

'Intellectual Terrorism' in France



Promises, promises. In October of last year, in an apparent attempt to co-opt the Islam issue from his conservative rivals, French President Emmanuel Macron [announced](#) a sweeping new program to defy the Islamic threat to his nation's society, culture, and values. A major focus of the program was education: Muslim parents, vowed Macron, would no longer be permitted to keep their children from learning facts of which their religion disapproved, and university professors would help shape a new "Islam of the Enlightenment," whatever that might mean. I wrote at the time that Macron's promises seemed destined to end up on the scrap heap, and indeed, instead of making significant new demands of Muslims, French authorities have persisted in 2021 in their noble tradition of ruthlessly demonizing and prosecuting critics of Islam, notably the presidential candidate Éric Zemmour. Also this year, in yet another apparent bid to win conservative voters, Macron took to the bully pulpit to condemn the importation of "woke" left-wing ideas from America. His government doesn't seem to have accomplished much of anything on this front, either. For a

perfect example of Macron's utter failure to live up to his own stirring rhetoric on both the Islam and "woke" fronts, consider the case of Klaus Kinzler.

Kinzler, who is German, has been a professor of German language and culture at the Grenoble Institute of Political Studies, known colloquially as Sciences Po Grenoble, for a quarter century. In November of last year, working groups of teachers and students were [tasked](#) with organizing a U.S.-style "week for equality and the fight against discrimination." Kinzler was a member of one of the groups, whose assigned topic was "Racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia." When, during the online exchanges among the group's members, Kinzler challenged the inclusion of Islamophobia in this trinity, another professor was outraged. A third professor agreed with Kinzler that even if there could be said to be such a thing as Islamophobia, it shouldn't be considered to be on the same plane as anti-Semitism or racism. Kinzler admitted that he isn't particularly fond of Islam and that, in fact, like many French people, he's rather unsettled by it. "Anti-Semitism," Kinzler later told *Die Welt* by way of [explaining](#) his position, "has resulted in millions of deaths. Genocide without end. Then there is racism, slavery. That, too, has led to tens of millions of deaths in history...But where are the millions of deaths linked to Islamophobia?" Good question.

The dissension within the working group had a ripple effect throughout Sciences Po Grenoble. During the next several months, professors and administrators fired off heated emails, issued demands, and filed complaints related to the dust-up. Then, on March 4, students and younger faculty members, [described](#) by Kinzler as fixated (again, U.S.-style) on "decolonialism, identity politics and anti-capitalism," [initiated](#) a hate campaign against him and the colleague who'd sided with him on the Islamophobia question, smearing both of them in online social networks as right-wing extremists and putting up banners all over Sciences Po

Grenoble reading “Fascists in our lecture halls” and “Islamophobia kills.” This mass explosion of irrational fury, which was coordinated by the local branch of the National Union of Students of France (UNEF), was so intense – Kinzler has characterized it as a “reign of terror” – that both professors were placed under police protection. (It seemed not to matter in the slightest to any of the students who raged at Kinzler, by the way, that he is married to a Muslim.)

How did Kinzler respond to the student uproar? Not, as many another professor these days would surely have done, by issuing a cringing apology, but by going on the offensive in a very public way. In a raft of interviews in the mainstream media, he accused Sciences Po Grenoble of teaching students to reject the very idea of open debate and encouraging them “to insult, abuse and defame teachers who have the audacity not to share their extremist opinions.” In one of these interviews, noted TV host Pascal Praud seconded Kinzler’s complaint, describing French universities as settings for “intellectual terrorism.” As the weeks went by, the situation in Grenoble got even messier: Kinzler’s immediate supervisor, Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary, filed a defamation suit against him; the director of the institute, Sabine Saurugger, criticized the student troublemakers but also castigated Kinzler for the “extremely problematic tone” of his remarks about Islam. Eventually the French Minister of Higher Education, Frédérique Vidal, got dragged in and ordered an official investigation; this resulted in a May 8 report that put a degree of blame on pretty much everybody involved. Kinzler’s offense? By criticizing the lockstep politics of Sciences Po Grenoble, maintains the report, he’d “damaged the image and reputation” not just of the faculty but of the entire institute.

But still Kinzler didn’t shut up. On December 14, after a new round of interviews in which he denounced Sciences Po Grenoble under Saurugger’s ideologically toxic management for specializing in radical-left “re-education,” she shocked the

nation by suspending him for four months. In [response](#), Laurent Wauquiez, the president of the regional council for Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, reacted by suspending the institute's 100,000-euro annual subsidy on the [grounds](#) that its left-wing administrators and faculty were engaged in "prolonged ideological and social perversion." François Jolivet, a member of the National Assembly, called for the French government to take direct control of the institute and for a parliamentary probe of political tyranny at French universities in general. Richard Malka, a lawyer who'd represented the editor of *Charlie Hebdo* in a racism trial after the publication of the famous Muhammed cartoons, [called](#) Sciences Po Grenoble "a small Pakistan...a laboratory of Stalinist thought" and observed that Saurugger, after serving as director for less than a year and a half, had "achieved the feat of destroying [its] reputation."

But most French academics appear to have lined up in tidy lockstep against Kinzler. Like most of their counterparts in the U.S., they've claimed, in the words of the *Daily Mail*, that "'Islamism' and wokeism" were "invented by right-wingers to constrict intellectual freedom and belittle universities." And Macron? While political allies of his, such as Jolivet, have spoken up, I've seen no indication, at this writing, that the President himself has said anything at all about the Kinzler case. In any event, as we already know, what Macron says doesn't necessarily mean anything. In fact, the more he professes to be addressing the defining issues of our time, the more likely it is *not* to mean anything. The important thing here is that, for all his big talk about taking on the Islamic threat and standing up to American "wokery," Macron has done little if anything about either of these issues. And unless he suddenly takes meaningful action (thereby breaking entirely with the pattern of his entire personal history), it's a safe bet that Klaus Kinzler – a heroic German champion of the "French values" that Macron keeps pledging to defend – will find himself hung out to dry

by the eloquent yet enervated little twit in the Élysée
Palace.

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