

## **Kantor Center Position Papers**

Editor: Mikael Shainkman

August 2018

### **A CRUMBLING TABOO? ANTISEMITISM IN AUSTRIA BEFORE AND AFTER THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS 2017**

Carina Klammer\*

#### **Executive Summary**

The ongoing growth of the far-right in Austria is neither a new phenomenon nor is it a by-product of the so-called “protest voters”. It has to be located within in the context of the Austrian “victim myth” and the Austrian repression of the Nazi past as well as more general changes of the European and even global political landscape. After the parliamentary elections in October 2017, the conservative Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) agreed to form a coalition with the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). Compared to the last ÖVP/FPÖ coalition in the year 2000, the government participation of the FPÖ did not result in a more moderate demeanour of the party. On the contrary, shortly after the elections, several FPÖ-related scandals regarding the National Socialist past stirred up the Austrian political landscape. None of those incidents affected the party’s popularity significantly. This is a worrying indication of the normalization of antisemitism in contemporary Austrian society.

#### **Results of the National Elections in Austria 2017**

The Austrian national elections on 15 October 2017 resulted in a further shift to the Right. Early opinion polls showed an increased support for the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), some analyses even suggested that the FPÖ might become the largest party. But with the rise of the new leader of the conservative Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP), Sebastian Kurz, in May 2017 the polls started to shift. Furthermore the ÖVP remodelled the party’s appearance as a whole. While trying to

appear more modern on the outside—especially with a rather young leader—the ÖVP shifted further to a populist approach. They addressed mainly two issues: First, the “exploitation” of the welfare system by immigrants and those supposedly “unwilling to work”. The focus of Austrian politics on issues of immigration had already developed before the so-called “refugee crisis”, but the refugee movements of 2015 intensified racist expressions within the political discourse and functioned as a further legitimization for the social and political exclusion of migrants. The second populist dimension was the call for a “change” or “renewal”. In doing so the ÖVP moved closer to contents typically emphasized by the FPÖ, but presented them in a more moderate way. Furthermore Kurz represented a wing of the ÖVP that wanted to end the coalition with the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ). With a personalized election campaign Kurz was able to increase the popularity of his party significantly within a rather short time.

But the ÖVP wasn't the only party with a new leader. In September 2016 the SPÖ had chosen Christian Kern as their new party leader, and under his leadership the SPÖ managed to prevent a predicted loss of votes. These new leaders of the ÖVP and SPÖ, both parties that had become associated with political stagnation rather than change, caused Heinz-Christian Strache, leader of the FPÖ since 2005, trouble to remain in the center of media attention as he used to be. In this light especially the ÖVP tried to seize the opportunity and pushed for snap elections. After the elections in October 2017 the ÖVP emerged as the largest party in the National Council by receiving 31.5 percent of the votes. The SPÖ achieved similar results to those in 2013 and finished second with 26.9 percent. Directly behind them came the FPÖ, which received 26 percent of the votes. The New Austria and Liberal Forum (NEOS) finished fourth with 5.3 percent. The campaign of the Peter Pilz List (a new party which had split from the Green Party) entered parliament for the first time with 4.4 percent, while the Green Party failed to cross the 4 percent threshold for the first time in 30 years.<sup>1</sup>

This also meant that the once largest party with a clear position against any political cooperation with right-wing extremists, suddenly was ejected from parliament. The SPÖ still struggles for a unified position towards the FPÖ, but there are many signs that the view of right wing of the party, which has accepted the FPÖ as a legitimate political opponent—and therefore if necessary as a possible ally as well—will become further established.

Opinion polls showed that the national election in 2017 was accompanied by general feelings of dissatisfaction, pessimism regarding the future and a desire for change. FPÖ voters was more pessimistic than most. For example, 86 percent of the FPÖ voters see the development of the past five years negative and 81 percent say the next generation will be worse off than the previous one. Voters especially chose the FPÖ because of the party's political platform (34 percent). In

contrast, one of the main reasons the ÖVP could win the election was the personalization strategy around Sebastian Kurz. 42 percent of the voters named the party leader as the main reason for choosing the ÖVP this time. Unlike Kurz, the personality of Strache did not play a significant role for the FPÖ voters. In general, men voted more for the ÖVP and the FPÖ and women more for SPÖ and the Greens. A further division can be seen along generational lines: older people tended to vote for ÖVP or SPÖ while the younger generation preferred the FPÖ or the Green party. Another particular trend is that the Social democrats continued to lose votes of the working class to the FPÖ.<sup>2</sup> Especially young working class men seem to be attracted by the rather aggressive rhetoric of the FPÖ. A few days after the election, ÖVP and FPÖ announced the start of talks over a future cabinet and their political agenda.<sup>3</sup> Compared to the last ÖVP/FPÖ coalition in the year 2000 the government participation of the FPÖ has not led a more moderate demeanour of the party so far. On the contrary, shortly after the election several FPÖ-related scandals regarding Austria's National Socialist past have rocked the boat of the national political landscape. Furthermore, none of those incidents has affected their further electoral success significantly. (For an example see the case of Udo Landbauer below).

### **Austria's Shift to the Right**

The growth of the far-right in Austria is not a new phenomenon, but rather part of a process which has been going on for more than a decade. After the end of the Second World War and especially during the peak phase of the Keynesian welfare state, antisemitism and racism manifested themselves less in terms of an organized political agenda but rather in everyday culture and the private domain. Even though antisemitism and racism continued to shape Austrian society in a structural form—like the system of exploitation of migrant workers, so-called “guest workers” as well as a secondary antisemitism as part of the national narrative of the Austrian nation-state after 1945)<sup>4</sup>, it was not until the so-called “Haider phenomenon” in the late 1980s that racism and antisemitism re-entered the political arena overtly as key issues. It is no coincidence that the political rise of Haider was coincided with the social-economic transition from the commitment to the welfare state to a neoliberal societal model. With the mobilisation of xenophobic attitudes Haider managed to lead the FPÖ out of its political isolation. In 1992 the FPÖ initiated a national referendum named “Austria first” (“Österreich zuerst”). 400,000 people signed the racist outcry the FPÖ had initiated. In the early 1990s the SPÖ reacted to the growing opponent with a policy expressed by their slogan: “Gesetze statt Hetze” (“Laws instead of smear”).<sup>5</sup> In doing so they claimed to be the only reasonable and constructive force to solve the so-called “issue of immigration”. Consciously or unconsciously, the SPÖ thereby accepted the narrative framework

FPÖ had pushed for in the first place: the framing of migration as the key problem in Austrian society and furthermore its promise of a “salvation” from this problem. As a consequence this strategy rather contributed to the fact that more and more voters who traditionally had been loyal to the SPÖ started to shift toward the FPÖ.

On the political level the support for the FPÖ was only temporarily decreasing when the FPÖ broke apart during their government participation in 2005. The more pragmatic and/or Haider loyal party members left the party and joined the new party Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (BZÖ) and what remained of the FPÖ had to reform itself. Under the leadership of Strache, German national fraternities became the party’s ideological core once again.

### **Antisemitism as a Core Element of FPÖ’s Ideology**

Since 2010 the FPÖ shifted to a rather Israel-friendly course and started to take a kind of patronizing stance towards the local Jewish community. For example, in November 2016 swastikas were smeared on the walls of the Jewish part of Vienna’s Central Cemetery. The FPÖ exploited the incident to present itself as an important force in the fight against antisemitism and called for special surveillance of the Jewish Cemetery.<sup>6</sup>

Events like these raised the question whether antisemitism might have become ideologically less defining for the party (and maybe even the extreme right in general). But the FPÖ never has broken with its antisemitic tradition. At the same time it is not simply a neo-Nazi party, but an extreme-right party with a populist approach. Therefore the FPÖ typically tries to cover its antisemitism in order to present itself as a legitimate party of the center. The party developed different strategies like condemning antisemitism only when it comes from Muslims, the “lying with the truth” strategy so to speak. That means, that the FPÖ is not inherently wrong with its claim that antisemitism among Muslims has been ignored or underestimated for far too long. The few studies we have for Austria indicate that (especially young, male) Muslims show an above average tendency towards antisemitic attitudes—especially with regards to openly outspoken forms of antisemitism. But the FPÖ, as a party based on an antisemitic ideology, uses this fact to bring moral confusion into the discourse and to distract from their own antisemitism (as well as the antisemitism of many Austrians in general). Furthermore, the fact that Austrians have learned to cultivate their antisemitism mainly in private or the semi-public, makes it easier to focus on the antisemitism of Muslims.

Furthermore the denial of its antisemitic attitudes was a precondition for the cooperation within the European Parliament with other right-wing populist parties like the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands.

The fact that the first visit of Israel by Strache and other leading figures of the FPÖ in 2010 wasn't met with much approval from the party's base showed that antisemitism is deeply rooted within the party. Strache later wrote a public letter to justify his visit to his own party members. Thereby he also tried to educate them why this step would be (strategically) relevant at the present moment. That's not something one typically does as a party leader unless one isn't completely convinced about the grassroots' commitment to fight antisemitism.

In April 2016, Strache and other members of the FPÖ visited Israel again, and claimed that they had been officially invited by the right-wing government party Likud. Upon request, leading figures of the Likud clarified that there had been no such official invitation. In addition to the view of Israel as a "bastion against Islam" the FPÖ tried to improve its relationship with Israel as part of a strategy to increase its acceptability by other member states of the European Union, especially in order to prepare the path for the acceptance of Strache as future Austrian Chancellor.

From the ideological perspective the FPÖ is still clearly attached to antisemitism on several levels. Particularly noteworthy is a "völkisch" German nationalism as one of the ideological core elements of the party. The frame of "the Christian Occident" the FPÖ has adapted is not only directed against Muslims, but also functions as a code against Jews. Less specific but still important is a secondary antisemitism as a mechanism of defense from guilt and remembrance of Austria's Nazi past. Also crucial is a structural antisemitism as a personalization and naturalization of social conditions of modernity and its economic structures ("the little people" against "the establishment").

### **The FPÖ within the European Political Landscape**

Unlike the situation when the FPÖ participated in the government in 2000, Austria is no longer the only European country with an extreme right-wing party in a government position. All over Europe the extreme right has gained strength on the national level. This political shift across the whole continent has improved the self-confidence of far-right actors immensely as well as reduced the extent of counter-reactions and international condemnations. Furthermore, various far-right parties and groups have managed to achieve a new level of unification of cross national alliances by expanding their ideological framework.<sup>7</sup> By focusing on narratives of the "Islamization of Europe" sometimes even opposing actors could agree on the pan-European white supremacist belief as a common goal.<sup>8</sup>

Since discussions about Islam and Islamism have become an important issue within European politics, the FPÖ under the leadership of Strache started to include the historical narrative of Muslims as "threat to the Christian Occident" in its propaganda and politics against foreigners.<sup>9</sup>

Although many German nationalists are influenced by an anti-clerical tradition, the founding myth of Europe having been shaped by Christianity—as a homogeneous cultural unit—has a specific historical background within right-wing ideologies. Furthermore the reactivation of the narrative of Muslims as a common enemy that helped to unify the extreme right all over Europe was too tempting.<sup>10</sup>

In 2015 various far right parties reached an agreement to form their own faction within the European parliament (Europe of Nations and Freedom, ENF). Therefore it is noteworthy that the suppression of any antisemitic outbursts was a precondition for the cooperation with less extreme and rather populist parties like the Lega Nord in Italy and Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom in the Netherlands.

Another increasingly important ideological bridge between different right wing fractions is the denunciation of gender and LGBTQ politics as so-called “gender ideology”<sup>11</sup>. In these times of socio-economic and political uncertainty traditional concepts of gender, and especially masculinity, are on the rise again. Furthermore gender has become an important ideological key symbol “to signify the failure of democratic representation”<sup>12</sup>. The scholars Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk emphasise that within the current language of populism the “opposition to gender is key for the ideological coherence of the present illiberal turn and that anti-genderism has become a new language of resistance to neo-liberalism”.<sup>13</sup> In that sense gender functions as an important umbrella term and “symbolic glue” to create broader alliances and gather different anti-liberal actors, especially those who “have not, necessarily, been eager to cooperate in the past”.<sup>14</sup> Since the attempt to defend male privileges and the rejection of feminism, homosexuality and transgender people are reaching far into the centre of society, “the demonization of ‘gender ideology’ has become a key rhetorical tool in the construction of a new conception of ‘common sense’ for a wide audience; a form of consensus about what is normal and legitimate”. Furthermore it is crucial to highlight that the view of “gender” as an ideology and a political strategy to undermine the “natural order” of things is deeply intermingled with antisemitic views and conspiracy theories. Thereby it is noteworthy that many anti-gender actors assume that gender policies like gender mainstreaming are no more than a strategic tool or “Trojan horse” for another but hidden agenda.<sup>15</sup>

For example, in her book *MenschInnen. Auf dem Weg zum geschlechtslosen Menschen*<sup>16</sup> the former FPÖ presidential candidate Barbara Rosenkrank claims that a “misguided elite” (of intellectuals) is responsible for the current dissolution of gender roles. Furthermore, she emphasizes that the current gender “re-education” actually is part of a comprehensive plan to create a so-called “Einheitsmensch” (literally homogenous human, a man not only without gender, but also without

principles, culture, nationality and history). Furthermore she claims that capitalists as well as communists are united by the same goal, namely the destruction of the traditional family. Usually such narratives do not address the key figure (“the Jew”) that is often presumed to monitor this kind of world conspiracy directly. But sometimes the underlying antisemitism reveals itself in certain hints, such as dropping Jewish names. Furthermore it has to be mentioned that antisemitism and sexism have an intertwined history. Among other things, because Jews and women have been stigmatized (and hated) for their supposed weakness. Which is why both groups have been accused to unite in a strategy which would be particular for them: the plotting against others from behind.<sup>17</sup>

With this in mind we can see two increasing developments within current narratives of the far right: Firstly, feminists function more often as bogey(wo)man for general social problems.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, even though issues of gender are highlighted, these narratives are based on and deeply driven by an (usually unspoken) antisemitism (as well as a reactionary anti-capitalism and anti-communism).

### **Changes in the Austrian Political Landscape**

The strengthening of the FPÖ enhanced certain changes of the political landscape on the national level as well. This includes the growing acceptance of the FPÖ as yet another party representing mainstream society rather than an extremist party. After the SPÖ had already formed coalitions with the FPÖ at the state level like in Burgenland, it started to consider a cooperation on a nation level as well.

Although a coalition on the national level would not have been the first time in history, the current approaches become even more challenging for a party whose self-image is supposed to be uncompromisingly anti-fascist. The SPÖ agreed to a coalition with the FPÖ in 1983 for the first time under Chancellor Fred Sinowatz. But in those days the FPÖ was still a rather insignificant party that only gained 4.9 percent of the votes whereas the SPÖ only slightly lost the absolute majority. Furthermore a more moderate wing of the FPÖ existed that became particularly influential even though it was rather small in numbers. It was under the era of Haider that liberal figures were removed from the party, but his populist approach avoided to put those who were also a member of German nationalist (some of them involved in neo-Nazi activities) fraternities into prominent positions within the party.<sup>19</sup> But under the leadership of Strache the FPÖ has become more open about its past. Since the national election in 2017, out of the party’s 51 MPs 18 are members of right-wing fraternities, including five of its six chairmen. This includes openly pan-German fraternities like the Olympia as well as FPÖ members with entanglements to the neo-Nazi movement. For example, in 2015 the FPÖ related magazine “Aula” characterized prisoners of

concentration camps as a “rural plague” (“Landplage”) and survivors of the concentration camp Mauthausen initiated legal actions on grounds of defamation and libel. The specific “Austrian condition” as a society that had dealt too late and too insufficiently with its Nazi past showed once more when the public prosecutor’s office of Graz terminated a proceeding against the magazine in the first place. They argued that it would be “understandable” that the release of thousands of people from a concentration camp had been a “nuisance” (“Belästigung”) for the affected Austrian areas and that it would be proven that some of the prisoners of the concentration camp were “lawbreakers”.<sup>20</sup>

And only a few weeks before the election the press released that Johannes Hübner from the FPÖ had given an antisemitic speech for the German “Gesellschaft für freie Publizistik” in 2016. The GfP is a platform for all sorts of historical revisionists and closely linked to the NPD. In his speech he called the founder of the Austrian constitution “Kohn” instead of “Kelsen”. The “Kelsen/Kohn” story is a well-known joke amongst the far right. Already the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt had made that remark about Hans Kelsen, to expose the Jewish origins of the legal scholar which is regarded as the architect of the Austrian constitution.<sup>21</sup> Hübner also made antisemitic remarks about the leading figure of the social democrats, Christian Kern, and used the term “so-called Holocaust survivors”. In the past, other members—like Susanne Winter—got expelled because the party was afraid their antisemitic statements might have crossed a line. It is therefore highly symbolic that the FPÖ decided not to expel Hübner. Probably because they didn’t worry about such statements harming the party’s anticipated electoral success.

As a consequence of the current social climate outspoken relativization and trivialization of the National Socialist past has become further normalized within public discourse and offences according to the “Verbotsgesetz” (punishable acts under the law banning National Socialist activities) have severely increased.<sup>22</sup>

### **Antisemitic Incidents before and after the National Elections**

In the light of these developments it is not a coincidence that antisemitic statements were an ongoing issue during the pre-election phase. The conservative candidate Sebastian Kurz publicly announced that a clear stance against antisemitism would be a precondition for a coalition with any party. Thereby he indirectly admitted that antisemitic views seem to be a problem within the Austrian political landscape.

In this respect it is noteworthy that the FPÖ was not the only political party connected to antisemitic incidents during the election campaign and that the articulated antisemitism either showed a worryingly open level of anti-Jewish hate speech.

In May 2017 somebody leaked an internal WhatsApp conversation of the conservative student representation at University of Vienna's Law School ("AG Jus"). The private group shared antisemitic slogans and pictures which also belittled the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. For example, one pictures showed a picture of a heap of ashes with the headline: "Leaked Anne Frank nudes!"<sup>23</sup> As a reaction, members of the AG Jus claimed that they had no antisemitic intention and that the whole conversation was simply a joke. Even though legal complaints were filed against some of the involved persons, the AG Jus did not face significant losses in the student representatives' elections taking place shortly after the incident.

Another incident was the so-called "Silverstein affair". Tal Silverstein, the spin doctor of the SPÖ, was responsible for a Facebook page with racist and antisemitic content that was supposed to look like it was run by Sebastian Kurz supporters. The dirty campaigning aimed to drive liberal voters away from the conservative party. Consequently the SPÖ was criticized for reproducing racism and antisemitism for the sake of their personal benefit. On the other hand Kurz courted antisemitic sentiments when he reacted with a statement that Austria should get rid of "the Silversteins". Another incident related to the newly founded GILT ("My Vote Counts!"), a populist "anti-establishment" party. Its leading candidate had referred to the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" and other conspiracy-theory documents on his personal website.<sup>24</sup> When Oskar Deutsch, President of the Austrian/Viennese Jewish Community (Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien, IKG), spoke out against any coalition with the FPÖ he received dozens of antisemitic comments via Facebook. Only three days after the election a member of the ÖVP called the Austrian Author Doron Rabinovici a "well-poisoner" on Twitter.<sup>25</sup> Another member of the ÖVP openly argued in favour of renaming the "Universitätsring", a part of the prestigious "Ringstraße", back to "Dr.Karl-Lueger Ring". After longstanding debates concerning the antisemitism of Karl Lueger the city had renamed the street to "Universitätsring" only in 2012. Lueger was not only the founder of the Christian Social Party and major of Vienna from 1897 until 1910, but also a leading figure of the antisemitic movement and an important inspiration for Adolf Hitler.

Especially the Green Party had pushed the issue of renaming various streets with a problematic reference to the Nazipast. Therefore it is no surprise that the ÖVP member explicitly referred to the disappearance of the Green Party from parliament as an opportunity to use the moment to reverse the renaming. Since the ÖVP/FPÖ coalition became official the FPÖ has been involved in more than a dozen scandals related to belittling or glorifying the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. One of these scandals involved Udo Landbauer, the leading FPÖ candidate for the

elections in Lower Austria and member of the fraternity Germania zu Wiener Neustadt. A songbook of the fraternity emerged that mocked Jews and the Holocaust<sup>26</sup> and celebrated Nazi atrocities and glorified the “Wehrmacht”. According to Landbauer he resigned from all political functions due to a “media witch hunt” against him. Despite the scandal the FPÖ managed to improve its result at the Lower Austria state elections in January 2018 by six percent points to 14.7 percent in total.<sup>27</sup>

### **Antisemitic Attitudes within General Society<sup>28</sup>**

In Austria, there is very little data collection regarding antisemitism. Especially systematic and data comparable over time is missing. In comparison to other countries research of antisemitism is hardly supported and the existing research is often linked to questions of dealing with the Nazi past, like the surveys of the historian Oliver Rathkolb.

According to a study by Maximilian Gottschlich in 2012 every second Austrian holds antisemitic views. A survey by Georg Lauß and Stefan Schmid-Heher looked at the political and authoritarian attitudes of 700 apprentices in Vienna.<sup>29</sup> Antisemitism was one item among others. The question was: Do Jews have too much influence in Austria? 55 percent did not agree, but only 35percent rejected strongly. Interesting is also the fact that 20percent didn't answer the question at all. And male adolescents had higher approval rates than females. The data also showed a difference according to the migration background. The sub-sample was very small (70 persons), but 55 percent (of those who answered the question) answered the question about Jews having too much influence with “yes”. But there exists also another study by Kenan Güngör and Caroline Nik Nafs,<sup>30</sup> which showed similar results among younger Muslims.

The existing data is mainly collected by NGOs and other non-state actors. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution publishes a yearly report (“Verfassungsschutzbericht”) on right-wing, left-wing and religious extremism that includes some information about antisemitism. This data, however, is not based on systematic monitoring, but on official police reports. Hence, the main sources for the documentation of antisemitism are non-state stakeholders. There are basically three institutions collecting and publishing data on antisemitic and racist incidences: the NGOs Forum against Antisemitism (FGA), which provides the most comprehensive report, and Civil Courage and Anti-Racism Work (ZARA), which monitors antisemitism as a sub-category of racist or extreme-right incidents. The third institution is the foundation Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance (DÖW), which monitors current activities of the extreme right as well as antisemitism in all its manifestations (including Islamicand left-wing, Israel-related

antisemitism). It collects records of the media coverage of the extreme right and its ideological elements, focusing on mainstream media and political discourse. This information is available in the archive, but the DÖW does not quantify the material.

The NGOs FGA and ZARA collect data by providing the possibility for victims and/or witnesses of antisemitism and racism to report harassments and other acts of discrimination they experienced and/or observed. The documented cases are compiled into a yearly report including statistical data, in which the incidents are categorized.

### **Results from FGA and ZARA**

The prevailing trend of the last years points to a rise of antisemitism. The FGA reported a significant rise of antisemitism following the last Gaza conflict in the summer of 2014. Whereas the reported incidents summed up to 255 in the year 2014, they rocketed to 465 reported cases in the year 2015.<sup>31</sup> The year 2016 continued this trend with a total of 477 reported cases.<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, this trend is to be explained by a further reach-out into the community, which had the effect that more people reported incidences. On the other hand, however, the worrying increase indeed reflects a rise of the antisemitic resentment, which is to be explained by current political changes and challenges. Already in 2015, the FGA reported an increase of antisemitism with special focus on Islamic antisemitism in the wake of the Gaza conflict in the summer of 2014. This is disturbing in so far as antisemitism in Austria for a long time was latent rather than manifest. European studies like the EUMC study showed that violent incidents against Jews are less of a problem than in other countries like France. (This has also to do with the demographic structure of Austria, because attacks are more frequently committed by younger people and the average age in Austria is higher than in France and most European Countries. Furthermore, the Jewish Community is smaller.) What we also can observe is that after events were the far-right make significant electoral gains extreme right-wing violence and incidences peaked. For example in the weeks prior and after to the second ballot, antisemitic, racist and anti-Left violence peaked and resulted—among other incidents—in the daubing of swastikas on the Jewish part of Vienna's Central Cemetery.

In 2016 the FGA documented 477 reported incidents of antisemitism. This is a part of a worrying trend of rising antisemitism in the last years documented by the FGA. Whereas in 2014 a total of 255 incidents were documented, the number nearly doubled in the following year to 465 reported cases in 2015. The data collected in the year 2016 underpins this trend and points to the fact that the

sudden increase of incidents has not been temporary or some sort of statistical outlier. Since the report from 2007 with 62 antisemitic incidents, the number of reported cases has been constantly increasing. In detail, the report points out 24 cases of verbal abuse and threat, 153 cases of hate speech in the internet and social media, 198 antisemitic letters and calls, 68 acts of vandalism, 7 physical assaults and 27 cases categorized as “other” forms of antisemitism. The only category that has not increased in comparison to 2015 is internet/social media.

As there is no national prevalence study on antisemitism, the reasons for this rise are open to speculation. Increasing awareness about hate speech in the internet as well as several publicly known convictions regarding the “Incitement of the People (“Volksverhetzung”) might be crucial influencing factors regarding the disposition to report incidents. Furthermore, the authors of the FGA-report point out that especially physical assaults and harassment in schools—such as the bullying of Jewish classmates—have become more frequent. Approximately 40 percent of the cases can be associated with a specific political/ideological spectrum: About 68 percent of the reported cases regard the right-wing and extreme right-wing political spectrum, 22 percent occurred within the context of Islamic beliefs, and 10 percent of the reported incidents regarded Israel-related, Left-wing antisemitism. The anti-racist NGO ZARA focuses on incidents associated with the extreme-right and documented 47 incidents throughout the year 2016.<sup>33</sup> Most of them occurred in the public space (17 incidents) and on the internet (18 incidents). The data of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution for 2016 have not been published yet, but the data on prosecutions of “Incitement of the People” and prosecutions according to the “Prohibition Statute” (“Verbotsgesetz”) is already known and shows that both have increased significantly.<sup>34</sup> From January to August 2016, 18 cases of “Re-Engagement in National Socialist Activities” (“Wiederbetätigung) have been brought to prosecution—this is almost the same number as all the cases in 2014.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, there have been alarming incidents related to the legal system and a number of cases related to the “Prohibition Statute” have either not been legally prosecuted or ended with an acquittal.

As the yearly reports of FGA and ZARA consist of data actively reported by victims or witnesses, they do not cover the full spectrum of antisemitic incidents. The data is limited to the experiences of people who actually can and want to report and who also know about and have access to the institution. For example, as all three institutions are based in Vienna, data tends to

blank out incidences in Austrian federal states. Such information can only be included, if the incident is considered “important” enough to be reported by the media.

## Conclusions

Data indicates that antisemitic resentments have increased and/or are expressed more openly in public than they used to be. Islamic Antisemitism continues to be a problem, but the rise of the right-wing and extreme right-wing political spectrum in Austria has fuelled antisemitic incidents. The most worrying development is the level of disinhibition (“Enthemmung”) regarding open anti-Jewish hate speech as well as the increasing references to conspiracy theories and antisemitic tropes in public and political discourse. One might ask if the taboo of antisemitism is starting to crumble in Austria. In any case, a taboo is not the solution we should aim for in the first place. On the contrary, by avoiding the issue of antisemitism instead of truly dealing with it, the establishment of antisemitism as a taboo has to be seen as one of the preconditions for the current troublesome situation.

\* Carina Klammer is a sociologist based in Vienna. Her main topics are right-wing extremism in post-National-Socialist countries and theories/criticism of ideologies of inequality.

---

1 Bundesministerium für Inneres (2017):

[http://www.bmi.gv.at/412/Nationalratswahlen/Nationalratswahl\\_2017/start.aspx](http://www.bmi.gv.at/412/Nationalratswahlen/Nationalratswahl_2017/start.aspx) (01.02.2018).

2 SORA (2017): <http://www.sora.at/themen/wahlverhalten/wahlanalysen/nrw17.html> (01.02.2018).

3 Falter, Matthias & Stern, Verena (2017): Fall Elections in Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic and their Impact on European Migration Policies. Budapest: Friedrich -Ebert-Stiftung Regional Project “Flight, Migration, Integration in Europe”. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/budapest/14036-20180117.pdf> (06.02.2017).

4 Cf. Grösel, Lisa (2016): Fremde von Staats wegen: 50 Jahre “Fremdenpolitik” in Österreich. Wien: Mandelbaum.

5 Zuser, Peter (1996): Die Konstruktion der Ausländerfrage in Österreich: Eine Analyse des öffentlichen Diskurses 1990. IHS Political Science Series, Working Paper 35. [http://irihs.ihs.ac.at/916/1/pw\\_35.pdf](http://irihs.ihs.ac.at/916/1/pw_35.pdf) (01.02.2018), p. 24.

6 Edthofer, Julia & Klammer, Carina (2016): Austria. In: Moshe Kantor Database for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism: Antisemitism Worldwide 2016. General Analysis Draft, 62-67. [http://kantorcenter.tau.ac.il/sites/default/files/Doch\\_full\\_2016\\_170717.pdf](http://kantorcenter.tau.ac.il/sites/default/files/Doch_full_2016_170717.pdf) (01.02.2018), p. 66.

7 Cf. Schiedel, Heribert (2011): Extreme Rechte in Europa. Wien: Edition Steinbauer.

8 Cf. Klammer, Carina (2013): Imaginationen des Untergangs. Zur Konstruktion antimuslimischer Fremdbilder im Rahmen der Identitätspolitik der FPÖ. Wien/Berlin: LIT.

---

9 For example, the demand to put the religious confession in the passport or to prohibit religious slaughter (because of animal cruelty). In doing so the FPÖ mostly addresses Muslims. Furthermore it ignores the fact that most of these regulations would affect people of Jewish faith as well.

10 Cf. Goetz, Judith & Klammer, Carina (2017): Between German Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Racism: Representations of Gender in the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). In: Köttig, Michaela, Bitzan, Renate, Petö, Andrea (Editors): Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

11 But we also can see this, for example, with the “Alternative für Deutschland” (AFD) in Germany. It is supported not only within the working-class but especially attracts “angry men” through all socio-economic milieus.

12 Grzebalska, Weronika, Kovats, Eszter and Petö, Andrea (2017): Gender as symbolic glue: how “gender” became an umbrella term for the rejection of the (neo)liberal order. Political critique. <http://politicalcritique.org/long-read/2017/gender-as-symbolic-glue-how-gender-became-an-umbrella-term-for-the-rejection-of-the-neoliberal-order/> (01.02.2018).

13 Graff, Agnieszka & Korolczuk, Elżbieta (2017): Gender as “Ebola from Brussels”: The Anti-colonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism. Signs, Journal of Women in Culture and Society (forthcoming).

14 Grzebalska et al. 2017.

15 Regarding the case of the FPÖ cf. Stögner, Karin (2017): Angst vor dem “neuen Menschen”. Zur Verschränkung von Antisemitismus, Antifeminismus und Nationalismus in der FPÖ. In: Grigat, Stephan (Editor): AfD & FPÖ. Antisemitismus, völkischer Nationalismus und Geschlechterbilder. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 134-164.

16 Rosenkranz, Barbara (2008): MenschInnen. Gender Mainstreaming – Auf dem Weg zum geschlechtslosen Menschen. Graz: Ares Verlag.

17 Cf. Stögner (2017).

18 Kuhar, Roman & Paternotte, David (2017): Anti-gender campaigns in Europe. Mobilizing against equality. London/New York: Rowman & Littlefield International.

19 Cf. Stiftung Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstandes, DÖW (1994): Handbuch des österreichischen Rechtsextremismus. Wien: Donauland.

20 ORF (2017): <http://steiermark.orf.at/news/stories/2756564/> (09.03.2017).

21 DÖW (2017): Freiheitlicher Antisemitismus. <http://www.doew.at/erkennen/rechtsextremismus/neues-von-ganz-rechts/archiv/juli-2017/freiheitlicher-antisemitismus> (01.02.2018).

22 Edthofer/Klammer 2016: 64.

23 Der Standard (2017): <https://derstandard.at/2000057250697/Antisemitische-Postings-in-Gruppe-der-Aktionsgemeinschaft> (01.02.2017).

24 The *GILT* party did not have any significance but it got some attention because its founding figure is a well-known actor and comedian in Austria.

25 <https://twitter.com/dorabinovici/status/920672731573694465?lang=de> (01.02.2018).

26 Like: “Step on the gas, you ancient Germanic peoples, we’ll manage the seventh million” (Guardian: 2017).

27 The Guardian (2018): <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/31/austria-dissolve-fraternity-linked-far-right-freedom-party-songbook> (01.02.2018).

28 The following part is largely based on the Austrian Section of the Antisemitism Report (Edthofer/Klammer 2016).

- 
- 29 Lauß, Georg & Schmid-Heher, Stefan (2017): Politische Bildung an Wiener Berufsschulen: Demokratische und autoritäre Potentiale von Lehrlingen. In: Philipp Mittnik (Hrsg.) Empirische Einsichten in der Politischen Bildung. Wien: Studienverlag, 95-123.
- 30 Kenan Güngör & Caroline Nik Nafs (2016): Jugendliche in der offenen Jugendarbeit. Identitäten, Lebenslagen & abwertende Einstellungen, Vienna. [http://think-difference.com/wp-content/uploads/Studie\\_Jugend\\_Abwertung-final.pdf](http://think-difference.com/wp-content/uploads/Studie_Jugend_Abwertung-final.pdf) (10.10.2017).
- 31 cf. Forum gegen Antisemitismus, FGA (2016): Jahresbericht 2015, Vienna. [http://fga-wien.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/FgA\\_Bilder/Berichte/FgA\\_Jahresbericht-2015\\_DE.pdf](http://fga-wien.at/fileadmin/user_upload/FgA_Bilder/Berichte/FgA_Jahresbericht-2015_DE.pdf)(08.03.2017), p. 7f.
- 32 Forum gegen Antisemitismus, FGA (2017): Jahresbericht 2016, Vienna. [http://fga-wien.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/FgA\\_Bilder/Berichte/Antisemitismusbericht-2017\\_FgA.pdf](http://fga-wien.at/fileadmin/user_upload/FgA_Bilder/Berichte/Antisemitismusbericht-2017_FgA.pdf)(01.02.2017).
- 33 ZARA (2017): Racism Report 2016, Vienna [https://www.zara.or.at/\\_wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Zara\\_RR16\\_-\\_Englisch\\_web\\_fin.pdf](https://www.zara.or.at/_wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Zara_RR16_-_Englisch_web_fin.pdf) (01.02.2018).
- 34 <http://www.stopptierechten.at/2016/11/05/drastische-zuwachse-bei-hass-und-verbotsdelikten/>(08.03.2017).
- 35 Der Standard (2017): <http://derstandard.at/2000045027796/Starker-Anstieg-bei-Neonazi-Anklagen> (08.03.2017).