Pro-EU parties sweep to victory in Austrian general election

Written by Jon Benton on 30 September 2019 in News

The scandal-ridden Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) haemorrhaged a third of its votes while the Greens chalked up impressive gains in Sunday’s poll.

Former Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz’s People’s Party (ÖVP) emerged victorious in Sunday’s general election, with the party increasing its vote share to over 38 percent. It is now weighing up its options for potential coalition partners to form a government.

Speculation is now mounting that both the Greens and the liberal NEOS- party could be asked to join Kurz in forming a government.

Meanwhile Austria’s Social Democrat Party lost more than five percent, winning 21.5 percent of the vote.
ÖVP MEP and European Parliament Vice-President Othmar Karas (AT, EPP) told this magazine, “It is the right approach by ÖVP-chairman Sebastian Kurz to keep the communication channels open to all parties. But the first addressees for coalition talks are most likely the Greens and the Social Democrats. The Freedom Party takes itself out of the game at the moment, and I think rightly so.”

The snap election took place in the wake of the 'Ibizagate' scandal, which saw Vice-Chancellor and former far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) leader Heinz-Christian Strache resign from government.

He was caught on video promising government contracts to a woman posing as the niece of a Russian oligarch in Ibiza as part of an undercover sting by a civil society group.

"I am delighted about this fantastic election result. The Austrian Greens are now the strongest Green Party in Europe" MEP Monika Vana (AT, Greens/EFA)

Following his resignation in June, Kurz’s government lost a vote of no-confidence, prompting the Chancellor to call for a snap election. Since then, Austria has been run by a technocrat caretaker government.
The election result has been hailed as a major victory for pro-European parties which managed to increase their vote share, while the FPÖ lost a third of its votes, falling to 17 percent. However, despite the FPÖ suffering significant losses, the party could still be asked by Kurz to join him in government.

Karas said, “The most important result of the parliamentary elections in Austria is that pro-European parties gained the most and are strengthened by the citizen’s vote.

There are three winners, the Austrian EPP (ÖVP), the Greens and the NEOS-Party (Renew). The far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) was punished by the voters for their scandals, but maybe also for the eurosceptic politics they perform together with the parties of [Marine] Le Pen and [Matteo] Salvini in the ID-group”.

It was a good night for the Greens, whose support more than tripled, clinching 12 percent of the vote.

“Never has a liberal party been stronger in national elections in Austria. It is now up to the ÖVP to form a pro-European government” Claudia Gamon (AT, RE)

MEP Monika Vana (AT, Greens/EFA), Head of Delegation of the Austrian Greens, said, “I am delighted about this fantastic election result. The Austrian Greens are now the strongest Green Party in Europe. Yesterday’s election results have shown that Austrians want a government that addresses the issues of climate change, social justice and the protection of human rights. We need a pro-European government that does not frequently provoke infringement proceedings.”

Meanwhile, Vana’s colleague, Sarah Wiener (AT, Greens/EFA), said, “This election was crucial for the fate of the entire Austrian green movement. Nobody could have expected such a sensational election result of 14 percent. Never before in Austrian history has a party, which has been voted out of office, been re-elected to parliament. But that’s not the end of the story: The party had the best result in the Greens’ history.”

She continued, “I think one reason for our success was that, as opposed to other parties, the Greens focused on content: ‘Clean politics and clean environment’, as the slogan said. By now, the entire population has become aware that our quality of life and even our survival depend on functioning ecological cycles and renewable energies. We must finally make politics for everyone. Clientele politics will not solve any of our existential challenges.”

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On speculation that the Greens would join Kurz’s government, she said that “cannot be answered today. The first step has to be taken by the ÖVP. Nevertheless: it is not about honour or vanity of being able to be in a government. It is about responsibility and content. Can we design and develop a plan, a strategy with the ÖVP for a better future for all of us? We will find out soon.”

Meanwhile, Renew Europe MEP Claudia Gamon, whose NEOS party increased their vote share to 7.4 percent, said “This is an excellent result for NEOS. Never has a liberal party been stronger in national elections in Austria. It is now up to the ÖVP to form a pro-European government.”
Senior MEP and Renew Europe colleague Guy Verhofstadt also welcomed NEOS’s result, tweeting, “Congratulations to NEOS for their results in the #Nationalratswahl2019! A strong signal against the backward and corrupt policies of Strache and the far-right and for an open, liberal, pro-European Austria.”

Outgoing European Commissioner President Jean-Claude Juncker congratulated Kurz on his victory and said “I wish you every success in forming a stable government with a pro-European course. For the upcoming common challenges, our European Union needs a strong Austrian voice.”

Austrian Commissioner Johannes Hahn also congratulated Sebastian Kurz on “This highly-deserved electoral victory,” adding, “I am also pleased that today’s election results have resulted in a stable, pro-European majority.”
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