French still at home in France?" (Ibid, p.127).

For the French populists, massive immigration is the cause for terrorism, and if you characterize immigration and use the term "Muslim immigration" and "Muslim invasion" in the public discourse, as the French populist very frequently tend to do, than this basically

sends the message that is almost becoming a stereotype in the West, that all Muslims are indeed terrorists, and that one is not excluding the other, which is falsely propagated. “Failing to recognize cultural and social differences amongst Muslims, many French people have been misled by the coincidence of local increases in Islamic visibility and the rise of political Islam within the Arab and Muslim world. In their confusion, they wrongly associate peaceful French Islam with the wider movement of Islamic fundamentalism. They overlook transformations in Islamic identity occurring among Muslims recently born and/or educated in France. These are the new Muslims who relate to Islam in remarkably modern terms- who are secularizing Islam, much the same way their Christian peers have secularized Christianity. For them, Islam constitutes a cultural or ethical frame of reference, fairly detached from ritualistic practice” (Cesari, 2002, p.2).

In my opinion, one of the greatest dangers of the far right today is that they are abandoning the notion of the far right and not classifying themselves as such. We have the perfect example of that in France. The National Front has abandoned the anti-Semitic programs and the Algerian and collaborationist obsessions of her father and the party goals of the past. Marine Le Pen has done everything in her power to restore the republican adjectives and references to its party, and that is the reason why dehumanizing Islam as something that is not republican is not facing any repercussions. We know now that anti-Semitism is a “virtue” for the far right, but in a today’s world, anti-Islam is not something that is carrying that kind of noise and negative notions, and not something that is being classified as politically incorrect and radical.

Many people today would not consider having anti-Islam sentiments as something radical- and that is the reason why it goes so well. The trouble of populism is that it has almost become as the widely accepted euphemism for the far right. Even Marine Le Pen is asserting and separated the far right organization that the National Front was in the past with the National Front of today. But indeed, nothing has changed. Marine Le Pen believes that she has successfully swapped a far-right organization and the notorious notions of its’ past policies for a populist party, and her call to revolt against the elites, giving the real people the much craved voice they deserve, the European bureaucracy and liberal capitalism suggests as much (Eltchaninoff, 2017).

Populism of today that we are seeing in the European Union, and the populism of today that I have presented with the cases of Austria and France is suggesting that it is so much more than anti-globalization, anti-elitism, anti-capitalism, anti-liberalism, anti-European bureaucracy and common monetary union and currency. It is anti-basic human rights and values, and that is borrowed and upgraded from the far right. That is why I would call it a euphemism of, and for the far right, because it is not enough calling the leaders and parties that propagate ideas that I have shown as populist.

It is far more from that, and it is leaning far to the right. They are the far right. The far right is leaning on the four main ideological motifs. These motifs are the soil, the people, life and the myth- and they are all interconnected. The first motif, the soil is very similar to the discourse of the nationalism of Maurice Barres that was criticizing the administrative conception of France. He asserted that “it seems that in their eyes France has ceased being made up of soil and men to become a theorem, a dialectical object destined to exercise intellectual perspicacity or give meaning to a discussion” (Le Pen, 2006). Marine Le Pen claims the abolition of the old National Front, but she shares the exact view that “France is an Idea, a collection of political principles, a State, a Nation, a Civilization, yes, she is all that, but she is also, above all- and this is too often forgotten- a land, regions, landscapes, a people of medium or small towns, of villages and fields, yes ... we will always have an ace up our sleeve, the incomparable soil of France!” (Askolovitch, 2015).

In the clear obsession with the soil that Marine Le Pen is sharing with the far right, the identity of the French people is something that is predetermined by geographical particularity, because “France is most of all incomparable in her geography, her climate, her mountains, her rivers and streams, her fields, her scattered woods and vast forests; she is incomparable in the infinity of her coasts, the extraordinary diversity of her landscapes and the extent of her soils ... incomparable, too, because she simply has the best arable lands, the most fertile soils in the world!” (Le Pen, 2006). In the narrative of Marine Le Pen, France’s precious and unique soil is facing enemies that France must find a way to defend itself from it.

These enemies are the sent from the European Union bureaucratic apparatus and the cosmopolitan finance of today. But bigger enemies are the people unworthy of inhabiting this precious soil- the Muslims and Islam, which Marine Le Pen likes to identify under the term Islamism. “The bond with one’s land, in rural idealization of France, provides a defense against liberalism, which uproots, and Islamism, which deculturates” (Eltchaninoff, 2017, p.162).

The second motif of the far right is the people. And of course, immigration is something that is being the basic problem, because “the identity of a people, its cohesion, the capacity to get along with one another and to feel united, are really, indisputably, fundamental elements in the life of a nation” (Le Pen, 2006). Immigrants are not under her classification of the French people, since “those who do not recognize themselves in those enchanted landscapes, in the spiritual strength of Catholicism, in these traditions or in the examples of France’s heroes who have inspired the dreams of entire generations of French youth, are not, in fact, heirs to a great people.

Immigrants are automatically excluded, and must then demonstrate that they can join the people” (Eltchaninoff, 2017, p.163). For Muslim immigrants, settlement in France has, since the first waves of immigration essentially meant exilic isolation from natural modes of transmission that has resulted in a cultural gap between parents and children, especially for North African immigrants. (Malewska-Peyre, 1982). So it is indeed a normal set of circumstances if these people who came are not able to demonstrate the willingness to join what in the eyes of the populist are the real people, because it is a radical transformation of cultural, identity related and not to mention religious aspects for those people. But this should not empower the populist claims that they are not belonging to the real society. The third motif of the far-right tradition is the theme of life.

Eltchanioff (2017) describes the theme of life for Marine Le Pen perfectly: “Marine Le Pen does not view historical and political life through the category of concepts and expressions that are open to the rational, but rather through attitudes and reactions based on notions of life and the physical realm. To favor the corporeal or tangible over the abstract is the very basis of the far right’s tradition, and this systematic position underpins Le Pen’s entire discourse. This is even more striking when one attends a meeting or rally, where her physical presence and passionate rhetoric are intended to weld the audience’s collective body and give those present a sense of invincibility. With fervor and fury, words become physical, allowing the audience to grasp the truth of what, according to Marine Le Pen, is happening in France”.

The final of the four pillars and motifs of the far right tradition and ideology is the role of the myth. As every far right traditionalist and ideologist tends to do, Marine Le Pen is generating this mythical vision of France’s history, reminiscing the golden age of the eternal France, which has been decadent for so many years, and now is ruined. The main culprits are of course the elites that have been responsible for these financial and demographic

transformations. But the way the culprits are presented is so interconnected that you get three main culprits in once, and alleged solutions for these culprits.

So the elites- the culprit number one, which are the arch enemies for the populist and anti-elitism as the core element of populism, because of their corruption, are the ones who have ended the French golden age making them dependent to culprit number two-trans nationalized bureaucratic monetary ascendancy of the German dictated European Union. And last, by the far right well written recipe, the third culprit, the barbaric, different, hostile, terrorist Muslims who are changing the demographic and occupying the republican, Christian and the streets of the real people where they do not belong with and are not worthwhile having and sharing the possibilities of the God-given French exceptionalism, which has to remain purely French. The rationale behind this presentation of this myth is the portray of the country urging for the savior- in this case, heroine, that Marine Le Pen is presenting herself to be. So it is obvious that Le Pen's narrative and attempts of de-demonization of the notorious far right status of the party is accomplished with the acceptance of the populist status, but in reality, they have everything in common with the old National Front.

Marine Le Pen has not indeed abandoned the traditional motifs and pillars of the far right, she has just upgraded it and covered the tracks of anti-Semitism, with the party's transformation with the alleged reject of the right/left divide, loud claims to republicanism and the Muslims as the new scapegoats. In order for her and her party's propagators to go unpunished or ashamed in any kind of way for the open racism and xenophobia, and to cover themselves with the veil that is sending a message that they are not the far right from the past, Marine Le Pen is defending secularism, although I have already showed that she is defending secularism only if it means prohibiting any kind of public expression of Islam, but in her case of the way that she is targeting Islam, she is prohibiting it even in private spheres- it is for her and her fans unacceptable in any way on the French soil.

Under this non-far right veil also goes the defensive stance towards feminism and the attention that she has paid in her public debates and speeches about feminist policies and how progressive should France be in the future regarding the status of women. We can see how she attracts this large amount of voters, since she is tackling all of these issues at once, interconnected, manipulating her voters, developing a seductive view of the world that is being profoundly felt by many people, she is providing answers for the understanding of the reality for their voters, who are feeling distant from the incumbent policies, and being hypnotized by her radical solutions that are not feasible in any kind of potential scenario. The

mythical totalitarianism has put the burden on France, and she is the heroine that is going to save the decadent country and respond to the real requests of the real people, while dislodging anyone that is not suitable under the classification of the real people.

The Muslim population is not belonging to this notion of the real people, and as in Austria, in France many of the measures that are propagated in order to regulate Islam-state relations “reveal an approach that one side attempts to give Islam a place in their society, while on the other side clearly refers to a stereotypical imagination of the Muslim, where the notion of Europe stands for enlightenment, modernity and progressiveness, while Islam and Muslims represent the opposite” (Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre, 2018, p.20). In this double-sided approach Marine Le Pen is avoiding being accused racist, somewhat mentioning the inclusion of the Muslims, but under rigid circumstances of adopting republican values and almost abolishing Islam as the religion it is. On the other side she is playing these mind games putting Islam, Muslims and Islamism under the same context, as I have already mentioned, sending an obvious message.

So in reality, the National Front never abandoned the racist sentiments. “The new Front National’s discourse is ultra-securitized and unassailable. More than anything, Marine Le Pen wishes to avoid falling prey to a word too far- like the Holocaust detail that left a mark in many minds and prevented her father from winning the votes of a majority of citizens. While supporting a program that is overly opposed to immigration and stigmatizing Islam, she is careful never to go off message. Euphemisms, implicit epithets and code words allow her to avoid being charged with open xenophobia ... globalized elites, in other words those who have symbolically left the national soil in order to pledge allegiance to the liberal economy, and above all the world of finance. The anti-Semitism born at the end of nineteenth century designated these masters as Jews. Marine Le Pen has abandoned any such accusations, but she has retained the full conceptual apparatus linked to this brand of economic and social anti-Semitism” (Eltchaninoff, 2017, p.167).

For a party that the National Front stands for, and the leader that Marine Le Pen stands for, crafted from the France’s finest populist leader- her father, but being more prudent, careful and patient, milieu is everything. Everything that is needed for such parties is the alleged outside enemy, and if that alleged outside enemy has been continuously inhabiting the country, it is even better for the populists- the outside enemies have become the inside enemies, so it is the time to get a use for it.

Muslims and Islam have become the new scapegoats of the France's right wing forces, and in the renationalized, strident and securitized ambient, it is not a surprise that Marine Le Pen has got 33.9 percentages of the votes in the latest French elections. Especially considering that France has faced more terrorist attacks than any other country in the European Union, inflamed by the populist discourse that all Muslims are potential terrorists, more than ten million votes is not a surprise.

### **Macron adopting Le Pen's policies**

The success of the far right in France has not stopped with the elections, nor did the mainstream come up fully victorious after the elections, because in the last 9 months the French people are gathering in their "yellow vests" anti-establishment protests, with more than 12 civilian casualties. It will be extremely interesting to see how are the next elections going to play out, but in my opinion, this is just the start for the populist forces in France. Main reason that is provoking me to assume this is the general renationalization and democratic decadence in the European Union. The second reason, which is even more important, is the role of the media, again inflamed by the populist influence in shaping the discourse of tightly connecting Islam and Islamism, especially when reporting on terrorism and terrorist threats. Also, there is the widely believed stereotype that Islam is an inherently violent religion.

Although French President Emmanuel Macron defeated Marine Le Pen and pursued neoliberal policies in his campaign, vehemently opposing racist and chauvinist claims from the National Front, which were campaigned on immigration concerns targeting and dehumanizing the Muslim population. After the elections, Macron argued that France needs to toughen up on immigration. He was eager in these endeavors and his government pledged to take back control of immigration policy, in a restrictive manner. This is clearly influenced by the far right and the large amount of voters that they attracted with their restrictive campaigns. As in the Austrian case, this shows the dissemination effect of the far right, making the centrist governments lean to the right in order to respond to the demand side from the population, and adopt policies characteristic to the far right. ISPOS/Sopra Steria poll on division in French society showed that 63 percent of respondents felt there were "too many foreigners in France", sixty-six percent saying that they felt that immigrants did not try hard enough to integrate. (TheLocal.fr, 2019). The new legislation passed in 2018 included doubling the time asylum-seekers can be held in detention, hasten the deportation of asylum-seekers and jail term for illegally crossing the borders within the European Union, which is a response to the negative



attitudes of the public regarding immigration, framed by the National Front, but later demanded by the masses, as I tried to show in the Austrian case as well, with similar mechanisms. A year later, president Macron's government announced new, restrictive measures that will make the French government take back control of its immigration policy. "The new plan includes quotas or targets for legal economic migrants, as well as a measure to deprive newly arrived asylum seekers of access to basic medical care for three months" (Ft.com, 2019). The restriction on the access to medical care for the migrants is something that is done in order to lure voters away from the far right, and I would argue that this is just the beginning of Macron's propositions that would be conducted in Le Pen like, far right manner. I argue that this will be done under the realization that the restrictive measures on immigration are beneficial in the electoral arena and the widely accepted notion by the French public that Islam is the religion of immigration, and something that should be excluded in France.

The More in Common country report conducted in 2017 gave us more insight about the negative attitudes towards immigrants that forced Emmanuel Macron to this policy shift, and gave us insight into "the appeal of populist sentiments relating to French identity, globalization, immigration, refugees, and Islam" (More in Common, 2018). According to their report, "the risk of terrorism is an issue of high public concern, with 53 percent of people citing it as one of the three most important issues in France. Also, the public has a clearly strong negative perception regarding the impact of immigration on France. "56 percent believes its impact has been negative, 23 percent very negative, while 16 percent believes it has been positive and just 2 percent very positive". According to this report, the people's views on immigrants are determined by the perception of Islam. "38 percent of the respondents agree with the proposition that Islam and French society are not compatible". The key finding from this report is that the amalgamation of anxieties about terrorism and immigration, especially directly linked to radicalized Muslims have created a fertile soil for restrictive immigration policies and people's acceptance of these policies as necessary and crucial. "There is a strong link in the public mind between domestic terrorism, immigration and the intake of refugees. This reflects a series of terrorist incidents in France, beginning with the Charlie Hebdo attacks in early 2015. Fifty three percent agree with the proposition that it is too dangerous to let refugees into France as there is a major threat of terrorism coming from people who come to France as refugees" (Ibid).

Polls also show that since 2017, Macron's core support has shifted from the center towards the right, which shows that this populist uprising has steadily been shifting the centrist to the right as in the Austrian case, although not so drastically and unambiguously. I argue that in the next electoral campaign, Emmanuel Macron is going to adopt this far right rhetoric and discourse, especially targeting the Muslim immigrants and the Muslim population with immigrant background.

### **Conclusion**

In Austria and France, countries that were bastions of human rights protection, progressiveness, enlightenment and acceptance of differences, in the milieu of general democratic decadence in the European Union, a major shift occurred. Renationalization, securitization and politicization of immigration and Islam took place, which was initially directed by the populist upsurge in these countries. In both countries shift regarding the Islam politics occurred, with the shift of the mainstream to the right, although presented with much clearer evidence in Austria than in France. But I argue that the more explicit shift is just about to occur in the next presidential and legislative elections in France, with the new restrictive immigration laws in France as the basis for these assertions that the mainstream is turning to the right.

The biggest finding of this research is that not only have the populist forces directed and systematically implemented securitization of Islam, but that they have generated a huge dissemination effect, where the centrist and leftist political parties and actors, under the realization of the beneficial electoral success and public attention that the right wing populists have gathered, steadily started adopting the same racist, xenophobic, chauvinist and discriminative discourses and politics, being encouraged by this positive feedback and the demand side from the voters. This has led to the systematical dehumanization of the Muslim population in these countries, being treated as counter societies and excluding them from the populist notion of the "real people".

Interestingly enough, both in Austria and France, institutionalist path dependency was abandoned when it comes to the treatment of religious denomination, which in both cases meant heavy violation of the states' constitution that in both countries unambiguously prohibited favoring of any religion and guaranteed peaceful co-existence. The populist uprising has led to the human rights violations both in Austria in France, with the discriminatory burqa bans.

Populists in Austria and France, empowered by the islamophobic agenda and the large masses of people that are accepting and supporting this same agenda, alongside having new partners that were never before involved in populist activities, with the mainstream turning to the right, or as I have shown in Austria, political actors that actually condemned their activities in the past, but later have joined them, have successfully implemented shifts in their countries' Islam politics. The most interesting and probably the most dangerous in this whole story is that they have accomplished this without any repercussions for their countries' constitutional violations. They have introduced and implemented new laws and political initiatives that were discriminatory in nature and only targeting one religious denomination- Islam and the Muslims. The best indicator of how rewarding this anti-Islam politics actually was and the best proof of this Islam politics shift are the post-election results and behaviors. In Austria the populist coalition that based their electoral campaign on the inflammatory discourse and negative sentiments towards Islam, after carrying out the Islam Act of 2015, formed the government. In France, Marine Le Pen, that based her electoral campaign on the racist discourse and the non-belonging of Islam and the Muslim population in France with the "real French" people, won almost forty percent of the votes in the presidential race, now pressuring the current president, Emmanuel Macron to propose reforms regarding state's immigration and Islam politics. The narrative of peaceful coexistence and pluralism that was omnipresent throughout the rich histories of these countries, no longer is, thankful to the populist uprising and their alienation framing of Islam and the Muslims. Also, public polls in these countries showed how negative the sentiments towards immigration and Islam have become, which was not the case before the populist uprising.

What I think is important to note is that the patterns that are visible in the cases of Austria and France, could also be applied to other European Union member states, where there are similar signs of this, I dare to say, global trend of anti-Islam and anti-Muslim sentiments, which are unambiguously rewarding in getting the media and the voters' support and attention. In both countries, the populist forces have endeavored for Austria and France to influence to generation of "Austrian Islam" and "French Islam", sending the message that Islam in its current, authentic form and the way it is practiced by its believers is not compatible with the modern, advanced Austrian and French societies. This implies that Islam is barbaric, rudimental and most importantly- not Western. The right wing populist uprising is something that has become so deeply rooted in the Western politics, and there are no indications that the situation is going to change in the future. For the matter of fact, they are even strengthening their populist bases all over the Western Europe, and the patterns that have been

observed in the cases of Austria and France could, unfortunately, be the electoral winning combinations for the rest of the Western Europe, and if we look at the situation in Great Britain, Netherlands and Italy, we will see that the situation is not much differing.

For the final words of conclusion, the right wing populism is going to make a significant effect in the Western politics in the years to come, and the targeting of Islam and the Muslims will play out the crucial role in their endeavors. This has negative implication for democracy and the future of the Muslim communities in Austria and France, since imitation of the far right practices has proven to be electorally beneficial, with no signs of slowing down. In the next elections in Austria and France, I argue that the right wing discourse will be emphasized and adopted by the mainstream more than ever before, since the negative sentiments regarding Islam in Austrian and French societies are on the rise evidenced by the public polls in these countries that I have presented. I argue that in the next presidential elections, Emmanuel Macron is going to imitate Marine Le Pen's recipe regarding harsh stance on immigration, which he already started doing as I have shown, tackling immigration and Islam as never before, since he realized, as many other centrist political actors in the European Union, how electorally rewarding populism is today. Populist uprising has changed the Islam politics in Austria and France, and has changed the general sentiments towards Islam and the Muslims among their population.

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