

# AUSTRIA'S EU POLICIES



Uncooperative



Sovereign



Neutral



# OUTLINE

1

PROFILE

2

POLITICS & ECONOMICS

3

INTEGRATION

4

EUROSCEPTICISM

5

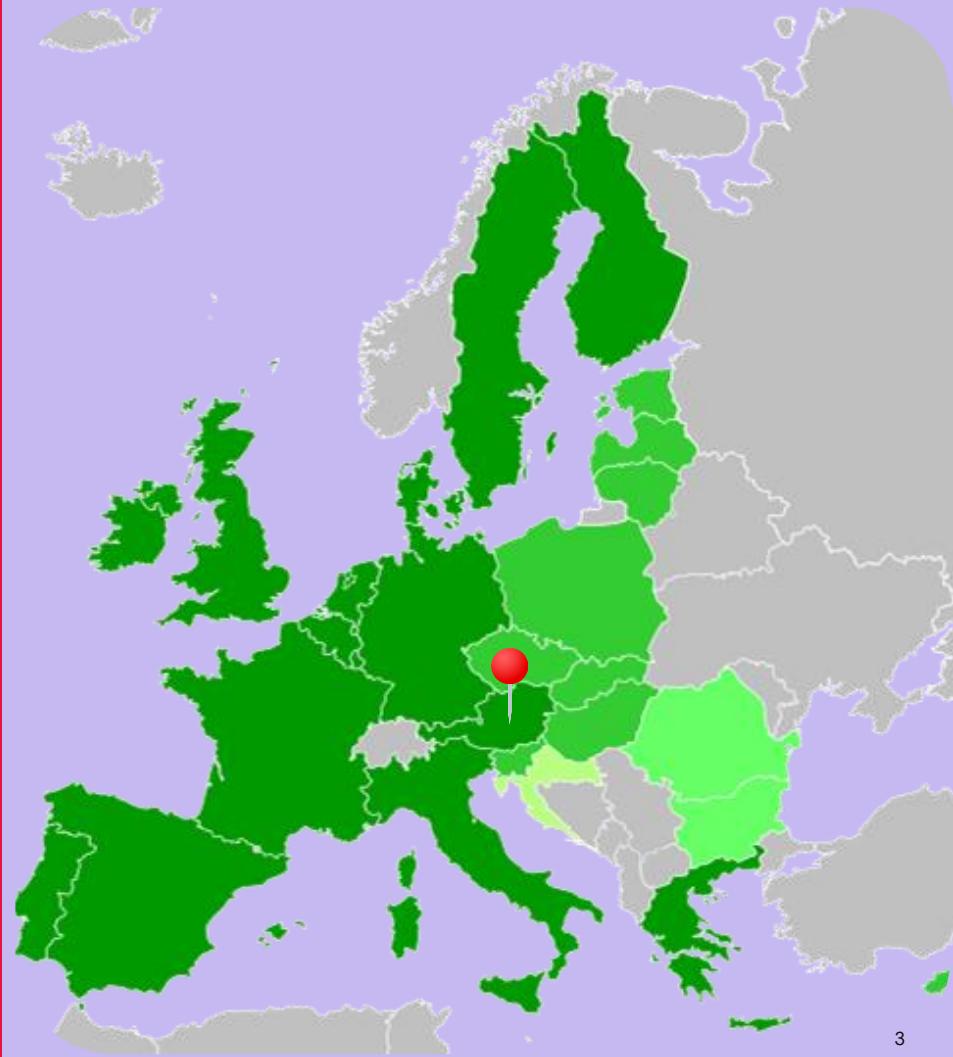
Migration

6

UKRAINE & RUSSIA

# Hallo, Ich bin Österreich

- Small size (2% of EU surface area) and population (9 million, 2% of EU population)
- Federal republic: 9 Länder
  - Landlocked
- Big neighbour Deutschland: 'minority complex'
- Central-eastern border then, heart of Europe now
- Semi-presidential, proportional representation: coalitions needed



# FORMER EMPIRE



## Habsburg Dynasty 1282–1918

Multi-ethnic, semi-autonomous collection of empires and kingdoms over 636 years  
(Bohemia, Spain, France, the Netherlands, the Holy Roman Empire, Italy, Hungary)



## Austrian Empire 1804–1867

The third largest and third most populous state in Europe, controlling a large part of Central Europe



## Austro-Hungarian Empire 1867–1918

A multinational, multilingual constitutional monarchy uniting the Kingdom of Hungary and the Empire of Austria under one ruler. Second largest state after Russia. Dissolved after WWI

Austria =  
öster Reich =  
eastern empire!

- Loss of regional power
- Loss of sovereignty
- No ‘Austrian’ identity: rather, ‘pan-Germanic’



## First Austrian Republic

1919-1934

Concept of an exclusively 'Austrian' state for an 'Austrian' ethnic group is only ~100 years old



### Civil war & austrofascism

1934-1938

Chancellor Dollfuss takes power, establishes far-right catholic authoritarian dictatorship 'Federal State of Austria' ruled by the Fatherland Front party



### Anschluss & Third Reich

1938-1945

Hitler was Austrian (famously), Pan-Germanic unification was welcomed in Austria, and other things the Sound of Music doesn't want you to know



### Decade of Allied occupation

1945-1955

Division of territory and Soviet-imposed, constitutionally-enshrined vow of perpetual military **neutrality**

# National reconstruction

*How does Austria  
find its place among  
European states  
now?*

National identity has to be quickly created, separate from pan-Germanic identity:

1

'Victim myth', "Hitler's first victim" isolates Austria from Europe and paves the way for the **eurosceptic far-right**

2

Enforced **neutrality** isolates it from Western Bloc, becomes entrenched and outdated in current foreign policy

3

Need for **sovereignty** means political and business interests shape degree of EU-level cooperation



EU is a solution to this issue  
– but Austria doesn't  
embrace it unconditionally



# Domestic political scandals

## Austria makes itself a difficult EU partner

1

### 1986 Waldheim affair

... deliberately electing a Nazi war criminal for president! Even US voters can't top this

**- If the accusations threaten Austrian identity, then creating a neutral Austrian identity comes at the expense of diplomatic relations**

2

### 1999 government

... an unelected far-right coalition government! Last time that happened was... WW2

**- Breaching the “cordon sanitaire”**  
**- First time the EU sanctions a current MS over its politics**  
**- Austria boycotted at EU level**

3

### 2019 Ibiza affair

... sting operation reveals a corruption scandal! Austrian politics making headlines is rarely a good thing

**- Evidence that supposed neutrality masks deep Russian ties**  
**- Political elite has evidently abandoned self-imposed political neutrality, yet uses it to justify Russian interests**

# Domestic political scandals

## Austria makes itself a difficult EU partner

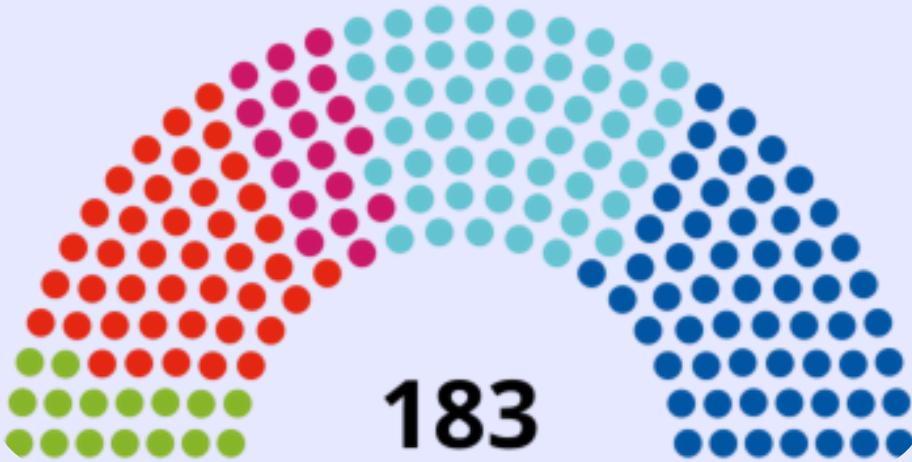
4

### 2021 Kurz corruption scandal

... In his second government and third overall scandal, Chancellor Kurz is accused of using tax money to buy positive media coverage and inflating his popularity in polls! The former Wunderkind meets the same fate as the FPÖs' Strache: resignation

- Corruption common across party lines
- Decades of frequent scandals involving political elites unusual for an otherwise healthy democracy; sets precedent for rule of law in EU

# 2024 LEGISLATIVE ELECTION, 2024 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION



Freedom Party of Austria	1,408,514	28.85	+12.68	57	+26
Austrian People's Party	1,282,734	26.27	-11.19	51	-20
Social Democratic Party of Austria	1,032,234	21.14	-0.04	41	+1
NEOS	446,378	9.14	+1.04	18	+3
The Greens	402,107	8.24	-5.66	16	-10

THE MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES OF AUSTRIA ORGANISED ON THE LEFT-RIGHT SPECTRUM BY EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT GROUP									
Party Family	Radical Left	Social Democrats	Greens	Liberals & centrists	Christian Democrats & Conservatives	Eurosceptic Conservatives	Radical Right Nationalists	Far right nationalists	
EP Group	The Left in the EP	Socialists & Democrats	The Greens - EFA	Renew Europe	European People's Party	European Conservatives & Reformists	Patriots for Europe	Europe of Sovereign Nations	
Acronym	GUE-NGL	S&D	Greens	Renew	EPP	ECR	PfE (Patriots)	ESN	
National Party Name		Social Democratic Party of Austria	The Greens - The Green Alternative	NEOS – The New Austria and Liberal Forum	Austrian People's Party		Freedom Party of Austria		
Party Acronym		SPÖ	GRÜNE	NEOS	ÖVP		FPÖ		

FPÖ: 6

NEOS: 2 seats

ÖVP: 5 seats

Grünen: 2 seats

SPÖ: 5 seats

# AUSTRIAN ECONOMY

116% 68% 78%

Of the **average EU GDP per capita**

of **exports** go to the EU

of **imports** are from the EU

2.7% of EU's GDP in 2024

Growth

-1,2%

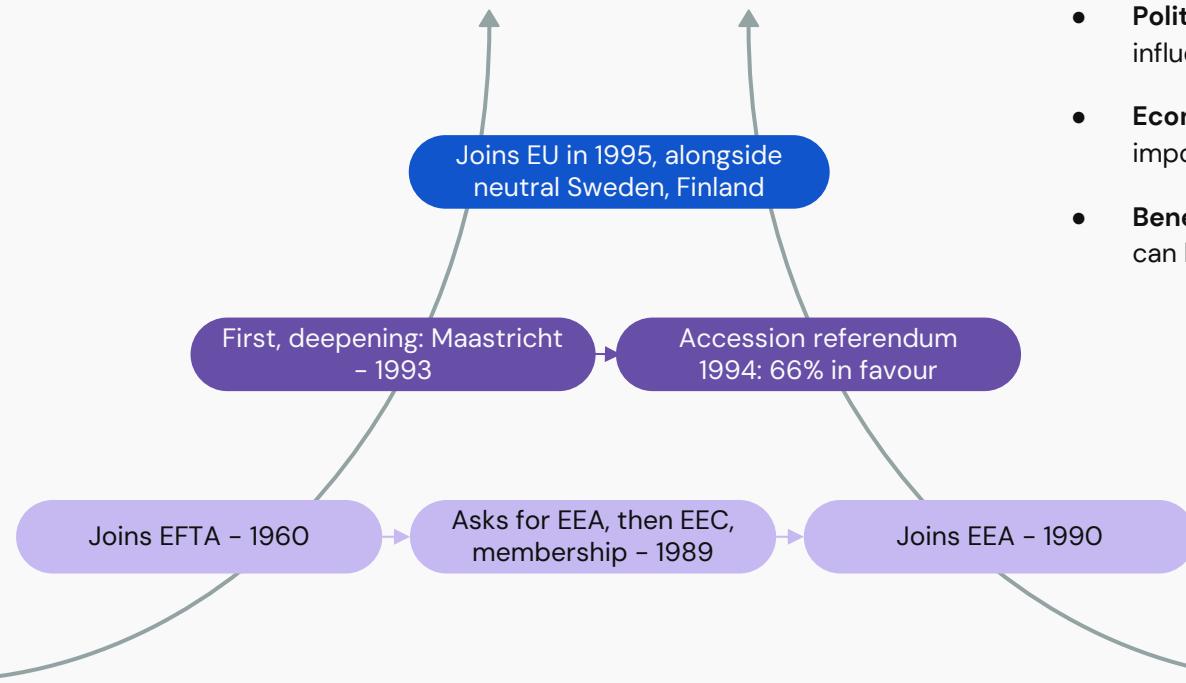
Smallest GDP growth in the EU in Spring 2025

Deficit

-4,7%

Excessive Budget Procedure since 2025, alongside 7 other MS

# Accession process



- **4th enlargement** – first post Cold War
- **Geopolitical reason:** change in Soviet policy under Gorbachev: 'Common European Home' supports politically neutral economic European integration, even before the Berlin Wall falls
- **Political reasons:** joining a political bloc ; regional influence
- **Economic reasons:** having a say on directives imposed on EEA members
- **Benefit for the EU:** wealthy developed countries can balance budget for future eastern expansion

# EU INTEGRATION



Net contributor: 1.54 million €

Frugal 4

Currently asking Commission to review 2028-2034 budget: 40% increase in Austrian contribution



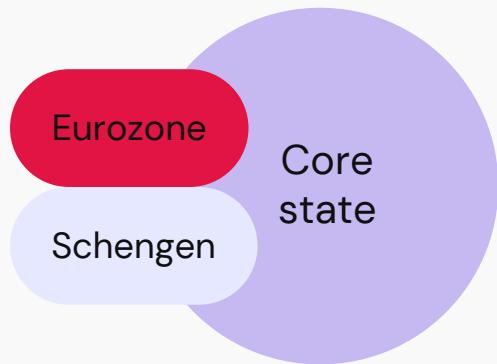
Population opposes NATO

membership

Partnership for Peace +  
peacekeeping operations

Neutrality compatible with EU  
membership

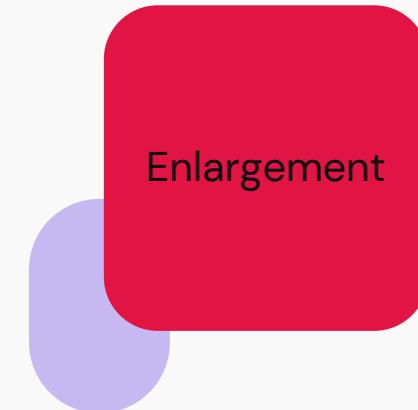
# EU INTEGRATION



Eurozone founder member: 1999

Schengen's first 'enlargement': 1997

Border controls with eastern  
neighbours: 2022 – 2025

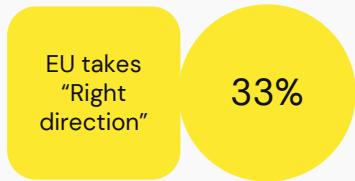
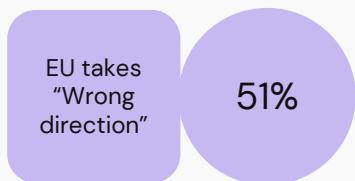


Government support for: Ukraine,  
Albania, Montenegro (geopolitical  
interests)

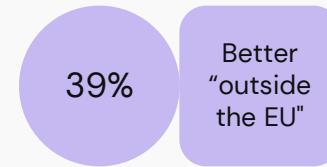
Government opposition to: Turkey

Public opposition to: all (including  
Ukraine)

# NORMALISED EUROSCEPTICISM



Average soft euroscepticism



Outlier hard euroscepticism



## Austria's location

- 88K asylum seekers and 107042 immigrants from third countries in 2015
- Among highest receiving countries per capita
- On land route from Balkans to Germany

# MIGRANT & REFUGEE CRISIS KURZ' ROLE AS FOREIGN MINISTER & CHANCELLOR

## BYPASSING THE EU

Negotiation with Serbia and North Macedonia to close borders on Balkan route (March 2016)

→ Bypassing EU decision-making to get preferred Austrian outcome, irrespective of other MS' interests

## CHANGING MS' POLICIES

EU's approach was controlled, not closed, borders

→ Set precedent for unilateral action by other MS closing their borders

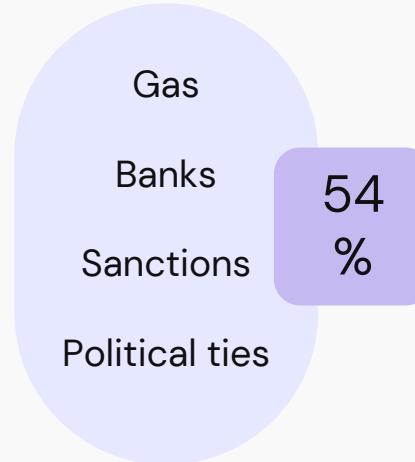
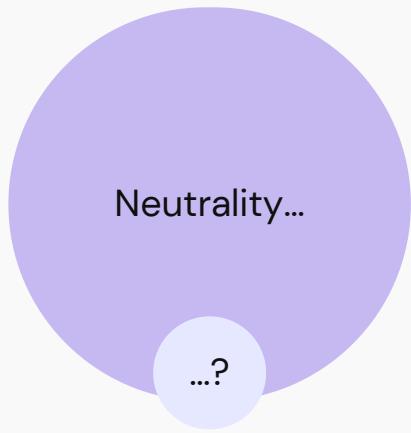
## CALL FOR EU ACTION

"Australian model": strong external border, externalisation of migration management

→ EU-Turkey Deal

→ Boycott of UN Global Migration Compact (2018)

# UKRAINE & RUSSIA



Entrenched Cold War friendliness with Russia seen as necessary & beneficial

Political and economic ties to Russia, domestic opposition to Ukrainian membership



Thank  
you!

