Fall Elections in Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic

and their Impact on European Migration Policies

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- The issue of immigration affected the national elections in Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic to a variable extent. In Germany, most parties' campaigns including the SPD and CDU had focused on other topics, yet, their stances on immigration and asylum largely influenced voters' decisions. The latter also applies to the elections in Austria and the Czech Republic where the winning and future governing parties had run fierce anti-immigration campaigns.

- The outcome of the elections in Austria and the Czech Republic strengthens EU member states calling for a more restrictive immigration policy and even a total closing of the borders. Concerning specific immigration policies, the future Austrian government will probably closely cooperate with the Visegrád Group at the EU level. However, due to many different interests, it is very unlikely that Austria will officially accede to the V4.

- Overall, the outcome of the elections in Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic will not fundamentally change the course of European migration policy but rather intensify the current tendency of externalization, aiming to prevent migrants from reaching European soil. This policy includes border protection, closer cooperation with neighbor states as well as plans for "hotspots" in order to detain and vet asylum seekers outside of Europe. Moreover, this means increasing deportations and presumably a redefinition of the concepts of asylum and sanctuary with the purpose of denying more people the right to enter the European Union.

Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary **3**

2. Introduction **4**

3. Country Reports **5**
3.1 Country Analysis Germany 5
3.2 Country Analysis Austria 9
3.3 Country Analysis Czech Republic 12

4. Elections Impact on the EU and the V4 . . . . . **15**

References **17**

Imprint **18**

1. Executive Summary

Two years after the so-called summer of migration in 2015 and Germany's decision to leave the borders open in particular for people fleeing Syria, immigration into the European Union and its member states is still a highly contested issue – especially during election times.

Germany's elections were characterized by the assumption that the conservative CDU/CSU would win the election, which they did – albeit heavy losses. The election campaigns were structured accordingly, focusing less on profound substance and more on emotions. Voters' biggest concern were immigrants – the ones already in the country, how their presence affects the social welfare system and security, and how to prevent others from immigrating through a deal with Turkey. However, the topic of immigration was largely avoided in most campaigns. Consequently, the far-right AfD was able to benefit most from an atmosphere by opting for "zero-immigration" and, ultimately, become the third strongest force at the elections.

In Austria, the national elections brought a shift to the right. The conservative ÖVP, which won the elections, and the also successful far-right FPÖ have already formed a coalition. Both government parties' campaigns had been dominated by the issue of migration and asylum and the call for a more restrictive migration regime, including the closing of borders, a more difficult path toward citizenship, massive cuts in financial support for asylum seekers and the enforcement of deportations.

The elections to the Chamber of Deputies in the Czech Republic reshaped the political landscape in favor of the populist party ANO led by the billionaire, Andrej Babiš. Migration has become a major issue dominating Czech public debates regarding European politics and there is an overarching consensus about very restrictive policies and the rejection of the relocation of asylum seekers within the European Union. Therefore, in cooperation with the Visegrád Group (involving the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland), regarding migration and asylum the prospective new government will continue to use pressure on the European Union and try to build coalitions with other countries, such as Austria.

The outcome of the elections in Austria and the Czech Republic strengthens EU member states calling for a more restrictive migration policy and even a total closing of the borders. Concerning specific migration policies, the future Austrian government will probably closely cooperate with the Visegrád Group (V4) at the EU level. However, due to many different interests, it is very unlikely that Austria will officially accede to the V4.

Overall, the outcome of the elections in Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic will not fundamentally change the course of European migration policy but rather intensify the current tendency of externalization, aiming to prevent migrants from reaching European soil. This policy includes border protection, closer cooperation with neighbor states as well as plans for "hotspots" in order to detain and vet asylum seekers outside of Europe. Moreover, this means increasing deportations and presumably a redefinition of the concepts of asylum and sanctuary with the purpose of denying more people the right to enter the European Union.

2. Introduction

This paper analyses the significance and politicization of migration during the fall 2017 national election campaigns in Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic.

Two years after Germany's decision to leave its borders open[1] for asylum seekers[2] mainly from Syria, immigration into the European Union and its member states remains a highly contested issue. Populist and nativist parties have exploited the issue and related fears – in many cases racist and xenophobic attitudes – for mobilizing voters. However, these parties are not solely responsible for policy shifts and a changing political culture. Over the years, most restrictive policies concerning migration and asylum have been initiated and implemented not by populist radical right parties, but rather by mainstream right-wing parties (Mudde 2013: 11-12) or, as in the case of Austria, even coalitions with Social Democratic parties.

To analyze these elections in Europe, we will, first, introduce the political actors and their election campaigns regarding migration in each country. We examine the role of migration in the respective electoral campaigns in Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic. Furthermore, this paper takes a closer look at right-wing populist and radical right-wing parties and their election manifestos, as well as reactions to these campaign promises by center and other established parties. What issues shaped the elections in general? How was the issue of migration framed and what solutions did parties offer? We reveal if any of the issues were concealed or, on the contrary, made part of a campaign strategy.

Second, as negotiations for future cabinet and policies are still ongoing, we will take a closer look at the elections' impact on European migration policies. We assess if the success of parties with a strong anti-immigration stance in Austria and the Czech Republic contribute to a more restrictive European approach towards the issues of migration, integration and asylum. Which specific agreements and frameworks may be renegotiated, questioned or even suspended? This will also include the European Union's approach towards matters and conflicts concerning the (political) distinction between refugees and economic immigrants[3], border policies and the relocation of asylum seekers within the Union. One major point of concern after the elections is whether, with a potential ally in the Austrian government, the Visegrád Group could exert more pressure on the European Union regarding migration policies. We will argue that while there is an opportunity for closer cooperation in specific policies, there are also many conflicting interests that make an accession of Austria to the V4 highly unlikely.

1. According to the Dublin III Regulation, Germany could have rejected asylum seekers entering the country via the Austrian border.

2. We define the term asylum seeker as someone who will claim or has claimed asylum; the term refugee as a person with recognized refugee status based on the Geneva Convention; the term migrant for a person moving in general; and the term immigrant for someone who enters a country with the intention of staying there.

3. This distinction has been strategically used to put asylum into question (see e.g. Merhaut/Stern 2018 and Kirchhoff/Lorenz 2018).

3. Country Reports

3.1 Country Analysis Germany

3.1.1 Political Parties

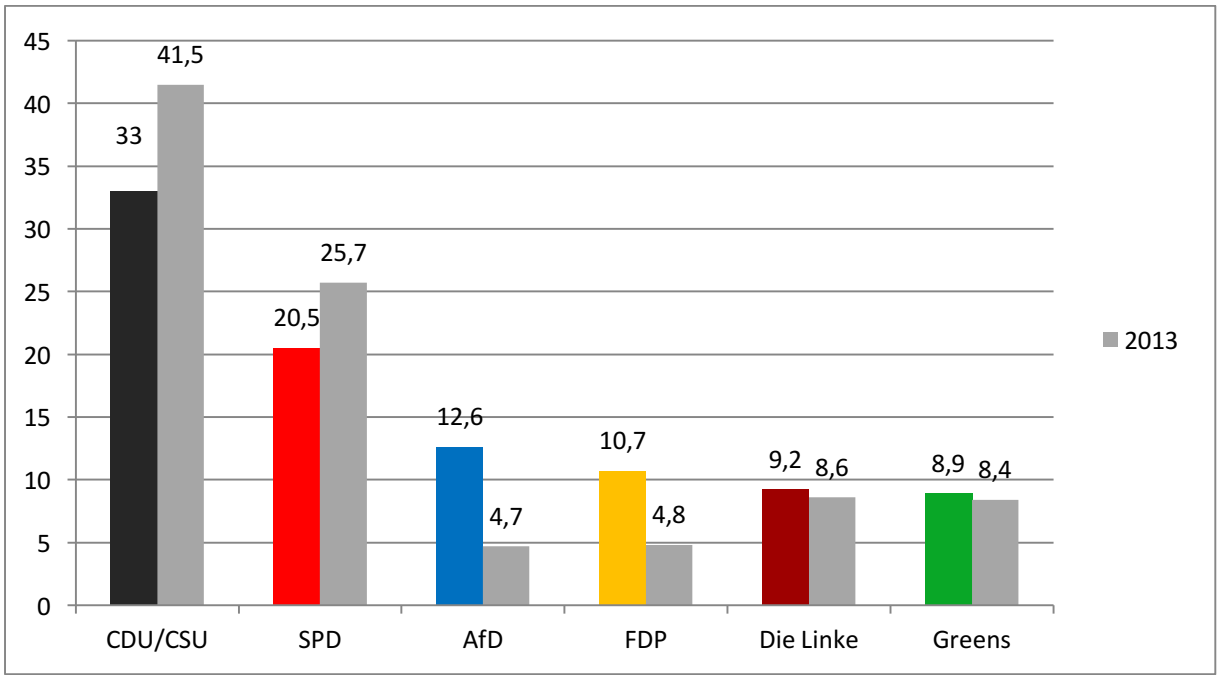

Table 1: Results of the national elections in Germany 2017[4]

With federal elections taking place every four years, Germany held its 19th election of the national assembly, the Bundestag, on September 24, 2017. Germany has a 5 per cent threshold and only six of the 34 parties that were up for election made it into the Bundestag: the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) – in Bavaria: the Christian Social Union (CSU) –, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), the Free Democratic Party (FDP), The Left (Die Linke) and the Alternative for Germany (AfD). As a result, the FDP, receiving only 4.8 per cent in the 2013 federal elections and losing its seat in the Bundestag for the first time since its formation in 1948 and election to the Bundestag in 1949, made a comeback. The AfD, founded only in 2013, had also missed the 5 per cent threshold that year, but managed to enter the Bundestag in 2017 by gaining 7.9 per cent – more than any other party – compared to the previous election.

The remaining 28 parties – among them the Pirates (PIRATEN), the radical right-wing National Democratic Party (NPD), and many small parties that were only running in certain federal states – received 5 per cent of the votes combined.

In general, the election results can be interpreted as a rejection of the Grand Coalition. While the two big parties, CDU/CSU and SPD, both lost an enormous amount of votes, all the small parties that made the 5 per cent threshold were able to increase, which, in part, was an expression of a protest vote.

After two terms of a Grand Coalition (Große Koalition) between CDU/CSU and SPD in 2005-2009 as well as in the incumbent government, the latter ruled out another term due to its poor showing at

4. Source: Federal Returning Officer:

2017: https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/bundestagswahlen/2017/ergebnisse/bund-99.html.

2013: https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/bundestagswahlen/2013/ergebnisse/bund-99.html (December 5, 2017)

the polls, which would put them at a disadvantage in a new coalition. Martin Schulz, SPD chairman and from 2012 to 2017 also president of the European parliament, had announced SPD's new place in the opposition – to much acclaim from party members and supporters. However, since current coalition negotiations have excluded another option, negotiations for a third term under CDU/CSU, FDP, and the Greens – the so-called Jamaica coalition – have stalled. At the SPD's party conference on December 8, 2017, delegates re-elected Schulz as chairman and agreed to exploratory talks between SPD and CDU/CSU. However, an actual coalition will be decided by yet another party referendum.

After having missed the 5 per cent threshold for entering parliament in 2013 by a small margin, the far-right AfD, which is already represented in most regional parliaments, obtained 12.6 per cent of the votes this year and came in third. Whereas the party had started out as a right-wing conservative project to reject European and German fiscal policies, the AfD went through several internal conflicts and its shift to the far-right became more and more pronounced in recent years. The party and its two main candidates, Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel, ran a fierce nativist, populist and nationalist campaign.

3.1.2 Migration

Germany came to fame when, during the so-called long summer of migration, chancellor Angela Merkel decided to leave its borders open, so asylum seekers could enter the country. Ever since, her party colleagues, most notably from the Bavarian CSU, have been challenging that decision arguing that Germany needs to set a limit ("Obergrenze") of maximum 200 000 asylum seekers[5] allowed to enter in a given year. With Merkel holding on to her original decision, the CDU and CSU have settled for a compromise, emphasizing that a similar situation must be avoided at all cost.

Due to either the need for compromises, confidence in winning, or in an effort to avoid losing too many votes, the Union's (CDU and CSU) election campaign fully endorsed chancellor Merkel but lacked real substance. Remarkably, their election manifesto mentions the topic of (forced) migration only briefly. The message: Germany has done an impeccable job for asylum seekers in need. However, Germany's goal is to manage immigration by limiting family reunifications in cases of subsidiary protection, focusing on deportations, and signing deals with African countries to keep the number of refugees as small as possible.[6] So-called illegal migration and human smuggling are to be brought to a halt by treaties like the EU-Turkey deal.

Despite an effort to maintain a low profile regarding the essence of asylum and refugee issues, Merkel's campaign tours, mainly in eastern states of Germany, were occasionally disrupted by protesters. Claims that they were ordinary citizens have been discredited; in most cases the demonstrators were mobilized by AfD and NPD in an attempt to strengthen their mobilizing potential for the so-called New Right.[7]

The AfD, starting out in 2013 as liberal-right and Eurosceptic, shifted its focus in 2015 to become openly far-right. They would limit immigration and hand-pick only qualified people to fill a void in the labor market. They are arguing that the social welfare state is not equipped for refugees and that, due to globalization, the Geneva Convention no longer applies. They make a case for closed borders, increased deportations, and citizenship for Germans according to ius sanguinis (instead of ius soli, which is an additional option in Germany since 2000). Evidently, this defines their underlying ideology concerning an assumed native culture being replaced by "foreign" ones.[8] The AfD

5. This maximum limit had also been a prominent topic during the, ultimately failed, so-called Jamaica coalition negotiations. Especially the Greens were fighting this proposition by the CSU, who were supported by the FDP.

6. CDU/CSU (2017): Für ein Deutschland, in dem wir gut und gerne leben. Regierungsprogramm 2017-2021, pp. 62-63. Online: https://www.cdu.de/system/tdf/media/dokumente/170703regierungsprogramm2017.pdf?file=1&type=field_collection_item&id=9932 (December 8, 2017)

7. Markus Kollberg: Merkels dunkles Deutschland. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, September 29, 2017. Online: http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/bundestagswahl/proteste-gegen-merkels-wahlkampfauftritten-in-ostdeutschland-15189444.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_0 (December 6, 2017)

8. On the New Right's codes replacing "race" with culture, see, e.g., Balibar 1989: 377 and Shooman 2011: 61.

is convinced that unaccompanied minor asylum seekers serve, in most cases, as anchor children, therefore no family reunification (which they would like to abolish altogether) should apply.[9]

The FDP has its own part in shifting society's notions of human rights to the right by taking a softer approach than AfD's blatant statements. For instance, they suggest asylum seekers should live in reception centers until their asylum application is decided. In case of rejection, they must be deported immediately. For security reasons, FRONTEX should be expanded to become a real, centralized European project with plenty of "hard-hitting operational personnel."[10] Additionally, the FDP intends to reform immigration law to further differentiate between long-term immigrants, the politically persecuted and refugees from warzones. Germany should be able to select the former, grant asylum to the persecuted, and only grant subsidiary protection to the latter. Moreover, they demand a system based on merit, treating refugees as potential long-term immigrants expected to prove their usefulness to the country.

The FDP's concept of "well integrated" refugees in fact stands for future candidates for the labor market. They also state that anyone without the right to stay must to be deported.[11]

The Greens, on the other hand, aim to provide assistance for successful integration, eliminate the underlying causes forcing people to flee, secure legal passage and guarantee fast and fair asylum procedures. Furthermore, they promote family reunification (including those eligible for subsidiary protection), more solidarity among EU member states and oppose deportations to Afghanistan.[12]

The Left is taking a similar line by demanding safe passage, fair trade, and fighting causes of flight, like arms exports. Additionally, they argue in favor of open borders and against reception centers in North Africa. Furthermore, they want to abolish the current Residence Act, which they call restrictive. In contrast to the FDP, they argue against immigration policies that classify refugees based on what they can do for the country.[13]

The SPD is taking a middle ground in the debate by supporting the right of asylum and family reunification, but deporting asylum seekers in case of rejection (except to Afghanistan). "Well integrated" asylum seekers should be allowed to stay, asylum in general must be managed by fighting the causes of flight, asylum seekers should be evenly distributed among EU member states, and the Schengen Area must be secured. As for the future, in an effort to strengthen the German economy, SPD is in favor of an immigration law along the lines of Canada.[14]

Despite being regarded as a close runner-up at the beginning of the election campaign, the SPD and most notably Martin Schulz lost their grip along the way. One reason might be the loss of three elections in federal states held in the spring. However, this was, without a doubt, an election driven by emotions and centered on a single topic: immigration. According to the Eurobarometer (2017), 37 per cent of the Germans believe that immigration is the most important issue facing the country. In addition, a recent survey by the Bertelsmann Stiftung shows that the majority displays a more critical attitude towards refugees (Arant et al. 2017).

Immigration has also been in the center of coalition debates: The Union's negotiations with the FDP and the Green Party had failed largely because of a disagreement over refuge and asylum. In particular, the parties were not able to compromise on family reunification. The preceding Grand Coalition had agreed upon two years in which family reunifications for the subsidiary protected are suspended, terminating in

9. AfD (2017): Programm für Deutschland. Wahlprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum Deutschen Bundestag am 24. September 2017, p. 31. Online: https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/06/2017-06-01_AfD-Bundestagswahlprogramm_Onlinefassung.pdf (December 6, 2017)

10. FDP (2017): Denken wir neu. Unser Programm zur Bundestagswahl. Effektiver Schutz der EU-Außengrenzen. Online: https://www.fdp.de/wp-modul/btw17-wp-a-148 (December 6, 2017)

11. FDP (2017): Die Freien Demokraten fordern: Vorübergehender humanitärer Schutz für Kriegsflüchtlinge. Online: https://www.fdp.de/forderung/80-2 (December 6, 2017)

12. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (2017): Zukunft wird aus Mut gemacht. Bundeswahlprogramm 2017. Online: https://www.gruene.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/BUENDNIS_90_DIE_GRUENEN_Bundestagswahlprogramm_2017_barrierefrei.pdf (December 6, 2017)

13. Die Linke (2017): Wahlprogramm. XI. Integration heißt soziale Offensive und gleiche Rechte für alle. Online: https://www.die-linke.de/wahlen/wahlprogramm/xi-integration-heisst-soziale-offensive-und-gleiche-rechte-fuer-alle/ (December 6, 2017)

14. SPD (2017): Standpunkte. Für unser Land – menschlich und weltoffen. Online: https://www.spd.de/standpunkte/fuer-unser-land-menschlich-und-weltoffen/ (December 6, 2017)

March 2018. During the Jamaica coalition negotiations, the Union, especially the CSU, insisted on suspending that decree further beyond March 2018. The FDP has been basically in line with the Union, however taking cases of hardship into account. The Green Party has firmly argued in favor of family reunifications as well as against a maximum limit for asylum seekers. The Green Party's willing to compromise over reception centers for asylum seekers was one of the very few agreements on migration policies during the Jamaica coalition negotiations. Ultimately, the differences between the parties, especially between the FDP and the CSU on the one hand and the Greens on the other, representing two very different electorates turned out to be insurmountable.

Far more similarities can be detected between the Union and the SPD, despite the fact that the ongoing talks about a new Grand Coalition might turn out to be very difficult: Being in coalition with CDU and CSU has put the Social Democrats in an unfavorable position in their preceding coalition. However, the issues of migration and asylum will unlikely be reasons for failing negotiations. The Union and the SPD both want to manage migration by securing EU's outside borders, investing in supporting crisis regions and having precise immigration laws. Differences such as approval (CDU/CSU) and refusal (SPD) of deportations to Afghanistan seem like minor details in the light of recent Jamaica coalition negotiations. Moreover, a Grand Coalition will presumably find common ground in European matters like solidary reception of asylum seekers among all EU member states.

3.2 Country Analysis Austria

3.2.1 Political Parties

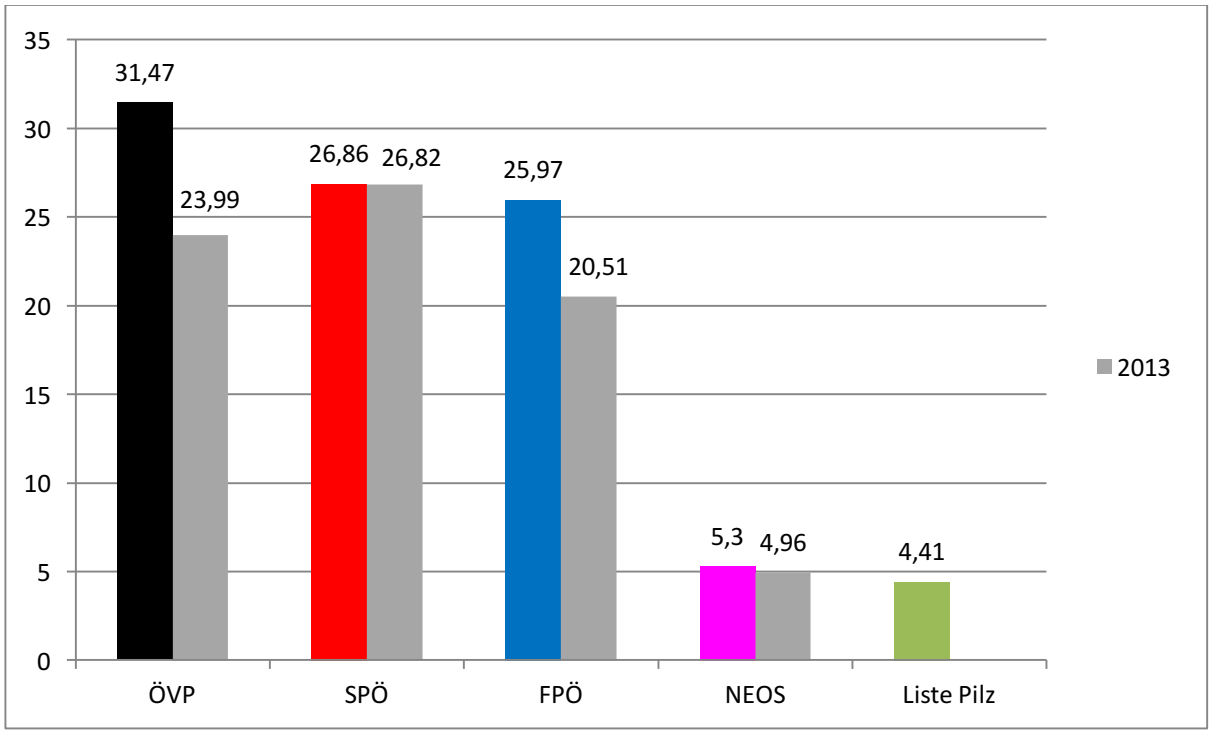

Table 2: Results of the national elections in Austria 2017[15]

The elections to the Austrian National Council on October 15th, 2017 resulted in a shift to the Right. In May 2017, Vice Chancellor and leader of the conservative Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP) (Austrian People's Party) Reinhold Mitterlehner resigned from his offices due to internal conflicts, resulting in a rise of his party rival, Sebastian Kurz. Having good polling numbers, Kurz seized the opportunity and practically terminated the coalition with the Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (SPÖ) (Social Democratic Party of Austria) under Chancellor Christian Kern in order to clear the way for snap elections.

Kurz proved to be right and obtained 31.5 per cent of the votes, which put the former second-ranked ÖVP on top. The election campaign was dominated by the issues of immigration and integration and carried the promise of an awakening and a new political style. Despite having been part of the cabinet for six years, the new ÖVP leader managed to present himself as a newcomer and a reliable alternative to traditional politics. Under Sebastian Kurz, the ÖVP has changed its signature design and portrayed itself as a movement rather than a traditional party.

While the SPÖ managed to gain marginally more votes than in the previous 2013 elections, it came in second with 26.9 per cent significantly behind the ÖVP. The Social Democrats had changed their party leader in May 2016, but decided against snap elections due to the ongoing presidential campaign at that time. Their electoral campaign focusing on social issues such as unemployment, housing, and education was overshadowed by allegations of smear campaigning and the dominating issue of migration.

The latter contributed to the continuing elector-

15. Source: Ministry of the Interior.

2017: http://bmi.gv.at/412/Nationalratswahlen/Nationalratswahl_2017/start.aspx.

2013: http://bmi.gv.at/412/Nationalratswahlen/Nationalratswahl_2013/start.aspx (December 5, 2017).

al successes of the far-right Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) (Freedom Party of Austria) after their failure in government in 2005. Before Sebastian Kurz became chairman of the ÖVP, the FPÖ had led the polls. Although Kurz also adopted the anti-immigration stance as a campaign issue, the Freedom Party under its long-time chairman Heinz-Christian Strache managed to win nearly 26 per cent of the votes by running a nativist, populist and anti-European campaign. Although ideological and personal ties between the Freedom Party and right-wing extremists have been problematized, and proven by critics and the media countless times over the decades, the party is essentially seen as an established political force.
Besides these three larger parties, two smaller ones won enough votes to enter or stay in the National Council. The young liberal-center party NEOS (Das Neue Österreich und Liberales Forum) (The New Austria and Liberal Forum) ran a campaign focusing on education, social and economic liberalism, which was supported by 5.3 per cent of the voters. The Liste Pilz was the electoral project of Peter Pilz, who had split with his former party, the Greens. Whereas the latter did not achieve the necessary 4 per cent and had to leave the parliament after more than 30 years, Pilz and his team obtained 4.4 per cent of the votes by running a populist campaign combining law-and-order rhetoric and leftist populism. Facing allegations of sexual harassment, the party leader Pilz had to withdraw from his mandate shortly after the election. A few days after the elections, ÖVP and FPÖ announced the start of talks over a future cabinet and their political agenda. Those negotiations have been concluded on December 15th, 2017 and the future government was sworn in by the Austrian president three days later.

3.2.2 Migration

Immigration and refugees have been a major issue in Austrian politics long before the summer of 2015. To some extent the politicization of immigration by FPÖ in order to mobilize voters contributed to the rise of the Freedom Party under Jörg Haider in the late 1980s and 1990s. The public discourse strongly associating immigration with matters of security and crime, as well as cultural identity has left its mark beyond election campaigns. A survey conducted in several European countries showed that Austrians score relatively high on racism and xenophobia (Rosenberger/Seeber 2011: 182). The events of the last few years have further contributed to a more polarized and very often hostile discourse concerning issues of immigration and asylum (Auel/Pollak 2016: 550). The consequence of this discursive shift is the normalization of (campaign) slogans and arguments that had been considered a taboo only a few years ago. The two future governing parties benefitted the most from their strong focus on immigration in the campaigns and in public discourse. Their voters identified immigration as the most important campaign issue (Zandonella/Perlot 2017: 30, 31).
The winner of the election and new Chancellor Sebastian Kurz exploited the current political atmosphere extensively and made the issues of immigration and asylum the main focus of his campaign. Since the fall of 2015, as Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Kurz has taken the stance of restricting (so-called illegal) migration and urging immigrants to adapt better to Austrian society and culture. One major pillar of his campaign was his leading role in the process of closing the so-called "West-Balkan-Route" in order to prevent people fleeing from crises, for example in the Middle East, coming to Austria and Germany. Similar to the Freedom Party, the conservatives and their chairman reduced several complex phenomena such as crime, Islamic extremism, education and (allegedly) excessive cost of the welfare state to one overall topic, which could be solved by closed borders and more stringent policies on immigration. Sebastian Kurz has suggested several times that he favors the Australian immigration model, which would include camps located outside national (or European) borders, where asylum seekers should be interned and wait for a ruling on their asylum status. Among other aspects, this model, as the ÖVP pointed out, would require not only the closing of the routes over the Mediterranean Sea but also a closer cooperation with North African

16. Die Neue Volkspartei – Liste Sebastian Kurz (2017): Der neue Weg. Ordnung und Sicherheit, pp. 20-21. Online: https://mitmachen.sebastian-kurz.at/page/-/Teil%203_Ordnung%20%26%20Sicherheit.pdf (December 7, 2017)

regimes for deportations and border security.[16]

In its campaign program for the elections, the far-right FPÖ rejected any form of immigration and called for more protection of the "homeland", its "autochthonous population" and traditional culture.[17] Furthermore, the party called for more deportations and denounced the idea of multiculturalism. As in the case of the ÖVP, the Freedom Party's campaign focused primarily on Muslim immigration. Being highly critical of the European Union, the FPÖ called for more efforts to secure the external frontiers but also reserved the right to formulate a national migration policy. Additionally, the Freedom Party questions the European Convention of Human Rights.[18]

Although the issue of immigration was not as dominant as with the two parties discussed above, on a policy level, the Social Democratic Party featured similar positions as the ÖVP. The SPÖ called for reducing the number of refugees in Austria, the enforcement of deportations and a fundamental reform of the European asylum system. The Social Democrats suggested the re-enforcement of FRONTEX and the establishment of "asylum centers" in North Africa, which should be run by the European Union.[19]

The two smaller parties, NEOS and Liste Pilz also called for fundamental changes in asylum procedures. The former proposed the acceleration of the process and immediate deportations in the case of a rejection for asylum.[20] The latter party proposes the establishment of asylum camps controlled by the United Nations, where asylum seekers are vetted and prepared for their arrival in Austria.[21]

In the coalition agreement released after the conclusion of the negotiations, the ÖVP and the FPÖ announced restrictions concerning the application for citizenship, massive cuts in financial support for refugees, the closing of external borders of the European Unions and the enforcement of deportations.[22]

16. Die Neue Volkspartei – Liste Sebastian Kurz (2017): Der neue Weg. Ordnung und Sicherheit, pp. 20-21. Online: https://mitmachen.sebastian-kurz.at/page/-/Teil%203_Ordnung%20%26%20Sicherheit.pdf (December 7, 2017)

17. FPÖ (2017): Wahlprogramm für Nationalratswahl. Unsere Grenzen sichern. Online: https://www.fpoe.at/themen/wahlprogramm-2017/unsere-grenzen-sichern/ (December 7, 2017)

18. FPÖ (2017): Wahlprogramm für Nationalratswahl. Unsere Souveränität. Online: https://www.fpoe.at/themen/wahlprogramm-2017/unsere-souveraenitaet/ (December 7, 2017)

19. SPÖ (2017): Plan A. SPÖ-Wahlprogramm 2017, p. 190-191. Online: https://christian-kern.at/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Plan-A_SPOe-Wahlprogramm-2017.pdf (December 7, 2017)

20. NEOS (2017): Das Zukunftsmanifest für ein neues Österreich, p. 14f. Online: https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/2359661/NEOS_Manifest_RGBweb.pdf?t=1511945028746 (December 7, 2017)

21. Liste Pilz (2017): Arbeitsprogramm Flüchtlinge. Ja, es geht. Online: https://listepilz.at/liste-pilz-arbeitsprogramm-fluechtlingspolitik-ja-es-geht/ (December 7, 2017)

22. ÖVP/FPÖ (2017): Zusammen. Für unser Österreich. Regierungsprogramm 2017-2022. Online: https://images.derstandard.at/2017/12/16/Regierungsprogramm.pdf (December 17, 2017)

3.3 Country Analysis Czech Republic

3.3.1 Political Parties

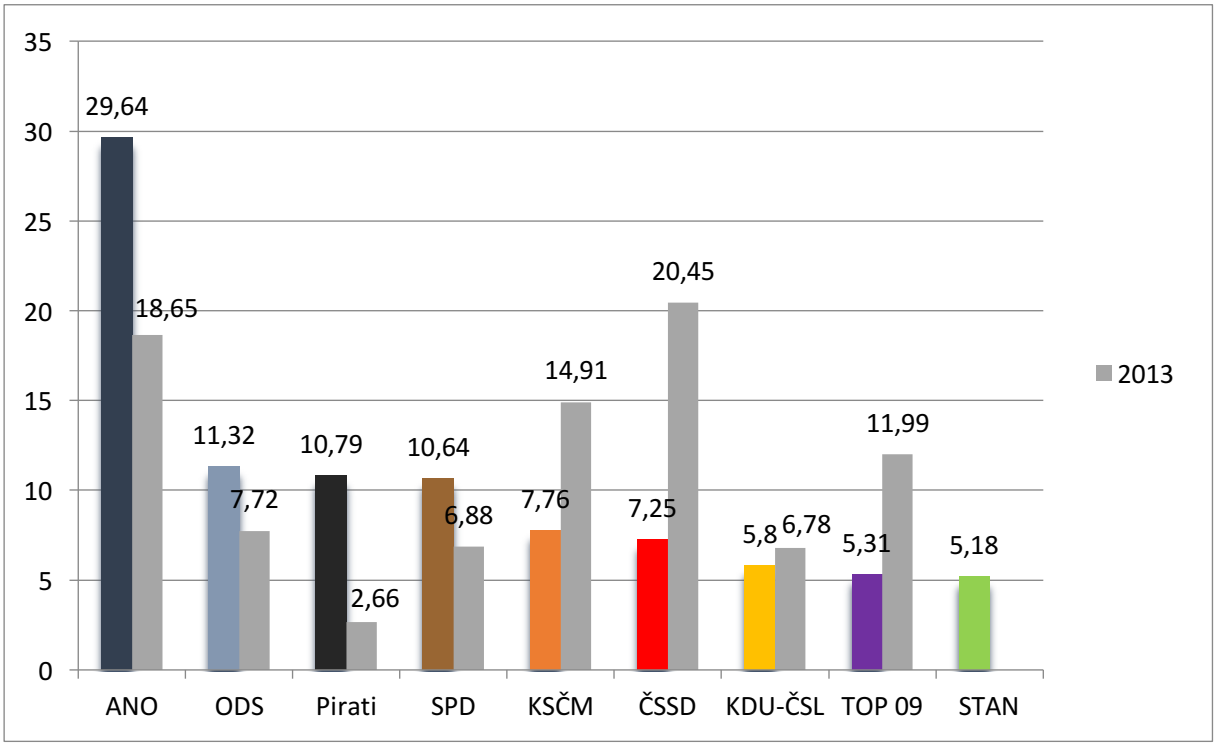

Table 3: Results of the national elections in the Czech Republic in 2017[23]

The elections to the Chamber of Deputies on October 20 and 21, 2017 fundamentally reshaped the political landscape in the Czech Republic, particularly in favor of populist parties. The overall winner, Akce nespokojených občanů (ANO) (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens / Yes), was founded by the billionaire and media tycoon Andrej Babiš in 2011 as a self-declared protest movement against government scandals and corruption. Having won 18.7 per cent at the previous national elections in 2013, ANO managed to obtain 29.7 per cent of the votes in 2017 and left all other competing parties significantly behind. Even though party leader Babiš had to leave his government position as Minister of Finance due to police investigations concerning financial irregularities in May 2017, he managed to run a successful campaign based on criticism of corruption and established political elites. With ANO defining itself as a movement rather than a party, Babiš benefitted from many voters' lack of trust in the traditional center-parties. He also positioned himself as an "anti-political candidate" outside the field of traditional politics, calling for an "entrepreneurial" (neoliberal) rather than a "political" approach towards governing. His demand for strengthening the executive branch and downsizing the legislation can be interpreted as authoritarian.

ANO was the only party of the former coalition government that could improve its electoral performance. The Česká strana sociálně demokratická (ČSSD) (Czech Social Democratic Party), the party of former Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka, suffered huge losses and finished only in sixth place with 7.3 per cent. The second junior partner in the

23. Source: Czech Statistical Office. 2017: https://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2017nss/ps2?xjazyk=EN.

2013: https://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2013/ps2?xjazyk=EN (December 5, 2017)

coalition, the Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová (KDU-ČSL) (Christian and Democratic Union - Czechoslovak People's Party) received 5.8 per cent of the votes.

The elections strengthened the conservative Občanská demokratická strana (ODS) (Civic Democratic Party), which obtained 11.3% and came in second. The Pirati (Pirates), a new party in the Chamber of Deputies, built its campaign around liberal issues such as transparency, individual rights and digital democracy. 10.8 per cent of the electorate voted for them. The liberal-conservative and pro-European party TOP 09 (Tradice Odpovědnost Prosperita) (Tradition Responsibility Prosperity) had to face a dramatic loss of votes (5.35 per cent), which certainly was due to a split with the Starostové a nezávislí (STAN) (Mayors and Independents) before the election. The latter, campaigning on the same platform with TOP 09 in 2013, won 5.2 per cent of the votes and entered Parliament independently. STAN mostly relies on local organizations and may be described as pro-European and liberal conservative. The Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy (KSČM) (Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia) had to deal with a massive loss and obtained 7.8 per cent of the votes cast.

Whereas parties of the traditional left, such as the Social Democrats and the Communists suffered losses and the center remains very fragmented, the far-right was strengthened in the election: 10.6 per cent of the voters supported the radical right party Svoboda a přímá demokracie - Tomio Okamura (SPD) (Freedom and Direct Democracy – Tomio Okamura). Okamura had founded the party Úsvit (Dawn) in 2013 and after internal conflicts in 2015, he had founded the SPD that, as its predecessor, features a far-right profile fiercely opposing immigration, multiculturalism and the European Union. During the campaign, Okamura and the SPD were supported by Marine Le Pen, the leader of Front National, a French far-right party.

On December 6, 2017, President Miloš Zeman appointed Andrej Babiš as new Prime Minister. Babiš is constrained to govern with a minority cabinet with changing alliances, depending on the issue, because most other parties are reluctant or unwilling to join a coalition led by ANO. The conservative ODS recently announced, that the party will not support the ANO minority government.[24] Only the Communist Party and the far-right SPD have shown support in parliament for the ANO cabinet.[25] However, as will be further elaborated below, these political conflicts cannot hide the fact that there is a strong anti-immigration and anti-refugee consensus among Czech parties. As Prime Minister, Babiš will continue this course, and has already called for similar policies concerning refugees and asylum as his former coalition partners did.[26] Babiš has distanced himself from Tomio Okamura's far-right SPD, but being dependent of the latter might push the prospective new government towards even more rigorous approaches.

3.3.2 Migration

As in many other countries, in the Czech Republic immigration has become a major issue dominating public discourse regarding European politics (Weichsel 2016: 583). According to the Eurobarometer survey, more than half of the Czech population considers immigration as a major challenge for the European Union. Only the issue of terrorism, often associated with immigration in public debates as well, was named more often (Standard Eurobarometer 2017: 7). 48 per cent of the Czech people have a "very negative feeling" about immigration from outside the European Union (Eurobarometer 2017). A longitudinal survey conducted by the Czech Public Opinion Research Centre (CVVM) between September 2015 and April 2017 reveals that about 60 per cent of the population opposes the admission of asylum seekers to the Czech Republic (CVVM 2017: 2). The refusal to accept asylum seekers goes along with a strong anti-Muslim attitude (Special Eurobarometer 2015: 33, 35).

When it comes to managing immigration, the

24. N.N.: ODS not to back minority government headed by ANO. Prague Monitor, December 12, 2017. Online: http://praguemonitor.com/2017/12/12/ods-not-back-minority-government-headed-ano (December 12, 2017)

25. Chris Johnstone: ANO leader Andrej Babiš appointed Czech Prime Minister. Radio Praha, December 6, 2017. Online: http://www.radio.cz/en/section/curraffrs/ano-leader-andrej-babis-appointed-czech-prime-minister (December 12, 2017)

26. N.N.: HN: PM Babiš wants to offer money instead of EC quotas. Prague Monitor, December 11, 2017. Online: http://praguemonitor.com/2017/12/11/hn-pm-babi%C5%A1-wants-offer-money-instead-ec-quotas (December 12, 2017)

Czech public prefers the idea of national sovereignty to a European approach (Standard Eurobarometer 2017: 35). The public's strong opposition to immigration and the admission of asylum seekers outlined above was reflected in the Czech government's stance on migration in the institutions of the European Union before the elections. In September 2015, along with Slovakia, Hungary and Romania, the Czech Republic voted against the relocation of 160,000 asylum seekers according to a quota system within EU member states. Even though or maybe because there are few foreign citizens in the Czech Republic, the issue of migration is strongly associated with ideas of cultural homogeneity, national identity and the opposition to multiculturalism.[27]

Most parties in the current Chamber of Deputies share the population's strong anti-migration attitude and support – at least to some extent – restrictive policies concerning both the accommodation of asylum seekers in particular and immigration in general. Besides campaigning against corruption and traditional political elites, Andrej Babiš has also strongly focused on the issues of migration and asylum in the last few years. In the wake of the so-called summer of migration in 2015, he criticized German Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to leave the borders open and accept Syrian asylum seekers by suspending the Dublin treaty and violating Czech sovereign rule (Weichsel 2016: 585). With regard to the external frontiers of the European Union, Babiš called for total closure and protection enforced by NATO-troops.[28]

Although the leader of ANO and current Prime Minister might sometimes use more populist overtones than others, his positions do not necessarily differ from those of the competing parties across the political spectrum, ranging from liberal-conservative parties such as the KDU-ČSL, to successful liberal projects such as the Pirates Party or to the Social Democrats. The election campaigns showed that there is an overarching consensus to engage with the issues of immigration and asylum by focusing on the enforcement of European border control in order to stop migrants from entering the European Union. The relocation of asylum seekers based on a quota set by the European Union was and, as mentioned above, still is vehemently opposed. Furthermore, the (strategic) distinction made by many parties between refugees in need and economic immigrants, often aims at delegitimizing migration in general and questioning the rights of asylum seekers in particular. Therefore, the ANO-leader suggested the establishment of "hotspots" outside the European Union, where asylum seekers should be vetted and separated from other migrants, who, as Babiš put it in 2015, "come to us to be unemployed and take immediately social benefits". A political atmosphere very hostile towards immigrants also creates opportunity structures for right-wing extremist parties. In this regard, Tomio Okamura's SPD ran a campaign with anti-Muslim, dehumanizing and anti-European slogans and, on election day, was rewarded with more than 10 per cent of the votes.

The strategy of externalizing the issue of migration and therefore preventing migrants from coming to Europe by focusing on the protection of external frontiers of the European Union goes along with a strong emphasis on national sovereignty, that must not be violated by European politics. This reflects both public opinion and positions of the political parties in the Czech Republic. In a statement after the election in October, Babiš announced that he intends to expand the coalition with the Visegrád Group to other countries such as Austria in order to put more pressure on the European Union regarding migration and border policies.[30]

27. Ivan Krastev (2017: 21) identifies the different historical experience of Central and Eastern European societies as one reason among others for the strong anti-immigrant resentment

28. Eric Maurice: Czech Republic advocates use of army to protect borders. EUobserver, August 25, 2015. Online: https://euobserver.com/migration/129988 (December 6, 2017)

29. Ibid.

30. N.N.: Tschechien: Wahlsieger Babiš sieht in Kurz einen Verbündeten. Die Presse, October 22, 2017. Online. https://diepresse.com/home/ausland/aussenpolitik/5307354/Tschechien_Wahlsieger-Babis-sieht-in-Kurz-einen-Verbuendeten (December 6, 2017)

4. Elections Impact on the EU and the V4

The European Union has laid a strong focus on managing migration in the last few years (Müller-Graff/Repasi 2016: 212). The so-called summer of migration and its aftermath has further contributed to the crisis of European politics in general and its migration policies in particular. Once more, a significant line of conflict has emerged among the member states. Despite all their differences, the Visegrád Group has managed to form a block to oppose plans for the relocation of asylum seekers according to a European quota and to pursue a fierce anti-immigration stance (Nič 2016, Pachocka 2016).

The outcome of the elections in Austria and the Czech Republic definitely strengthens the position of those member states within the European Union that call for a more restrictive migration policy, including a closing of the borders. The new governing parties in Austria and the Czech Republic ran campaigns with a strong focus on immigration and asylum and the promise of drastically reducing or even stopping immigration altogether. In some aspects, the future Austrian government will join the V4 at the EU level regarding specific policy issues concerning immigration and asylum. Representatives on both sides have announced that they plan a closer cooperation regarding European migration policies. The chairman of the far-right FPÖ and future Vice Chancellor has even suggested that Austria should join the V4.[31]

However, it is highly unlikely that Austria will join the group officially as its fifth member state. With too many other interests at stake, Austria's accession to the V4-Group would further complicate an already precarious alliance between the four Central and Eastern European countries – and probably Austria's position as well. Besides economic and other national interests, there are multiple differences concerning migration. With having accommodated more than 150,000 asylum seekers since 2015, the situation in Austria is very different from the Visegrád member states, for instance, concerning relocation. Chancellor Sebastian Kurz himself has denounced the very idea of Austria joining the Visegrád Group.[32] Regarding the management of migration, both V4 and Austria, and to some extent Germany, will further pursue a double strategy, by calling for European strategies to close borders and prevent immigration on the one hand and, on the other, by dusting off the idea of national sovereignty in order to initiate measures on a national level that might suspend or even breach European policies and agreements, such as the Schengen Convention or European plans for the relocation of asylum seekers.

The European Union's failure to find a common ground and successfully implement policies within Europe has further shifted the focus toward the externalization of migration. Therefore, the outcome of the elections in Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic will not fundamentally change the course of European migration policy but rather intensify the general tendency of externalization which aims to prevent migrants from reaching European soil. Party manifestos, campaigns and policy plans in all three examined countries pursue the strategy of externalizing the phenomenon of migration and flight.

That, first, entails a more thorough protection (closing) of the border of the Union by expanding the resources and competences of agencies such as FRONTEX. Second, the European Union will further strengthen cooperation with the governments of neighboring states in Turkey and North Africa in order to block migration routes. As the deal with Turkey has demonstrated, this strategy will make Europe more dependent on authoritarian regimes or even civil war factions as in the case of Libya. The cooperation with such governments could, third, also pave the way for the establishment of "hotspots" along the external European frontier and along migration routes, where asylum seekers are detained, vetted and their applications processed. Fourth, the strategy of externalization will also include enhanced deportations of immigrants to their country of origin, despite safety concerns (for example to Afghan-

31. Margaretha Kopeinig: Was bringt Straches Flirt mit den Visegrád-Staaten. Kurier, October 11, 2017. Online: https:// kurier.at/politik/ausland/was-bringt-straches-flirt-mit-den-visegrad-staaten/291.381.446 (December 8, 2017)

32. APA: Kurz will keinen Beitritt Österreichs zu Visegrád -Staaten. Der Standard, October 19, 2017. Online: https://www.derstandard.de/story/2000066322540/kurz-will-keinen-beitritt-oesterreichs-zu-visegrad-staaten (December 8, 2017)

istan). And finally, fifth, a further step of externalization might be the discursive and eventually even legislative redefinition of concepts such as asylum and refuge with the purpose of denying people the right to asylum. Considering the tendency of restricting immigration, a reconsideration of who deserves to come to Europe and has a right to stay serves the conceptual narrowing that eventually may result in the substitution of asylum by subsidiary protection.

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Abbreviations

AfD	Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany)
ANOA	kce nespokojených občanů (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens / Yes)
CDU	Christliche Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union of Germany)
CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (Christian Social Union in Bavaria)
ČSSD	Česká strana sociálně demokratická (Czech Social Democratic Party)
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party)
FPÖ	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria)
KDU-ČSL	Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová (Christian and Democratic Union - . . Czechoslovak People's Party)
KSČM	Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy (Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia)
NEOS	Das Neue Österreich und Liberales Forum (The New Austria and Liberal Forum)
ODS	Občanská demokratická strana (Civic Democratic Party)
ÖVP	Österreichische Volkspartei (Austrian People' Party)
SPD (CZ)	Svoboda a přímá demokracie - Tomio Okamura (Freedom and Direct Democracy – Tomio Okamura)
SPD (D)	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
SPÖ	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (Social Democratic Party of Austria)
STAN	Starostové a nezávislí (Mayors and Independents)
TOP 09	Tradice Odpovědnost Prosperita (Tradition Responsibility Prosperity)

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Matthias Falter is a political scientist with a research focus on Austrian and European politics, parliamentarianism, ideologies of inequality, political theory, and contemporary history. In his dissertation, he examined the political reactions towards right-wing extremism in Austria and the underlying normative frames. Matthias Falter was a Doctoral Research Fellow at the Center for Austrian Studies at the University of Minnesota and a researcher at the University of Vienna. He has taught several courses at the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna.

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- Exchanging experiences concerning integration and sharing best practices in the field of integration policies.
- Developing ideas and recommendations for a Common European Migration and Asylum Policy, as well as contributing to a rapprochement of the divergent approaches towards migration policy within Europe.