

# **'Just the beginning': Austria announces plans to close several mosques, deport dozens of imams**



Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz has initiated a crack-down on foreign-funded religious groups in his country.(Dan Kitwood/Getty Images)

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz announced on Friday that the government is planning to shutter seven mosques and expel dozens of imams from the country.

At a press conference, Kurz declared, “Parallel societies, political Islam and radicalization have no place in our country.” Vice Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache echoed: “This is just the beginning.”

## **What brought this on?**

Following years of build-up during Europe’s ongoing migration crisis, Austrian voters have elected conservative leaders who have vowed to “crack down” on government benefits for immigrants and “political Islam.”

In 2015, the Austrian government passed a so-called “law on Islam,” which prohibited the funding of religious groups by outside entities, and required Muslims to have “a positive fundamental view towards (Austria’s) state and society.”

The imams being considered for deportation — as many as 60 — are being funded by the Turkish-Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Cooperation in Austria (ATIB), a group aligned with the Turkish government.

A spokesman for ATIB, Yasar Ersoy, confirmed that the imams were indeed paid by Turkey’s state religious authority, but said, “We are currently working on

having imams be paid from funds within the country.”

## **How's it going over?**

Predictably, Turkey's presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin took to Twitter to denounce the move, saying: “Austria's decision to close down seven mosques and deport imams with a lame excuse is a reflection of the anti-Islam, racist and discriminatory populist wave in this country.”

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan said last week of Kurz, “This immoral chancellor has a problem with us.”

Conversely, leader of the French Front National, Marine Le Pen, said, “Austria is taking things in hand and showing that ‘when you want to, you can!’” The head of Italy's League and interior minister, Matteo Salvini, also weighed in with support of the actions, saying, “Those who exploit their faith to endanger a country's security should be expelled!”

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Source: <https://www.theblaze.com/news/2018/06/08/just-the-beginning-austria-anounces-plans-to-close-several-mosques-deport-dozens-of-imams>

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