

Dear Friends of Austria!

So much happened in May where to begin?

POLITICAL UPHEAVAL IN AUSTRIA:

Recent weeks and days were like riding a roller coaster in Austrian politics. Here is a short summary of what happened until end of May:

May 17: Scandalous videos of Vice Chancellor H-C Strache (FPÖ) were published. In these videos, filmed 3 months before the elections in 2017, H-C Strache offered a person, believed to be a Russian connection to Putin's circle, lucrative governmental contracts in exchange for financial support of the party before the elections and to buy into one of Austria's leading newspaper to enhance the positive coverage of his party.

May 18: As this political bombshell detonated the vice chancellor resigned as did the FPÖ party chairman. Austria's President Alexander VanDerBellen addressed the nation with deep sorrow about the critical state the nation was brought into. He urged to stand together to get out of the crisis in an orderly way.

May 19: Chancellor Kurz demanded the resignation of the minister of interior, Herbert Kickl (FPÖ), so that fair investigations of this affair can be guaranteed. This was not accepted by the FPÖ and as a consequence all ministers of FPÖ resigned en block. Only the minister of foreign affairs, Karin Kneissel stayed on, as she runs as an independent although she was nominated by and is close to the FPÖ.

May 22: Chancellor Kurz nominated and President VanDerBellen swore in experts as interim leaders of the vacant minister positions for interior, defense, health and social affairs, sport, and infrastructure. Kurz installed 2 persons close to him for each interim minister as support. The current finance minister Löger (ÖVP) became also Vice chancellor.

May 27: A no-confidence vote initiated by the opposition parties against the whole government got approved by a majority of the parliament. That means that Chancellor Kurz and all ministers had to resign. The opposition parties based their vote against the government mostly on the irresponsible actions by the junior party FPÖ demonstrated by the scandalous videos and the non-inclusive and seemingly self-serving actions by Chancellor Kurz to resolve this major crisis without any serious consultation with parliament and the opposition parties.

This is the first time in the 2nd Republic that a no-confidence vote got approved. Sebastian Kurz is now involved in the abrupt ending of 2 governments, and this was the shortest lasting government ever in Austria. This comes on the same day as ÖVP gained in Austria a majority of votes at the European Parliament elections and Sebastian Kurz himself enjoys popularity.

May 28: With the re-installed transition government in place, governmental business can continue until a "permanent" (lasting until the new elections in September) Chancellor will be named by the President. This person will then suggest the new interim cabinet which has to be approved by the President. This will guarantee that the government continues functioning without any interruption.

Sebastian Kurz decided not participate in any functions of the interim government or in the parliament.



May 30: President VanDerBellen has decided: **Dr. Brigitte Bierlein** (69), will be Austria's first female Chancellor. She currently serves as President of Austria's Constitutional Court and will be in office until a new government is formed after general elections this fall. She will suggest the candidate for each ministry whom President VanDerBellen then has to approve. The first names listed suggest a cabinet based on expertise and not on political influence. The new government is expected to be sworn in on Monday, June 3.

A huge wave of relief is felt for the very responsible and thoughtful but also swift way Austria's President Alexander VanDerBellen is handling this unique major crisis, never before happened in the 2nd Republic. Broad agreement and respect are also shown towards Brigitte Bierlein from all corners of the political spectrum. After weeks of heated debate, scandals, confrontation and controversy this should pave the way to a productive, stable government until the new elections in the fall.

The date for the new elections in September will be set next week. *(Side note: More important than ever: if you are eligible to vote but have not yet registered yet, you can do this ANYTIME, but do it as soon as possible!*

<https://www.bmeia.gv.at/reise-aufenthalt/leben-im-ausland/wahlen/waehlerevidenz/>

Stay tuned for the developments next week.

EUROPEAN UNION ELECTIONS

Also, last weekend the election to the European Parliament were held. The results in short:

The Green and Liberal Parties won big, the traditional parties, like Conservatives and Social Democrats, lost big, the right-wing populist parties won some but not to the extend as it was forecasted. The Greens, a party coalition focusing on environmental issues, went from 52 seats in the European Parliament in 2014 to 69 in 2019, making them the fourth largest voting bloc in the EU.

In Austria, 28% of the under 30-year-old voters cast their vote for the Green Party, that are the most votes in this age group. The overall distribution, in comparison to the EU election in 2014, brought big gains for the ÖVP, about the same % for SPÖ and Grüne (which actually means a comeback for the Green Party as they tanked at the 2017 national elections), and a moderate loss for the FPÖ.

The biggest winner was democracy as participation reached its best EU showing, EU wide over 50%. The EU sceptics made not too significant gains, and more voters in favor of the EU were mobilized. Now intense negotiations will take place to nominate the President of the EU Parliament and the heads of the commissions.

OTHER NEWS FROM AUSTRIA:



It's the Grannies! Every Thursday evening Austrian grandmas and women from a generation that watched their mothers suffer the fallout of World War II are demonstrating and fighting against the rise of the far-right to ensure their grandchildren can enjoy the democracy they helped found in Austria. They are aiming to form an international "resistance" against the right wing and extremists across Europe and beyond.

May 3: World Press Freedom Day: Antonio Guterres, UN General Secretary: "No democracy is complete without access to transparent and reliable information. We must all defend the rights of journalists, whose efforts help us build a better world for all."

May 8: The 8th of May 1945 marked the end of the Second World War in Europe and the end of the Nazi reign of terror in Austria. While looking back at the darkest chapter in Austria's history, the 8th of May also represents a day of liberation and joy.

Mothersday:



A special tribute to mothers of the [SOS Children's Villages](https://www.soschildrensvillages.org/) around the world. Founded 70 years ago in 1949 shortly after WWII in Imst, Tirol, by Austrian Hermann Gmeiner, SOS Children's Villages is the world's largest nongovernmental organization dedicated to the care of orphaned and abandoned children in 135 countries. SOS's

comprehensive approach includes family strengthening, long-term care, youth empowerment, and advocacy programs. When a child has no family to care for them, SOS welcomes them into a safe home where they grow up with one of the SOS families – and at the center of those families – are SOS mothers. Becoming a SOS mother is a true calling. SOS mothers dedicate their lives to caring for children in need and some have raised over 100 children. SOS's innovative holistic model results in a 100% high school graduation rate in the United States and gives children a proper foundation in life. For more information see attached flyer and <https://www.sos-usa.org/>



May 15: The Austrian Consulate General in Los Angeles, celebrating its 50 years anniversary, was led by diplomats exemplifying public service at its best, from first Consul General Thomas Klestil, who later became President of Austria, Ulrike Ritzinger as 11th, and to today's 12th Consul General, Andreas Launer. Its mission is to promote cooperation between Austria and the entire West of the US (16 states), granting help to expats, and performing a wide range of consular services.



May 18: Cold spell in Austria – prolonged unusual cold temperatures for May prompted the ski region Hochkar in Lower Austria (and a few others) to open again their ski resort already closed for the season: “Family Fun at Gratis-Sonnenskilauf” - 70 bis 130 cm snow – a record for May! Just a reminder: In January, the same ski resort had to declare emergency because of the record high snow levels that buried the region.



May 20: Niki Lauda, Austrian idol and hero, and three times F1 Champion has died after a long and complicated illness. He was one of the toughest men to have ever lived, who put up the greatest comeback of all time.



May 23: In cruel acts of vandalism some of the portraits of NS - and Holocaust Survivors, currently on public display along the Ringstrasse in Vienna, were shamelessly damaged. President Alexander Van der Bellen visited the exhibit to express his deep shame and sorrow towards these inexplicable acts, in the name of all Austrians. He was accompanied by his spouse Doris Schmidauer, IKG-President Oskar Deutsch, Alice Uhl (Caritas) and by Luigi Toscano, the producer of the extraordinary documentary the exhibit is based on: “Gegen das Vergessen” (Lest We Forget). Following these incidents, members from several organizations from all religious backgrounds (Christian, Muslim and Jewish) and youth groups are volunteering and watching over these portraits around the clock, pitching their tents next to the exhibits.

Note: The documentary: “Gegen das Vergessen” was also shown at the Seattle International Film Festival on May 23/24. I personally was very impressed and moved by it.



May 26: „Frauenlauf“: over 30,000 female runner participated in this 32nd annual event over a distance of 5km or 10km through the Viennese Park “Prater” at ideal weather conditions. It started 1988 with about 500 participants.... Vienna only contributed this year over 16,000 runners!



May 27-29: 40 Years of the Vienna International Center Celebrations with international and national dignitaries including UN General Secretary Antonio Guterrez, are held in Vienna.



May 27-29: Greta Thunberg, the famous young Climate Change activist, is participating in Vienna’s R20 Austrian World Summit, an initiative of Arnold Schwarzenegger's climate action organization. R20 works to speed up the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement. She was guest by President VanDerBellen: „Greta and her fellow activists giving us hope that we can be successful in our actions together against the climate crisis”. She also participated in the weekly Friday’s school walk out to amplify the necessity to act on the climate crisis now.



May 27: Laura Freudenthaler, Austria, won the European Union Prize for Literature! Her winning novel is “Geistergeschichte” (Ghost story).



11 most beautiful places in Austria to visit: <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/most-beautiful-places-austria/index.html>



"Pride"-**Almdudler** with homosexual „Trachtenpärrchen“ edition, honoring the Europride Days 2019 to be held in Vienna from June 1 -16, promoting tolerance and respect.



FELIX turns 60! As a pioneer for sugos FELIX was the first company in Austria to launch canned pasta sauces, vegetables, and tasty ready-made meals. Of course, the FELIX tomato ketchup is a standard in the Austrian household.



Darbo turns 130! This traditional Tirolian company guarantees high quality fruit products like jam/marmalade and honey, but also desserts, fruit juices and products for diabetics.

UPCOMING EVENTS IN SEATTLE REGION:



May 16 – June 9:



There are still a few more days left to watch some of the great selection of this year's Seattle Intereantional Film festival! There are several German Language movies still to come: For movie line up and tickets: <https://www.siff.net/>

Especially, come and watch the **Austrian contribution** on June 5 at 9:30pm (AMC Pacific Place) or Thursday, May 6, 3pm (SIFF Uptown):



The Ground Beneath My Feet (*Der Boden unter den Füßen*), 2019, Marie Kreutzer. In this Austrian psychodrama, a workaholic business consultant, her life already complicated by caring for her paranoid-schizophrenic half-sister (and her affair with her boss), begins to feel her own mental state destabilizing. ***This showing is graciously supported by the Consulate General of Austria In Los Angeles.***

meetup

of the Austrian - Österreichische Gruppe:



Saturday, June 29, 3pm: Seward Park, Shelter # 5 – *Es wird a Grillerei!* Join the fun, bring the whole family and meet fellow Austrians of all ages! Details still to come! Check back the website, also for other events:

<https://www.meetup.com/Austrian-Stammtisch-and-Events/> or contact Juergen Schatzer:

juergenschatzer@gmail.com

Mit herzlichen Grüßen

Eva Kammel