
AUSTRIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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GENERAL INFORMATION

After the breakdown of the Holy Roman Empire, the Austrian Empire "Kaisertum Österreich" was declared in 1804 and transformed into the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867. The Austrian Federal Constitution was passed by the Constituent National Assembly in 1920, turning the country into a federal republic. Following World War II, Austria was occupied by the Allies and regained its final independence in 1955. In exchange, Austria had to declare permanent neutrality which is the reason why it is one of the few EU Member States that are not a member of the NATO. As a parliamentary democracy, the federal legislation is exercised by the National Council (Nationalrat) together with the Federal Council (Bundesrat) – the two chambers of Parliament. Of the approximately 8.6 million inhabitants of Austria, 1.9 million live in

the capital Vienna. German serves as the country's official language. Austria joined the EU in 1995 and entered the Eurozone in 1999. The Head of Government, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, is the EU's youngest government leader. The Head of State is the Federal President who is directly elected by the people. Currently, the position is held by Dr. Alexander Van der Bellen. Austrian EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn is responsible for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy. ■

ECONOMY

Having a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of 42.000 Euro and an unemployment rate of 5.5 per cent in 2017, Austria is among the wealthiest EU Member States. In the Global Competitiveness Index of the World Economic Forum Austria ranks 18 of 137. Its overall

GDP reached 369.22 billion Euro in 2017 with a growth rate of 4,5 per cent. The service sector provides two thirds of the GDP. Trade and industry make up about one third and agriculture contributes less than 2 per cent. Much of the economic strength of Austria's service sector relies on tourism which alone contributes 15.9 per cent to the GDP. It was ranked 12 of 136 in the World Economic Forum Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017. In terms of trade, Austria's main trading partners are Germany (30 per cent exports and 43 per cent imports) as well as Italy, the US and Switzerland. A government debt in relation to GDP of 80.4 per cent places the country slightly below EU average. Currently contributing 2.763 billion Euro to the EU budget (2016) makes Austria a net contributor to the Union. In the face of Brexit Austria favours a smaller EU budget instead of increasing it. ■



PRIORITIES

The overall motto of the Austrian Presidency is “A Europe that protects”.

The Presidency will focus on strengthening the European Union, helping it to get closer to its citizens and re-establishing trust. In order to achieve these objectives, the Presidency aims to enhance the principle of subsidiarity.

It believes that only if there is sufficient room for local solutions to smaller issues, it will be possible to credibly promote unity in the big ones. In the light of the challenges ahead, the Austrian Presidency will strengthen the protecting role of the European Union, in particular concerning three priority areas:

SECURITY AND THE FIGHT AGAINST ILLEGAL MIGRATION

The Austrian Presidency aims at reforming the Common European Asylum System and seeks to re-focus and strengthen the European Border and Coast Guard Agency FRONTEX, in order to guarantee the efficient protection of the EU's external borders. Further, the Presidency wants to work more closely with third countries regarding effective return policies. A key goal is to provide assistance to those in need of protection before they enter the EU while preventing those not in need of protection from setting off on the crossing to Europe. With view to security, the Austrian Presidency will advocate efficient cooperation of and information exchange between the security authorities of Member States as well as the interoperability of the relevant large databases. ■

SECURING PROSPERITY AND COMPETITIVENESS THROUGH DIGITALISATION


The Austrian Presidency wants to make sure that the EU consistently avoids overregulation and makes progress in the fields of innovation and digitalisation. It underlines the importance of safeguarding the competitiveness and sustainability of the European economy while at the same time taking into account citizens' concerns vis-à-vis digitalisation. In order to bring the digital economy to its full potential, the Digital Single Market needs to be completed and a modern and balanced regulatory framework shall be set in place. For this to become reality, national budgets need to be protected from harmful tax competition and tax avoidance. The Austrian Presidency thus aims at continuing the EU's work on the taxation of the digital economy. ■

STABILITY IN THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD

The Austrian Presidency will focus on promoting strong relationships between the EU and its neighbours, with the Western Balkan and South Eastern European countries taking a special place. The Presidency believes that it is in the interest of Europe's economy and security that the future of these regions lays within the European Union. Along with its European partners, Austria will thus advocate for developing a concrete EU perspective for all Western Balkan/South Eastern European states. This should be based on clear criteria relating to their individual performance and work on achieving measurable progress. ■



WHO IS WHO

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INFORMATION,
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Die neue
Volkspartei

ÖVP = Austrian People's Party

FPÖ DIE SOZIALE
HEIMATPARTEI

FPÖ = Freedom Party of Austria

ÖVP



SEBASTIAN
KURZ

Federal Chancellor

FPÖ



HEINZ-CHRISTIAN
STRACHE

*Deputy-Chancellor/ Federal
Minister for Civil Service and
Sport*

ÖVP



GERNOT
BLÜMEL

*Federal Minister for the EU,
Arts, Culture and Media*

ÖVP



JULIANE
BOGNER-STRAUSS

*Federal Minister for Women,
Families and Youth*

ÖVP



HEINZ
FASSMANN

*Federal Minister for Education,
Science and Research*

FPÖ



BEATE
HARTINGER-KLEIN

*Federal Minister for Labour,
Social Affairs, Health and
Consumer Protection*



>> WHO IS WHO

FPÖ



NORBERT
HOFER
*Federal Minister for Transport,
Innovation and Technology*

FPÖ



HERBERT
KICKL
*Federal Minister
for the Interior*

independent



KARIN
KNEISSL
*Federal Minister for Europe,
Integration and Foreign Affairs*

ÖVP



ELISABETH
KÖSTINGER
*Federal Minister for
Sustainability and Tourism*

FPÖ



MARIO
KUNASEK
Federal Minister of Defence

ÖVP



HARTWIG
LÖGER
Federal Minister of Finance

ÖVP



JOSEF
MOSER
*Federal Minister for
Constitutional Affairs, Reforms,
Deregulation and Justice*

ÖVP



MARGARETE
SCHRAMBÖCK
*Federal Minister for Digital
and Economic Affairs*



POLICY FIELDS

GENERAL AFFAIRS

The Austrian Presidency puts subsidiarity in focus as it aims at a Europe people can identify with. To answer the question where more and less Europe is needed, a high-level conference will be held, and public consultations will be organised. Progress on the accession process of the Western Balkan candidate countries shall be achieved. Simplification and increased results orientation of the cohesion policy will be key during the debate on the Multiannual Financial Framework. Regarding the final stage of Brexit negotiations, the Presidency is keen to maintain the unity of the EU 27 and protect citizens' rights. The annual rule of law dialogue will take place during Austria's term. ■

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

When completing the Banking Union, the Austrian Presidency pursues risk reduction as its main goal. An agreement on the Banking Package shall be reached. Negotiations on the Capital Markets Union shall focus on innovation and growth. Better compliance with the Stability and Growth pact is intended to further strengthen credibility. The Presidency will continue the EU's fight against harmful tax competition, tax fraud and tax evasion. It wants to work on the taxation of the digital economy in an international

framework (G20, OECD) and progress on the EU's common corporate tax base and VAT-reform. Debating the 2019 EU budget will involve negotiations on future own resources. ■

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Securing the rule of law in the EU will be key for the Austrian Presidency. To achieve this, enhancing cross-border judicial cooperation and reorganising Eurojust will be central. Further, the establishment of a crisis-proof security union and a strategic reorientation in the area of internal security are fundamental objectives for the Presidency. Besides internal security, other essential points are the protection of external borders, the fight against radicalisation, terrorism and organised crime. Moreover, digital security in all areas, a transparent handling of data and the increased use of e-Justice solutions shall be promoted. ■

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Presidency will focus on increasing security and stability in the immediate neighbourhood. Apart from the Eastern Partnership – with special attention to Ukraine and Russia – and the South Eastern European countries, the Middle East and Africa play an increasingly important role. Irregular migration

shall be tackled by cooperative partnerships with countries of origin and transit. Development cooperation will be strongly linked to this aim. Economic ties with South-East Asia will be key. The principle of effective multilateralism will play a role in the transatlantic relations; strategic advancement of the EU's trade relations is planned. First projects of the PESCO shall be implemented. More attention shall be given to cybersecurity and fight against terrorism within the CSDP and internationally. ■

EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH AND CONSUMERS

The Austrian Presidency is committed to create fair working conditions for all and thus continues to promote transparent and reliable working conditions in the EU. In this regard, it supports existing initiatives in the field of equal treatment, non-discrimination and the reconciliation of work and family life. Moreover, Austria aims to conclude negotiations on the amendment of the Carcinogens Directive and the European Accessibility Act. The Presidency will prepare a common EU position on Tobacco Control and a progress report on "Health Technology Assessment". With regard to digitisation, it wants to concentrate on working and employment conditions, social and labour law and platform-based work. ■



>> POLICY FIELDS

ENVIRONMENT

Climate protection will constitute a priority of the Austrian Presidency in the field of environment. Key topics for the Presidency will thus be the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24) in Katowice in December 2018 and the work towards completing the negotiations on further reduction of CO₂ emissions of passenger cars and vans. Further, the proposal on single-use plastics will receive special attention. The Austrian Presidency also plans to present conclusions on the orientation of the future global biodiversity policy after 2020. ■

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

In the field of agriculture, the Austrian Presidency will focus on discussions and negotiations on the Common Agricultural Policy after 2020 as well as on the Commission's proposal on the food supply chain. Other relevant dossiers include a review of the EU Forest Strategy and of EU activities on deforestation. With view to consumer protection, the work on the veterinary medicinal products and medicated feeds package will continue. In the field of fisheries, the negotiations on 2019 catch limits for the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and the North Sea/Atlantic will be predominant. ■

COMPETITIVENESS

To increase competitiveness, small and medium-sized enterprises and start-ups will be given special attention during the Austrian Presidency. Austria will support initiatives that promote innovation and professional skills and push for better framework conditions for digital services and digitalisation in companies. Great emphasis will lie on the completion of the Online Platform Economy projects, the Regulation on establishing a Single Digital Gateway and the Reform of the Patent Package. To set the course for the future, it aims for rapid progress at the Horizon Europe package and plans to seize the opportunities of Artificial Intelligence, in particular for Europe's re-industrialisation. ■

EDUCATION, YOUTH, CULTURE AND SPORT

The Austrian Presidency will turn with particular attention to the future of the EU's cooperation on education and the successor programme to Erasmus+. In the area of youth, the Presidency aims to agree on a work plan for the first implementation phase of the EU Youth Strategy from 2019 to 2020. Further, Austria will present a proposal for conclusions on the role of youth work for young migrants and refugees. In the area of culture, key topics will be the revision of the

European Agenda for Culture of 2007 and the adoption of the new Work Plan for Culture as of 2019. In the area of sport, a key aspect will be sport and physical activity at the workplace. ■

TRANSPORT, TELECOMMUNICATION AND ENERGY

The Austrian Presidency aims to continue to work on the dossiers of the mobility packages. The Commission's proposals for the revision of transport infrastructure cost, the European Electronic Toll Service (EETS) and the promotion of clean and eco-friendly road transport vehicles will constitute key priorities. With view to telecommunication, the Presidency intends to finalise the negotiations on the revision of the legal framework for telecommunications, in particular the European Electronic Communication Code. In the field of energy, the Presidency will focus on the completion of the Clean Energy Package and in particular on the electricity market design. ■





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