

The ÖVP of outgoing Chancellor Sebastian Kurz easily pulls ahead in the general elections in Austria

The People's Party (ÖVP) led by outgoing Chancellor Sebastian Kurz easily pulled ahead in the general elections organised on 29th September in Austria. It won 37.5% of the vote, i.e. its highest result since the general election of 24th November 2002 (42.3%), and 71 seats (+ 9 in comparison with the previous general election on 15th October 2017).

Its former partner in the government coalition, the Freedom Party (FPÖ), populist movement led by Norbert Hofer, was heavily sanctioned by the Austrians. It won only 16.2% of the vote and 31 seats (-20). According to the exit polls a large share of voters who chose the FPÖ in 2017 turned to the ÖVP.

The FPÖ was the cause of this snap election, which has taken place 3 years ahead of time and consecutive to the overthrow by the National Council (Nationalrat), the lower

house in Parliament of outgoing Chancellor Sebastian Kurz on 27th May last. For the first time in Austria's history a Prime Minister failed to win Parliament's confidence.

Hence the FPÖ was beaten by the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), led by Pamela Rendi-Wagner, which came second with 21.2% of the vote (40 seats, -12). The main losers in the previous elections on 15th October 2017, the Greens/Green Alternative will be returning to the benches of parliament: they won 13.8% of the vote, taking 26 seats (+26). Finally, NEOS-New Austria (NEOS), liberal party led by Beate Meinl-Reisinger, won 8.1% of the vote and 15 seats (+5).

Turnout rose to 75.1 %, i.e. below the figure recorded in the previous general election of 15th October 2017 (-5 points).

General election results of 29th September 2019 in Austria

Turnout: 75,1%

Political Parties	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats
People's Party (ÖVP)	1 789 976	37,5	71
Social Democratic Party (SPÖ)	1 006 769	21,2	40
Freedom Party (FPÖ)	769 187	16,2	31
The Greens-Alternative Green (DG)	654 961	13,8	26
NEOS-New Austria (NEOS)	382 329	8,1	15
Others	136 772	3	0

Source : <https://wahl19.bmi.gv.at>

Outgoing Chancellor Sebastian Kurz will therefore retain his post. He is not due to change policy - even though the tone of his programme will depend on the partners in the next government coalition. Indeed, the victor in this election must now find the partners to lead the country. He has three options.

The first lies in the renewal of an alliance with the FPÖ. However, the weak score won by the latter does not place the ÖVP in a position of strength. The work undertaken by the new leader, Norbert Hofer to change the FPÖ's image has not produced the desired results.

The second option comprises an alliance with the SPÖ to revive the tradition of the grand coalition - these two parties had governed Austria together for 44 years since the end of the 2nd World War. *"It is not what we hoped for, this is not what we fought for,"* declared the SPÖ's leader Pamela Rendi-Wagner. A major share of the Social Democrats are against this idea and according to the polls, Austrians are mainly against it too. Finally, the SPÖ's result is the lowest since 1945. It does not allow it to assert its views either. The ÖVP/SPÖ alliance therefore seems to be thing of the past.

A third path might rally the ÖVP and the ecologists. The Greens/Green Alternative have won ground since the general election of 2017. The fact that the issue of global warming and the climate is uppermost in Austrian minds, ahead of migration, is one reason behind this. Each political party *"has greened"* its respective programme, and, except for the FPÖ, they all decreed a climate emergency. Sebastian Kurz promised that Austria would be carbon neutral by 2045. However, according to one poll, only a quarter of the ÖVP electorate support an alliance with the ecologists.

The ecologists' spokesperson, Werner Kogler indicated that it was too early to speak of participation on the part of the Greens in government and he said that the ÖVP would have to *"make radical changes"* if the Greens/Green Alternative were to join forces with it. Although the

ecologists govern in several Länder together with the ÖVP, the formation of a coalition between the two parties at federal level would be a first.

Each would have to make many concessions however, if an alliance were to be formed, which many political analysts deem highly unlikely. *"Many voters gave their vote to the ecologists because they are radically against Sebastian Kurz, which will make any negotiations long and difficult,"* stressed Markus Wagner, a professor of political science at the University of Vienna. *"If we look at the main issues at stake, we note an 80% convergence rate between the FPÖ and the ÖVP, and a 20% rate only between the latter and the Greens/Alternative Green,"* notes Peter Filzmaier, professor of political science at the University Danube at Krems an der Donau, who nevertheless indicated that a coalition between the ÖVP and the Greens seemed the most likely to him in view of the election results.

Aged 33 and from Vienna, Sebastian Kurz joined the People's Party (ÖVP) when he was 16 years old. In 2009 he gave up his study of law to take over the leadership of the party's youth section. The following year he was elected as a town councillor in Vienna. In April 2011 he was appointed Secretary of State for Integration.

He entered Parliament after the general election on 29th September 2013 and he was appointed Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs in the government led by Chancellor Werner Faymann (SPÖ), who was replaced in 2016 by Christian Kern (SPÖ). In May 2017, Sebastian Kurz took over the leadership of the ÖVP, which he reformed in both shape and form (turquoise became the party's new colour). To mark this development, the party presented itself at the election on 15th October 2017 under the name *"Sebastian Kurz List-the New People's Party"*.

After this election the man who has sometimes been nicknamed *"Milchbubi"* (the young lad) or *"Wunderwuzzi"* (the child genius) became the youngest chancellor ever in Austria's history and

more widely the youngest leader ever in Europe. to the Ballhausplatz, the official residence of the Austrian Chancellors, and have renewed their confidence to lead Austria for the next four years.

On 29th September the Austrians re-elected him

You can read all of our publications on our site:
www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France , Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.