

EUW Austria: Annual Political Report 2016

On December 4th Austria is going to *elect a new State President* since the results of the regular term elections on May 22nd were declared invalid by the Constitutional Court of Austria .

The annulled elections had shown a narrow result : the Green candidate Alexander van der Bellen was in the lead with only 30.000 votes against his opponent Norbert Hofer from the Freedom Party (FPÖ).

This time again a very narrow result is expected: whereas most media and institutions rather favored van der Bellen, Hofer is the candidate of the anti-establishment movement.

Both candidates, who surprisingly won the first run against the fellow candidates of the two governmental parties, do have remarkable political careers: Van der Bellen was the Green Party leader for about ten years and Member of Parliament, Hofer has been Third President of the National Council since 2013 . In so far the election result is not going to change substantially Austrian politics. It is rather seen as a signal for the *next parliamentary elections*. They probably will take place already in 2017 instead of 2018, because the grand coalition between Social Democrats (SPÖ with their new party leader Chancellor Christian Kern) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP with Vice Chancellor Reinhold Mitterlehner and shooting star Sebastian Kurz - our, only 30- year- old, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Integration) atmospherically has come to an end. The two coalition parties are looking for favorable positions in the coming contest against Heinz Christian Strache, the leader of the Freedom Party, who the polls show as number one with 30-35%.

Although our country has *the highest number of jobs in history the unemployment rate is increasing due to job migration within EU*, mainly from people from Eastern Countries such as Slovakia, Hungary, Romania. And because of the fact, that last year more than a million immigrants and refugees passed through Austria and nearly 100.000 stayed in order to get asylum in our country, many people feel insecure. Therefore the political discussion as well as the concerns of the Austrian people still focus *on immigration issues*. Especially national security topics and measurements to make Austria less attractive to immigrants have been dominating the political dispute.

As a unification on federal level hasn't been achieved so far some "Bundesländer" (Federal countries of Austria) like Upper Austria , Burgenland, Lower Austria have started to *reduce*

their financial supplements for immigrants , which were at a very high level, nearly the same level as the wages of women working all day long in supermarkets.