

Right-wing government takes shape in Austria

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15 November 2017

The programme of the new Austrian government will be characterised by cuts to social spending, a strengthening of the internal and external repressive state apparatus, and an intensification of anti-refugee and anti-immigrant policies. Although the coalition talks between the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) are taking place in secret and are yet to be concluded, it is already clear that agreement exists on the key issues.

It is now considered certain that a coalition will be established between the two parties. Immediately after the October 15 election, ÖVP leader Sebastian Kurz initiated talks with the right-wing extremists. Both parties have indicated over recent days that the talks are going well, and backed the initial results.

FPÖ leader Hans-Christian Strache praised the talks on Saturday as a “good process,” adding that “50 percent of the incoming government’s programme will bear the FPÖ’s deep blue signature.” The right-wing extremists’ participation in government has been interpreted by Strache as the “prelude to two to three terms in office.”

For its part, the ÖVP is also expecting a coalition with the FPÖ. ÖVP deputy parliamentary leader August Vöginger stated that he thinks the talks are on the right track.

A possible distribution of government posts is already under way. Kurz as chancellor is prepared to grant the FPÖ several key posts. FPÖ leader Strache is likely to become vice chancellor and interior minister, while former FPÖ presidential candidate Norbert Hofer could head the Foreign Ministry. This would put two of the most right-wing figures within the FPÖ in two of the highest government posts in Austria. Strache’s connections with fascist circles are well documented.

Other potential FPÖ candidates for ministerial posts

include the 25-year-old leader of the party in Salzburg, Mallene Svazek, and Dagmar Belakowitsch. Svazek is to assume control of the Ministry for Social Services. Svazek was personal assistant and political adviser to Harald Wilimsky, a rabid anti-Semite.

Belakowitsch, a close Strache ally, regularly rails against foreigners and asylum-seekers. She called for the use of military vehicles to deport refugees, saying, “They can scream as loud as they want in there.” Belakowitsch is to lead the Health Ministry. The ministries of transport and sport will also go to the FPÖ.

The ÖVP is expected to take control of the defence, economy and finance ministries. An additional post is to be created for Josef Moser, who is to make Austria “fit for the future.”

A jurist, Moser has enjoyed a long career in the FPÖ. He was recruited to the party in 1991 by then-FPÖ leader Jörg Haider, and led its main office for a year. Between 1992 and 2002, he was the FPÖ’s parliamentary leader. In 2004, he switched to head the Austrian court of auditors and repeatedly made public appeals for drastic budget cuts.

He has now been elected to parliament as a non-party candidate in third place on the Sebastian Kurz List—i.e., the ÖVP. He will press ahead with the destruction of the social state, which big business has been demanding for some time. There is too much money stuck in state structures, said Moser. Austria has an “efficiency problem.”

A centrepiece of the government’s programme will be a drastic package of austerity measures. The current intention is to reduce the national debt from 82 percent of GDP to around 70 percent. To remove burdens from business, tax rates are to be cut from 43 percent to 40 percent. This measure alone will cost some €4 billion.

The government wants “as little regulation as possible and the maximum amount of freedom,” Kurz announced.

This is to be achieved above all through cuts to social spending. There are rumours that foreigners and asylum seekers will only be able to claim benefits like social assistance and child care benefits after a five-year period. At the same time, nationwide rules for social assistance will be introduced. The model to be adopted in this regard is the so-called “social assistance light” for asylum seekers in Upper Austria and Lower Austria, where non-Austrians receive only a fraction of the benefit given to Austrians. This will be the first step to cutting benefits for all.

However, a government led by Kurz and Strache will go much further. Negotiators in Vienna are “fiercely determined,” to undermine the influence of interest groups, wrote the web site *news.at* recently in a piece headlined, “The end of social partnership.” The influence of trade unions and workers’ representative bodies will be reduced, so that the hollowing out of collective agreements and labour laws can proceed without their involvement.



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