

## Austria Briefing: September & October 2024

*Reporting period: 01.Sep - 31.Oct*

### Operation Luxor

#### Rahma Austria Wins Case Against Unlawful State Seizure

- In June, the [Graz Regional Court unlawfully seized €210,000 from Rahma Austria](#), a Muslim charity targeted during Austria's notorious "Operation Luxor." Intended for charitable work in Turkey, these funds were blocked without evidence, only to be released recently after the Higher Regional Court (OLG) Graz ruled there was no legal basis for confiscation. Despite the collapse of original accusations around terrorism and money laundering, the state has pivoted to prosecuting Rahma Austria for alleged financial misconduct—a move that appears more about intimidation than justice.
- [Austrian police have unlawfully visited over 700 Rahma Austria donors](#), accusing them of terror financing without grounds. This state-sanctioned harassment of Muslim charities and their supporters is neither accidental nor isolated. It is part of an ongoing campaign that criminalizes pro-Palestinian support and Muslim activism in Austria. Rahma Austria's case exposes how the Austrian government is exploiting "counter-terrorism" to intimidate and marginalise Muslim institutions, particularly those supporting Palestine, in what amounts to an unsettling misuse of power against communities striving for justice and solidarity.

#### US grants UAE Leadership immunity in Abu Dhabi secrets Lawsuit

- A high-stakes lawsuit is underway in Washington, D.C., against the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Lorenzo Vidino. Vidino, a key advisor to Austria's "Documentation Center for Political Islam," has long been influential in shaping Austria's policies and investigations, notably in the now-infamous "Operation Luxor." His assessments contributed to major Austrian raids targeting Muslim community in Austria—only for the cases to be dropped due to lack of evidence.
- This lawsuit also implicated Vidino in practices of defamation, raising questions about whether innocent individuals were wrongfully branded as extremists to serve broader political motives. [Meanwhile, the U.S. government has intervened in support of the UAE leadership, granting them immunity](#), underscoring the power dynamics behind this case and potential state-driven manipulation in anti-muslim narratives.

## Another Luxor Sub-Case Dismissed: No Conviction Against Islam Teacher

- In another setback for the expansive Operation Luxor, [an Islamic teacher accused of Nazi re-engagement was acquitted](#), with no appeals from the prosecution, making the verdict final. The case, which centred around chats containing satirical Whatsapp stickers of Hitler shared in a school group during COVID-19, found no evidence implicating the teacher or his students in intent to promote Nazi ideology.
- The repressive Operation Luxor raids, initially launched with terror related accusations, has thus far yielded no convictions, with most accusations—primarily around alleged terrorism financing and extremism—being dismissed over time. This latest acquittal underscores persistent flaws in the operation, which constitutes an overreach of anti-terror tactics used to intimidate Muslim and organisations without substantive evidence.

## US Sanctions Target Austrian Palestinian Despite Lack of Evidence

- The [U.S. Treasury recently imposed sanctions on Adel D., a Palestinian living in Vienna, alleging his role as a leader of Hamas in Europe](#). However, Austrian authorities have repeatedly dropped investigations against him due to a lack of conclusive evidence. Despite intelligence shared over two decades from the U.S. and Israel, which included accusations of funnelling donations to Hamas through the Palestinian Association of Austria (PVÖ), no actionable evidence has been presented in Austrian courts.
- Operation Luxor, which aimed to crack down on alleged terrorism links within Austria, also implicated Adel D. Yet, by February 2023, the case against him was closed, citing no solid proof of terror financing. The renewed U.S. sanctions against D., despite repeated findings of no prosecutable evidence, expose how geopolitical pressures influence domestic legal proceedings, turning Austria's justice system into a stage for foreign agendas. The alleged influence of Israeli intelligence throughout Operation Luxor points to a broader strategy that prioritises political alignment over the principles of due process and evidence, raising serious questions about Austria's autonomy in matters of national security and justice.

## Absurd investigations under the Special Fraud Law against Farid Hafez dropped

- Farid, one of the survivors of the infamous Operation Luxor, found himself subjected to years of unjust scrutiny. While the terrorism-related charges against him were eventually dropped, the state continued its relentless pursuit, pivoting to other

fabricated charges under the Special Fraud Prevention Act. Despite the lack of any legitimate evidence, he endured nearly four years of absurd and politically motivated investigations, illustrating the state's determination to punish him regardless of the merit of the original case. This relentless targeting exposes the disturbing reality of how individuals can be dragged through prolonged legal battles, often under dubious pretences, as part of broader efforts to suppress dissent and criminalise the muslim community.

## National Security & Counter-terrorism:

### Austria's Joint Action Day: A Facade for State Overreach

- On [September 10, 2024, Austria launched an extensive "Joint Action Day" targeting so-called Islamist extremists across all federal states](#), involving actions against 72 individuals, including four home raids, five interrogations, and "risk talks" with 20 individuals. Additionally, 52 prison cell searches were conducted on Muslim inmates. The operation, organised by the Directorate for State Protection and Intelligence (DSN), was justified by its timing near 9/11, exploiting the symbolic weight of the date despite having no credible evidence of any planned attacks.
- The raid seemed less about real security concerns and more about political posturing. By targeting a marginalised community and engaging in sweeping, invasive actions with minimal legal grounds, the state sidestepped accountability and exhibited blatant overreach. This orchestrated crackdown was especially aimed at Muslims unlikely to receive widespread support, underscoring how easily the state could exploit fears to bypass due process.
- This move also appears to be an attempt by the ruling Green Party and ÖVP to recover from recent failures, including their mishandling of the foiled Taylor Swift attack, and to polish their image as "protectors" ahead of the national election. By publicly targeting Muslims, the government seeks to gain voter favour rather than addressing genuine safety needs. Such heavy-handed tactics are a stark reminder that unchecked state power, especially when used to intimidate and scapegoat.

### Vienna "Terror Plot" Dropped for Lack of Evidence

- The [Austrian authorities' investigation into an alleged Christmas 2023 terror plot targeting Vienna's Stephansdom has ended with all charges dropped due to insufficient evidence](#). Despite the media frenzy around the case, the investigation failed to substantiate any concrete threat, revealing a worrying pattern in Austria's approach to national security. Five individuals—four men and one woman—were accused of forming an ISIS cell, but, with no verifiable evidence, the case has been dismissed, leaving behind a trail of reputational damage and trauma for those involved, including one detainee who tragically died by suicide in custody.

- This incident underscores a broader trend where high-profile accusations against Muslim individuals are weaponized to fuel fear and bolster support for expanded surveillance powers. Authorities used similarly baseless claims of a supposed plot against Vienna's Pride Parade to argue for more expansive security powers, including the federal Trojan horse to access encrypted messaging platforms. With no substantial evidence of imminent threats, these cases appear more focused on creating a climate of suspicion and fear, stigmatising the Muslim community, and justifying invasive surveillance measures.

### **Weapon-Free Zone in Vienna's Favoriten District Extended Again**

- [Vienna's weapon ban zone in Favoriten, initially intended as a temporary three-month measure, has now been extended until January 2025](#), covering areas around Reumannplatz and Keplerplatz. What began as a reaction to isolated incidents has evolved into a mechanism granting the state broad surveillance powers, including extensive stop-and-frisk authority in predominantly Muslim and POC neighbourhoods. The state sensationalises local incidents to justify expanding state control and surveillance in specific areas, where social concerns are overshadowed by policing. The ongoing, indefinite extensions suggest that this "temporary" measure may be less about public safety than about enforcing targeted, intensified policing.

### **Palestine Related Repression:**

#### **Zionist Agendas at the Antisemitism Conference: Criminalizing Pro-Palestinian Solidarity and Free Speech**

- The first international [antisemitism conference in Austria](#), held in the Austrian Parliament, attended by key political figures and Jewish organisations, concluded with a declaration that framed any criticism of Israel or Zionism as antisemitism. The conference focused on defending Israel's right to self-defense, particularly against Palestinian resistance, and criminalizing anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian solidarity movements.
- By equating anti-Israel views with antisemitism, the conference supports the Zionist agenda and aims to suppress dissent, criminalising legitimate criticism of Israeli policies. This risks empowering state surveillance and security measures to target those advocating for Palestinian rights, creating a climate where free speech, especially regarding the occupation of Palestine, is increasingly stifled. The conference reinforces efforts to delegitimize Palestinian resistance and solidarity as a threat, further criminalising activists and silencing opposition to Israel.

## National Development

### Far-right FPÖ wins national election, yet fail to gain mandate to form Government

- The [final results of the 2024 Austrian election](#) show the FPÖ as the largest party with 28.85% of the vote, followed by ÖVP at 26.27% and SPÖ at 21.14%. NEOS gained 9.14%, surpassing the Greens, who received 8.24%.
- Despite winning the largest share of votes in the September 2024 Austrian elections, [the right-wing populist FPÖ was denied the usual mandate to form a government by President Alexander Van der Bellen](#). In an unprecedented move, Van der Bellen called for further discussions between the leaders of the three largest parties—FPÖ, ÖVP, and SPÖ—regarding possible cooperation. He acknowledged a "classic stalemate," as neither the ÖVP, SPÖ, nor other key parties, including the Greens and NEOS, were willing to collaborate with FPÖ under its leader Herbert Kickl. Kickl's insistence on becoming Chancellor as a condition for participation.
- [President Alexander Van der Bellen tasked ÖVP leader Karl Nehammer with forming a new government after no party was willing to collaborate with FPÖ leader Herbert Kickl](#). Nehammer accepted the mandate and plans to initiate talks with the SPÖ and potentially a third party to form a stable coalition, seeking a broad majority in Parliament. Van der Bellen explained the unusual decision, stating that it was a "completely unprecedented" situation where no one was willing to work with the FPÖ.
- Meanwhile, Kickl rejected the mandate's outcome, claiming that the voters had called for change and that the FPÖ should lead the government. Other parties, including the Greens and NEOS, expressed willingness to engage in talks with Nehammer to explore possible solutions. The process has sparked significant political debate, with critics from FPÖ regions accusing Van der Bellen of disregarding the will of the electorate.