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Austria

# Government of the far right on the horizon

- IV Online magazine - 2025 - IVP - January 2025 -

Publication date: Saturday 18 January 2025

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**In the Austrian parliamentary elections on 29 September, the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), led by Herbert Kickl, emerged as the strongest party with 28.85%, just ahead of the right-wing conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) with 26.27%. The Social Democrats came in third with 21.1 per cent. Since the Social Democrats ruled out a coalition with the FPÖ at the federal level from the outset, the conservatives could choose whether they would rather govern with Kickl or with the Social Democrats.**

Negotiations with the Social Democrats and the liberal Neos for a governing coalition were ended by the Neos and the conservatives. Neither was even willing to negotiate the participation of the rich and super-rich in the necessary budget restructuring (reintroduction of an inheritance or wealth tax), so great was the pressure on both bourgeois parties from capital. The Social Democrats also proposed alternatives such as a bank levy – all of which was dismissed out of hand. Conservative Chancellor Karl Nehammer, who had made it clear during the election campaign that he would not under any circumstances be a stepping stone for Kickl to the Chancellery, resigned as Chancellor and as party leader on 4 January.

Since then, the conservatives have agreed to form a government with the far-right under a Chancellor Kickl. Kickl has successfully lobbied by promising the capital associations that he would implement the economic programme of the conservatives if he could take over the chancellery and important ministries. The pressure of capital on conservatives and liberals was apparently so overwhelming that the negotiations with the Social Democrats were brought to failure, who had demanded a fairer distribution of the burdens from the necessary budget reorganisation, thus a modest capital tax.

## A policy against the working class

The FPÖ and ÖVP know that the implementation of this massive redistribution from bottom to top, which corresponds to the ÖVP's economic programme, will lead to a change in public opinion.

The destruction or at least a significant weakening of the health system (20% cut in the hospital sector alone and further privatisation); attacks on public sector workers (freezing the salaries of teachers, nurses and police officers) and on pensioners (freezing pensions and raising the statutory retirement age); a 'labour market reform', i.e. cutting benefits and tightening employment conditions; and increasing mass taxes. It is to be expected that people will soon turn away from the ÖVP and the FPÖ in response to such measures.

For this reason, and because of the ongoing proceedings against leading representatives of the ÖVP and FPÖ, both parties are interested in weakening democratic controls and the rule of law. For example, the independence of public television and radio is to be weakened or eliminated, and massive influence is to be exerted on the most important print media (including advertising corruption).

The weakening of the 'Chamber of Labour' (which has its origins in the 1918/19 revolution) or even its destruction by reducing or abolishing membership fees for this chamber is a further starting point.

The same applies to the independence of the judiciary (termination of proceedings, prevention of investigations and the initiation of new proceedings), the Court of Auditors, the Austrian Institute of Public Statistics and even the public

administration: the appointment of political secretaries-general in all ministries under the Sebastian Kurz government gives an indication of the direction to be taken. Sebastian Kurz, a provocative young politician, had already served 17 months as chancellor of a so-called 'turquoise-blue' coalition (ÖVP-FPÖ) in 2018/19, but at that time the conservatives were still a little stronger than the far right...

# Racism and reaction at the heart of the programme

The aim of further tightening xenophobic and anti-minority measures is to divert discontent onto supposed scapegoats (refugees, migrants, the unemployed, welfare recipients, LGBTIQ+ people or even socially critical artists).

Furthermore, the FPÖ and ÖVP advocate everything that feeds the climate crisis and advocate abandoning climate targets.

Broad alliances to defend democratic and social rights and against 'Orbanisation' are now the order of the day. The success of these defence actions will depend on whether the social democracy and the trade unions participate in the defence with all their might (organisations to the left of social democracy play only a very small role in Austria). This will be a very big challenge in view of the decades of social partnership, in which the average strike times were measured in minutes, if not even in seconds per person and year (!).

At the same time, we have to develop an offensive left-wing programme and debunk not only the right-wing populism of the FPÖ, but also the neoliberal ideology of the 'Neos'.

In the medium and long term, it will only be possible to stop the shift to the right if a strong, radical social and political left emerges in Austria that can stand up to blue-black populism.

15 January 2025

Translated for **International Viewpoint** from [ISO website](#).

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