Country reviews

The Old Member States

The fourth enlargement countries

16 Austria 377
17 Finland 396
18 Sweden 414
16
AUSTRIA

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Figure 16.1 Map of Austria
1 Geographical position

Located in Central Europe, Austria borders Germany, Switzerland, Lichtenstein, Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. The country, extending over 83,879 square kilometres, consists of nine provinces (Bundesländer) with a population of 8.5 million, including small percentages of Slovenian, Croatian, Slovakian, Czech, Hungarian, and Romani language minorities. It has an urbanization rate of 68 per cent and its capital is Vienna.

2 Historical background

Austria is considered a ‘belated nation’ that turned from a monarchy to a republic in 1918 and was forced into independence against its will. The new nation-state was widely questioned and eventually failed, largely due to ideological conflicts between its two main political camps. The Social Democratic and Christian Socialist ruling coalition, which adopted a parliamentary form of government in accordance with the 1920 Constitutional Act, did not last long, due to the escalation of domestic political tensions. The Social Democrats’ political attraction towards the democratic Weimar Republic and the resulting attachment to Germany contrasted with the hesitant Austrian patriotism felt by the Christian Socialist Party. They promoted a Catholic and dynastic-orientated Austrian patriotism and tried to turn Austria into a ‘better’ Germany.
In March 1933, Federal Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss dissolved the National Assembly and, in breach of constitutional provisions, began to rule by emergency decree. The Communist Party and the Austrian National Socialist Party were banned. In May 1933 Dollfuss founded the Vaterländische Front (Fatherland Front) in order to unify the traditionally bourgeois parties. In February 1934, a civil war took place between the Christian Socialists, supported by the paramilitary Heimwehr, and the Social Democratic Party militia, the Schutzbund. In the process, social democracy was abolished. In May 1934, a new constitution was promulgated, ideologically rooted in political Catholicism and modelled politically according to Italian and Portuguese fascism. The corporatist state was in power between 1934 and 1938. Dollfuss was killed during a Nazi putsch attempt supported by National Socialist Germany (NS-Germany) in July 1934. His successor, Kurt Schuschnigg, continued the authoritarian political course (Wodak et al., 2009).

Although the so-called Anschluss, the annexation of Austria with NS-Germany in March 1938, was achieved by threat of military force, this was accompanied by euphoric celebrations by large segments of the Austrian population. Austria was integrated into the German Reich for seven years.

In the Moscow Declaration of November 1943 (Annex 6), the Allied powers – the UK, the USSR, and the US – declared the occupation of Austria by Germany null and void and expressed their intention to restore it as an independent state.

The Second Republic came into being in April 1945 and adopted the Constitution of 1920, which was amended in 1929. The political success story of the Second Republic, which, like the First Republic, emerged from the disintegration of a larger entity, was mainly based on the consensus orientation of political elites.

Between 1945 and 1955 the Allied Forces occupied Austria, but in 1955 it finally became an independent country again after signing the so-called State Treaty (Staatsvertrag) with the Allies. Simultaneously, Austria became a neutral country. Both neutrality and the Austrian model of neo-corporatism – based on a social partnership (Sozialpartnerschaft) between labour, business, and agricultural sector representations – were called pillars of Austrian national identity at least until the late 1980s.

Between 1955 and 1966, Austria was governed by the so-called Grand Coalition, consisting of the Christian Democratic Austrian People’s Party, ÖVP (Österreichische Volkspartei) and the Socialist Party (SPÖ). Between 1966 and 1970, the ÖVP gained an absolute majority and was able to govern alone. In the early 1970s the Socialist SPÖ (later renamed the Social Democrats in 1991) became the dominant party. During Chancellor Bruno Kreisky’s leadership, from 1970 to 1983, Austria emerged as a quite prosperous country, with a strong welfare system, and also gained an international reputation as a mediator in conflict situations. From 1983 to 1986 the state was governed by an SPÖ–FPÖ coalition, then the SPÖ and the ÖVP formed a coalition government again (Wodak et al., 2009).

In the 1980s, social change and the increasing mobility of voters led to the erosion of the two dominant parties and their relevant subcultures. The highly controversial and internationally debated coalition government between the right-wing populist FPÖ and the ÖVP, from 2000–2003 and 2003–2006, was again followed by a coalition between the SPÖ and ÖVP, which was renewed after the general elections of 2008 and 2013.

3 Geopolitical profile

Before the end of the bipolar bloc system, the neutral state of Austria was situated exactly between the East and the West, close to the Iron Curtain, a fact that impacted on Austrian national self-image as a bridge and a bulwark at the same time towards and against the Communist regimes. After 1989, the country was particularly challenged in redefining its position in a changed European and geopolitical landscape.
At the same time, the system change in the former Socialist single-party states and the political processes in the wake of 1989 created an opportunity for Austria to become a member of the EC/EU in 1995, after a successful referendum. Until the mid-1980s, there was a general consensus that Austrian neutrality and Austria’s resulting role in international politics could not be reconciled with full membership in the EC.

Since Austria joined the EU, there has been stronger cooperation within the Common Foreign and Security Policy and also with NATO through the Partnership for Peace framework.

4 Overview of the political landscape

Austria is a federal republic, with a parliament consisting of two chambers. The first chamber (Nationalrat) is composed of 183 MPs, elected by Austrian citizens every five years in nine constituencies congruent with the nine federal provinces and further subdivided into 39 regional constituencies. The second, and weaker, chamber (Bundesrat) is the representative body of the federal provinces. It consists of nominated members of the nine regional Parliaments according to the strength that political parties have in each one of them.

With the exception of Upper Austria, where the regional government is elected every six years, the remaining eight regional governments are elected every five years. Whilst the federal government, in comparison with other political systems, has a relatively strong position, the sway of the federal provinces is considerable. The federal government, headed by the federal chancellor, is strongly accountable to parliament. Although the Austrian head of state, the federal President, is directly elected by the population for a six-year period, his or her powers are of a formal and representative nature only.

Citizens of Austria have been guaranteed basic rights and freedoms since 1867. Austria ratified the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms on 4 November 1950.

5 Brief account of the political parties

In the aftermath of WWII, three parties emerged in Austria: the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), the Peoples’ Party (ÖVP) and the Communist Party (KPÖ). The first two dominated the political landscape. In the late 1940s, a fourth party, the Alliance of the Independents (Verband der Unabhängigen, VdU), which was renamed the Freedom Party (FPÖ) in 1955, established itself (Pelinka and Rosenberger, 2007, 154).

During the course of the environmental social movements of the 1980s, the Green Party emerged. In 1993 the Liberal Forum (Liberales Forum, LIF) established itself as the first splinter party to separate itself from the Freedom Party, and in 2005 the Freedom Party split again, producing a further party called the Alliance of the Future of Austria (Bündnis Zukunft Österreich, BZÖ). Whilst the Liberal Forum defined the character of the party as Liberal and acted accordingly, the BZÖ can be characterized as right-wing populist (ibid., 155f).

In 2013 two new parties became important, as they were elected to the national parliament: Team Stronach and NEOS (The New Austria). Team Stronach was founded in summer 2012 by the Austrian-Canadian billionaire Frank Stronach. Meanwhile, NEOS, founded in spring 2013, can be classified as a new liberal party bringing together some former members of the LIF and the ÖVP.

Alongside these parties are two parties competing solely in the European arena: the Liste Hans-Peter Martin (List HPM) and the Junge Liberale, JuLis (Young Liberals). Hans-Peter Martin, a former journalist, was nominated as front-runner for the EP elections of 1999 by the SPÖ. During his first mandate in the EP he broke with the SPÖ. In the next EP elections in 2004
he ran as an independent candidate and immediately received 14 per cent of the votes, giving him two seats in the EP. In the national elections of 2006 he also ran with this list but could not surpass the threshold of 4 per cent. Since this experience, HPM is a party running only in EP elections. In the EP elections in 2009, Martin received 17.9 per cent of the overall votes and got 3 out of the then 17 Austrian EP mandates. The second such party, JuLis, which originates from the Liberal Forum, represents economically Liberal positions. It ran in the EP elections of 2009 for the first time, but was only able to get 0.7 per cent of the vote.

The SPÖ is one of the major parties in Austria and since the 1970s, it has been in power for more than 30 years with a break between 2000 and 2006, either in a single party government in the 1970s, or in a coalition government with the ÖVP or the FPÖ (Pelinka, 2009). It is the dominant centre-left party in Austria, being particularly strong in Vienna. Meanwhile, the ÖVP is the centre-right counterpart of the SPÖ, with its strongholds in the Länder. Since 1986, the ÖVP has been represented in government either as junior partner of the SPÖ (from 1986 to 1999 and again since 2006) or as the senior partner, from 2000 to 2006, of the FPÖ/BZÖ. The last general elections before the EP elections in 2009 took place in September 2008, after the Grand Coalition between the SPÖ and ÖVP – in place since 2006 – collapsed in July 2008. Both government parties lost a considerable number of votes: the SPÖ obtained 29.3 per cent of the vote, losing 6.1 per cent, whilst the ÖVP received 26.0 per cent, with its support dropping by 8.3 per cent. In the last general elections in September 2013, the SPÖ and ÖVP lost again votes: the SPÖ gained 26.8 per cent and the ÖVP 24.0 per cent of the votes.

Next to the two major parties in 2008 there were three, and after 2013, four, opposition parties represented in the Austrian parliament, the Nationalrat. The oldest and most established party amongst these parties is the VdU/FPÖ. Up to the mid-1980s, this party was a small player on the Austrian political landscape, with electoral results ranging from 12.7 per cent in 1949 to 5.0 per cent in 1983. In 1986, with Jörg Haider taking over the party leadership and the reorientation of the party towards immigration and integration issues, the party became a major actor in Austrian politics. The FPÖ also immediately changed its performance and started acting in an explicitly populist way. This topical reorientation and the new party style attracted voters, and the FPÖ reached a first peak in 1999 where it became the second strongest party after the SPÖ, achieving 26.9 per cent of the vote. Shortly after this election, in February 2000, the FPÖ became the junior partner in an ÖVP-FPÖ government. In the following elections in 2002, it lost considerable votes due to intra-party dissent and joined the ÖVP in government as a weakened junior party.

Due to further intra-party dissent in 2005, the FPÖ split into the BZÖ and the old FPÖ, with Jörg Haider being the party leader of the newly founded BZÖ. All FPÖ ministers in the then ÖVP-FPÖ government joined the BZÖ; consequently the FPÖ lost its government party status. In the
next general elections in 2006, both the FPÖ and the BZÖ managed to enter into the national parliament: between 2006 and 2013 these two parties on the right wing of the political spectrum have been represented in the Austrian Parliament. These two right-wing populist parties were the winners of the 2008 elections: the FPÖ, with its 17.5 per cent vote share, and the BZÖ, with its 10.7 per cent vote share, obtained an accumulated 28.2 per cent of the votes. The extreme right-wing populists became the second most important political group in the Austrian political system. With the unexpected death of its leader Jörg Haider in a car crash shortly after the elections in October 2008, the BZÖ lost in importance. Indeed, in the general elections of 2013 it failed to pass the threshold of 4 per cent of votes and, hence, could not enter the Nationalrat any longer. Meanwhile, the FPÖ gained more votes again in 2013, obtaining 20.5 per cent of the vote share.

Since 1986, the Greens have been represented in the Austrian Parliament. They have their strongholds in urban areas, in particular in Vienna. Their vote share in legislative elections has varied between 3.4 per cent in 1983 and 12.4 per cent in 2013. The vote share of the Green Party has been steadily growing since the first half of the 1980s, with the exception of the 1995 and 2008 elections. After the general election in 2013, the Greens became the fourth strongest party in the National Council. The two new parties, Team Stronach and NEOS could obtain 5.7 per cent and 5 per cent of the vote share respectively.

5.1 Party attitudes towards the European Union

Austria joined the European Union in 1995, together with Finland and Sweden. Whilst the two major parties, the SPÖ and the ÖVP, as well as the FPÖ at that time, supported EU membership, the Green Party was rather sceptic (Kritzinger and Michalowitz, 2005).

Looking at data from the Euro-manifesto project, we notice that the ÖVP can be characterized from the beginning as a Europhile party, whilst the SPÖ was much more moderate in its EU position (Lefkofridi and Kritzinger, 2008). In 2008, the SPÖ announced in an open letter to the tabloid Neue Kronen Zeitung that future EU treaties would be subjected to referenda, taking up a major demand by its EU-sceptic electorate and thus positioning itself as a more Eurosceptic political actor in the Austrian party landscape (Wodak et al., 2009, 243).

The FPÖ, which at the time of EU accession was positively oriented towards the EU, made a U-turn in the following years and now has to be considered a highly EU-sceptic party. The EU is blamed for the loss of national identity, high immigration rates, criminal activity, and for using Austrian taxpayers money in other regions of the EU, mostly in Eastern Europe.

The reverse applies to the Green Party: starting off with a Eurosceptic position in 1995, it developed a more balanced, positive EU position. The BZÖ, meanwhile, was rather critical of the EU, with a focus on the supposed privileges of EU politicians and representatives, the EU bureaucracy, democratic deficits within the EU, and a lack of people-oriented policy. While NEOS adopts a pro-European position, Team Stronach is rather sceptic of the European integration process and the euro in particular.

Thus, today, Austrian parties can be divided into two groups: the highly Eurosceptic and the more Euro-balanced ones. Amongst the latter group, the ÖVP shows exceptionally strong pro-EU features.

6 Public opinion and the European Union

In 1994, a 66.6 per cent majority of Austrian citizens decided in favour of EU membership in a referendum. This rather positive public outlook on the EU changed rapidly after the referendum. Already in 1995, only 39 per cent of Austrian citizens regarded their country’s membership as a good thing, and over the last 15 years it even decreased to 30 per cent. Whilst
Figure 16.2  Austrian attitude to the European Union


Figure 16.3  Perceived benefit of EU membership in Austria

positive public attitudes towards the EU average between 50 and 60 per cent in Member States, Austrian public opinion features the most negative attitudes towards EU membership amongst the old EU Member States, surpassing, sometimes, even the UK.

When analysing the question of whether Austria has benefitted from being a member of the EU, we can also observe that Austrians are less likely – in comparison to citizens in other Member States – to see EU membership as benefitting the country economically. Whilst in the beginning citizens still thought their country would benefit from EU membership, this attitude has changed over the years. Austrians have become more Eurosceptic, particularly after the 2004 Eastern enlargement. Only from 2009 onwards do we observe a slight upward trend, closing the gap to the EU average (Eurobarometer 75, 2011).

The loss of full national sovereignty, fear of mass-immigration especially from the new EU Member States, as well as opposition towards being a net payer in the EU led to negative attitudes towards the EU (Eurobarometer, 2009).

Overall, the Eurobarometer data reveal a slight upward trend towards EU support, although the overall majority of Austrians still have a predominantly Eurosceptic attitude towards EU membership. We could thus observe a slight discrepancy between parties’ and voters’ positions concerning EU stances.

### 7 National and EP electoral systems

In Austria, a proportional electoral system is used. It entails the possibility of preference voting, but de facto the Austrian system can be characterized as a closed list system. Voters rarely use the possibility of preference voting; the political parties do not use it as a competitive element in their campaigns (Müller et al., 2001). Whilst for national elections there are 39 regional constituencies, for European Parliament elections there is only one national constituency. The threshold to gain seats both in the national and European parliaments lies at 4 per cent. Finally, Austria is, as yet, the only country within the EU where citizens can already vote at the age of 16, whilst in order to stand for election they must be 18 years old.

Due to subsequent changes in EU treaties, following the accession of new Member States, the number of MEPs has decreased over the years, from 21 in 1995 to 18 in 1999, and from 17 under the Treaty of Nice, to increase again to 19 under the Treaty of Lisbon. The two new MEPs, one from the SPÖ and another from the BZÖ, took their seats in the European Parliament in mid-December 2011.
Austria

8 A glance at EP and national elections

After joining the EU in 1995, the first EP elections took place in 1996, with eight parties running the race: SPÖ, ÖVP, FPÖ, Greens and the Liberal Forum as well as three further lists, the handicap list related to people with disabilities, the citizen initiative Die Neutralen (The Neutrals) and the Communist Party.

The two main parties, the SPÖ and the ÖVP, achieved around 29 per cent of the vote, whilst the FPÖ obtained 27 per cent. Thus, it improved its results considerably in comparison to the national elections in 1995, when it reached 21.9 per cent (Melchior, 2001, 33–4).

Seven parties took part in the 1999 elections. Apart from the SPÖ, the ÖVP, the FPÖ, the Greens, the LIF, the Communist Party and the Conservative list Christlich-Soziale Allianz/Liste Karl Habsburg, CSA (Christian-Social Alliance List Karl Habsburg) – set up by the heir to the throne of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy – presented themselves (ibid., 34). In comparison to the 1996 elections, the established parties ÖVP and SPÖ gained votes, whilst the FPÖ lost votes, dropping to 23.5 per cent. The Greens improved their vote share from 6.8 per cent to 9.3 per cent. The LIF was not able to surpass the 4 per cent threshold and no other party was able to achieve representation in the EP.

The 1999 campaign of the SPÖ focussed on Chancellor Viktor Klima and on the EP front-runner Hans-Peter Martin, who was not a party member but was well-known to the Austrian electorate as an independent journalist who had previously written the bestseller The Globalization Trap (ibid., 39). The ÖVP campaign was dominated by security issues related to the potential membership of Austria in NATO. The Kosovo War also played a major role in the overall campaign of the two main political parties (ibid., 39–40). Other issues the campaign focussed upon were the Central and Eastern European enlargement, the fight against mismanagement, and transparency at the EU level. Whilst the two major parties were supporters of enlargement, the FPÖ opposed enlargement due to a potential increase in international crime, immigration, and loss of identity (ibid., 40). The FPÖ positioned itself as a Eurosceptic and protest party.

The 2004 elections differed from the former EP elections. The SPÖ won the elections and was able to improve its vote share slightly, with 33.4 per cent and 7 seats. The ÖVP came in second, with a 32.2 per cent vote share and 6 seats. The Greens were also able to slightly improve their 1999 results, surpassing for the first time the 10 per cent threshold in a nationwide election: the party achieved 12.9 per cent of the vote share.

However, the FPÖ collapsed electorally, from 23.4 per cent and five seats to 6.3 per cent and one seat. This can partly be explained by the fact that the party was punished as a junior partner in the coalition government with the ÖVP. It had to moderate its Eurosceptic populism and support pro-European policies, resulting in a credibility loss as a protest and Eurosceptic party. Moreover, in 2004 the party was characterized by internal factionalism and a conflict of personalities and many FPÖ voters abstained from voting (Fallend, 2004, 7–8). Most importantly though, the new List Hans-Peter Martin, the former front-runner of the SPÖ in 1999, was able to capture the protest vote, pointing to mismanagement at the EP level (Fallend ibid., 5–6). List HPM obtained 14 per cent of the vote share and became the third largest party.

Table 16.4 Turnout at EP and national elections in Austria: 1994–2009 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EP elections</th>
<th>National elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examining the vote share of Austrian parties in EP elections since Austria’s membership in the EU, we observe some interesting dynamics. Most striking were the changes for the FPÖ. Starting out in 1996 with a 27 per cent vote share, the party dropped down to 6 per cent in 2004, only to recover slightly in 2009. Unlike in national elections, in EP elections the FPÖ faced an opponent that also presented critical but more flexible EU positions and was therefore a genuine alternative for Euro-sceptic voters: the List HPM. Interestingly, the two main government parties, the SPÖ and ÖVP, were quite stable in their vote shares in EP elections until 2004; their vote shares dropped only in the elections in 2009.

Turning to turnout, we can observe that in 1995 the novelty of the first EP elections also led to a turnout of 67.7 per cent. However, in the following elections in 1999 and 2004, the turnout declined considerably. In 1999, the turnout was 49.4 per cent and in 2004 it dropped to 42.4 per cent. Thus, turnout in EP elections is considerably lower than in national elections.

9 The 2009 European election

9.1 Party lists and manifestos

In the 2009 EP elections there were eight electoral lists. Apart from the main national parliamentary parties, the SPÖ, ÖVP, FPÖ, BZÖ, and the Greens, the List HPM, the KPÖ, and the Young Liberals also entered the electoral competition.

Analysing the Austrian party programmes for the 2009 EP elections, one notices that the SPÖ was mostly concerned with its traditional policy area, growth and employment, which gained particular relevance in the context of the financial and economic crisis. In particular, the SPÖ called for a social Europe of the citizens instead of a conservative Europe of the markets. Interestingly, the SPÖ clearly assigned competences to the various levels: whilst they called for competences on issues such as immigration and access to the Austrian labour market to remain national, they called for a European-wide competence on issues such as the economic crisis, the fight against terrorism, and organized crime. Finally, typical Austrian topics such as transit policy or nuclear policy were also mentioned.

Meanwhile, the ÖVP manifesto made reference to Europe from a more global perspective. It praised European integration as a project bringing peace to the European continent. Also, the ÖVP was more eager to present itself as a successful party at the European level, resulting in higher subsidies for the Austrian economy and the implementation of Austrian interests on environmental issues. The party also pointed out measures to be taken in order to address the international economic and financial crisis. Both major parties, SPÖ and ÖVP, requested more rights for the European Parliament, greater transparency and, most interestingly, a national referendum on Turkey’s entry to the EU.

Turning now to the opposition parties, the FPÖ emphasized six major topics: the reduction of EU bureaucracy, the protection of the German language and culture, the empowerment of citizens, the ending of negotiations on Turkish membership, the economy, and security issues. In particular, issues regarding corruption and bureaucracy in the EU, as well as the reduction of Austrian membership fees, were central goals. The rest of the programme was dedicated to ‘national’ issues and on how to maintain Austrian sovereignty. Amongst the issues raised in this context were the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty, the protection of the Austrian labour market and the Austrian banking sector, the abolishment of the Schengen Treaty and the preservation of Austria’s neutrality. It is interesting to note that most issues raised problems that had already been decided upon – for example, the Lisbon Treaty – and that were not relevant or had nothing to do with the EP elections per se, such as Austrian neutrality. The programme of the FPÖ was therefore quite populist and focussed on EU-bashing issues.
Austria

The List HPM especially targeted EU bureaucracy and overpaid politicians as its major topics. Similar to the other parties, HPM was also in favour of national EU referenda and the preservation of Austria’s neutrality, and against EU membership for Turkey. A major populist proposal was the redistribution of the potential money saved after a scaling down of the EU bureaucracy to poor people and for the creation of jobs.

Finally, the Green Party proposed a common European way to fight the economic crisis and to build up a European social policy. It argued that issues such as immigration and asylum should be regulated at the European level. Like the government parties, the Green Party was also in favour of greater EP empowerment, but, unlike any other party, it was open-minded about EU membership for Turkey and the Western Balkan states. The BZÖ did not issue an election programme.

9.2 Electoral campaign

The EP election campaign in 2009 was hardly used to convey any ideas about the future of the EU. This is true for almost all of the parties; the Green Party was somewhat of an exception. Debates and campaigns focussed more or less on issues of domestic politics or rehashed topics, which had already dominated the 2004 campaign. Amongst the latter are the rejection of Turkey’s potential EU accession, which was an FPÖ issue, and the fight against the privileges of politicians, especially MEPs, which the List HPM put forward (Perlot and Zeglovits, 2010).

At the beginning of the campaign the SPÖ presented itself as a team player in Brussels, but also as a strong advocate for better social conditions in Europe, for example, with regard to employment and standardized minimum wages. The underlying reason for its social concerns was the Eastern and South-eastern enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007, which brought cheaper labour to Austria. Towards the end of its campaign, it heavily condemned the xenophobic election campaign of the FPÖ, appealing to moral sentiments and the social conscience of the electorate.

The ÖVP advertised its European competence and experience, claiming to be the party that best represented Austria’s interest within the EU. Its MEPs argued that the economic crisis confirmed the importance of the European Union. It emphasized the party’s traditional pro-European line, drawing upon supporters of the European Union.

The List HPM promoted its fight against high wages and high pensions for EU-officials and MEPs, and emphasized the need for controlling misgovernment and corruption within the administrative bodies of the European Union. It advocated the preservation of Austrian neutrality and demanded the holding of national referenda for key European questions. Further, it acted against EU over-regulation, for instance, on energy saving lamps, a topic highly debated by the Austrian public and thus best applicable to populist campaigning. The HPM List aimed especially at Eurosceptic voters. It revealed issues that were malfunctioning in the EU and criticized the lack of clear responsibilities within the EU, the exuberant European bureaucracy, the ‘culture of corruption’ in Brussels, the ‘privileges’ granted to MEPs, and the ‘waste’ of taxpayer’s money at the European level. Whilst supporting the principle of subsidiarity, it fiercely opposed the Lisbon Treaty and any further enlargement of the EU. The List HPM presented itself as the only defender of the people and as a fighter against those who were in political power.

The Green Party, echoing its European counterparts, advocated a European social and ecological union. This included, amongst other things, the regulation of financial markets, abandoning nuclear energy, non-genetically modified food, and the protection of the privacy of citizens, as opposed to a surveillance society. Moreover, the Greens demanded an increase in highway charges for large trucks. The Greens used a variation of the central motive of the famous painting by Eugène Delacroix, Liberty Leading the People (1830) as the main leitmotif for the campaign. The main reason for the use of this iconic image was to present the party as a dynamic movement to the voter.
As in any other election, the EP election campaign of the FPÖ was mainly carried out by its party leader, Heinz-Christian Strache, and not by the head of the list for the EP elections, Andreas Mölzer. The main issues were the preservation of a Christian Europe against the accession of Turkey, the closing of EU borders in order to prevent trans-border crime, the vetoing of the European directive on asylum, and the promotion of a social Europe. At the end of the campaign, the FPÖ presented itself as a victim of negative SPÖ campaigning. The SPÖ heavily attacked the FPÖ’s xenophobic campaign.

The BZÖ stressed opposition against the Asylum Directive, the Treaty of Lisbon, and the accession of Turkey, on the one hand, and supported the re-introduction of border controls, a tax on speculative financial transactions, and abandoning nuclear energy and the Euratom Treaty, on the other. The head of list, Ewald Stadler, was presented as tough-minded and incorruptible.

On two instances, there were negative incidents during the electoral campaign. On the one hand, the Minister of the Interior, Maria Fekter from the ÖVP, distributed leaflets – to mobilize voters to go to the polls – that had a strong similarity to the advertising style of her own party. On the other hand, in response, the FPÖ sent party campaign material that looked like government official information brochures to young voters.

### 9.3 Electoral results

Voter turnout reached almost 46 per cent in 2009, which represented an increase of 3.5 per cent compared to the EP elections in 2004. However, compared to the voter turnout of 78 per cent in the previous national election in 2008, it was still relatively low. As in other countries, Austrian parties were not able to mobilize their voters. Disappointment with the EU, as well as dissatisfaction with the selection of candidates and the EU policy positions parties presented, were decisive reasons for citizens not to cast their ballots (SORA, 2009). In addition, the electoral campaigns focussed mainly on national topics and were largely neglected by the Austrian mass media. Media coverage was mostly interested in the intra-party dissents within the ÖVP and the Green Party, regarding the heads of the lists of the respective political groups. The second candidates on the candidate lists of the ÖVP, Greens, and BZÖ ran preference voting campaigns, which, at least in the case of the ÖVP, had mobilizing effects on its typical voters. The low turnout rate is already a first indication that EP elections can still be considered ‘second order’.

### Table 16.5 EP election results in Austria: 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political party</th>
<th>Vote %</th>
<th>Change from 2004 %</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Seat change from 2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>−2.7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPÖ</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>−9.6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>−2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List HPM</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>+3.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPÖ</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>+6.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>−3.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZÖ</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>+4.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPÖ</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>−0.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JuLis</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>+0.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil vote</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>−0.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstention</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>−3.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Turnout</strong></td>
<td><strong>46.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>+3.5</strong></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An examination of voter preferences shows that the predicted and expected close race between the two main parties in government: SPÖ and ÖVP, did not happen. The SPÖ lost about 10 per cent of the vote share and three seats, and was thus not successful with its newly adopted, more EU critical, position. In total the SPÖ had four MEPs, but after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty an additional MEP joined the group after 15 December 2011. Most importantly, the SPÖ failed to mobilize its traditional constituency to participate in the EP elections (SORA, 2009). Unsurprisingly, the main reasons why voters chose the SPÖ were the economic crisis, the job market situation, and unemployment concerns, but also immigration and crime issues (Kritzinger et al., 2009).

The ÖVP also lost votes and was down 3 per cent but was, in comparison to the SPÖ, more successful in the mobilization of its traditional constituency. The intra-party dissent related to the head of list of the ÖVP campaign and the strongly personalized electoral campaign for preferential votes by the second-placed ÖVP candidate Othmar Karas, resulted in a better outcome for the junior partner in government. The ÖVP eventually became the strongest party in the EP elections and considerably distanced itself from its SPÖ coalition partner. The main reasons to vote for the ÖVP were the economic and financial crises as well as the party’s support for European integration (ibid.). Both government parties benefitted substantially from the votes of their respective core voters (SORA, 2009).

The main opposition party, the FPÖ, was extremely successful in mobilizing its voters, almost doubling its share of the vote. Former voters who abstained in 2004 returned to the party in 2009 (ibid.). And yet, it lagged behind its pre-electoral expectations, failing to achieve its aim to become the largest party. It became only fourth largest party, after the ÖVP, SPÖ, and List HPM. The crucial issues explaining why voters chose the FPÖ were immigration, but also the economic crisis (Kritzinger et al., 2009). A large segment of people affected by the economic crisis voted for the FPÖ (SORA, 2009).

The second winner in the election race was the List HPM, which accumulated the protest vote that most likely would have switched to the FPÖ otherwise. The List HPM mostly benefitted from former SPÖ and FPÖ voters as well as from non-voters in 2004 (Plaser and Ulram, 2009). Its focus on issues critical of the EU, and on blaming EU institutions, proved to be a successful strategy. It attracted mainly retired persons and workers who did not agree with the ‘privileges’ granted to members of the EP, who were not satisfied with EU institutions and politics, who perceived that European and Austrian citizens lacked a say in European affairs, and who were in favour of greater political control over the European level (ibid., 2009). The head of List, Hans-Peter Martin, blamed the EU for its inefficiency, bureaucracy, and waste of money, and thus echoed the dissatisfaction of Austrians with the supranational organization. The unique support of the Neue Kronen Zeitung, Austria’s top-selling tabloid – with a market share of 42 per cent – for the List HPM’s electoral campaign proved to be a crucial factor towards its success. About 70 per cent of voters for the List HPM were also readers of the tabloid, or to turn the figures the other way around, nearly 30 per cent of Kronen Zeitung readers voted for the List HPM (ibid.).

Surprisingly, and against the European trend, the Green Party got only 10 per cent of the share of the vote, a loss of 3 per cent in comparison to 2004, and did not reach its declared targets. This might be due to leadership battles before and during the EP election. Nevertheless, the Greens were able to keep their two seats in the EP. The party did well amongst young voters and amongst voters concerned with environmental issues.

The BZÖ reached close to 5 per cent of the vote, which at the time of the election proved insufficient to gain a seat in the EP. As soon as the Lisbon Treaty came into force and Austria obtained 19 instead of 17 seats, the BZÖ gained 1 seat. In mid-December 2011, Ewald Stadler took his seat in the EP. The BZÖ received the most votes in Carinthia, the federal state, which was governed by its charismatic leader Jörg Haider until his death. Issues of importance were, once again, the economic crisis and immigration (Kritzinger et al., 2009). The Communist Party of Austria and JuLiS clearly failed to gain any seats in the EP.
Austrian MEPs joined four political groups in the EP. The ÖVP members joined the European People’s Party, the SPÖ MEPs the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, and the Greens the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance. Meanwhile, the FPÖ MEPs decided to sit in the EP as non-attached members due to their particular policy stances. In terms of representation and impact on decision-making processes these circumstances weakened a potential national Austrian position.

At the 2009 EP election, a major turnover took place: out of the then elected 17 Austrian MEPs, nine were newcomers: three from the ÖVP, two each from the SPÖ and the List HPM, and one each from the Green Party and the FPÖ, respectively. Amongst Austrian elected MEPs, 41.1 per cent were women. The Green Party had only female representatives and the FPÖ had none, the ÖVP had a clear male overbalance, whereas amongst the SPÖ and List HPM delegations gender distribution was balanced.

### 9.4 Campaign finance

For the 2009 EP elections, the financing of Austrian party campaigns was regulated by the so-called Political Parties Act (BKA-RIS, 2010), which specifies with further legislation how much funding each party receives for different aspects of their activities. The Austrian parties relied on a generous public funding system (Sickinger, 2009). Each party received a defined amount of funding for electoral campaigning. Public funding for EP elections was set at a lower level than for national elections. In the case of national elections in 2008, the total public funding for electoral campaigns was €2.21 multiplied by the number of persons entitled to vote and was to be allocated to the parties represented in the Parliament at the ratio of their vote share (section 2a, part G of Political Parties Act, BKA-RIS (2010)). The same rules applied to EP election campaigns, except that the total funding was 10 per cent lower (section 2b, part G; §§2a–b of Political Parties Act, BKA-RIS (2010)). However, in comparison to other countries the difference was quite small. If funding was not spent, it had to be reimbursed to the state.

Although many attempts were made to regulate non-public party funding – the latest one in 2013, which, however, is not tackled here – this is still a grey area. Again for the 2009 EP elections, Austrian political parties were able to receive voluntary contributions from anonymous donors up to a sum of €7,260. Any contribution above that level had to be disclosed to the Audit Court, but not to the public (Sickinger, 2009). However, contributions from public institutions and other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>EPP</th>
<th>S&amp;D</th>
<th>ALDE</th>
<th>Greens/EFA</th>
<th>ECR</th>
<th>EUL/NGL</th>
<th>EFD</th>
<th>NA</th>
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<tr>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPO</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List HPM</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPÖ</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Party</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZÖ</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPÖ</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>JuLis</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
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Table 16.7 List of Austrian MEPs: seventh legislature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>National party</th>
<th>Political group</th>
<th>Professional background</th>
<th>Year of birth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Committee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Othmar Karas</td>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Party official</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Vice-President of European Parliament (since 18 Jan. 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vice-Chair of EPP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisabeth Köstinger</td>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Youth politics</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Committee on Budgetary Control (until 5 April 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hella Ranner (until 31 Mar. 2011)</td>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Committee on Transport and Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heinz K. Becker (since 1 Apr. 2011)</td>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Managing director</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Committee on Employment and Social Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Rübig</td>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Committee on Petitions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Committee on Budgetary Control (since 6 April 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Committee on Industry, Research and Energy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Seeber</td>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Jurist, economist</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernst Strasser (until 23 Mar. 2011)</td>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Jurist, consultant</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hubert Pirker (since 31 Mar. 2011)</td>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Management consultant Advertising and PR</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Committee on Transport and Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karin Kadenbach</td>
<td>SPÖ</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Advertising and PR</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jörg Leichtfried</td>
<td>SPÖ</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Jurist</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Committee on Transport and Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn Regner</td>
<td>SPÖ</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Jurist</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Subcommittee on Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannes Swoboda</td>
<td>SPÖ</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Party functionary</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Committee on Legal Affairs (Vice-Chair)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Vice-Chair of S&amp;D (until 17 Jan 2012)</td>
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<td>Chair of S&amp;D (since 18 Jan 2012)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Committee on Financial, Economic and Social Crisis (until 31 July 2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Josef Weidenholzer (since 1 Dec. 2011)</td>
<td>SPÖ</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>University professor of history</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(continued)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
major interest groups were exempt from the regulation. Moreover, any contributions from private institutions, interest groups, or enterprises given directly to the campaign were also not taken into account. Austria’s campaign finance law was criticized by the Council of Europe, which strove for tighter campaign finance regulation in Austria (GRECO, 2011).

In general, Austrian parties spend less for their campaigns on EP elections than for national elections. However, we have to interpret these figures cautiously, as no detailed information on campaign expenses is available. We only know how much parties receive as campaign refunds from the state, but not how much they spend. The data show that refunds were based on the number of seats a party obtains and did not reflect their actual spending. As the ÖVP obtained more votes in the EP elections than in the national elections this might have resulted in higher campaign refunds, biasing the overall picture on campaign spending.

### 10 Theoretical interpretation of Euro-elections

#### 10.1 Second-Order Election theory

The novelty of the first EP elections in 1996 led to a relative high turnout, even if it was lower than that achieved at national elections (SORA, 2006, 403f) and decreased even further in
the elections that followed. From this perspective, it can be argued that Austria partially fits in the Second-Order Election model.

Yet, the picture of the two established government parties, the ÖVP and SPÖ, concerning vote share is, instead, more blurred. Whereas the SPÖ lost considerably at the European elections, the ÖVP gained at least in the 1996, 1999, and 2009 European contests. This ‘anomaly’ seems to reflect that the discontent of many citizens with the SPÖ and ÖVP grand coalition government only affected negatively the senior partner, the Socialists, thus refuting the hypothesis that government parties lose votes in EP elections as a general rule in the Austrian case (Reif and Schmitt, 1980).

In general, opposition parties did not obtain substantial vote shares in EP elections. Indeed, the FPÖ won in some cases when being an opposition party but it lost quite a remarkable number of votes as a junior partner in the coalition with the ÖVP in the 2002 national elections as well as the 2004 EP elections. By contrast, the Greens did not considerably improve their results in EP elections compared to national ones. The most striking element of the 2009 Euro-election was the result of the HPM List, which ran only in the European contest, and obtained the third largest share of the vote. Both the FPÖ and the HPM campaigns focussed on their party leader and their head of list respectively, confirming the important part that charismatic politicians can play at the European level.

10.2 Europe Salience theory

Although national issues seemed to dominate the Euro-election campaigns, with the emergence of the HPM List in 2004, an increase in European issues could be observed. The other parties marginally raised European topics, but domestic matters remained the focus of the electoral
contest. European policy stances combined with a debate on the future of Europe were of secondary importance or did not emerge at all.

Concerning the European integration process, the more established parties, the SPÖ and ÖVP, featured very positive to more moderate stances. More specifically, the ÖVP and SPÖ tended to follow similar positions, except for social and economic policies. The SPÖ emphasized European growth and employment policies, whilst the ÖVP stressed the question of competitiveness without undermining the Austrian social market economy.

As to the opposition parties, they held substantially different positions towards the European integration process: whereas the Green Party was rather positive towards the EU, highlighting aspects connected to the European social and ecological union, the FPÖ featured the most negative stance, emphasizing the loss of national sovereignty and all kinds of immigration issues. The BZÖ was also critical of the European Union, but pointed out its economic advantages. Finally, the HPM List could be labelled as Euro sceptic, with its aim of downsizing the EU budget, reducing bureaucracy, and fighting corruption at the European level.

In brief, Austrian parties seemed unable to learn from previous experiences. The quality of communication about Europe and EU issues has not been improved since 2004. EP campaigns were fought from a national perspective and the EU is still presented as a scapegoat when it comes to unpopular political decisions, a strategy that helps EU sceptic parties and politicians on the one hand, and discourages potential Europhile voters on the other (Perlot and Zeglovits, 2010).

The EP electoral contests feature substantial aspects of the second-order election model: low turnout, loss of government parties, gain for opposition parties, and the dominance of national topics. Future elections will show whether 20 years of EU membership and changed economic conditions provoked by the financial crisis will turn EP elections into a contest in its own right.

References

Primary sources


Austria


Secondary sources