

2004 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION BRIEFING NO 13 THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION IN AUSTRIA JUNE 13 2004

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Key points:

- As a consequence of the permanent election campaigns (in spring 2004 elections were also held for the Federal President, for the Chamber of Labour and in two provinces) and of the widespread anti-EU feelings in the public, voter turnout in the elections to the European Parliament (EP) in Austria (42.4%) was considerably lower than in recent national elections.
- The four major, established Austrian parties - the Christian democrats (ÖVP), the Social Democrats (SPÖ), the right-wing, populist Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the Greens - faced new competitors in the electoral arena, most prominently the former top candidate of the SPÖ, Martin, who had been excluded from the Social democratic fraction of the EP because of his 'inquisitorial' methods against party colleagues.
- 'Party rebel' Martin, who had founded his own list, dominated the first part of the election campaign depicting himself as a political martyr, who, assisted by the biggest tabloid of the country, proclaimed to continue his anti-privilege campaign and not to stop attacking the system of MEP salaries and travel expenses, which are, according to his claims, prone to abuse. By this, he was able to attract the major part of those anti-EU and anti-party oriented protest voters who went to the polls at all (and did not prefer to stay at home, as most of them did). Martin, whose list finally rose from zero to 14%, was *the* sensation of the election.
- The big loser, on the other hand, was the FPÖ. Former party chairman Haider strived to reverse the electoral downward trend, which started after the FPÖ had entered a national coalition with the ÖVP in 2000 and escalated after it had blown up the same coalition in 2002. He accused the SPÖ top candidate to be a 'traitor to one's country', because the latter had supported the 'sanctions' of the other 14 EU governments against the new centre-right coalition in 2000. Yet, Haider's strategy to play the 'patriotism' card only made the headlines, but failed to attract voters.
- Both major parties gained votes: the SPÖ 1.6% (now 33.3%), the ÖVP 2.0% (now 32.7%). The Greens (12.9%) crossed the 10%-threshold for the first time in a national election. The FPÖ suffered another terrible defeat: similar to the general elections of 2002, the party lost 17.1% of the votes, the biggest loss any party had ever

experienced in a national or provincial election since 1945. With 6.3% it was only able to defend one of its former five seats in the EP. This seat did not go to the party's official top candidate, however, but to a representative of the nationalist wing of the party, who had led a successful preference vote campaign, allowing him to take over the first place in the FPÖ list.

Background/Context

The campaign for the elections to the European Parliament (EP) in Austria on 13 June 2004 was short, characterised by intensive backbiting between government and opposition parties and a lack of concentration on 'European issues'. As a matter of fact, Europe or, more precisely, the European Union (EU) is a sensitive matter in Austria. After having agreed to EU membership in a referendum in 1994 by an impressive vote of 66.6%, Austria has constantly ranked among those EU member states in which support for European integration is the lowest. According to the latest Eurobarometer survey in spring 2004 only 30% of Austrians believe EU membership to be a 'good thing' (only in the United Kingdom is the respective figure lower, the EU average amounts to 48%).¹ The widespread anti-EU feelings in the population have been aggravated by Austrian parties and politicians (not only those from the opposition), who have developed a habit in using the EU as a scapegoat for national problems (e.g., social cutbacks, rising unemployment). Voter turnout at the EP elections in 1996² and 1999 was somewhat below the rates of other national elections, be they presidential or parliamentary. What is more, before the EP elections on 13 June, elections had already taken place in spring 2004 for the Federal President, for the Chamber of Labour and in two provinces (Carinthia and Salzburg), prompting many people to be fed up with the permanent election campaigns.

Parties, Candidates, and Programmes

The Christian democratic Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) once more relied on Ursula Stenzel as its top candidate. She is a well-known former journalist of the national Austrian Radio and TV Station (ORF), who had already presided over the ÖVP candidate team in 1996 and had led the party to its first victory in a national election since 1966. This time the party, which considered itself to be *the* European party in Austria, campaigned for a strengthening of the Christian democratic fraction in the EP (pointing to the alleged failures of 'red and green' governments across Europe), for securing economic growth and creating new jobs, for a relentless fight against terrorists and organized crime, for an expansion of the rights of the European Parliament, and for a modern and citizen-oriented European constitution.

Like the ÖVP, the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) did not change its candidate team, with one important exception: Hans-Peter Martin, a former journalist and well-known book author, who had been put up as independent top candidate in 1999, but was soon relegated to the second row of his party fraction, was not nominated again (and, as a consequence, founded his own list, see below). Instead, the SPÖ team was led by Hannes Swoboda, a former member of the city government of the capital Vienna and widely respected MEP, who had already been top candidate in 1996 and chairman of the SPÖ fraction since 1996. The SPÖ campaign stressed the opportunity for the voters to pass judgement on the

¹ Eurobarometer 61. Spring 2004. Public Opinion in the EU15 (First Results), p. 8 (www.europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion).

² As Austria joined the EU only in 1995, the first direct election of the country's MEP's was held only in 1996 (up to that time, the Austrian MEP's were delegated by the national parliament on the basis of the results of the 1994 general elections).

incumbent government in the EP elections. The major slogan was ‘Austria must be heard again’, alluding to the problems that the new ÖVP-Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) government had in 2000 after its inauguration in being accepted as equal partner by the other EU governments. More specifically, the members of the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition were accused of a low attendance rate in meetings of the EU councils, thereby failing to represent national interests effectively. In addition, the SPÖ fought against the power of international corporations, rising unemployment rates and the erosion of the European social model as well as for neutrality.

The right-wing, populist FPÖ had undergone heavy intra-party turmoil since it entered the national coalition with the ÖVP in 2000. In all sub-national elections since then (with one exception) it had lost dramatically, indicating that many of the protest voters of the past were unsatisfied with the restrictive social reforms that their party’s team had to agree to in government. The government team had been increasingly attacked internally by provincial politicians longing for a revival of the populist roots of the party. This split had intensified and finally led to the breakdown of the first ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in 2002. The only exception was the election in Carinthia in March 2004, where the FPÖ won slightly more votes than in 1999 (now 42.4%) and was able to defend the position of Governor for Jörg Haider (who had to step down as national party chairman in order to pave the way for the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in 2000). Haider’s victory was interpreted by the party leadership as a turning point for the electoral fortunes of the party. Yet, the candidate list mirrored the still existing intra-party split: The party executive nominated Hans Kronberger as top candidate, a former TV journalist and MEP since 1996, who had built up a reputation as an expert in environmental policy, but lacked charisma. On the third place in the list was placed Andreas Mölzer, a representative of the German-national wing of the party, who condemned Haider’s strategy of vote-maximization to open the party towards all societal groups and advocated a return to its original ‘core group’. He equated immigrants with violence and organized crime, advocated closing the borders and preferred to have more children from native people. Mölzer announced that in case of his election as an MEP he intended to establish bonds with other right-wing parties, such as the Vlaams Blok and the Danish People’s Party. As opinion polls indicated that the FPÖ could expect heavy losses, leaving it rather doubtful whether third place would be sufficient to gain a seat in the EP, Mölzer led a personal campaign to get preference votes, which should place him at the top of the FPÖ list (for this purpose he needed the support of at least 7% of FPÖ voters).

The Greens once more set up their experienced MEP Johannes Voggenhuber as top candidate, assisted by a national MP and former member of a provincial government at second place of the list. Being ardent opponents of European integration in the past, the Greens took the clear majority in favour of EU membership in the 1994 referendum as a mandate to fight against the EU’s alleged neo-liberal and undemocratic tendencies from *within*. Their campaign (which was co-ordinated with the other Green parties in the EU) was the most ‘European’ one. They demanded a transformation of the EU from a project of governments ruling like feudal lords to one of the European citizens, an extension of co-decision rights for the European Parliament, and an expansion of the common social and environmental policy. Austria’s traditional neutrality policy was to be upheld within an autonomous EU common foreign and security policy, focussing on conflict prevention and peaceful conflict resolution.

The four parties mentioned, which are also the only ones represented in the national parliament, were faced with two new competitors. When the former top candidate of the SPÖ, Martin, realised that he had no chance of being re-nominated again (he was accused by his former colleagues of having been a rather lazy MEP), he founded his own ‘List Hans-Peter

Martin' (HPM). Martin focussed his campaign almost entirely on the system of MEP salaries and travel expenses, which he depicted as being prone to abuse.³ Specifically, he argued that travel expenses were not calculated according to the exact costs, but as lump sums, enabling MEPs to earn up to € 100,000 per year in addition to their regular salary. Moreover, he accused 232 MEPs of having claimed the high daily allowances of € 262 even in cases when they were not present in Brussels or Strasbourg at all or only there for less than an hour. Martin had collected his evidence by using a hidden camera and tape recorder, and several MEPs reported that they had been intimidated by him. When the social democratic fraction of the EP (SPE) excluded him because of his 'inquisitorial' methods, he depicted himself as a martyr who was determined to continue his fight as a free citizen against the authoritarian party apparatuses and the political elites that he alleged despised mankind. Moreover, he criticised the power of 'big business' in Brussels. In the beginning Martin fought alone, with little money and without election placards; soon, however, he was supported by the most widely read daily tabloid, the *Kronen Zeitung*, received coverage by international media (such as the *New York Times*, the *International Herald Tribune* and the BBC) and was invited to talk-shows on German private TV. In order to be entitled to claim financial compensation for his campaign expenses, he founded a party, whose statutes were condemned by his opponents as 'Stalinistic' or 'totalitarian' (in fact, his party was to be led by a party executive, comprised of himself and two other members nominated by him).

Finally, a list called 'Left' ran for the elections, with Leo Gabriel, a former journalist and book author, president of a research institute focussing on Latin America and co-founder of Attac Austria, as top candidate. The 'Left' was supported by other groups such as the Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ), whose chairman occupied the third place on the list. It opposed the neo-liberal, anti-social policies emanating from the EU internal market, the restrictive immigration policies of the EU countries (described as 'racist') and the provisions for military re-armament in the draft for the new constitution. As an alternative, its proponents pleaded for an end to privatisation, the introduction of a guaranteed income of € 1,000 for all people and equal rights for all immigrants who have settled in Europe on a permanent basis, and rejected the use of military force inside and outside the EU. The 'Left' suffered (more than Martin who at least had the assistance of the *Kronen Zeitung*) from neglect by the national broadcasting corporation ORF (the ORF invited neither Martin nor Gabriel to the main TV confrontation between the top candidates, arguing that only the 'relevant' parties, i.e., those already represented in parliament, should take part).

Campaign Issues

The campaign focussed only to a limited degree on the primary issues highlighted by the election programmes of the parties described above. In fact, the major campaign issues were: (1) MEP salaries and travel expenses, (2) Turkish accession to the EU, (3) the 'sanctions' of the other 14 EU governments against the new ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in 2000, and (4) the style of party competition. Newspaper columnists, political scientists and even politicians (Franz Fischler, the Austrian member of the EU Commission, being the most prominent one) were deploring time and again the low level of debate in the election campaign and the widespread opinion, fostered by the parties themselves, that almost all evil had its origins in Brussels.

³ The MEP's are paid according to national schemes, linking their salary to the salary of their colleagues in the national parliament. Several attempts of the EP to introduce a uniform system had failed in the past, because any standardisation would have as a consequence that MEP's of 'poor' countries (such as those from Eastern Europe) would earn more than their national counterparts or even their prime ministers.

At first, media coverage of the campaign was dominated by ‘party rebel’ Martin and centred on MEP salaries and travel expenses. All parties agreed that Martin had a correct point, and that the respective EU regulations had to be amended, but at the same time they objected to his, as they perceived them, ‘Stasi’ methods (referring to the state security service of the former German Democratic Republic). His opponents expressed their irritation that Martin had not supported any of the recent initiatives to abolish the system, and that he seemed to have realised the failures of the system only after five years of profiting from them himself. They warned him that he served as ‘useful idiot’ for EU critics, undermining the only EU institution which offered possibilities of democratic control. Nevertheless, ÖVP and SPÖ announced that, even before an agreement on new EU regulations, their candidates would apply for travel expenses only at the level of what they had actually spent.

The second prominent issue concerned the question whether - and, if so, when - Turkey should become a member of the EU. All candidates, except Gabriel from the list ‘Left’, agreed that Turkey was not fit for EU membership at the moment, and that before accepting Turkey as a new member, the EU should come to terms with its recent enlargement from 15 to 25 states. The precise reasons given were different, though: while the FPÖ pointed to Turkey’s ‘non-European’, Islamic character and predicted the ‘end of the EU’ in case of its membership, the other parties were more concerned about the country’s economic and social fitness, its problematic human rights standards and its treatment of the Kurdish minority. Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel’s plea that to transform the Austrian elections to the EP into a referendum on Turkey’s membership is missing the point failed to impress the proponents of this debate.

The FPÖ, notably former party chairman Jörg Haider, was the author of the third major campaign issue. Haider, since 1999 Governor in the province of Carinthia and (in particular after his triumph in the March elections to the provincial parliament) still the strongman of the party, dug up a letter from the SPÖ’s top candidate Swoboda to his colleagues in the EP, in which the latter expressed his understanding for the reaction of the other 14 EU governments in 2000 against government participation of the right-wing, populist FPÖ, accusing the party of having used racist and xenophobic statements in order to gain votes.⁴ The fact that in his letter Swoboda also appealed to the other MEPs to keep up and even to intensify their contacts with Austria was ignored by Haider. As a matter of fact, Swoboda had argued that the ‘sanctions’ were ‘exaggerated’, but had supported their ‘direction and philosophy’. As a consequence, the Carinthian Governor called Swoboda a ‘traitor to one’s country’ and demanded that he be deprived of his voting rights. Other FPÖ politicians took up the charges and extended them to the SPÖ as a whole, which backed up Swoboda. The ÖVP did not repeat the label ‘traitor to one’s country’ for Swoboda, but stated that his behaviour deserved further investigation. Moreover, an e-card was presented on the ÖVP homepage showing a picture of Swoboda with the saying ‘thank you for the sanctions’. The plan of the FPÖ to install a parliamentary committee to investigate the case, however, was disapproved of by the ÖVP, arguing that such a committee is limited to investigating misbehaviour of members of the national government, not of MEPs. When the Austrian Commissioner Fischler intervened

⁴ On 31 January 2000, shortly before ÖVP and FPÖ concluded their coalition negotiations, the Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres, as president of the EU, threatened on behalf of the other 14 member states, in an historically unprecedented move, to take measures against the new government in case the FPÖ should be part of it. The announced measures were: no bilateral contacts with members of the Austrian government, no support for Austrian candidates applying for positions in international organisations, and restriction of the contacts with Austrian ambassadors to the ‘technical’ (i.e., non-political) level. After the inauguration of the new government on 4 February, the ‘sanctions’ were imposed. However, they proved counterproductive, as they stirred up national feelings in the country. A report by three ‘wise men’ confirming that the new government had respected ‘European values’ provided the EU-14 with a good reason to lift the sanctions on 12 September 2000.

in the debate and defended Swoboda, calling the criticisms against him ‘scandalous’, the FPÖ also extended its reproaches to include him and blamed him for having failed to represent Austrian interests in the EU.

As the ÖVP refused to apologise for the attacks on Swoboda, the SPÖ chose a new campaign topic: it declared the elections to the EP to be a referendum on political style, an opportunity to pass judgement on the ‘mud struggle’ and the insults by the two governing parties, ÖVP and FPÖ. Unfortunately, the SPÖ itself provided ammunition for the debate on political style, when its national MP Josef Broukal, annoyed by the ‘patriotic’ affectation of the governing parties, reminded his colleagues in a parliamentary debate one week before election day of Haider’s former sins, in particular his praise for the values of SS veterans and for the ‘orderly employment policy’ of the Third Reich. When he finally said, referring to the ÖVP and FPÖ MPs, that they are ‘at liberty to mourn for the National Socialists’, the level of turmoil peaked. Broukal’s apology for the statement and his explanation that it should only refer to Jörg Haider were not accepted by the two governing parties, which vehemently demanded his resignation as proof that the SPÖ still respected the country’s democratic institutions. When SPÖ chairman Alfred Gusenbauer tried to explain Broukal’s statement by alluding to the ‘pogrom atmosphere’ prevailing in the respective parliamentary meeting, he was immediately urged to join Broukal and resign as well. As a consequence, the last week before the day of the election was filled with reproaches and counter-reproaches that the ‘other side’ should apologise for violations of basic standards of political decency. When Governor Haider also called the Austrian Commissioner Fischler (from the ÖVP) a traitor to one’s country, Chancellor Schüssel finally broke his silence and said that Haider’s statement was not acceptable. The SPÖ and Greens, in turn, were not satisfied with this late reaction and criticised the Chancellor for failing to come to the defence of Swoboda earlier.

Results

It was no wonder that as a result of the campaign voter turnout on 13 June 2004 dropped further to 42.4%, well below the rates in the presidential and parliamentary elections of recent years (see Table 1). The reasons for abstention seem quite clear: According to a survey by the OGM institute, 76% of non-voters were frustrated about the EU, and 39% were disinterested altogether; 66% of them saw, above all, disadvantages in EU membership, only 28% advantages. For those who voted ‘control of abuses’ was the most important motive (stated by 85% of the respondents), followed by ‘best representative of Austria’ (78%), a ‘Euro-critical position’ (60%) and ‘tradition’ (58%).⁵ The Fessel-GfK institute revealed that 39% of respondents were ‘angry’ about the salaries and ‘privileges’ of MEPs, and 26% about the disrespect for Austrian interests, e.g., in the issue of truck transit through the Alps.⁶

⁵ OGM (2004): ORF-Wahltagsbefragung: Wahlen zum Europäischen Parlament. 13. Juni 2004, Vienna.

⁶ Fessel-GfK (2004): Analyse der Europawahl 2004

(http://www.gfk.at/research_data/free_download/files/PRESS/Politik_Analyse%20Europawahl%202004.pdf).

Table 1: Voter Turnout in National Elections (%) (1995-2004)

Year	Presidential Elections	Parliamentary Elections	European Elections
1995		86.0	
1996			67.7
1998	74.4		
1999		80.4	49.4
2002		84.3	
2004	71.6		42.4

Source: Federal Ministry of the Interior (www.bmi.gv.at).

The SPÖ remained the strongest party, slightly in front of the ÖVP. Both major parties gained votes: the SPÖ 1.6% (now 33.3%), the ÖVP 2.0% (now 32.7%). The ÖVP was one of the few governing parties in Europe which did not lose votes in this election. However, because of the reduction of seats for Austria in the new EP (18 instead of 21) it had to give up one seat. The Greens crossed the 10%-threshold for the first time in a national election and, with 12.9% of the votes, were able to retain their two seats.

Table 2: EP Elections in Austria (1996-2004)

	1996		1999		2004	
	Percentage of Votes	Number of Seats	Percentage of Votes	Number of Seats	Percentage of Votes	Number of Seats
SPÖ	29.2	6	31.7	7	33.3	7
ÖVP	29.7	7	30.7	7	32.7	6
FPÖ	27.5	6	23.4	5	6.3	1
Greens	6.8	1	9.3	2	12.9	2
Martin	-	-	-	-	14.0	2
Left	-	-	-	-	0.8	-
Liberal Forum	4.3	1	-	-	-	-

Abbreviations:

- SPÖ = Social Democratic Party of Austria
- ÖVP = Austrian People's Party
- FPÖ = Freedom Party of Austria
- Martin = List Hans-Peter Martin – For Real Control in Brussels
- Left = Opposition for a Solidly United Europe

Source: Federal Ministry of the Interior (www.bmi.gv.at).

The FPÖ suffered another terrible defeat: similar to the general elections of 2002, when the party declined from 26.9% to 10%, the party lost 17.1% of the votes – the biggest loss any party had ever experienced in a national or provincial election since 1945 – and was only able to defend one of its former five seats in the EP (see Table 2). Even in Carinthia, the home province of former party chairman Jörg Haider, where the FPÖ had won 42.4% in the recent provincial election, a mere 19.3% of the voters chose FPÖ in the EP elections. The media interpreted the result as a defeat for Haider, all the more as it was he who had determined his party's electoral strategy. The FPÖ, which in the past was very effective in mobilising disenchanted protest voters against the political 'establishment', had obviously lost its credibility as spokesman for the 'small man in the street' after it had entered government. According to the analysis of the SORA institute, 60% of the FPÖ voters of 1999 did not go to the polls this time, 15% moved over to Martin, and only 16% once again voted for the FPÖ.⁷ Intra-party critics blamed the co-operative politics of the party leadership in the coalition with

⁷ SORA (2004). Wählerstromanalyse EU-Wahl 2004 (<http://www.sora.at/wahlen/wsa/EU-Wahl2004>).

the ÖVP and giving-up of its former anti-EU stance as the main reasons for the electoral defeat. Potential voters were also confused by the fact that the FPÖ had in fact put forward two top candidates with rather different profiles: the pragmatic Kronberger and the right-wing Mölzer. Mölzer's campaign for preference votes proved successful; he received 21,980 preference votes and pushed Kronberger (who received only 8,965 preference votes) out of first place of the FPÖ list (7% of the party vote would have been sufficient, in fact Mölzer received 13,9%). Surveys revealed that only 3% of the FPÖ voters chose the party because of Kronberger, while 16% did so because of Mölzer.⁸ The once populist party is now represented in the EP by a clear adherent to the former German-national core group of the party, reviving a tradition which had seemed to belong to the past.

A substantial segment of the former FPÖ voters who did not stay at home switched over to the list of Hans-Peter Martin, which, just founded, climbed to 14% of the votes. Once more it was proven how flexible the voters with protest motives can be: without hesitation they turned away from Haider to their new 'Robin Hood' Martin. SORA found out that Martin attracted voters from all other parties: 15% came from 1999 FPÖ voters, 9% from the SPÖ, 6% from the ÖVP and 8% from the Greens.⁹ Martin was obviously successful in pushing his main issue: as already noted above, in an exit poll by Fessel-GfK, 39% of the respondents stated that they were 'angry' about the salaries and 'privileges' of the MEPs. The major motives to vote for Martin were his protest against MEP privileges, salaries and travel expenses (important for 53% of the respondents), his (honest, engaged, independent) persona (21%), and protest against the EU in general (20%). The support by the most widely read tabloid, the *Kronen Zeitung*, also had an effect: 21% of its readers voted for Martin, and 77% of all Martin voters were readers of this newspaper.¹⁰

Consequences

The results of the EP elections prompted a severe crisis within the FPÖ and threw a shadow on the long-term prospects of the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition ruling the country since 2000. Interestingly, Jörg Haider, who had dominated the FPÖ campaign with his harsh accusations against the SPÖ top candidate Hannes Swoboda and the 'patriotism' theme, was not held responsible for the disaster (despite the FPÖ's heavy losses in 'his' province, Carinthia still remained the relative stronghold of the party). The nationalist wing of the party, strengthened by the triumph of its candidate Andreas Mölzer, called for a 'complete new start' for the party. To demonstrate its determination to draw lessons from the election and to start anew, the FPÖ party leadership announced a re-building of its government team. Of the three portfolios which the FPÖ occupied two could not be disposed of, however: Vice Chancellor Hubert Gorbach was out of question and party chairman and Minister for Social Affairs Herbert Haupt, in spite of his very unfavourable public image, refused to resign. As a consequence, the Minister of Justice Dieter Böhmdorfer offered his seat (although he could not be blamed in any meaningful way for the electoral defeat). Ursula Haubner, sister of Jörg Haider, state secretary for women in the second ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in office since February

⁸ Kronberger tried to win back his seat by appealing to the Constitutional Court. He argued that the preference voting system, which enabled 7% of the voters of a party list to impose their will on the other 93%, set decisively lower standards for the EP election than for the national parliamentary elections. In his case, more than half of the voters had not used their right to cast a preference vote at all and had thereby accepted the candidate ordering on the FPÖ list. In substance, constitutional lawyers gave his claim a good chance of success; however, as Kronberger missed the time-limit within which an electoral result can be contested, the Court rejected it for formal reasons.

⁹ SORA (2004). Wählerstromanalyse EU-Wahl 2004 (<http://www.sora.at/wahlen/wsa/EU-Wahl2004>).

¹⁰ Fessel-GfK (2004): Analyse der Europawahl 2004

(http://www.gfk.at/research_data/free_download/files/PRESS/Politik_Analyse%20Europawahl%202004.pdf).

2003 and managing party chairman since October 2003, was designated by the party executive to replace Herbert Haupt as party chairman (but not as Minister for Social Affairs). Haider himself refused to take over the party chairmanship. He declared that the 'Haider FPÖ does not exist any more'; he described himself as a classic politician of the opposition, whose era had ended with government participation of the FPÖ. In the future he announced that he would concentrate his energies on his province of Carinthia. An extraordinary party congress was summoned for 3 July to confirm the reshuffle. Haubner, who was a representative of the 'moderate' wing of the party, received 79% of the votes of the delegates. She had to accept, however, that the chairman of the Viennese party organisation, a declared fan of Mölzer and 'hope for the future' of the party, was elected deputy chairman. It seems that this is not the end of the story.

Despite the FPÖ's electoral disaster, premature parliamentary elections seem unlikely. Neither the FPÖ nor the ÖVP are interested in them. The ÖVP had renewed its coalition with the FPÖ in February 2003 against strong intra-party resistance and public opposition. It seems likely that a second break-up of the coalition will be punished by the voters. Another interesting question is whether Martin will also run in the next general elections, which would pose a further serious threat to the electoral chances of the FPÖ and might lead to a more enduring re-building of the Austrian party system.

This is the latest in a series of election and referendum briefings produced by the European Parties Elections and Referendums Network (EPERN). Based in the Sussex European Institute, EPERN is an international network of scholars that was originally established as the Opposing Europe Research Network (OERN) in June 2000 to chart the divisions over Europe that exist within party systems. In August 2003 it was re-launched as EPERN to reflect a widening of its objectives to consider the broader impact of the European issue on the domestic politics of EU member and candidate states. The Network retains an independent stance on the issues under consideration. For more information and copies of all our publications visit our website at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/1-4-2.html>.