

TRIUMPH OF THE WOMEN?

*The Female Face of
Right-wing Populism
and Extremism*

04

Case study Austria
Judith Goetz

TRIUMPH OF THE WOMEN? THE STUDY SERIES

All over the world, right-wing populist parties continue to grow stronger, as has been the case for a number of years – a development that is male-dominated in most countries, with right-wing populists principally elected by men. However, a new generation of women is also active in right-wing populist parties and movements – forming the female face of right-wing populism, so to speak. At the same time, these parties are rapidly closing the gap when it comes to support from female voters – a new phenomenon, for it was long believed that women tend to be rather immune to right-wing political propositions. Which gender and family policies underpin this and which societal trends play a part? Is it possible that women are coming out triumphant here?

That is a question that we already raised, admittedly playing devil's advocate, in the first volume of the publication, published in 2018 by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung *Triumph of the women? The Female Face of the Far Right in Europe*. We are now continuing this first volume with a series of detailed studies published at irregular intervals. This is partly in response to the enormous interest that this collection of research has aroused to date in the general public and in professional circles. As a foundation with roots in social democracy, from the outset one of our crucial concerns has been to monitor anti-democratic tendencies and developments, while also providing information about these, with a view to strengthening an open and democratic society thanks to these insights.

The *Triumph of the women?* study series adopts a specific perspective in this undertaking: The country-specific studies examine right-wing populist (and occasionally right-wing extremist) parties and their programmes concerning family and gender policy. The analysis highlights the question of which political propositions appeal to women voters, making parties in the right-wing spectrum seem electable in their eyes. How do antifeminist positions gain ground? In addition, individual gender policy topics are examined, the percentage of votes attained by these parties is analysed and the role of female leaders and counter-movements is addressed.

While the first volume of studies focused on countries within Europe, the new study adopts a broader view and analyses individual countries and topics worldwide. Where do right-wing populist parties manage to shift the focus of discourse or even shape debates on family and gender policy, in addition to defining the terms of engagement when dealing with issues relating to flight and migration? And do their propositions concerning social policy respond to the needs of broad swathes of the electorate for greater social welfare?

Whatever the answers to these questions, it is important to us that progressive stakeholders agree on these challenges and work together to combat the growing fragmentation and divisions within our societies.

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CASE STUDY

AUSTRIA

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// The history of the extreme right² in Austria has been marked by pronounced fluctuations. Its successes in this country can partly be explained by Austrian history after 1945. No significant re-education or denazification occurred in Austria after the demise of National Socialism and the official line that was adopted until the 1990s upheld what is dubbed the victim thesis, which claims that Austria was the first victim of Hitler's Germany. It was not until 1991 that, for the first time, an official representative of Austria, Franz Vranitzky, then SPÖ [Social Democratic Party of Austria: a social-democratic political party] Federal Chancellor, admitted the Nazi crimes committed by Austrians and simultaneously apologised for these. As a result of these factors, National Socialist mindsets have persisted almost unchanged and have merely been adapted to the political circumstances. In 1947, former National Socialists who were less implicated in the regime's crimes were given the right to vote and consequently the Verband der Unabhängigen (VdU) [Federation of Independents] was founded in 1949, bringing together the so-called Drittes Lager [»Third Camp« traditionally steeped in right-wing views and pan-Germanism] as a forerunner of the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) [Freedom Party of Austria: right-wing extremist political party]. It was just a few years later, in 1955, that this association spawned the FPÖ, which became and remains a significant right-wing extremist force, not only in Austria but throughout Europe. Over the years, the FPÖ was able to devise a political programme and gain a foothold in political discourse, with extreme right-wing gender policies and anti-feminist stances also playing a central role (cf. Amesberger/Halbmayer 2002, Bailer-Galanda 1997, Geden 2004, 2006, Goetz 2014, 2018, Goetz/Klammer 2017, Klammer 2013, Rösslhumer 1999, Wegerer 1995). Due to its many years of experience both in the opposition and in government, the FPÖ serves as a model and blueprint for many other extreme right-wing parties throughout Europe. It has managed to integrate women into its structures—albeit hesitantly—and to reach out to them as voters, has introduced central narratives on gender politics and anti-feminism into the right-wing context and has popularised such narratives by drawing on its practice-based know-how. However, the FPÖ is not alone in these endeavours. Its gender policy agendas have also received support from non-parliamentary groups. The FPÖ's most recent participation in government, in particular, has made it clear that there are extensive policy overlaps on gender issues with the increasingly right-wing ÖVP [Austrian People's Party: conservative/Christian-democratic political party] under Sebastian Kurz. //

¹ I would like to thank my colleague Isolde Vogel for her helpful research and assessments, which I was able to draw on for the present text.

² When using the term »right-wing extremism«, I refer to Willibald Holzer's working definition (1994); he defines right-wing extremism by means of the ideologies underlying it, above all anti-egalitarianism, rather than in terms of conventional theories of extremism that conceptualise society as a horseshoe with two extremist peripheries and a supposedly socially neutral centre. The core of right-wing extremist thinking thus derives from a rejection of the idea that all humans are equal, invoking the principle of nature/naturalness and undemocratic and anti-pluralistic attitudes.

In Austria, the anti-feminist spectrum includes right-wing extremism in party-political form in the guise of the FPÖ along with a number of other relevant groups. These include extra-parliamentary right-wing extremist groups such as Pegida [Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident: a pan-European, anti-Islam, far-right political movement], the *Identitäre* [Identitarian Movement: a right-wing extremist organisation] or members of *Burschenschaft* organisations (right-wing student fraternities) that advocate German nationalism within Austria, single-issue groups such as men's and fathers' rights organisations (Väter ohne Rechte [Fathers without Rights], men's rights blogs on the Internet), organisations of Christian women and right-wing Catholics as well as right-wing conservatives (parts of the ÖVP, Marsch für die Familie [March for the Family], anti-abortion activists and other representatives of the churches). Anti-feminists in Austria repeatedly make statements on prominent platforms in the media and academia, attempting to deny the legitimacy and/or academic status of feminist concerns. »They are all united by a common concept of the enemy: feminism, (deconstructivist) gender theories, gender equality policies and the associated pluralisation of gender identities and forms of desire« (Mayer/Goetz 2019: 209). In the light of the extreme right's especially fervent struggle against gender equality policies, which has now grown more vigorous than ever, and how it »attempts, together with other actors, to reverse the feminist achievements of recent years and decades« (ibid.), it becomes particularly evident that there is an urgent need for a closer examination of the phenomenon of anti-feminism.

The FPÖ is a central constant in Austrian right-wing extremism. This analysis will first sketch out its gender policy programme based on current election manifestoes and the programmes pursued by the party, as well as the *Handbuch freiheitlicher Politik* [Handbook of Liberal Politics]³—a manual for FPÖ leaders and party officials. Subsequently, the gender policy measures of the ÖVP/FPÖ government coalition will be examined to show how the FPÖ puts its ideology into practice when it participates in government. A further section

³ FPÖ (2013): *Handbuch freiheitlicher Politik*; available at: https://www.fpoe.at/fileadmin/user_upload/www.fpoe.at/dokumente/2015/Handbuch_freiheitlicher_Politik_WEB.pdf (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

addresses the role of women in what is often called the »men's party«, considering, on the one hand, the central female figures and their significance within the party; on the other hand, the reasons for the increasing number of female voters are discussed. In conclusion, past feminist protests and counter-strategies will be addressed and, on this basis, prospects for the future.

FPÖ Policy on Women and Gender

»Equal but not the same«

Today, the FPÖ's gender policy is still based on the idea—generally accepted by right wing extremists—that men and women are »equal, but not the same«. From this perspective, drawing on biological arguments, men and women are understood as complementary beings who »by nature« have certain intrinsic characteristics and abilities. The FPÖ's election and party manifestoes, however, do not contain an autonomous policy on women. This policy area is instead always addressed as part of the »FPÖ policy on family, women and children for Austria« (NFZ 35/1999: 9) or in the chapter »Family and Generations« (2011 party programme). The FPÖ's general manual, *Handbuch freiheitlicher Politik* [Handbook of Liberal Politics] even states: »The terms »woman« and »family« cannot be separated by force«⁴ (FPÖ 2013: 131). The family »as a community of a man and a woman and the couple's children« has played a central role in the FPÖ's programme for decades and is seen as »the natural nucleus and a cohesive element in a functioning society«, which, »along with solidarity between generations«, purportedly »guarantees our future viability«.⁵ This idealised image, thus, forms the basis for analysing and evaluating societal challenges concerning gender relations, as well as solutions for associated problems. In this context, »future viability« primarily refers to families from »mainstream« society, i.e. Austrian families, intended to ensure the continued existence of the »Volk« [the nation: this specific term has a Nazi taint in German] through births in Austrian families.

⁴ FPÖ (2013): *Handbuch freiheitlicher Politik*: 131; available at: www.fpoe.at/dokumente/2015/Handbuch_freiheitlicher_Politik_WEB.pdf (last accessed on 6.12.2020).

⁵ <https://www.fpoe.at/themen/parteiprogramm/familie-und-generationen/> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

While women's and family issues were completely omitted from the manifesto for the 2019 elections to the National Council, the 2017 manifesto includes a sub-chapter on »Our Women«, alongside similar sections on »Our Young People«, »Our Environment«, »Our Animals«, »Our Farmers«, etc. The section in question is entitled »Ensuring equal rights for our women and protection against discrimination«⁶ and addresses differences in pay between men and women, equal rights and oppression of women. The reference to »our women« already makes it clear that, here, policy is being made for women rather than by women themselves. For the FPÖ, »real freedom of choice for women« does not mean freedom for women to decide whether they want to have children or not, but is reduced instead to ensuring »that a mother can decide without financial pressure whether she wants to stay at home with her children (...) or (...) work«.⁷ The FPÖ's understanding of equal rights is directed against »equating men and women«,⁸ which is implicitly assumed to be part of emancipatory women's and gender policy. Effective means of promoting women, as well as »window-dressing measures, such as the »Binnen-k [internal I]«⁹ and including a reference to daughters in the national anthem«,¹⁰ are explicitly rejected in an anti-feminist tone, claiming that these are not suitable means for »actually enhancing women's position« and purportedly »distract from women's real problems«.¹¹ »Self-confidence instead of quotas« is a further proclamation in the *Handbuch freiheitlicher Politik*, where quotas are rejected with the »argument« that this means women »would be presented as incapable« »because the assumption would be that

they would only be able to achieve such positions if this were imposed by legislation«.¹² Although, on the one hand, the current party programme also contains a commitment to »equal opportunities for men and women«, structural disadvantages are denied and compensatory measures are rejected: »We firmly reject the preferential treatment of one sex to eliminate actual or alleged disadvantages. Statistically computed inequalities caused by a variety of factors cannot be compensated for by injustice to individuals. We are, therefore, opposed to a quota system or gender mainstreaming.«¹³ The *Handbuch freiheitlicher Politik* also rejects gender theories with reference to »the biological determinacy of men and women« and notes that this is »basically positive and, therefore, cannot or should not be changed by abstruse theories«.¹⁴ The accompanying argumentation displays a pronounced similarity to Barbara Rosenkranz's 2008 publication »*MenschInnen. Gender Mainstreaming. Auf dem Weg zum geschlechtslosen Menschen*«. In it, the long-standing FPÖ politician describes a horror scenario, asserting that the actual goal of »gender ideology« is the »elimination of gender differences«¹⁵ and claiming that this is forced upon people (against their will) by a small minority. By presenting this argument, she created an »important (theoretical) basis for extreme right-wing rejection of gender mainstreaming and gender theories, which enjoyed broad reception in extreme right-wing circles and is still referenced today by numerous like-minded people« (AK Fe. In et al. 2019: 48). Over and above the FPÖ's efforts to present gender as a »dangerous ideology«, the party also plays an important role in dismissing gender theories as nonsense, namely as »gender mania«. This term has become a key buzzword in anti-gender-theory discourse in the German-speaking world, having first been used in 2008 in the Austrian parliament by

6 FPÖ (2017): Unsere Frauen; available at: <https://www.fpoe.at/themen/wahlprogramm-2017/unsere-frauen/> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 The internal I is one of the most established forms of gender-inclusive language in German, and is used to indicate gender inclusivity in nouns. One example is the word *PolitikerInnen*, which includes both *Politiker* (male) and *Politikerinnen* (female).

10 At the end of 2011, the Austrian National Council decided to extend the lyrics of the Austrian national anthem »Heimat bist du großer Söhne« [Homeland of great sons] by mentioning Austria's »daughters«, too, providing that the modernised version would be sung at public events from early 2012 onwards. Compare: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1323222517110/bundeshymne-oesterreich-ist-jetzt-heimat-grosser-tochter>. (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

11 FPÖ (2017): Unsere Frauen; available at: <https://www.fpoe.at/themen/wahlprogramm-2017/unsere-frauen/> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

12 FPÖ (2013): *Handbuch freiheitlicher Politik*: 134; available at: https://www.fpoe.at/fileadmin/user_upload/www.fpoe.at/dokumente/2015/Handbuch_freiheitlicher_Politik_WEB.pdf (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

13 <https://www.fpoe.at/themen/partheiprogramm/familie-und-generationen/> (accessed on 26.9.2020).

14 FPÖ (2013): *Handbuch freiheitlicher Politik*: 135; available at: https://www.fpoe.at/fileadmin/user_upload/www.fpoe.at/dokumente/2015/Handbuch_freiheitlicher_Politik_WEB.pdf (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

15 Rosenkranz 2008: 90.

Karlheinz Klement,¹⁶ who has meanwhile been barred from the FPÖ on several occasions. Campaigns and slogans such as »Stop gender mania«,¹⁷ »Freedom of choice instead of gender mania «¹⁸ or »Yes to families instead of gender mania « (2015 election manifesto) demonstrate the importance of the term in denigratory strategies. In addition, the FPÖ takes a stand against gender-sensitive language wherever it can, including through its student offshoot. The right-wing student organisation, »Ring freiheitlicher Studenten« (RFS) felt that academic freedom was under threat due to the use of the internal I and started a citizens' initiative against it in 2018, although this seems to have petered out subsequently.¹⁹ Attacks by the FPÖ on university-based gender studies have so far been limited, with the exception of such attempts at discreditation of and recurring references to the alleged failure of »gender ideology «.

Yes to Life, No to LGBTIQ*

In *Handbuch freiheitlicher Politik*,²⁰ the FPÖ clearly declares its support for saying »Yes to life«, as an expression of its pro-natalist, that is birth-promoting policy. Although this sounds harmless at first, this policy above all seeks to remove obstacles that could stop women from carrying a child to term; in other words, it aims to prevent abortions and start a discussion about »unwanted abortions«. On the question of provisions concerning the cut-off point for abortions, the same document, believed to have been written by current party leader Norbert Hofer, proclaims in anti-abortionist language that »4 out of 10 children are killed in the womb« and that »the womb (...) is thus the place with the highest mortality rate in our country«.²¹ Unsurprisingly, Norbert Hofer,

16 Klement, Karlheinz (2008): »Rede zum Genderwahnsinn« on 6.6.2008; available on YouTube (last accessed on 2.3.2019).

17 https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20160308_OTS0006/fpoeiff-erinnerung-stopp-dem-genderwahn-heute-pressekonzferenz-mit-schimanek-ullmann-ecker-berger-karloviits-dieringer-granza (accessed on 26.9.2020).

18 https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20150307_OTS0021/fp-matiasekschuetz-wahlfreiheit-statt-genderwahn.

19 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000080640386/fpoe-kaempft-weiter-gegen-gendergerechte-sprache> (accessed on 26.9.2020).

20 Cf. FPÖ (2013): *Handbuch freiheitlicher Politik*: 134; available at: https://www.fpoe.at/fileadmin/user_upload/www.fpoe.at/dokumente/2015/Handbuch_freiheitlicher_Politik_WEB.pdf (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

21 Ibid. p.160.

along with the former FPÖ Spokesperson on Women, Carmen Schimanek, is also responsible for the citizens' initiative »#FAIRÄNDERN.«²² Better chances for pregnant women and their children«. In addition to the FPÖ and ÖVP, church organisations, in particular, promoted the petition, which officially focused on »abolition of the eugenic indication«,²³ that is, a ban on late abortions. From the outset, however, there was a suspicion that the underlying strategy entailed instrumentalising the debate on late abortions to amend provisions on the cut-off point for abortions, while also playing off the rights of people with disabilities against women's rights. The initiative has so far gathered over 60,000 supporters and has consequently also been discussed in parliament, most recently in July 2020; the preliminary result is a note that comments should be sought from the associations Down-Syndrom Österreich (DSÖ) [Down Syndrome Austria: charitable organisation] and RollOn Austria.²⁴ There is, consequently, no clear outcome to this process yet.

The FPÖ has also repeatedly mobilised its supporters against sex education addressing diversity and individual FPÖ politicians have, for example, railed against »precocious sexualisation«.²⁵ In 2017, the Styrian FPÖ started a smear campaign against the association *L(i)ebenslust*, which does sex education work in schools, and the ÖVP-FPÖ government sought to ban external (sex education) associations from sex education lessons.²⁶

22 A punning portmanteau term combining the words »fair« and »change«.

23 Alarmingly, this wording has also been adopted directly by many media outlets, although the correct term would actually be »embryopathic indication« and has nothing to do with »eugenics«. The Ministry of Justice also adopted the term in a statement in March 2020, although both terms (eugenic and embryopathic) are mentioned in places in that text. See https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXVII/SBI/SBI_00005/index.shtml (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

24 https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/PR/JAHR_2020/PK0724/#XXVII_BI_00006 (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

25 This is a right-wing rallying cry used, above all, to ward off contemporary pedagogical approaches to sex education in early childhood. It is intended to enable children to develop a positive body image, reduce feelings of shame and develop a responsible, self-determined sexuality. The efforts are aimed, among other things, at recognition of sexual and gender diversity and the children's ability to recognise (sexualised) violence and to defend themselves against it.

26 Cf. inter alia <https://liebenslust.at/stellungnahme-des-netzwerk-sexuelle-bildung-steiermark/>, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000105423450/entschlussungsantrag-ging-durch-sexualunterricht-kuenftig-ohne-vereine>. (accessed on 26.9.2020).

In addition to the »adoption of children by same-sex partners«,²⁷ the FPÖ also rejects same-sex marriage. Anneliese Kitzmüller, long-standing FPÖ Spokeswoman on Family Policy, even described the Constitutional Court's 2015 decision to lift the adoption ban for homosexual couples as a »dark day for Austria's children«, saying »the psyche of the children is sidelined«, »while lesbians and gays take centre stage«.²⁸ Rather than simply rejecting partnerships of same-sex couples, the FPÖ attempted with all the means at its disposal to prevent »marriage for all«. This came into force in 2019 (while the ÖVP-FPÖ government was still in office), following a ruling by the Constitutional Court, and now enables marriage as well as registered civil partnerships for homosexual and heterosexual couples. Due to a lack of legal alternatives, the FPÖ has shifted its focus to demanding that heterosexual marriage be privileged. The FPÖ has also expressed its opposition to the right to a gender-neutral entry (third gender option) in the civil-status register and in official documents, which is now authorised in the light of a 2018 Constitutional Court ruling. Harald Stefan, FPÖ Constitutional Affairs Spokesperson, described the decision as »completely incomprehensible«²⁹ and Herbert Kickl, former FPÖ Minister of the Interior, also blocked implementation of the register entries by issuing an administrative instruction.³⁰ Over and above the hostility to LGBTIQ* that takes aim at legal improvements, a plethora of pejorative homophobic and trans-phobic statements have emerged from the FPÖ. To date, no FPÖ members are out as LGBTIQ*. The party's current make-up and political orientation make future involvement of LGBTIQ* seem rather unlikely. In summary, the FPÖ is clearly trying to fight legal improvements for LGBTIQ* by all possible means, only accepting decisions from higher-ranking legal authorities such as the Constitutional

Court with great reluctance and, thus, contributing significantly to upholding and executing discriminatory policies.

Ethnicisation of Gender Justice Debates

Oppression or discrimination against women are only mentioned in FPÖ policies in the context of »immigration of people from patriarchal cultures« with reference to »forced marriage or obligation to wear a headscarf«, whereas such phenomena are completely ignored when »mainstream« society is addressed.³¹

The FPÖ has a long-standing tradition of ethnicising gender justice debates and labelling oppression and discrimination exclusively as a problem of immigrants. Long before the 2015/16 incidents on New Year's Eve in Cologne—when hundreds of cases of sexualised violence by groups of men, mainly of Arab and North African origin, were reported—the FPÖ's political agenda already included the issue of the headscarf, forced marriages, but also so-called honour killings or »culturally determined oppression of women«. On the one hand, the party viewed this as evidence of the purported backwardness of »Islam« while, on the other hand, it was also exploited by the party to present itself »as an alleged educator and protector of women's rights« (AK Fe.In et al. 2019: 132) and as proof of the superiority of »its own culture«. However, scant attention was paid to (sexualised) violence, oppression and discrimination in the »dominant society«, just as there was little focus on actual offers of support for those affected. The FPÖ has played a pioneering role in the European context in racist instrumentalisation of women's rights, precisely because it realised at an early stage the huge potential afforded by the growing wave of anti-Muslim racism (at the latest in the aftermath of 11 September). Already in the 2010 Vienna municipal election campaign, the FPÖ already presented a poster that read: »We protect free women, the SPÖ is for compulsory headscarves«. In recent years, however, there has been a »shift in the construction of victims«, which has turned away from »migrant women as potential victims, (...) and instead the threat to »our«, i.e. »white women«, has moved to the centre of political

³¹ FPÖ (2017): Unsere Frauen: 24; available at: <https://www.fpoe.at/themen/wahlprogramm-2017/unsere-frauen/> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

²⁷ FPÖ (2013): Handbuch freiheitlicher Politik: 142; available at: https://www.fpoe.at/fileadmin/user_upload/www.fpoe.at/dokumente/2015/Handbuch_freiheitlicher_Politik_WEB.pdf (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

²⁸ https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20150114_OTS0128/fpoe-kitzmueeller-zu-adoption-fuer-homosexuelle-schwarzer-tag-fuer-unsere-kinder (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

²⁹ https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20180629_OTS0206/drittes-geschlecht-fpoe-stefan-vfgh-urteil-voellig-unverstaendlich (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

³⁰ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000112574005/weisung-kickls-als-minister-blockiert-eintrag-des-dritten-geschlechts> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

agitation« (ibid.: 134). By emphasising the risk that immigrant men supposedly pose for »our women« and the associated externalisation of sexualised violence, the FPÖ, like other right-wing parties throughout Europe, has succeeded in making political capital far beyond its own circles from racist references to women's issues.

This does not necessarily stand in contradiction to its rejection of feminism, gender theory and women's and LGBTIQ* rights. On the contrary, the FPÖ, like other right-wing parties, manages to reject feminism on the one hand, while referencing women's rights on the other, if these can be deployed to construct a racist argument. This is usually done under the discursive framing or meta-narrative that all feminist demands have already been implemented in society and that today it is women who are really the most privileged (through support schemes and quotas). Moreover, they claim that feminists are never satisfied with the progress made and engage with luxury problems like language use, while failing to address women's »real problems«, such as economic difficulties. Furthermore, the FPÖ claims to be concerned with »true equality«, not with the »gender struggle« imposed by feminists. They allege that FPÖ politicians are the true defenders of women's rights, claiming that this is precisely because neither feminists nor those on the left recognise the threat that immigrant men pose to the current status quo for women. A 2017 event organised by an FPÖ women's association, the *Initiative freiheitlicher Frauen*, should, for example, be interpreted in this spirit; under the title »Are we about to gamble away women's rights?«, the »mistaken tolerance towards immigration from the Islamic world« was discussed.

The FPÖ in Government: Upgrading Male and Female Roles and the Family

Although the chapter entitled »Women« made up slightly less than two and a half pages in the 180-page-long ÖVP-FPÖ government programme »Zusammen. Für unser Österreich« [Together. For our Austria], women did not evade the coalition's worrying plans. For example, the idea of a biologically constructed, complementary gender dualism, with only »men« and »women« (equipped with natural characteristics and differences) as possible identities, was spelt out in the chapter on

»Fairness and Justice«: »The particularities of both sexes make the added value for society visible. Knowing and recognising the differences between men and women is a component of human life and, thus, inviolably linked to human dignity.« This wording was based on precisely the aforementioned »equal but not the same« tenet. The ÖVP-FPÖ government's (re-)establishment of these gender policy ideas as paradigmatic for society largely aimed to re-establish a supposedly natural gender order and the associated gender roles. This is directly connected to exclusion and devaluation of other lifestyles that do not correspond to these prescriptive notions, while also linking into increasing restrictions imposed on extended options hitherto available to women, and attempts to force women back into traditional, more restrictive roles. It is hardly surprising that women were addressed in the government programme primarily as mothers (or as women with a migration background).

The definition from the FPÖ party manifesto already cited above, which views »family« solely »as a community of a man and woman and the couple's children«, was also included in the ÖVP-FPÖ government programme. This concept of the family is not just extremely exclusive, but above all outdated, failing as it does to take any account of the reality of how many people live, for single parents, patchwork families and the families of same-sex couples have for some time now been a self-evident reality within society. Although political measures for homosexuals were completely omitted in the government programme, propagation of this heteronormative family image also concealed a homophobic backlash against the increasing acceptance of alternative ways of life and family constellations. In the long run, these efforts could have led to a renewed deterioration—initially on the symbolic level, but in the long run potentially in legal terms, too.

Language and Abortion

The government's programme also stipulated that gender-inclusive language »must not be practised at the expense of comprehensibility«, an idea taken very literally, inter alia by Mario Kunasek (FPÖ), former Minister of Defence. Although mandatory provisions on this issue had never existed for the Austrian armed forces, he stated in an interview with *Kronen Zeitung* that »feminist language guidelines (destroy...) the

organically developed structure of our mother tongue, pushing it to the verge of illegibility and incomprehensibility« and that he, therefore, wanted to abolish the »internal I« option for gender-inclusive language. Juliane Bogner-Strauß (ÖVP), former Minister for Women's Affairs, also took a rather ambivalent position. On the one hand, she stated in various interviews that »using gender-inclusive language creates awareness«, yet, on the other hand, she also asserted that it sometimes »does not promote comprehensibility«, in which case she thinks it »does not make sense«. The Minister for Women's Affairs also presented herself as a »pragmatic feminist« who simply wants to address the issues. The ÖVP politician was also not willing to sign the women's referendum 2.0; its demands for a 50:50 gender quota as well as a reduction in working time to 30 hours went too far for her. She was not alone in this, as other government ministers did not support the initiative either. Overall, the government programme did not show any potential for improving women's situation in terms of social and economic policy. Although it did include a commitment to supporting women's advancement in the world of work: planned »income transparency« was the sole measure foreseen, with no other policies to reduce the income gap between men and women or to protect women from discrimination (in the workplace).

In a written interview with the feminist magazine *an.schläge*, the Minister for Women's Affairs also stated that »new legal provisions on the cut-off point for abortions are currently (...) not on the agenda«. That suggested that this might yet change. On the question of abortion, or rather pregnancy, the government programme stated that pregnant women need »special support«. This did not mean, however, that throughout Austria women in this situation would be able to take self-determined decisions on the further course of their pregnancy without financial obstacles. On the contrary, the FPÖ and ÖVP intended to introduce »medical and social counselling before planned abortions«. However, this should be seen not as a form of support but more as an additional hurdle, as the intention was for women to attend counselling—which, in the worst-case scenario, would have been obligatory—before being able to have an abortion legally. That would have been a major organisational and also

financial challenge for women in more rural areas with poor provision of counselling. Preventive measures to reduce unwanted pregnancies were also no longer envisaged.

Ethnicised Measures to Prevent Violence

Measures to prevent violence announced in the government programme were similarly worrying. They focused on »immigrant and refugee women« and considered violence against women primarily to be a migrant problem. Former Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl's pledge to also work for gender equality in foreign policy and to dedicate one million euros to measures to combatting female genital mutilation (FGM) was certainly very laudable. At the same time, however, the government showed no interest in a multitude of gender and discrimination issues affecting Austrian »mainstream« society and male violence in this context. This perpetuated racist externalisation of violence as a problem viewed as predominantly affecting migrant communities.

The headscarf ban for girls under the age of ten was a similar step towards ethnicising gender justice and anti-violence issues. The announcement that 100 additional places would be created over the next four years in facilities providing protection for women affected by violence was, however, assessed as »insufficient« by anti-violence experts and representatives of various facilities to protect women against violence. It was also noticeable that the government always spoke of emergency accommodation in this context, but not about women's refuges—largely to make it clear that women should not expect any fundamental support or enduring protection.

»Protection against violence as a new focus« of the Division for Women in the Federal Chancellery was also used as an »argument« to legitimise massive financial cuts in funding for policy concerning women. It is, therefore, all the more surprising that numerous measures on protection against violence were affected by cuts introduced by the Ministry of the Interior, such as training courses for police officers by trainers from women's refuges, counselling for families in crisis situations, where violence is also a frequent issue, or funding for the lecture series »Eine von Fünf« [One in Five] at the University of Vienna, which takes up topics

related to domestic or gender-specific violence against women and introduces students to these issues. Although the cuts often only affected »small amounts«, they frequently threatened the survival of the projects affected, especially for many smaller associations.

Women in the FPÖ, the »Men's Party«

The FPÖ as a Men's Party

Since its foundation, a clear male dominance has prevailed in the FPÖ. Karlheinz Klement, who has been expelled from the FPÖ on several occasions and is now Secretary General of the Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (BZÖ) [Alliance for the Future of Austria: right-wing populist and right-wing extremist political party], summed this up in 2008 when he said: »The FPÖ is a men's party!«³² At the time of his statement he was still deputy to former Party Chairman Heinz-Christian Strache and also acted as »FPÖ Equal Opportunities Officer«. This male dominance—although the proportion of women at all levels of the party is increasing at times—is particularly evident in the clear excess of male party functionaries. In the Austrian National Council, the FPÖ brings up the rear with 17 per cent female members, while the average for the all parties in the Austrian Parliament is just under 40 per cent.³³ At the beginning of 2020, there was only one woman among the regional party leaders in Austria's nine federal states: Marlene Svazek as head of FPÖ Salzburg, and in parliament, too, only five of the 30 FPÖ seats were filled by women. The situation was hardly any better in the last legislative period, when eleven of the 51 seats in the National Council went to women. The average of about one-fifth of women in the National Council, as recorded by Amesberger and Halbmayr (2002: 393) at the beginning of the 2000s, has not changed fundamentally even in the last few years, when the FPÖ recorded a significant increase in the overall share of the vote in elections. This air of being a men's party is also underlined by the firm entrenchment of fraternities with a German nationalist focus

within the party. Where there are posts to be filled, these are often filled by fraternity members, and, thus, these male-aligned communities still function as the FPÖ's central »pool of well-educated staff« (Lunznig 2009: 39). This can be seen not least in the high number of fraternity members in parliament: In the aftermath of the National Council elections in 2019, twelve fraternity members were given a mandate, which corresponds to a share of 40 per cent and thus the highest level reached in FPÖ history since it first participated in an election in 1956. In the previous legislative period, 20 of the 51 FPÖ seats, and thus 39 per cent, were also filled with fraternity members. For comparison: under Jörg Haider in 1999, »only« nine of the 52 seats went to fraternity members, and thus, 17 per cent of the seats. Since the student fraternities also act as career networks and support networks, it may come as no surprise that, especially during the ÖVP and FPÖ coalition government, numerous other posts in the cabinets and in (state-affiliated) companies were also given to »fraternity brothers«. While in the Haider era it could still be said that the proportion of fraternity members among party functionaries was lowest when the party was strongest, this was no longer the case in the Strache and Hofer era.

However, male dominance is also evident in the perspective from which political propositions are formulated. As already mentioned, the FPÖ's party programmes do not yet include an independent policy on women, who are usually mentioned in connection with family policy. Furthermore, wordings such as »Give our women equal rights and protect them from discrimination« in the 2017 election manifesto underline that the focus of policy in FPÖ politics is rather dictated (by men) for women than created by women (for women).

Important Women in the »Men's Party«

Within the FPÖ, women have repeatedly held important political offices. Significant female figures in the FPÖ's history include, for example, Heide Schmidt, who was the first FPÖ Secretary General from 1988 and a presidential candidate in 1992, and Susanne Riess-Passer, former head of the federal party and the first female politician in Austria to hold the office of

³² <https://www.profil.at/home/reine-maennersache-fpoe-209126> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

³³ https://www.parlament.gv.at/SERV/STAT/PERSSTAT/FRAUENANTEIL/frauenanteil_NR.shtml (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

Vice-Chancellor.³⁴ In contrast to Rosenkranz, however, these two politicians belonged to the liberal wing of the party, which meant that they became less known for ideologically relevant policy on women.

The situation is different with Barbara Rosenkranz. Not only did she enjoy high esteem within the party as Strache's long-standing party comrade, but, in the publication cited above, she also provided the most important lines of argumentation deployed to reject feminism and gender theories, especially gender mainstreaming—not only for the FPÖ, but for the entire extreme right-wing spectrum. Anneliese Kitzmüller, on the other hand, attracted attention especially as the only female government negotiator as well as Third President of the National Council under the ÖVP-FPÖ government. In her function as FPÖ Family Policy Spokesperson, she had previously already railed against »rainbow dreams« and commented on the lifting of the adoption ban for homosexual couples by saying that »Marxist equality mania«³⁵ had »triumphed over children's rights«. In her 2011 publication »Wir sind Familie« [We are family] she also described abortion as »wrong«³⁶ and afternoon care for children as being »as formerly nationalised in the GDR«.³⁷ The ÖVP-FPÖ coalition government programme also bore her imprimatur, as reflected in the concept of the family enshrined in the government programme, which mirrored that of the FPÖ party programme. Both Rosenkranz and Kitzmüller are also members of »Mädelschaften« with a German nationalist slant, the female equivalent of the aforementioned fraternities.

Susanne Winter, who in the meantime has been expelled from the FPÖ, is regarded as a pioneer of racist instrumentalisation of women's rights in Europe. She has also repeatedly caused a stir with racist statements. In 2013, she published the German edition of the racist book by Belgian Vlaams Belang [Flemish Importance: Flemish nationalist right-wing

extremist political party] politician Anke Van dermeersch *Weder Hure noch Sklavin – Frauen und Islam* [Neither whore nor slave – women and Islam]. Van dermeersch also founded the »Women against Islamisation« initiative and advocated the thesis that »Islam« forces women to be either whores or slaves. Kriemhild Trattig can also be mentioned as a prominent female figure in FPÖ history. Not only was she the first woman to hold the position of head of the FPÖ parliamentary group in the Carinthian *Landtag*, or regional parliament, and the second female *Landtag* president, but she was also considered a »liberal old hand«,³⁸ »leading liberal ideologist«³⁹ (Bailer-Galanda 1997) and »political foster mother of Haider«.⁴⁰

In 1994, a women's organisation, the *Initiative freier Frauen* (IFF), was founded as a national organisation within the ranks of the FPÖ. On the whole, the project seems to pursue the goal of integrating women into FPÖ structures and making their voices heard sporadically on women's political agendas. However, they are currently not of any real relevance either within the party or in the public sphere. On the contrary, political presence seems to depend very much on the commitment of individual women, so that individual groups are sometimes more, but mostly less, active. For example, the federal organisation's website has not been updated for several years. Carmen Schimanek (née Gartelgruber), long-standing FPÖ Women's Affairs Spokesperson, who was replaced in this role by Rosa Ecker after the 2019 elections to the National Council, has held the office of Party Chairwoman at the federal level since 2011. Since 2019, the FPÖ's training institute, the *Freiheitliche Bildungsinstitut* (FBI), has also established its own »Women's Academy« »for politically committed individuals with the aim of encouraging women to become involved in politics and take on responsible political positions«.⁴¹

³⁸ https://www.kleinezeitung.at/kaernten/landespolitik/4644974/Gemeinderatswahl-2015_Kriemhild-Trattig-kandidiert-fuer-die-FPOe (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

³⁹ https://web.archive.org/web/20160121032638/http://doew-web01.doew.at/thema/thema_alt/rechts/refrauen/frauenbildre.html (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

⁴⁰ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2602450/politische-ziehmutter-haiders-im-wahlkampf-fuer-die-fpoe> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

⁴¹ Freiheitlicher Parlamentsklub (2019): FPÖ-Schimanek: »Frauen-Akademie – eine neue Ausbildungsschiene des Freiheitlichen Bildungsinstituts (FBI)«. OTS (30.3.2019); available at: https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20190330_OTS0009/fpoe-schimanek-frauen-akademie-eine-neue-ausbildungsschiene-des-freiheitlichen-bildungsinstituts-fbi (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

A first in-service training course was completed at the end of the same year.

In summary, the selected examples show that women in FPÖ's ranks have always held important political offices, through which they exercise political power and influence. Occasionally they also take part in the production of ideology (for example, B. Rosenkranz, Winter, Kitzmüller) and their (women's) political positions are appreciated and listened to both within the FPÖ and beyond in the extreme right-wing spectrum. Nevertheless, with a few exceptions, they are rarely on the front line. This can be attributed, on the one hand, to the party's continuing male-aligned foundations, but, on the other hand, also to the lesser significance these women attribute to themselves. For example, Kitzmüller and Rosenkranz, despite having completed their studies, and in Rosenkranz's case also exercising political functions for years, indicate »housewife«⁴² as their occupation, even on the Austrian parliament website.

Men on the Right, Women on the Left?

Generally speaking, fewer women in Austria still vote for right-wing, right-wing conservative or right-wing extremist parties. This was most obvious in the run-off elections in the course of the 2016 election for the Federal President, where the strongest candidates after the first round of voting were from the FPÖ and the Greens [The Green Party]. Austrian electoral regulations foresee a run-off between the two candidates in this scenario; in this case that was contested by the FPÖ and the round repeated due to suspected »irregularities« because of the small difference in votes. In the first (later annulled) round of the run-off election, 60 per cent of female voters picked the Green candidate, while the figure in the re-run vote was 62 per cent, whereas the FPÖ candidate, Norbert Hofer, notched up 60 per cent of the male vote in the first round and 56 per cent in the second round. Significant differences in the voting behaviour of men and women could also be observed in the 2017 and 2019 National Council elections. While hardly any gender differences could be observed with regard to ÖVP, NEOS [The New Austria and Liberal Forum: liberal political party] and

⁴² https://www.parlament.gv.at/WWW/PAD_14693/index.shtml (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

Liste Pilz [green and left-wing populist political party, founded by Peter Pilz], women voted more often for SPÖ or the Greens. Although an above-average number of men (29 per cent) voted for the FPÖ in 2017, only slightly fewer women (22 per cent) voted for the FPÖ. The differences were more pronounced among young voters, as almost two-thirds of young men voted for the ÖVP and FPÖ, while young women voted more for the Greens. In 2019, the voting behaviour of men and women also differed mainly in terms of votes for the FPÖ, NEOS and the Greens, but there was scarcely any difference between the ÖVP and the SPÖ. While women voted mainly for NEOS and the Greens, the FPÖ received many more votes from men (21 per cent) than from women (11 per cent).⁴³ The FPÖ's obvious losses compared to the previous elections are due to the Ibiza affair⁴⁴ and the ensuing failure of the coalition with the ÖVP. Voter surveys by social research institute SORA revealed that the remaining FPÖ voters indicated as the main motive for their vote was the party's substantive positions on immigration, security, jobs and working conditions, followed by a desire to see the FPÖ return to government, along with assertions that the party had been »wronged« and they voted for it »more than ever now«.⁴⁵

In particular, the outcome of the election to the post of Federal President led to a debate in Austria about »women voting differently«.⁴⁶ In line with the theme, the focus was more on attempts to justify why women voted for the left, but less on explanatory models as to why they voted for the right. Reasons cited in the media (with reference to academics)

⁴³ https://www.sora.at/fileadmin/downloads/wahlen/2019_NRW_Wahlanalyse.pdf (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

⁴⁴ In a video published in May 2018, former Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache and former head of the FPÖ parliamentary group, Johann Gudenus, showed, among other things, their willingness to engage in corruption, circumvent laws on party financing and efforts to take control of non-partisan media. The video was made shortly before the 2017 national elections at a meeting with the alleged niece of a Russian oligarch in a villa on the Spanish island of Ibiza. At the end of 2019, former party leader Heinz-Christian Strache was expelled from the party. Norbert Hofer had already taken over the presidency of the party after his resignation in May 2019.

⁴⁵ <https://www.sora.at/themen/wahlverhalten/wahlanalysen/nrw19.html> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

⁴⁶ The voting behaviour of women, or the idea that women tend to vote for the left, is also a matter of intense debate within right-wing circles. Some go so far as to question women's voting rights or even demand these be scrapped. <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000097655139/darum-fordern-rechtsextreme-die-abschaffung-des-frauenwahlrechts> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

included, among other things, that women apparently generally vote more to the left and/or less erratically⁴⁷ and that other parties were more concerned with the political interests of women, such as questions of social security, compatibility of work and family life, childcare and equal treatment of men and women.⁴⁸ In the same vein, political scientist Birgit Sauer stated in an interview that women tend to vote rationally according to their interests and that this is why they tend to vote for the left rather than for the FPÖ. As further factors, she mentioned the »martially male« behaviour of the FPÖ, which tended to deter women; she noted that this had been altered by many other right-wing parties by having a woman at the top, but that this did not apply for the FPÖ.⁴⁹ Sauer also stated that the differing economic situation of women and men, for example with regard to »labour market integration, income or dependence on public services«⁵⁰ or their »different life circumstances«⁵¹ also play a role in voting behaviour. In this context, political scientist Kathrin Stainer-Hämmerle, for example, believes that issues such as childcare, the minimum wage or pensions are much more relevant for women than for men, and that they, therefore, feel more at home with parties that support them.⁵² Consequently, more progressive gender-policy offers are consistently a relevant factor, encouraging women to vote for parties such as the SPÖ, the Greens or even smaller left-wing parties, which, in particular, also criticise the social policy of the ÖVP-FPÖ government and its effects on women, as well as advocating fair wages and work distribution, improved financial security, independence or child care. For example, the SPÖ criticised the Social Assistance Act for entrenching women's and children's poverty because it »made savings on housing, heating, educational opportunities for children and food«.⁵³ Since the Greens began to

⁴⁷ <https://diesubstanz.at/parteien/wahlverhalten-frauen-nicht-ganz-so-sprunghaft/> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

⁴⁸ <https://www.news.at/a/frauen-wahlrecht-anders-waehlen-10404523> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000084915864/frauen-und-maenner-waehlen-unterschiedlich-ausser-sie-sind-verheiratet> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

⁵¹ <https://kurier.at/politik/inland/warum-frauen-lieber-links-waehlen/313.269.866> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ <https://frauen.spoe.at/2019/04/16/umfrage-zu-frauenarmut-sozial-politik-der-regierung-ist-zynisch-und-kalt/> (accessed on 26.9.2020).

participate in government and in the light of their difficulties in asserting their policy goals vis-à-vis their coalition partner, the ÖVP, the SPÖ has taken on an even more important role in criticising the impact of government measures on policy issues related to women.

Political scientist Peter Filzmaier has also argued that women are more sceptical about more extreme positions, such as those of the FPÖ, noting that the further to the right that parties are on the political spectrum, the more male voters will number among their electorate.⁵⁴ Amesberger and Halbmayr had already come to a similar conclusion in their study in the early 2000s. They found that in terms of attitudes, women adopted »roughly the same racist, xenophobic and exclusionary positions« as men (Amesberger/Halbmayr 2002: 41), but had little time for certain right-wing extremist forms of articulation, such as aggressive rhetoric or demagoguery. Over the last 20 years, however, a normalisation of right-wing extremist thought patterns and political styles can be observed, as well as a steady expansion of the limits of what can be said. The general social climate now encompasses incitement, and below-the-belt attacks have long ceased to be isolated cases. Approval of democracy as the best form of government has also dropped significantly in recent years, to 63 per cent. In 2017, this figure was 72 per cent, 18 per cent lower than in 2013.⁵⁵ These developments indicate that the obstacles to women voting for extreme right-wing parties, as sketched out above, have also been eroded.

Further reasons for the FPÖ's success can be traced back to the essentially pessimistic views of a large share of its voters about the future and their dissatisfaction with the current status quo. Issues such as security or migration also rank high on the list of suggested causes and are easily transformed into fears of a lack of social security etc. and into political issues or can be used to mobilise and instrumentalise these fears. Many people cope with these anxieties by asserting ideas of dominance à la »Austrians first« and attempting to defend or maintain such notions, that is, giving priority to their

⁵⁴ <https://derstandard.at/2000063213961/Frauen-waehlen-anders-Der-rechte-Rand-ist-maennlich> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

⁵⁵ <https://www.sora.at/themen/wahlverhalten/wahlanalysen/nrw19.html> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

own social position—at the expense of others. From this vantage point, they seek some kind of compensation for experiences of discrimination they have encountered, or fears that they might have this kind of experiences, by attributing to themselves, as members of the »dominant society«, greater rights to certain state benefits etc.—precisely what the FPÖ promises them. Gaining power through self-exaltation and the accompanying desire to maintain certain relations of dominance, which are beneficial precisely to members of the dominant group in society, constitutes a central motivation in voting for such parties, irrespective of gender. For women, however, additional motivation exists, namely the wish to project the threat of sexualised violence exclusively onto men who are identified as migrants. In this context, the media and political rabble-rousing after New Year's Eve 2015/16 in Cologne and the racist nightmare vision of the »encroaching hordes of male migrants« conjured up in this context, have left their mark and continue to have an impact to this day. The FPÖ, as well as groups such as the *Identitäre*, reinforce such narratives through the prism of the high number of women murdered in Austria in the last two years.⁵⁶ Although most victims knew the perpetrator and were related to or in a partnership with him, right-wing extremists only pick out those cases in which the alleged perpetrators have a migrant background, with a view to racist instrumentalisation of these murders.

Counter Movements and (Successful) Strategies

Regular Feminist Protests

Political developments in recent years, particularly the formation of governments with the FPÖ at the national level and in Austria's nine federal states, have led to feminist protests being increasingly directed against

⁵⁶ Crime statistics indicate that 41 women were murdered in Austria in 2018 and 39 women in 2019. In 2020, 19 women have been killed so far (as of October 2020), compared with a total of 19 women over the entire year in 2014. This also makes the increase clear; cf. <https://www.aofef.at/index.php/zahlen-und-daten> (last accessed ? .10.2020). It should also be emphasised here that for some years now more murder victims in Austria have been female rather than male. Cf. <https://apa.at/news/mehr-morde-an-frauen-als-an-maennern-in-oesterreich/> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

these phenomena. One example is Upper Austria, where feminist and women's political organisations have had to deal with an ÖVP-FPÖ federal state government since 2015 and have demonstrated that feminist associations cannot be quashed so easily. In late 2017, it was announced that all funding for some women's organisations would be scrapped as their activities »are no longer part of the core business of the women's affairs department according to the new funding criteria«. Important initiatives were created in Upper Austria to make feminist concerns heard and to secure social solidarity, with the hashtags #OhneUnsVielSpaß [roughly: So you can do without us?] (in view of the inauguration of a federal state government with no women in Upper Austria in October 2015) or #frauenlandretten [roughly: Save womenspace] (in response to the funding cuts). The group *Frauen gegen Hofer* [Women against Hofer] mainly concentrated on highlighting and criticising Norbert Hofer's positions on women and gender policy during the 2016 election campaign for the Federal President.

As already mentioned, some of the measures taken by the ÖVP-FPÖ government also aimed to make women's political work impossible, to intimidate women's projects and to reverse the feminist advances on the equality front that, in some cases, had been (co-)achieved by precisely these associations. Many of the projects concerned refused, however, to be intimidated and were certainly not going to let themselves be played off against each other. In Austria, however, »protesting« often signifies verbal criticism above all, which meant that the cutbacks by the Division for Women in the Federal Chancellery primarily triggered protest letters, public letters and press campaigns. The *Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund* (ÖGB) [Austrian Trade Union Federation] also repeatedly formulated criticism of the government's plans, focusing in particular on the impacts of certain measures for women. For example, ÖGB Vice-president and Chairwoman on Women's Affairs, Korinna Schumann said in the context of a demonstration against the twelve-hour working day in 2018: »Women bear the main brunt of care work in Austria. One out of two women in our country works part-time—often not voluntarily. An extension of working hours further reduces their chances of switching to full-time work and thus to a

better income». ⁵⁷ The ÖGB also mentioned that these developments have dreadful consequences, especially for single parents living on the breadline and subsequently called for fair labour market opportunities for all. Larger or noteworthy feminist protests on the part of Austrian trade unions have so far failed to materialise.

Feminist Protests against the ÖVP-FPÖ Government

At the national level, feminist and women's political organisations took part in the large-scale demonstrations against the ÖVP-FPÖ government, which also addressed women's political concerns. The revived »Thursday demonstrations«, previously held during the FPÖ's participation in government from the 2000s onwards, dedicated their 20th demonstration to the slogan »overthrowing patriarchal rule«, as well as attempting to ensure the presence of feminist themes and a balanced gender ratio in the speeches, at times even »100 % stage for FLINTs«. ⁵⁸ In addition, the demonstrations also set their own agenda. On the day of the ÖVP-FPÖ's government inauguration, a »Day X – Women's*Protest Night« was held, with artists at the Heldenplatz in Vienna seeking to make clear that they would »hold those who support anti-women* laws to account«. Together with other organisations, the initiators of the women's petition for a referendum organised a »human chain for women's rights« around the parliament in 2018, with approx. 2,000 people participating, to protest against abolition in the Austrian army of »internal I«. Resistance also formed, for example, from single mothers who started to organise ⁵⁹ and older women. The »Omas gegen Rechts« [Grannies against the Right], who are now also found in Germany and have even made it into the *New York Times*, also emerged in 2017 in the course of the protests against the ÖVP-FPÖ government coalition. To this day, almost no major demonstration in Vienna takes place without a »grannies block«, which grandpas in solidarity

⁵⁷ https://www.oegb.at/cms/S06/S06_0.a/1342592589856/home/100-000-bei-demo (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

⁵⁸ The German abbreviation FLINT stands for women, lesbians, inter-, non-binary and trans people.

⁵⁹ <https://mosaik-blog.at/alleinerzieherinnen-alleinerziehende-muetter-unterhaltsgarantie-kinderkostenstudie-schwarz-blau/> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

also join. They have succeeded in creating political participation opportunities for older people, enabling them to take part in political debates, and have, thus, been able to show other people possibilities for action or to (re-)politicise them.

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the first Austrian referendum on women's rights and in the light of the continuing economic and social inequalities between the sexes, a specially founded initiative organised a new referendum to demand that women's issues be dealt with in parliament. The Women's* Referendum 2.0 was signed by half a million people in Austria in 2018 and could be considered a success even though levels of support were lower than in 1998. Among the central demands were genuine equal opportunities and freedom of choice, a 50:50 gender quota, minimum wage, equal pay for equal work and a reduction of working hours to 30 hours. Since »not a single one of the demands has been implemented or at least passed by parliament so far, we are sticking to our demands«, the homepage says. The initiative has actually remained active to this day, commenting on day-to-day political events and conducting effective public relations work and protest actions. In a theatre protest in front of the Chancellery in early 2019, activists drew attention to the murders of women and the lack of proportion demonstrated by sufficient funding being available for helicopters, yet not enough for protection of women. In the alliance #KeinenMillimeter Rückschritt bei reproduktiven Rechten [Not budging one millimetre on reproductive rights], founded in 2019, opposition and women's organisations collected signatures against the aforementioned citizens' initiative #FAIRÄNDERN, which aims to ban late abortions.

Many of the protests mentioned were also supported by politicians and members of the Greens, the Austrian Communist Party (Kommunistische Partei Österreichs (KPÖ)/Wandel), as well as by the SPÖ, and their grassroots and youth organisations; in the case of the latter primarily through verbal statements of support rather than much physical participation in demonstrations (with the exception of their youth organisation and large demonstrations). The concerns of the Women's* Referendum and the #KeinenMillimeter alliance, as well as the criticism of spending cuts and of the dearth of women in the Upper Austrian govern-

ment, were taken up by the aforementioned parties, which as a rule adopted a supportive and solidarity-based position. However, this could change in future due to the participation of the Greens in the government, for they have faced accusations at the beginning of their term of office of abandoning women's issues in the government to the ÖVP and not reintroducing the Division for Women within the Federal Chancellery that was abolished by the first ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in 2000. During their time in opposition, the Greens had called for this division to be reinstated. Moreover, after several months of Green participation in government, it can be stated, in summary, that »the coalition agreement (on the ideological level) contains numerous rhetorical concessions, women's rights and support for women should be strengthened. However, tangible measures for implementation are largely missing, which is why these statements will most likely have no impact at all«. ⁶⁰

In particular, the ÖVP-FPÖ government faced criticism that financial resources were cut and hardly any measures were considered to counteract the shockingly high number of murders of women. In September 2019, under the transitional government, an anti-violence package was adopted, initiated by the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition, and much criticised by the opposition, as well as by victim protection and women's organisations. The focus here was on an obligation to report cases of suspected violence (without the consent of the victims) and higher penalties, which, however, would hardly deter offenders from their actions; the populism accompanying the debates was also striking.

What Remains?

Although high-profile work by feminist organisations was unable to ward off many of the measures described above, their continuous protest has, nevertheless, ensured broad public awareness of feminist issues. In this spirit, feminist criticism also helped to understand and classify the contradictory policies of right-wing parties. On the one hand, these parties claim to want to protect women from sexualised violence, yet, on the other hand, the same parties cut funding for insti-

⁶⁰ <https://www.gwi-boell.de/de/2020/05/18/feministische-politik-als-kollateralschaden> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

tutions that offer women protection, while adopting measures criticised by experts; for example, funding for seminars on »violence in the family« for trainee police officers has been cut and the Vienna Intervention Centre against Violence in the Family has been closed down. ⁶¹ In particular, activists involved in the Women's* Referendum continue indefatigably to participate in political debates and do not shy away from difficult confrontations with political adversaries, for example in TV duels. The initiative also attracted considerable attention with its call to reduce working time to a 30-hour week. As well as triggering a fascinating debate, which made this goal more realistic, this also underlined that making controversial demands is a political instrument that should not be left solely to the right. Particularly in times of political upheavals and financial cuts, recognising that it is important not to let groups be played off against each other has been crucial, as well as placing greater emphasis on what unites women rather than on what divides them, entering into broad political alliances in order to be stronger together and to build up pressure. The alliances and ongoing protests, such as during the Thursday demonstrations, have not only strengthened cohesion and cooperation across a broad political spectrum, but have also counteracted feelings of isolation and powerlessness in the face of seemingly inexorable developments.

The most successful counter-strategy to date, it must unfortunately be noted, is, however, embodied by the right-wing parties per se. In Austria, right-wing extremist parties have been weakened above all by their own divisions (FPÖ/LIF [Liberal Forum: liberal political party, now rolled into NEOS], FPÖ/BZÖ, currently FPÖ/DAÖ or Team HC [Team HC Strache – Alliance for Austria, founded as The Alliance for Austria (DAÖ), right-wing extremist party that split off from the FPÖ]), ⁶² the death of leading figures (Jörg Haider) or political scandals such as the Ibiza affair. The FPÖ nevertheless still notched up 16.2 per cent of the votes

⁶¹ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000083624642/projekt-zu-gewalt-gegen-frauen-vom-innenministerium-gestoppt> (last accessed on 26.9.2020).

⁶² »Die Allianz für Österreich« (DAÖ) [The Alliance for Austria], now known as »Team HC Strache Allianz für Österreich« or, in short, »Team HC«, was founded at the end of 2019 by three former FPÖ members of the Vienna City Council and Federal State Parliament.

at the elections following the affair. A large share of former FPÖ voters also migrated to the ÖVP, which takes a slightly better position on women's issues. However, the voters can scarcely be said to have abandoned right-wing ideas; they have just found them in other parties. Even the current participation of the Greens in government with the ÖVP does not necessarily go hand in hand with improvements on policies affecting women, as is most clearly shown by the Minister for Women's Affairs. Not only were women's issues left to the ÖVP, but they were also allocated to the Chancellery Division dealing with »Integration and Women«. That is a worse state of affairs than under the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition and continues the ethnicisation of gender issues. It comes as little surprise that the Minister for Women and Integration, Susanne Raab (ÖVP) identifies a threat for Austrian women in the »pronounced degree to which patriarchal cultures are arriving here«. ⁶³ Moreover, she never tires of emphasising that she is not a feminist but wants to do »politics based on common sense«. ⁶⁴ She also states she has »personally never experienced sexism in the workplace«. ⁶⁵

Raab was criticised in connection with the »Dokumentationsstelle Politischer Islam« [Documentation Centre on Political Islam], which she founded in July 2020. In the usual anti-patriarchal manner adopted when dealing with people who have immigrated to Austria, she announced that she wanted to fill the post with a woman: »I want this centre to be headed by a woman, because we are vigorously combatting patriarchal structures.« ⁶⁶ Originally planned as a »Research and Documentation Centre on Anti-Semitism, Religiously Motivated Political Extremism (Political Islam) and Racism in the 21st Century«, it now has a reduced focus due to the concentration on religiously motivated Islamism and has once again been placed within the context of ethnicised gender debates by Raab's statement. These selected examples alone make clear that there continues to be a need for feminist criticism and protests.

⁶³ <https://www.heute.at/s/-am-arbeitsplatz-habe-ich-noch-nie-sexismus-erlebt--53380435> (accessed on 26.9.2020).

⁶⁴ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000113626707/ich-weiss-viele-muslimische-muetter-auf-meiner-seite> (accessed on 26.9.2020).

⁶⁵ <https://www.heute.at/s/-am-arbeitsplatz-habe-ich-noch-nie-sexismus-erlebt--53380435> (accessed on 26.9.2020).

⁶⁶ <https://orf.at/stories/3172282/> (accessed on 26.9.2020).

The only positive aspects that can be noted, are that the proportion of women in government has reached an all-time high, a National Action Plan against violence is foreseen and that the cuts in funding for women's projects are to be reversed. In addition, consideration is being given to »accreditation procedures for associations or persons who wish to offer sex education workshops in schools«. ⁶⁷ Abortion, or rather compulsory counselling, is no longer included in the current coalition agreement »Responsibility for Austria. 2020–2024 Government Programme«. ⁶⁸ It remains surprising, however, that there are plans to draft a National Action Plan against racism and discrimination, yet no plans exist for a National Action Plan specifically to combat sexism and other gender-related forms of discrimination. In particular with a view to achieving longer-term change, there is a need for a broad social debate on and criticism of extreme right-wing mindsets in parts of society. On the other hand, however, there is also a need to dismantle structures of discrimination and strengthen democratic attitudes through prevention and intervention work. Contact points for both are rather scarce in Austria.

⁶⁷ ÖVP/Grüne [The Green Party] 2020: 207; https://www.dieneuevolkspartei.at/Download/Regierungsprogramm_2020.pdf (last accessed 8.12.2020).

⁶⁸ https://www.dieneuevolkspartei.at/Download/Regierungsprogramm_2020.pdf (accessed on 26.9.2020).

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