



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Will keeping the far-right out of government be enough to ensure the stability of the new Austrian government?



On Thursday, the announcement of an **agreement** to form a government between three centrist parties brought relief to Austria's political mainstream. Moderate parties throughout Europe also felt a sense of relief, as Austria was on the verge of a government headed by the far-right, the ideological offspring of the Nazis.

It took five months of painful attempts to form a government that would not include Herbert Kickl's extremist Freedom Party (FPÖ), which was founded in the 1950s by Nazi officers and officials of the Third Reich.

The efforts to exclude this party from the options for forming a government were (and are) a major challenge for Austrian democracy, as the FPÖ came first in the last September elections with 29% of the vote.

Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen was particularly attacked by the far-right when he **offered** a mandate to the moderate conservatives in the first round of consultations, even though they came second in the elections. This sparked a revolt from the extreme right, who accused him of violating the constitution.

Government with scars

The leaders of the new coalition are satisfied with the work that has been done, even though their government was formed after a record-breaking long negotiation period. We are "happy and proud," said the leader of the moderate right-wing People's Party (ÖVP) and future Chancellor Christian Stocker, emphasising in a celebratory mood that "compromise is a great Austrian virtue."

But as much as they have reason to be satisfied, the partners in the future government will not enter the mandate without scars. The fact that they have formed the first tripartite government since the Second World War shows how difficult it is to reach an agreement and, above all, how challenging it will be to maintain the stability of such a coalition.

The most important link in the future government will be resistance to the rise to power of the extreme right

It is clear that the most important link in the future government will be resistance to the rise to power of the extreme right. After all, this was the troika's main motive for reaching an agreement.

But will setting up a "firewall" against the heirs of extreme politics be enough to hold the coalition together and, above all, to solve problems, particularly in the economy and on the issue of immigration?

The government of moderate conservatives, social democrats (SPÖ), and liberals from the Neos party was formed out of necessity, in opposition to the extreme right, so their agreement had to include many mutual compromises.

Tightening of migrant rules

A compromise with the growing anti-migrant sentiment of the electorate is one of the most important, so the government will **tighten** the rules for migrants, following the widespread trend in other European countries.

Future Chancellor Stocker announced stricter conditions for obtaining asylum, followed by a one-year deadline for migrants to integrate into Austrian society and a ban on the wearing of the hijab for girls under the age of 15. The partners also agreed to completely freeze the granting of asylum if the government believes that the number of applicants has increased.

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Removing the far-right from power in Austria also means preventing the prominence of pro-

Russian policies, given that Kickl's right shares a strong affinity with Moscow, similar to that of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

In view of the great influence that Russian politics and business have on the situation in Austria, this is an important shift that takes Vienna out of the circle of Moscow's potential European allies for the time being, and at a time when the end of the war in Ukraine is in sight.

Encouragement for the European mainstream

The compromise between the pro-European partners in Austria is an encouragement for the moderate, centrist policies in Europe, who are themselves struggling with the rise of extreme populists across the continent.

The agreement in Vienna follows the electoral **success** of moderates in neighbouring Germany, where the new government is likely to be made up of moderate conservatives and social democrats, similar to Austria.



The FPÖ's approval ratings have risen to around 35% - Herbert Kickl

Two countries with strong ties also have problems due to the rise of the far right, which is forcing moderate political elites to make major compromises with each other. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) and its Austrian counterpart, the FPÖ, have remained out of government.

Both parties are victims not only of their

extremism but even more so of their inability to form coalition alliances with moderate forces through compromise. In the negotiations with Stocker's conservatives, for example, Herbert Kickl ultimately demanded the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Security, but this was not granted to him, precisely because the leading politicians of the mainstream feared the intrusion of Russian influence into sensitive areas of the state.

However, just as the AfD in Germany does not view the defeat in the February elections as a loss, its ideological allies in Austria are also anticipating snap elections soon and, naturally, another positive outcome.

They also have plenty of reasons for such expectations. The long torment over the formation of the government has given them additional tailwind, with the result that the FPÖ's approval ratings have risen to around 35%, while the moderate conservatives have fallen by around 7% since the previous elections last September.

The new federal cabinet in Vienna will therefore be under constant threat of new elections and a potentially poor result, in addition to a rather slim majority in parliament with which they will try to push through their coalition programme full of compromises.