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1. Challenges and Developments on Five Continents

1.1. Europe and its Neighbouring States

1.1.1. European Union

1.1.1.1. Introduction

It was a challenging year for the EU. Alongside issues such as migration, trade, further development of the internal market, innovation and the next Multiannual Financial Framework, the year was characterised by the negotiations on the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU. These negotiations were formally concluded on 25 November when the Heads of State and Government endorsed the Agreement on the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU and the Political Declaration, setting out the Framework for the Future Relationship between the EU and the United Kingdom.

In the second half of the year, Austria held the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the third time after doing so already in 1998 and 2006. In view of the elections to the European Parliament, scheduled for May 2019, and the upcoming end of the legislative period, the number of dossiers to be closed was particularly large.

The political discussion process on the future of Europe, launched in 2017 in the context of the Leaders’ Agenda, was also continued. With the exception of the United Kingdom, citizens’ consultations were organised in all EU Member States and their results were summarised in final reports. A total of fourteen debates involving acting Heads of State and Government were held in the European Parliament.

1.1.1.2. Austria in the Institutions of the European Union

With the Amendment to the Federal Ministries Act of 2017, responsibility for fundamental matters relating to Austria’s membership in the EU, including coordination of matters relating to the EU and the European Council, was transferred from the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs (MFA) to the Federal Chancellery.

The Permanent Representation of Austria to the European Union

The Permanent Representation serves as direct point of contact to the institutions of the Union, the Council Presidency and other Member States. All federal ministries, the Liaison Office of the Federal Provinces as well as social partners and interest groups (the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the Federal Chamber of Labour, the Chamber of Agriculture, the Trade Union Federation, the Association of Municipalities, the Association of Cities and Towns, the Federation of Austrian Industry and the National Bank) are represented by qualified experts.

The Permanent Representation’s central task is representing Austria during preparations for the political and legislative decisions to be taken by the EU. Staff from the Permanent Representation or from the federal ministries participate in the relevant negotiations held within the competent Council working groups and committees. In total some 4,500 such meetings take place every year. Before being formally adopted at
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ministers’ level, the negotiation results generally have to pass the ambassadorial level (the Committee of the Permanent Representatives and, as required, also the Political and Security Policy Committee).

The Permanent Representation’s tasks also include providing interested citizens with first-hand insights into its activities and the work of the European institutions. The Permanent Representation’s Visitor and Information Service thus hosted 152 groups of visitors (a total of 4,396 persons). The Permanent Representation also assists Austrians wishing to apply for jobs that are advertised by EU institutions. The related services range from providing information about jobs and vacancies that are advertised by the Commission for delegated national experts to internship opportunities in ministries, Member States, country offices or universities.

The European Parliament

Out of the total of 751 seats in the European Parliament, 18 are held by Austrian Members, distributed as follows: ÖVP (Austrian People’s Party) 5, SPÖ (Social Democratic Party) 5, FPÖ (Freedom Party) 4, GRÜNE (Greens) 3 and NEOS (New Austria and Liberal Forum) 1.

On 28 June, the European Council adopted Decision (EU) 2018/937 establishing the composition and distribution of seats following the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU. The total number of seats in the European Parliament will thus be reduced to 705. The number of elected Members of European Parliament (MEPs) that represent Austria, will, however, be increased to 19. The decision will come into force when the United Kingdom (UK) leaves the EU.

Currently 126 Austrians (72 women and 54 men) work in the European Parliament, which corresponds to 1.3% of its total headcount.

The European Council

Austria is represented in the European Council by Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. Four ordinary meetings of the European Council were held. In addition, two informal meetings were held in Sofia and Salzburg and six special meetings were held in the Article 50 format, i.e. without the participation of a UK representative.

The Council

In the Council of the European Union, Austria is represented by the relevant members of the Federal Government. In the first six months of the year, the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union was held by Bulgaria and in the second half of the year by Austria.

In the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), which is composed of the Member States’ foreign and/or European affairs ministers, Austria is represented by Federal Minister Karin Kneissl. This Council format is chaired by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (EU HR), who is elected for a period of five years. The
Foreign Affairs Council held a total of ten meetings. In addition, two meetings were held in the Development Cooperation format and two informal meetings in the Gymnich format.

A total of 30 Austrians (13 women and 17 men) work in the General Secretariat of the Council, which corresponds to 1.0% of its total headcount.

**The European Commission**

In office since 10 February 2010, the Austrian EU Commissioner and former Federal Minister Johannes Hahn has held the position of Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations in the Juncker Commission since 1 November 2014 and also represents the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, in these matters.

In total 487 Austrians (231 women and 256 men) work in the European Commission, which corresponds to 1.6% of its total headcount.

**The European External Action Service**

The European External Action Service (EEAS) was established at the end of 2010 by merging the Commission’s and the Council’s foreign policy services and by involving diplomats from the national diplomatic services. As of the end of the year, 324 members of the EU Member States’ national diplomatic services worked in the EEAS (this is equivalent to 34.4% of EEAS positions in the AD category). Of this staff, 158 (48.8%) worked at headquarters and 166 (51.2%) in the delegations. At the end of the year, the EEAS headcount totalled 2,486 individuals, of which 64.8% worked at headquarters in Brussels and 35.2% in the Union’s global network of 140 delegations and offices. Taking into account all employment groups covered by the EEAS budget (including permanent posts, contract staff and delegated national experts), 51 Austrians currently work in the EEAS. On average, this represents a share of 2.05% Austrians in the above categories.

**The Court of Justice of the European Union**

Since October 2009, former Federal Minister Maria Berger has been a judge at the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in Luxembourg. On 28 November, the Austrian Federal Government, in agreement with the Main Committee of the National Council, proposed Andreas Kumin as her successor. Since September 2013, Viktor Kreuschitz has been the Austrian judge at the General Court (EGC).

The Republic of Austria is represented before the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), consisting of the Court and the General Court, by legal counsels from the Constitutional Service of the Federal Ministry for Constitution, Reforms, Deregulation and Justice (Directorate-General V, Department V.6). Austrian courts have initiated 25 new preliminary ruling proceedings (i.e. proceedings, in which a national court refers a question relating to the interpretation or validity of Union law to the Court).
At the end of the year, there was one case of alleged infringements of Union law pending against the Republic of Austria. This concerned discriminatory regulations regarding the legal nature, the shareholding and the minimum and maximum prices of certain service providers, such as civil engineers, patent agents and veterinary surgeons, and thus Austria’s failure to fulfil its obligations under Article 14(1), Article 15(1) and (2)(b) and (c) and (3) and Article 25 of Directive 2006/123/EC on services in the internal market. Two procedures (award of service contracts to the Austrian State Printing Office and transposition of the VAT Directive 2001/84/EC) were concluded with judgements. Four other proceedings, three of which related to the implementation of EU regulations in the field of awarding concessions and one to infringement against obligations in connection with the disposal of spent fuel and radioactive waste, were withdrawn by the European Commission.

The EU’s Accession to the ECHR

Under the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the EU is obliged to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). This accession would create an additional possibility of filing an individual complaint directly against the EU in areas of Union competences and/or would enable a review of Union legal acts before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) for compatibility with the ECHR. After the ECJ concluded in its Opinion 2/13 of 18 December 2014 that the original draft accession agreement was not in all aspects compatible with primary law requirements, deliberations on the text continued within the Union. Convinced of the benefits it would generate in practice for the protection of human rights in Europe, the EU’s accession to the ECHR has been a long-standing priority for Austria and was also both actively and successfully promoted during the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The Committee of the Regions

As a consultative body and forum for the representation of regional and local interests connected to the European integration, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) takes part in the debate about Europe and contributes to its shaping. Austria is represented by twelve members in the CoR. In this body, each of the nine federal provinces has one seat, while towns, cities and municipalities together have a total of three seats. On 28 November, the European Commission submitted to the Council a proposal for a decision on the CoR’s future composition following the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU. This proposal provides for a reduction of the CoR from 350 to 329 members. Austria will not be affected by these changes.

The European Economic and Social Committee

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is a consultative body that involves economic and social interest groups in the EU’s legislative process. At the organisational level, the EESC’s members are divided into the Workers’ Group, the Employers’ Group and the Various Interests’ Group. Topics are dealt with in six the-
matic sections. Austria is represented by twelve members composed of representatives of the social partners and the Austrian Consumer Protection Association. On 28 November, the European Commission submitted a proposal to the Council for a decision on the composition of the EESC following the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU. This proposal provides for a reduction of the EESC from 350 to 329 members. Austria will not be affected by the changes.

1.1.1.3. The Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union

1.1.1.3.1. CFSP

Under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), current global policy issues are dealt with by the Foreign Ministers of the EU Member States. In the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), decisions are generally taken unanimously (constructive abstention is possible) on the basis of strategic guidelines set by the European Council. The Brussels-based Political and Security Committee (PSC) is composed of representatives of the EU Member States and regularly monitors international foreign and security policy developments, supervises the implementation of agreed policies and provides strategic direction in missions and operations in the context of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

During its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria pro-actively supported the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP), Federica Mogherini, in particular with respect to the implementation of all priority areas identified in the EU Global Strategy. In this context, Austria placed a special focus on managing the challenges associated with migration, promoting the European perspective for the countries of South East Europe, expanding and strengthening the Eastern Partnership, promoting effective rules-based multilateralism and strengthening the CSDP. Accordingly, the informal meeting of foreign ministers (Gymnich) held in Vienna at the end of August dealt, inter alia, with the Middle East peace process, developments in Syria, Iran and South East Europe, transatlantic relations and effective multilateralism. As had been the case in Sofia in mid-February, a meeting with the accession candidates also took place at the end of the Gymnich meeting in Vienna.

At the FAC in June 2016, the Member States’ Foreign Ministers adopted the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS), presented by HR/VP Mogherini. The priorities of external action defined by the EUGS focus on security and defence, state and societal resilience, regional order, global governance, and an integrated approach to managing conflicts and crises. Adopted by the FAC in June, the priorities defined by the EEAS for the third year of the Strategy’s implementation focus on continuing the relevant work undertaken over the two previous years, while at the same time improving its working methods. In this respect, work carried out so far in the areas of security and defence, strengthening effective multilateralism and global rules-based order and resilience will be further pursued. From the very outset, Austria has contributed pro-actively to implementing the EUGS and has also played an active, pioneering role by launching numerous initiatives in the area of “effective multilateralism”, including the
adoption of the Council Conclusions marking the 20th anniversary of the Rome Statute at the FAC in July, the introduction of a non-paper in the PSC on concrete measures to strengthen effective multilateralism in July, and by organising a High-Level Retreat at the European Forum Alpbach.

1.1.1.3.2. CSDP

The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which was strengthened by the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon on 1 December 2009, is an integral part of the CFSP. The Global Strategy for EU Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS), adopted in 2016, has contributed to deepening the European Security Strategy approach of 2003. Among other things, this led to the definition of a new level of EU ambition in the field of security and defence, which serves to implement the following three strategic EUGS priorities: (I) response to external conflicts and crises; (II) capacity building for partner countries affected by fragility/instability; and (III) protection of the Union and its citizens. From the outset, Austria has actively contributed to implementing all strands of the Global Strategy and during its Presidency of the Council of the European Union continued to work towards strengthening the Common Security and Defence Policy. In this context, Austria advocates a comprehensive approach to security with a focus on prevention and increasing resilience, including a better linkage between internal and external as well as civil and military security aspects.

In November, the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) adopted comprehensive Council conclusions on security and defence. The priorities highlighted included capability development (Civilian CSDP Compact, Capability Development Plan), enhanced defence cooperation (Permanent Structured Cooperation, Coordinated Annual Review on Defence), adaptation of structures and instruments (Military Planning and Conduct Capability) and the further development of CSDP partnerships (new UN-EU Action Plan). In addition, the implementation of the European Defence Action Plan (European Defence Fund) and the implementation of the Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation adopted in 2016 by the EU and NATO leaders. Important cross-cutting topics addressed in this context were military mobility and hybrid threats.

With a view to promoting a comprehensive approach to security and as requested by the European Council, an EU Civilian CSDP Compact was prepared in order to meet the aim of strengthening civilian CSDP. During the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, this compact was adopted by the Council and the Member States in November. The aim is to improve civilian CSDP both in qualitative and in quantitative terms and to provide it with appropriate capabilities to respond more effectively to current and complex security challenges such as irregular migration, border management, terrorism and organised crime. The goal pursued by civilian CSDP is to make an important and central contribution to resilience in third countries and the EU’s neighbourhood – and thus to security in Europe at large. Austria’s commitments to the Civilian CSDP Compact were submitted to the Council of Ministers and adopted in November. Austria will inter alia contribute to strengthening civil-military cooperation, training measures for Austrian and European experts, the secondment of police officers and experts in the field of customs administration and the protection of cultural assets. As
a next step, a National Implementation Plan for the Civilian CSDP Compact in Austria will be prepared.

Agreement was also reached on a new list of Permanent Structured Cooperation projects (including an Austrian project in the field of NBC defence) and on the common position prepared by the Austrian Presidency on the planned European Defence Fund. Within the framework of the ATHENA Special Committee, the 2019 budgets for military CSDP operations and missions were adopted in a timely manner.

The Austrian Presidency was also able to make progress in the discussion on improving the (not least due to reasons relating to EU law) very difficult cooperation between CSDP and justice and home affairs. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is a workshop held in cooperation with the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). This cooperation plays a very relevant role, especially with a view to managing irregular migration, ranging from addressing the root causes of migration to external border management and preventing as well as combating terrorism. Another topic that was successfully addressed – and is more important than ever in the light of the current security policy situation – was improved cooperation with relevant international organisations, in particular the UN and the OSCE (including inter alia the important role of confidence-building measures). In this context, the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union also organised a launch event for the new Joint EU-UN Action Plan on Crisis Management.

Ongoing CSDP Operations and Missions and Austria’s Involvement

In the reporting year, the following CSDP missions/operations were conducted:

**Civilian CSDP missions:**
- EUAM Iraq
- EUAM Ukraine (with Austrian contribution)
- EUBAM Libya (with Austrian contribution)
- EUBAM Rafah (Palestinian territories)
- EUCAP Sahel Mali
- EUCAP Sahel Niger
- EUCAP Somalia
- EULEX Kosovo (with Austrian contribution)
- EUMM Georgia (with Austrian contribution)
- EUPOL COPPS (Palestinian territories)

**Military CSDP Operations and Missions:**
- EUFOR Althea (Bosnia and Herzegovina; with Austrian contribution)
- EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia (Mediterranean; with Austrian contribution since 2015)
- EUNAVFOR Somalia Operation Atalanta (Horn of Africa)
- EUTM Mali (with Austrian contribution)
- EUTM RCA (Central African Republic)
- EUTM Somalia
Europe and its Neighbouring States

1.1.1.3.3. Fighting International Terrorism

The number of terrorist attacks in Europe decreased slightly in the reporting period. More than 350 people have been killed by Islamist terrorists since 2015. Around 40 serious Islamist attacks had been committed, going hand in hand with an increase in the frequency of jihadist attacks. Against this background, Austria continued to place a special focus on cooperating with its partners in the fight against terrorism. The key pillars for action at EU level are the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy, developed in 2005, the EU terrorist list, rules to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing as well as the Directive on the Use of Passenger Name Record (PNR) Data.

In September, the Council adopted the regulation establishing a European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS). Under this system, third-country nationals who are exempt from the visa requirement may be checked prior to entering the Schengen area and, if necessary, be refused travel authorisation. These provisions seek to help improve internal security, prevent illegal immigration, reduce delays at borders and contribute to protecting public health. The system is to become operational by 2021 at the latest.

Implementation of the European Commission Action Plan to strengthen the fight against terrorist financing was continued in cooperation with the EU’s Financial Action Task Force. One of the objectives pursued is to prevent to the largest extent possible access to financial sources that could be used by terrorists to plan and carry out attacks. In order to counter misuse of the Internet by terrorist groups, the EU developed new legislation to tackle terrorist content online. The relevant rules were prepared in cooperation with social media companies and with a view to detecting and deleting terrorist and other illegal content on the Internet.

The European Parliament presented the recommendations prepared by the Special Committee on Terrorism, which was founded in 2017 to combat radicalisation, improve data compatibility and provide support to victims of terrorism. Apart from recommending to strengthen the role of EU agencies such as Europol and the European Agency for the operational management of large-scale IT Systems (EU-LISA), the committee expressed its concerns about insufficient data exchange between agencies, and between Member States and EU authorities. Thus, activities towards improving interoperability of EU information systems for security, border and migration management were launched in the context of the Berne Group in order to promote networking among the EU Member States through enhancing interoperability of EU information systems for security, border and migration management. Cross-border access by law enforcement authorities to electronic evidence and financial data was also facilitated.

The fight against terrorism also featured very prominently on the agenda of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In cooperation with the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), a Joint Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkans was drawn up, which defines common goals and measures for all six partner countries in South East Europe. The politically binding document, which was adopted at the Justice and Home Affairs Council in Tirana in October, seeks to strengthen cooperation between the EU and South East Europe. It
represents an important basis for pooling measures aimed at preventing and combatting terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation in the neighbouring region. The Joint Action Plan is to be implemented by 2020 and seeks to provide the basis for developing country-specific priorities and fields of action.

The Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union also laid the legal foundation for improved funding for counter-terrorism experts in EU representations in third countries. This will not only contribute to strengthening security cooperation with third countries but also decisively improve cooperation in the field of counter-terrorism at operational level.

With respect to sanctions (COMET), further individuals and entities were listed under Common Position 2001/931/CFSP. This relates to both the freezing of funds and other assets as well as to enhanced measures of police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters.

As home to many international organisations, Austria is a hub for the promotion of peace and security and for the fight against crime, drug abuse and terrorism. In this spirit, cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) was strengthened. Further progress achieved includes better links between the internal and external aspects in the fight against terrorism, strengthening the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism (P/CVE) agenda, as well as regular exchange with EU Member States on the global security situation and on current terrorist threats.

Cooperation within the framework of the Global Coalition against ISIL/Da’esh that was established by the USA and comprises 79 states and organisations constitutes a further pillar in the fight against terrorism. In the context of its involvement, Austria participated in two of six working groups, namely on stabilisation (supporting the development of state infrastructure in areas freed from Da’esh) and on FTF (Foreign Terrorist Fighters). In addition, Austria is making available EUR 2 million as stabilisation assistance to Iraq between 2017 and 2019.

1.1.1.3.4. Cyber Security and Hybrid Threats

As a result of the major cyber attacks WannaCry and NotPetya, which caused extensive damage worldwide in 2017, the close links between cyber security and the geopolitical power struggle have become more visible to the general public. As early as at the end of 2017, the EU had compiled a Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox, which provides a list of all diplomatic options – ranging from statements to démarches and sanctions – available to EU Member States and providing support in dealing at diplomatic level with violations of international law in cyberspace. Negotiations on a horizontal cyber sanctions regime were launched under the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In addition, EU Member States increasingly seek to promote their own resilience, including through dialogues, exercises and cyber security capacity building in the EU’s neighbourhood and in developing countries. At international level, the USA and a
group of like-minded partners have increasingly begun to publicly name and directly shame those state actors that are behind cyber-attacks.

As efforts in the context of the Fifth Group of Governmental Experts (UN GGE) had failed in 2017, the 73rd UN General Assembly decided to launch two parallel negotiation processes to discuss the issue of security in the use of ICTs within the framework of the United Nations. Thus, not only is the UN GGE to be continued, this time comprising 25 governmental experts (as had been proposed by the USA and the EU), but an Open Ended Working Group (as proposed by Russia) that may be joined by all states, will also be set up. Generally, international interest in contributing to the related standard setting has increased substantially. At the same time, a number of states are strongly pushing for drawing up new treaties to further expand state control over the Internet under the pretext of combating crime and terrorism and safeguarding sovereignty. EU Member States will contribute to both UN processes in order to advocate for an open, secure and free cyberspace in which international law, including all human rights and fundamental freedoms, is upheld. Issuing the “Paris Call” in November, French President Emmanuel Macron also urged companies to support and fulfil these important requirements for an open Internet.

In the OSCE, work on the implementation of the 16 Confidence Building Measures on Cyber Security, which make the OSCE an international role model in this context, has continued. Cyber security was also a priority of the Italian OSCE Chairmanship. In this context, the topics of cyber diplomacy and co-operation between states and private companies were discussed at a conference held in Rome in September.

The development of EU policies on hybrid threats is closely related to the process of strengthening EU policy in the fields of security and defence. Based on the invitation of the Foreign Affairs Council of May 2015, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in close cooperation with the Commission and the European Defence Agency and in consultation with the EU Member States, prepared a framework document, which provides for the development of an EU strategy on hybrid threats.

Subsequently, in April 2016, the Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats, developed by the EEAS and the Commission, was presented. Directed at EU institutions and Member States, this Framework outlines 22 actions aimed in particular at improving situational awareness of hybrid threats, building resilience and strengthening prevention and crisis response. In this respect, a special focus is placed on critical infrastructure, energy security, transport and supply chain security, the health and financial sectors, general improvement in the ability of EU institutions and Member States to respond to hybrid threats, and cooperation with third countries and international organisations. The steps envisaged include the creation of a Hybrid Fusion Cell as part of the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre at the EEAS and a European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki. As of now, a total of 20 states have already joined this institution, which is open to both EU and NATO member states. On 10 September, Austria signed the relevant Memorandum of Understanding.
Action 1 of this Framework provides for launching a Hybrid Risk Survey to identify key vulnerabilities, including specific hybrid-related indicators, which could “potentially affect national and pan-European structures and networks”. With a view to its implementation, a Group of Friends of the Presidency was set up in the summer of 2017 and given a much broader mandate.

The Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union presented a comprehensive work programme, which proposed structuring the new mandate scheduled for 2020 along several strands of work (managing hybrid threats at Member State and EU level, cooperation with NATO and other international and regional organisations as well as with third countries, and conceptual matters). Involving some 750 participants, making it the largest EU exercise on hybrid threats to date, the Hybrid Exercise Multilayer 18 (Parallel and Coordinated with NATO) EU-HEX ML 18 (PACE), was conducted in autumn.

1.1.1.4. The Enlargement of the European Union

At its meeting in Thessaloniki in 2003, the European Council agreed to “reiterate its unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries”. Building on this fundamental commitment, the Heads of State and Government reaffirmed in December 2006 that the future of South East Europe lies in the European Union and endorsed the “renewed consensus on enlargement”, which has guided and defined the EU’s enlargement policy to this very day.

These principles, adopted by the European Council are based on the premise that the Union’s capacity to integrate new members must be taken into account and emphasise, alongside the consolidation of commitments made, the observance of a fair and at the same time rigorous conditionality. This means that progress in an accession process, such as the granting of candidate status, is based on clearly defined criteria and may only be recognised if such objectives have been fulfilled. In the accession negotiations, priority is given to the key areas of the rule of law, fundamental rights, improvement of economic policy governance and reform of public administration (“fundamentals first” principle).

As no enlargement package had been published in 2017, the European Commission initially presented a “credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans” on 6 February. This strategy inter alia sets out six flagship initiatives aimed at supporting the transformation of the South East European candidate countries in the areas of rule of law, security and migration, socio-economic development, transport and energy network connections, the digital agenda as well as reconciliation and good neighbourly relations.

The actual enlargement package including the country reports on the individual states (six South East European candidate countries and Turkey) was presented on 17 April. In this package, the European Commission recommended opening accession negotiations with Macedonia and Albania. While the reports on the four other countries of the Western Balkans, as this region is known, (i.e. Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo) were also largely positive, Turkey was given an extremely critical
assessment due to considerable regression, particularly with respect to the areas of the rule of law and fundamental rights.

Furthermore, 15 years after the meeting in Thessaloniki in 2003, a summit between the EU, its Member States and the six South East European candidate countries was held in Sofia on 17 May. At this meeting, mutual commitment to the European perspective of the entire region was reaffirmed. The Heads of State and Government of the EU Member States agreed on a declaration, with which the South East European partners concurred. The declaration contained a priority agenda setting out measures for enhanced cooperation with the region.

Aware of the central and indispensable role a credible EU perspective plays in the peaceful and stable development of South East Europe, Austria has been one of the major advocates and political supporters within the EU of the six South East European accession candidates in the enlargement process. This foreign policy priority is reflected in Austria’s relevant commitment at EU and regional level, including in the Berlin Process, in whose annual summit meeting (London, on 9 and 10 July) Austria participated with high level representatives. The foreign and European policy focus Austria places on South East Europe, a region it enjoys very close historic, cultural, economic and inter-personal ties with, was also reflected in the context of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of the year. In this spirit, the first-ever conference of the six South East European candidate countries’ ministers for EU integration was organised in Tirana on the initiative of the Austrian Presidency and chaired by Federal Minister Karin Kneissl.

Austria also provided tangible support to the pre-accession process via EU-funded twinning partnerships and short-term expert assistance (TAIEX), thus supporting candidate countries in strengthening their public administration. Austria contributed inter alia to helping Macedonia in progressing towards European standards on water quality, to projects aimed at fighting money laundering in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and at combating human trafficking in Serbia. In the context of TAIEX, Austrian authorities seconded experts to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia to share relevant specialised know-how in the fields of environment, justice and home affairs, finance, aviation safety, health, social housing, agriculture, cybercrime, taxation, customs and excise as well as administrative law.

The EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) is the funding mechanism for the pre-accession process. The beneficiaries are candidate countries (Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, Albania and Turkey) and potential candidates (Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Kosovo). As a flexible instrument, IPA provides assistance depending on the overall progress made by the beneficiary countries and their specific needs, as identified in the European Commission’s evaluations and annual strategy documents. In this context, the migration and refugee crisis are taken into account. The IPA II Regulation currently in force entered into effect on 1 January 2014 and expires at the end of 2020. Total funding for the period 2014-2020 amounts to 11.699 billion euros. On 15 June, the European Commission presented its proposal for the IPA III regulation for the years 2021-2027. Negotiations on this proposal were launched and expedited under the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and actively progressed.
Ongoing Accession Negotiations

Accession negotiations with Montenegro were launched in June 2012 with a special focus on the areas of rule of law, the judiciary, human rights and the fight against corruption and organised crime. By the end of the year, a total of 32 negotiation chapters had been opened, the most recent being chapter 27 (environment and climate change) on 10 December during the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Three chapters have already been provisionally closed. Progress in the field of rule of law will continue to influence the pace of negotiations.

Accession negotiations with Serbia were formally opened in January 2014. By the end of the year, a total of 16 negotiation chapters had been opened, the most recent being chapters 17 (economic and monetary policy) and 18 (statistics) on 10 December during the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Two chapters have already been provisionally closed. The pace of negotiations will be highly dependent on progress made in the field of rule of law and normalisation of relations with Kosovo.

Following its official application for accession in 1987, accession negotiations with Turkey were opened on 3 October 2005. By the end of 2018, 16 negotiating chapters had been opened and one chapter closed.

Turkey has been in a customs union with the EU since 1995. The enlargement rounds of the EU in 2004 and 2007 required incorporation of the new EU Member States into the customs union. To that end, the Ankara Protocol, an additional protocol to the 1963 Association Agreement (the Ankara Agreement) was signed in July 2005. Turkey, however, issued a declaration in which it stated that it continued to not recognise the Republic of Cyprus and that the customs union did not apply to Cyprus. Having repeatedly criticized this breach of contract, the Council of the EU decided in December 2006 to partially suspend accession negotiations. Until full implementation of the Ankara Protocol by Turkey, eight related negotiation chapters will thus remain unopened and it will also not be possible to close any of the previously opened chapters.

Furthermore, in its conclusions of 26 June, the Council of the EU noted that “due to its continuing and deeply worrying backsliding on the rule of law and fundamental rights, including freedom of expression”, Turkey has been moving further away from the EU and that accession negotiations have therefore “effectively come to a standstill” and that “no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing and no further work towards the modernisation of the EU-Turkey Customs Union is foreseen”.

Austria is in favour of breaking-off EU accession negotiations with Turkey and – considering the central role Turkey plays in the field of economy, security and migration – supports the development of an EU-Turkey neighbourhood concept.

Rapprochement of Further South East European States with the EU

Macedonia has had candidate country status since 2005. For a long time, the name dispute with Greece stood in the way of the start of accession negotiations. After a roadmap for settling the name issue with Greece had been adopted under the Prespa Agreement, the Council of the European Union, in its conclusions of 26 June, outlined
the way forward towards a launch of accession negotiations in June 2019. The prerequisite for the actual opening of accession negotiations is that Macedonia fully implements the Prespa Agreement and continues to make concrete progress on urgent reform priorities and on the fight against corruption.

**Albania**, which was granted candidate status by the Council in June 2014, has made steady progress towards its next goal, the opening of accession negotiations. The European Commission’s country report of 17 April contained an unequivocal recommendation to open accession negotiations. In the light of the progress made, the Council of the European Union, in its conclusions of 26 June, outlined the way ahead towards a launch of accession negotiations in June 2019. In the meantime, Albania is called upon to achieve tangible and credible progress, especially in the field of judicial reform (in particular the re-evaluation of judges and prosecutors) and the fight against organised crime (relating in particular to drug cultivation and trafficking).

The EU’s strategy vis-à-vis **Bosnia and Herzegovina** continued to be based on the political leadership’s commitment to a comprehensive reform agenda. After having submitted its application for EU membership on 15 February 2016, the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina received the questionnaire, which aims to provide information on the country’s readiness to acquire candidate status. The answers provided by Bosnia and Herzegovina were submitted to the President of the EU Commission Jean-Claude Juncker on 28 February. The European Commission then began its work on the avis and prepared a number of follow-up questions. The answers to these questions were, however, still pending at the end of the year.

**Kosovo’s** rapprochement with the EU depends to a large extent on its progress in the areas of the rule of law, justice, public administration and the establishment of a functioning market economy. Another essential element is the normalization process with Serbia. On 19 January 2012, a visa liberalisation dialogue was launched with Kosovo. On 18 July, the European Commission presented a report stating that Kosovo now met all the conditions for visa liberalisation and recommended that the Member States lift the visa requirement for Kosovo. In September, the competent committee of the European Parliament issued a positive opinion and the EU Member States are now called upon to decide on the recommendation of the European Commission.

1.1.1.5. **The Initiative “Europa fängt in der Gemeinde an” (Europe starts at a local level)**

In 2010, the non-partisan initiative “Europe starts at local level” was launched by the MFA and the European Commission Representation in Austria. The initiative aims to establish mayors and municipal representatives as “Municipal Councillors for European Affairs” in as many cities and municipalities as possible. They will then act as the local population’s main contact partners on topics related to the EU. By the end of the year, more than 1,050 representatives from all federal provinces had joined the initiative.

With a view to continuing the initiative, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed at the 5th General Assembly of Municipal Councillors for European Affairs on 16 November between the MFA, the European Commission Representation in Austria, the
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Liaison Office of the European Parliament (EP) and the Austrian Association of Municipalities.

Examples for relevant initiatives launched by Municipal Councillors for European Affairs in their respective municipalities and cities include, among others, a regular EU information page in the local council newsletters, regular “EU roundtables” and panel discussions, EU-related activities directed at pupils as well as “EU committees” at municipal level. The MFA acts as a central information, networking, service and contact point for initiative members. The range of services provided by the MFA to Municipal Councillors for European Affairs also includes an email information system they can use to access concise information on current EU issues, an electronic EU information platform enabling Municipal Councillors for European Affairs to network with one another, information-sharing seminars for members and information trips to Brussels.

From 11-13 April and 26-28 November, some 25 Municipal Councillors for European Affairs took part in the fourteenth and fifteenth such information trips to Brussels respectively. With a view to promoting networking and basic knowledge sharing, the MFA hosted the first welcome and information-sharing seminar for Municipal Councillors for European Affairs on 19 October.

1.1.2. Austria’s Neighbourhood

1.1.2.1. South Tyrol

South Tyrol enjoys a special status within Austrian foreign policy. The protective function Austria assumed with regard to South Tyrol, which results from in the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement (Treaty of Paris) of 1946, is exercised in an attentive manner by the Austrian Federal Government. Austria’s protective function is expressed in the interest taken in the general and autonomy policy developments in South Tyrol, as well as in a large number of working visits and contacts. At European level, the autonomy of South Tyrol serves as a model for the resolution of minority conflicts. It has become a common asset shared by all three linguistic groups (German, Italian and Ladin) living in South Tyrol and as such is to be preserved and dynamically developed. At the same time, there is no doubt for Austria that under international law South Tyrol’s autonomy is also based on the right to self-determination, which – as a continuing right – is exercised by South Tyrol in the form of a high degree of autonomy. Austria maintains close and amicable relations with Italy. Austria’s and Italy’s common membership of the EU has facilitated a number of additional links that are also of benefit to South Tyrol. With the many initiatives it has launched, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation “European Region Tyrol – South Tyrol – Trentino”, which was established in 2011 and is currently chaired by South Tyrol, serves as a good example of the practical application of European instruments in the interest of regional cooperation. In the aftermath of the migration crisis and in connection with the transit issue, the governors of the European Region also made joint public appearances.

The most important event of the year was the elections to the South Tyrolean province parliament (diet) on 21 October. Although the governing South Tyrolean People’s Party
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(SVP) was able to maintain its politically decisive position by winning 41.9% of the vote, it lost two of its 17 seats. Team Köllensperger, which ran for the first time, recorded a substantial success winning six seats, and the right-wing populist Lega is represented in the province parliament with four members. After having held exploratory talks in November, the SVP decided to launch coalition negotiations with the Lega in December.

The influx of migrants coming to Austria and Germany via Italy remained an important topic in the political debate. Intensive cooperation between Vienna, Rome, Bolzano and Innsbruck in managing irregular migration was continued.

The adoption of implementing provisions aimed at the realisation of competences enshrined in the Autonomy Statute – thus putting the Memorandum adopted in May 2015 with Prime Minister Matteo Renzi into practice – lost momentum in the election year. There is still no solution in sight, however, with respect to place, hill, mountain and field names (toponymy). In the course of the coalition negotiations between SVP and Lega, it was decided to withdraw the relevant national law of 2012, which had been challenged before the Italian Constitutional Court, in order to pave the way for a new approach to resolving this issue.

Other important topics dealt with in South Tyrol were transit traffic, the handling of large carnivores (bears and wolves), and preparatory work aimed at the re-recognition of specialist medical training at South Tyrolean hospitals. At the Brenner Transit Summit in Bolzano, organised by the European Commission and attended by high-ranking representatives from Austria, Germany and Italy as well as from the affected regions, the majority of participants agreed on a joint declaration. It was, however, not possible to achieve a breakthrough with regard to further measures towards restricting transit traffic. After years of negotiations between the South Tyrolean Health Care Administration, the Austrian Medical Chamber and the health authorities in Rome, a solution was achieved that paves the way for adopting a declaration on the recognition of specialist medical training in 2019.

A wish that has been expressed by South Tyrol for many years is to be able to acquire Austrian citizenship in addition to their Italian one as an expression of the deep attachment to and close bonds with Austria. This was included together with two other case groups in the Federal Government’s Programme under the heading of “Rethinking Dual Citizenship”, stating that in the spirit of European integration and in order to promote ever closer union among Member States’ citizens, consideration shall be given to granting members of the ethnic groups of German and Ladin mother tongue speakers in South Tyrol, for whom Austria exercises the protective function based on the Treaty of Paris and subsequent practice, the opportunity to acquire Austrian citizenship in addition to Italian citizenship.

In view of the complex legal situation in Austria, an expert group was set up whose work is to enable the preparation of a draft to be used as a decision-making basis for further steps. Austria has announced its willingness to enter into a dialogue with Italy on this topic; all further steps will of course be taken into close coordination with the representatives of South Tyrol.
1.1.2.2. Austria’s Neighbours

Germany

After the exploratory talks on a “Jamaica” alliance between the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU), the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the Greens had failed on 19 November 2017 as a result of the FDP’s withdrawal, the Union (CDU/CSU) launched coalition negotiations with the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), which were successfully concluded on 7 February.

Key priorities of the coalition agreement: Strengthening of the EU budget and structural reform of the euro area (German-French axis); EU Social Compact and a framework for minimum wage rules and national basic security benefit systems in the EU; no tax increases, increase in child benefits, reduction in the solidarity surcharge; the range for annual immigration is not to exceed 180,000-220,000, central reception, decision-making and return facilities, skilled workers immigration act; equal financing of health insurance; 65% renewable energies by 2030; 8,000 new nursing staff; nationwide development of gigabit networks, 3.5 % GDP for research and development by 2025; increase in funds for development cooperation and defence; expansion of all-day schools and reorganisation of financial relations between the federal and state governments to enable, among other things, greater cooperation in the field of education.

In the state elections in Bavaria and Hesse in October, both the CDU/CSU and the SPD suffered heavy losses: In Bavaria, the CSU lost the absolute majority and the SPD dropped to fifth place. On 5 November, the CSU signed a coalition agreement with the Free Voters. In Hesse, the CDU was able to continue its government cooperation with the Greens thanks to the strong support won by its coalition partner. The results of these two state elections had a direct impact on federal politics; on 29 October, Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that she would neither stand for the party chairmanship in December, nor lead the CDU into the next federal election in 2021 or be available for any other political office. At the run-off elections held on 7 December, CDU Secretary General Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer was able to win 52% of the votes, thus defeating Friedrich Merz, the former leader of the CDU/CSU group in the Bundestag, and became new Chairperson of the CDU. Paul Ziemiak, chairman of the Junge Union, became new CDU Secretary General.

At foreign policy level, Germany showed willingness to assume more responsibility than before. Globalization, in particular the opening of markets in the context of free and fair world trade, are perceived as an opportunity for the German economy and as a contribution to safeguarding social systems. For the financial year 2019, the Bundestag (German Federal Parliament) increased the budget for the Federal Foreign Office by 375 million euros and for the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development by 800 million euros.

German foreign policy is committed to multilateralism (UN, G7, G20, OSCE, NATO). For the period 2019/2020, Germany was elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. The special challenges of German foreign policy include transatlantic relations as well as relations with Russia, Turkey and the Middle East. Against the background of combating the root causes of flight, cooperation at all levels with Africa has
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gained increasing importance (“Compact with Africa”; summit at the level of Heads of State and Government with the Compact States on 30 October in Berlin, which was also attended by Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz representing the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union).

The USA remains Germany’s most important partner outside of Europe. Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) is seen as a complementary instrument to NATO structures (“staying transatlantic and becoming more European”).

In response to the annexation of Crimea, which violates international law, Germany supports maintaining sanctions against Russia. At the same time, the German government has been striving to ensure good cooperation with Russia in a wide range of areas.

Germany considers Austria as being traditional, while at the same time being a dynamic business location that offers jobs to many German citizens and whose companies are active in Central and Eastern Europe. The general public traditionally values Austria mainly as a holiday and cultural destination.

At political, economic and social level, there was regular exchange involving numerous contacts at all levels. At top government level, Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz met inter alia with Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, and Federal Minister Karin Kneissl with Foreign Minister Heiko Maas in Berlin.

Germany remained by far the most important foreign trade partner for Austria. In 2018, Austrian exports rose by 5.6 % compared to the previous year. The share made up by Germany in Austria’s total export volume amounted to 30.2 % in 2018. The most important goods sourced from Germany are mechanical engineering products and motor vehicles.

Italy

Parliamentary elections were held in Italy on 4 March. As electoral alliances were facilitated by the new electoral law “Rosatellum” introduced prior to the elections, many parties formed alliances in the lead-up to these elections. As the strongest such electoral alliance, the centre-right alliance was able to win around 37 % of the vote, while the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S, receiving approx. 32 %) was the single party with the highest number of votes. Securing around 17 % of the vote, the Lega surprisingly fared much better than Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia (FI, winning 14 %) within the centre-right alliance. Support for the Partito Democratico (PD) dropped from 25 % to almost 19%. Following Matteo Renzi’s resignation as party leader, Maurizio Martina took over as interim head of the PD on 12 March. On 1 June, 89 days after the parliamentary elections, Luigi Di Maio (M5S) and Matteo Salvini (Lega) agreed on forming a new government led by Giuseppe Conte as an independent non-party Prime Minister, who was sworn in by President of State Sergio Mattarella on 1 June.

Since 1 June, Enzo Moavero Milanesi has been Italian Foreign Minister. The traditional priorities of Italian foreign policy have remained unchanged; the new administration thus continues to place a special focus on Libya, the Middle East and the Euro-Atlantic
integration of the countries of South East Europe. The strategic alliance with the USA continues to play a very important role. Due to its geographical location, Italy is furthermore an important NATO alliance partner and has also stepped up its involvement in the fight against terrorism (for instance by training Iraqi security forces). Since July 2017, NATO has deployed surveillance drones in Sicily. Yet, also Russia continues to be considered an important dialogue partner.

Italy gives priority to drawing the EU’s attention and activities to the Mediterranean region, and in particular to the issue of migration. As one of the front-line states in terms of first arrivals, Italy insists on greater European solidarity on the refugee issue and an effective European return policy. Since taking office, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini has been mobilising against ships from non-governmental organisations that rescue smuggled refugees and migrants in distress at sea and has refused access to Italian ports in order to achieve a solidarity-based distribution of refugees and migrants within the EU.

After months of drawn-out negotiations with the European Commission, the Italian budget was adopted on 29 December. In a historic move, the European Commission had rejected the first draft budget, which provided for a deficit of 2.4%. The revised draft provides for a deficit of 2.04% in 2019 and assumes GDP growth of 1%. For the time being, the Italian government has thus been able to avoid the excessive deficit procedure threatened by the EC.

The excellent bilateral relations between Austria and Italy are characterised by a very active exchange of visits, intense economic relations and mutual tourism. Italy remains Austria’s second largest trading partner. Trade relations with the regions of Northern Italy are particularly close. As regards dual citizenship considerations in South Tyrol, the Italian government has, however, indicated its disagreement. For Austrians, Italy remains the most popular holiday destination.

**Liechtenstein**

The Principality of Liechtenstein is a constitutional hereditary monarchy. Head of State is Prince Hans-Adam II, whose son, Hereditary Prince Alois, has been in charge of official functions and duties since 2004. The coalition government, consisting of the Fortschnittliche Bürgerpartei (FBP, Progressive Citizens’ Party) and the Vaterländische Union (VU, Patriotic Union), in office since March 2017, is led by Adrian Hasler (FBP) as Head of Government. After several years of budget consolidation, the current government is focusing on the goals of future orientation and continuous renewal of Liechtenstein. The related priorities are an active policy that promotes regions and attracts companies as well as managing demographic challenges and promoting education and innovation.

Since 2017, Liechtenstein has been implementing the global standard of Automatic Exchange of Information in International Tax Matters (AIA) recommended by the OECD and the EU. After having implemented further adjustments in tax law recommended by the EU, Liechtenstein was removed from the EU’s “grey list” of non-cooperative tax
jurisdictions on 2 October. It was confirmed that Liechtenstein fulfilled the EU requirements regarding tax transparency and fair taxation of companies.

Liechtenstein’s foreign policy priorities include safeguarding its sovereignty, free access to global markets, deepening relations with its neighbouring states, and active multilateral engagement that is committed in particular to promoting the rule of law and protecting human rights. Both in the bilateral and in the multilateral context, as a member of the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the European Economic Area (EEA), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), Liechtenstein proves itself a reliable and committed partner. With a view to strengthening its relations with its neighbours, Liechtenstein also participates in quadrilateral ministerial meetings involving Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Bilateral relations between Austria and Liechtenstein are characterized by close cooperation in all areas that is based on mutual trust. Regional ties are very strong; close to 2,200 Austrian citizens live in Liechtenstein, and more than 8,400 Austrians commute daily to their workplace in the Principality. Apart from an official visit by Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen from 19 to 20 March, there was an active exchange of bilateral visits: Federal Minister Karin Kneissl, Federal Minister Josef Moser and Federal Minister Juliane Bogner-Strauss travelled for talks to Vaduz and all members of the Liechtenstein Government paid visits to their counterparts in Vienna.

**Switzerland**

In its relations with Switzerland, Austria attaches importance to further strengthening the existing close and trusting relations. This also relates to bilateral projects, European and international issues, which were discussed in detail. With regard to relations between the EU and Switzerland, Austria especially highlighted the importance of the Institutional Framework Agreement. The consistently strong mutual interest was also reflected in an intense exchange of visits. In the context of the official visit that Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz paid to Federal President Alain Berset on 20 November, the ratification instruments for the Agreement between Austria and Switzerland on Cooperation in the Field of Cross-border Airspace Protection against Non-military Airborne Threats (“Air Police Agreement”), signed on 28 September 2017, were exchanged.

Some 65,000 Austrians reside permanently in Switzerland; internationally, this is the second largest number of Austrian citizens residing abroad. In addition, some 9,000 individuals commute daily across the Austro-Swiss border. With more than five million overnight stays, the Swiss are the third largest tourist group in Austria.

Switzerland is Austria’s fourth largest trading partner, the fourth most important buyer of Austrian goods and the second most important consumer of services. Swiss investors are among the most important investors in Austria. Swiss companies active in Austria employ more than 25,000 people, while some 18,000 people work for Austrian companies in Switzerland.

The Swiss voters decide on substantive issues at all levels of the state, i.e. at communal, cantonal and federal level. This form of direct democracy is a central element of the Swiss Confederation. On 25 November, the self-determination initiative (on precedence
of Swiss constitutional law over international law) introduced by the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) was rejected by a strikingly clear majority. The Institutional Framework Agreement (IFA) between the EU and Switzerland remained a sticking point in Switzerland’s relations with the EU.

The objective of the IFA, also known as the “Market Access Agreement”, is to create institutional rules for existing and future agreements that deal with Switzerland’s partial participation in the EU internal market. These include the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons, the Agreement on Agriculture, Land Transport and Air Transport, as well as the Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Product Regulations.

On 7 December, the Swiss Federal Council “took note” of the result produced by the negotiations between the EU and Switzerland with regard to the IFA and then submitted the agreement to a public consultation process. In order to increase political support for the IFA within the country, national debates with the cantons, political parties, social partners and interest groups are scheduled for spring 2019. The aim of this internal Swiss process is to achieve a “consolidated position” on the flanking measures and the Citizens’ Rights Directive (Free Movement Directive), which Switzerland considers to be open issues.

The Federal Council underlined its commitment in principle to the Framework Agreement, stating that the result of the negotiations was “to a large extent in Switzerland’s interests and in accordance with the negotiating mandate”. The European Commission reacted cautiously; in Brussels’ view, the wish for consultations was respected.

The “recognition of stock exchange equivalence”, which allows European shares to be traded on Swiss stock exchanges, was extended by the European Commission on 20 December for a limited period until 30 June 2019.

Slovakia

In February, the assassination of the young Slovak journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée as well as revelations about Mafia connections within political circles triggered protests among the public, which the country had not seen since the 1990s. The protest marches organised under the slogan “For a Decent Slovakia” in Bratislava and other cities in the country ultimately led to the resignation of Prime Minister Robert Fico and far-reaching personnel changes in the government. However, the tripartite coalition formed by Smer, Slovenská národná strana (SNS) and Most-Híd remained in power and on 22 March former Deputy Prime Minister for Investment and Digitalisation, Peter Pellegrini, was sworn in as the new Prime Minister.

At the foreign and European policy level, Slovakia’s course continued to be characterised by continuity and pragmatism. The only topic on which ideological differences along the respective party lines are noticeable is the position on Russia – an issue that has repeatedly led to tensions within the coalition. Thus, the newly developed Slovak Security and Defence Strategy, which is to replace the 2005 strategy, has not yet been adopted by parliament as the SNS regards it as being too critical of Russia.
On 1 July, Slovakia took over the one-year Presidency of the Visegrád Group (V4) from Hungary. Cooperation in this format is an essential pillar of Slovakia’s foreign policy. In accordance with the Presidency’s motto “Dynamic Visegrád for Europe”, Slovakia is placing a greater focus on European agenda topics during its term as the Group’s chair and also seeks to prevent the formation of new dividing lines within the EU. Slovakia furthermore continues cooperation with European, regional and transnational partners in the V4+ format, focusing in particular on deepening existing partnerships.

After Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák had ended his one-year term as President of the 72nd General Assembly of the United Nations in New York in September, political resistance at home to the Global Pact on Migration – which he supported – almost led to his resignation in November. Not least with a view Slovakia’s Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2019, President Kiska and Prime Minister Pellegrini were ultimately able to persuade Lajčák to remain in office.

On 29 November, a summit meeting of the “Friends of Cohesion” took place in Bratislava, which was attended by a total of 16 states, seven of which were represented by their prime ministers. The meeting was convened to discuss common interests regarding the design of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027.

At bilateral level, the year was characterized by an intensive exchange of visits at high level, which underlined the quality of the close and friendly relations. Federal Minister Karin Kneissl chose to travel to Slovakia on her first official trip abroad, which took place on 9 January. On 19 February, President Andrej Kiska visited Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen in Vienna; on 7 May, Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini, who had taken office only a short time before, met Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz for talks and on 6 June, the President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka paid an official visit to his Slovakian counterpart Andrej Danko, who paid his return visit to Vienna on 3 December. Together with the new German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the two Heads of State also took part in a discussion on Europe, organised at the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration on 9 October.

The anniversary and commemorative year 2018 offered many opportunities for joint events including 100 years of the Republic of Austria/Czechoslovakia, the reform movement and the invasion in 1968 as well as the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the state of Slovakia and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Austria and Slovakia. The Austrian Embassy in Bratislava and the Austrian Cultural Forum Bratislava organised a number of cultural projects to mark these events, including the biggest year-round art project T.R.A.M. – Time Travel Vienna-Bratislava, to commemorate the legendary tramway line Vienna-Bratislava.

For a short time, the very good bilateral relations were overshadowed by two national legislative initiatives with consequences for the respective neighbour. The decision of the Austrian Parliament to introduce the indexation of family allowances was received with disappointment by Slovakia. Not least due to the large number of Slovak nurses working in Austria, it is one of the countries that is most affected by this decision. Austria, for its part, expressed concern about the adoption of a law introducing a special food retail tax, which will also have a severe impact on Austrian companies. The law,
which comes into force on 1 January 2019, is considered discriminatory by companies and not in compliance with EU law. In both cases a solution is being sought at European level.

The economic ties between Austria and Slovakia are particularly close. Austria is the second largest foreign investor in the country after the Netherlands. Bilateral trade has continued to develop dynamically, with Slovakia’s overall very positive economic development having a favourable effect. Slovakia’s geographical proximity also makes it an ideal target market for first-time exporters and commercial enterprises.

The improvement of cross-border road and rail transport infrastructure remained an unchanged priority in bilateral relations. Cooperation in the energy sector, particularly on issues of gas and oil supply security, also remains of strategic importance. The positions held by Austria and Slovenia regarding the use of nuclear power, however, differ substantially. Completion of reactors 3 and 4 at the Mochovce nuclear power plant has again been delayed. After a “hot test phase”, reactor block 3 is now scheduled to be commissioned in the second quarter of 2019. Austria regularly reiterates its legitimate safety concerns and stresses the importance of a rapid and transparent exchange of information. Bilateral nuclear meetings at expert level take place annually.

Trilateral cooperation between Austria, Slovakia and the Czech Republic (“Austerlitz/Slavkov3”) initiated at the beginning of 2015, has proven to be a useful complementary instrument for political coordination and cooperation on important future-related issues.

**Slovenia**

A few months before the end of the legislative period, Prime Minister Miro Cerar resigned in reaction to the annulment of the referendum on the government’s most important infrastructure project, the extension of the railway line to the port of Koper, thus prompting early elections. The parliamentary elections on 3 June were won by the right-wing conservative Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) led by former Prime Minister Janez Janša securing 24.92% of the votes, ahead of the newly formed “List Marjan Šarec” (LMŠ) party reaching 12.6%. After several months of government negotiations, in the course of which it quite soon became clear that the election winner would not be able to form a government, a five-party, centre-left minority government was ultimately sworn in on 13 September. Alongside the LMŠ, this government coalition comprises the Social Democrats (SD), the Party of the Modern Centre (SMC), the party led by Alenka Bratušek (SAB) and the Pensioners’ Party (DeSUS). The minority government is, however, dependent on the (passive) support of the The Left party.

The unresolved border issue between Slovenia and Croatia remained one of the most influential domestic and foreign policy issues in Slovenia. Throughout the year, there were numerous minor incidents in the Bay of Piran, for instance in connection with fishing in the area of the disputed borders. In July, Slovenia filed a complaint with the European Court of Justice on the grounds that Croatia – in Slovenia’s view – by not implementing the international arbitration award of June 2017 was preventing Slovenia from implementing EU law on territory that is – according to the arbitration award.
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– Slovenian. Slovenia furthermore warns against the negative international example that is set by the non-implementation of an international arbitration award affecting two EU Member States.

Despite an increase in illegal border crossings from 1,934 to 9,149, the number of asylum seekers and persons entitled to asylum in Slovenia remained at a low level (about 300 and 600 persons respectively).

At political and economic level, the **very close and intense relations** between Austria and Slovenia were further developed. Federal Minister Karin Kneissl visited Slovenia on 20 March; Slovenian Foreign Minister Miro Cerar paid a visit to Vienna on 7 November and Prime Minister Marjan Šarec on 5 December. In addition, Slovenian ministers took part in the meetings and conferences held under the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union or attended events involving the Slovenian ethnic group in Austria.

At the invitation of President Borut Pahor, Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen took part in the **trilateral meeting of the Presidents of Slovenia, Austria and Croatia in Goriška Brda** on 5 July. In turn, President Borut Pahor attended the **European Forum Alpbach** on 25 August at the invitation of President Van der Bellen.

Today, the **Slovenian ethnic group** in Carinthia and Styria plays a bridge-building role between Austria and Slovenia. The award of the Grand Austrian State Prize to the Austrian author Florjan Lipuš, who writes in his Slovenian mother tongue, was also welcomed by Slovenia.

Austria used bilateral contacts at all levels to work towards the recognition of – and thus a significant improvement in – the situation of the **German-speaking ethnic group in Slovenia**. In its resolution of 17 May, the Parliament requested the Federal Government to support and advocate the recognition of the German-speaking ethnic group in Slovenia. The ethnic group itself reiterated its demands in two resolutions submitted to the Slovenian government in March and November. Slovenia continues to refuse recognition of the ethnic group. Funding provided by Slovenia remains limited. Austria makes available project and basic funding.

Furthermore, Austria consistently pursues the unchanged goal of a rapid processing by Slovenian authorities and courts of the still pending 89 outstanding denationalisation cases involving Austrian nationals.

Taking account of the special role played by the neighbouring federal provinces of **Carinthia** and **Styria** in cross-border cooperation with Slovenia – for instance in the fields of disaster and flood protection, tourism, education or business – **Joint Committees** were set up with both federal provinces. Owing to the elections and the long government formation process in Slovenia, only one committee meeting was held: chaired by Governor Hermann Schützenhöfer and Foreign Minister Miro Cerar, the Joint Committee with Styria met in St. Stefan ob Stainz on 30 November.

Austria continued its border controls at the **common border with Slovenia**, while Slovenia continues to hold the view that such border controls are superfluous.
The last instance ruling that extension of the operating life of the Krško nuclear power did not require a cross-border environmental impact assessment was met with lack of understanding by Austria. Slovenia continues to monitor the impact of the Austrian law on combating wage and social dumping on Slovenian companies very closely and together with other states actively combats the indexation of family allowances.

Economic relations between Austria and Slovenia are particularly intensive. Some 1,000 Austrian companies are active in Slovenia. Austria has for many years been the largest foreign investor in Slovenia, while Slovenian citizens remain the most important per capita consumers of Austrian products. A new Magna Steyr coating plant is currently one of the largest greenfield investments in the country. Koper is the most important port for Austrian companies and Austria is following developments relating to the planned extension of the railway line to Koper very closely. As economic growth has picked up in Slovenia, both bilateral exports and imports increased. Unemployment rates fell to 5.0 %, companies complain of a shortage of skilled labour.

In 2018, the Slovenian economy grew by 4.5 %, the inflation rate stood at 1.4 %, exports further increased by 5.8 % and imports rose by 10.3 %.

Czech Republic

Gaining 51.36 % of the vote, Miloš Zeman won the presidential elections on 26 and 27 January against Jiří Drahoš (48.64 %), starting his new term of office on 8 March. On 16 January, Andrej Babiš (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens, ANO), who was appointed Prime Minister in December 2017, lost the vote of confidence in the Chamber of Deputies and following the acceptance of his government’s resignation by President Miloš Zeman on 24 January, governed “in demission”. Following time-consuming efforts aimed at forming a coalition government and a change of leadership in the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), Andrej Babiš was reappointed Prime Minister on 6 June; the other members of the minority government formed this time by ANO and ČSSD were appointed on 27 June. On 30 June, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) decided to actively support this government in parliament. In the vote of no confidence held on 12 July, out of the 200 MPs a total of 105 voted in favour of the government while 91 voted against. As late as on 16 October, Social Democrat and former Deputy Foreign Minister Tomáš Petříček was appointed Foreign Minister by President Miloš Zeman, after the latter had rejected the originally proposed Miroslav Poche (Member of the European Parliament, ČSSD). About one year after the parliamentary elections of October 2017, the formation of a government was thus completed.

After the parliamentary immunity of Prime Minister Andrej Babiš had (again) been lifted on 16 January, police investigations initiated against him on suspicion of fraud in connection with the receipt of EU funding for the wellness centre belonging to the Agrofert Group were continued. Because of the alleged kidnapping of his son Andrej Babiš Junior with a view to obstructing the investigations, the opposition introduced a motion of no-confidence against the Prime Minister in the Chamber of Deputies, which failed.
The ČSSD lost support in the elections for the renewal of part of the Senate (27 of the 81 seats) in October and was overtaken by the ODS and the STAN (party of mayors and independents). Senator Jaroslav Kubera (ODS) became new President of the Senate.

At foreign policy level, the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to regard the strategic dialogue with Germany, the Visegrád-4 cooperation and cooperation with Slovakia and Austria in the context of the Austerlitz/Slavkov3 format as three essential forms of Czech regional cooperation. Until June 2019, the latter group is chaired by the Czech Republic. In addition, membership in the EU and NATO, South East Europe and the EU’s Eastern Partnership have remained priorities of Czech foreign policy. The government aims to give the Czech Republic a stronger voice in the EU. The country sees a need for reform in the EU, holds the view that the EU should do less but more effectively and is in favour of strengthening the role of both the European Council and the Member States.

With respect to the area of asylum and migration, the Czech Republic holds the view that competence for admission should remain with the Member States. The Czech Republic wants to continue to play an active role in improving external border protection and supporting countries of origin and transit outside the EU.

The bilateral exchange of visits, which had been intensified since 2014, slowed down as a result of the long Czech government formation process. However, at government level, Prime Minister Andrej Babiš paid a visit to Vienna on 18 May. On 5 February, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Radek Vondráček, visited the President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka in Vienna, who paid his return visit to Znojmo on 17 June. On 3 and 4 October, a trilateral meeting involving the Slovak President of Parliament Andrej Danko was held in the Austerlitz/Slavkov3 format in Kremsier.

With regard to the planned expansion of the Dukovany nuclear power plant, a technical opinion of the Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism was submitted dealing with the environmental impact statement prepared by the Czech Republic, as well as statements by almost 14,800 citizens and local and regional authorities in the course of the main proceedings. Bilateral consultations were held in Prague on 10 and 11 April.

Austria and the Czech Republic are working towards integrating their gas markets. An important tool to be potentially used in this context is the BACI (Bi-directional Austrian-Czech Interconnector) gas pipeline project. Since 1 July, the network operators GasConnect Austria and Net4Gas (Czech Republic) have been renting physical transmission capacities in the Slovak gas grid on a trial basis. After one year, a comparison is to be carried out based on economic efficiency considerations between this solution and building a pipeline.

Activities aimed at improving the bilateral transport infrastructure remain high on the agenda. In this context, the bilateral working group on road infrastructure met to discuss the connection of the Austrian S 10 expressway and the Czech D 3 motorway as well as of the Austrian A 5 motorway and the Czech R 52 expressway. On 12 September, Transport Minister Dan Ťok met his counterpart Federal Minister Norbert Hofer in Vienna for talks on the development of the road network and the improvement of the
railway infrastructure in order to reduce travel time between Vienna and Prague to 3 hours 45 minutes.

The Czech Republic remains Austria’s most important trading partner in Central and Eastern Europe and the third most important trading partner in the EU after Germany and Italy. For Austrian companies, the Czech Republic is the fourth most important destination for investments, while Austria is the fourth most important investor in the Czech Republic.

In the field of cross-border cooperation, the Czech Deputy Minister for Regional Development Zdeněk Semorád, the Lower Austrian Province Councillor Martin Eichtinger and representatives of Upper Austria and Vienna signed a memorandum in Štířín on 12 November, which emphasised the importance of the programme “European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) Austria – Czech Republic” and the need for appropriate EU funding for the period 2021-2027.

**Hungary**

At domestic level, the main event were the parliamentary elections in April, in which the governing parties, the Hungarian Civic Union/Christian Democratic People’s Party (Fidesz/KDNP), achieved a two-thirds majority. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán commenced his third consecutive term of office, in terms of thematic priorities the focus remained on the areas of security and immigration.

On 12 September, the European Parliament adopted a decision to initiate proceedings under Article 7 TEU against Hungary for clear risk of a serious breach of the common values of the Union (Article 2 TEU). International attention focused, among other things, on the introduction of a special migration tax, a further tightening of asylum laws, the campaign against George Soros and restrictions relating to civil society and media freedom. As the Hungarian authorities did not issue a confirmation that the conditions stipulated in the 2017 amendment to the university law were met, the Central European University, which is based in Budapest and funded by the Open Society Foundation, announced the partial relocation of its US-accredited degree programmes to Vienna. A “national consultation” on families prepared measures to provide further support for families with children. The adoption of laws establishing a new system of administrative courts that were decoupled from the ordinary courts of law gave rise to discussions.

Wage increases were at the centre of the government’s economic programme. Nominal economic growth remained strong, and the employment rate reached record levels. At the same time, however, companies increasingly struggled with a growing shortage of labour. Investment by the German automotive industry remains high on the government’s agenda, which was also highlighted by the agreement on the construction of a BMW plant in Debrecen. A new regulation on overtime in the Labour Code triggered joint demonstrations by opposition parties and trade unions.

At foreign policy level, the completion of its one-year term as Presidency of the Visegrád Group in June under the motto of “V4 Connects” was of particular relevance for Hungary.
Relations with Austria were intensive and characterised by a comprehensive exchange. On 1 and 2 March, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl paid an official visit to Budapest and met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó, the Minister for Human Resources Zoltán Balog and the Deputy Speaker of Parliament János Latorcai. Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz attended the meeting between the heads of government of the Visegrad countries and Austria in Budapest on 21 June. Parliamentary contacts were further deepened by an exchange of visits, including the participation of the President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka in a meeting between the Speakers of the parliaments of the Visegrad countries and Austria in Balatonfüred. Regular consultations in the context of the Bilateral Working Group involving representatives from both foreign ministries, as well as bilateral nuclear and energy talks were also continued.

Economic relations and tourism play a key role in the bilateral relationship. In terms of trade volume, Austria is Hungary’s second most important trading partner and third largest investor. According to a Hungarian statistical survey, some 2,800 Austrian companies employ over 80,000 people in Hungary. Four Austrian companies that are active in Hungary have formed “strategic partnerships” with the government.

Cross-border and regional cooperation was further intensified. Austria and Hungary jointly and pro-actively contribute to regional cooperation programmes such as the “INTERREG V-A Austria-Hungary 2014 to 2020” programme, for which a total budget of around 95 million euros was made available.

1.1.3. South East Europe / Western Balkan Countries

The six countries of South East Europe (SEE), Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia (also collectively referred to as the “Western Balkans”), which are geographically speaking surrounded by EU Member States, but do not yet belong to the EU, are a key priority of Austrian foreign policy. Bringing the region closer to the EU was also one of the three main priorities of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Austria also continued to contribute pro-actively to the Berlin Process. At the Berlin Process Summit in London on 9 and 10 July, meetings were held not only at heads of state and government level, but also between the foreign and interior ministers of the six South East European countries, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, the United Kingdom and Austria, also involving representatives from the European Commission and several international financial institutions. At political level, Austria was represented by Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. In the lead-up to the London Summit, a meeting involving the ministers for economic affairs of the above-mentioned countries was held in Vienna on 4 July and chaired by Federal Minister Margarete Schramböck.

The Berlin Process seeks to support the enlargement process by developing concrete solutions to problem areas that pose obstacles to the countries’ rapprochement with the EU. Such obstacles include weaknesses in transport infrastructure and economic
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cooperation, bilateral disputes or failure to come to terms with the past. The original plan was to hold five annual summits between 2014 and 2018. At the Trieste meeting in 2017, it was, however, agreed to continue the process beyond 2018.

Albania

The main item on the country’s agenda was the further implementation of the judicial reform initiated in 2016. An important element in this context is a re-evaluation of judges and public prosecutors (“vetting”), which is accompanied by an EU-financed international observation mission led by Austria and Italy.

Furthermore, Albania made important progress in the other areas that had been defined as key priorities for its EU integration process (reform of the judicial system, reform of its public administration, fight against organised crime, fight against corruption and protection of human rights).

The political climate in Albania continued to be dominated by polarisation, particularly between the two main political camps, Prime Minister Edi Rama’s Socialist Party and the opposition Democratic Party led by Lulzim Basha. In addition, and as a result of student protests, a number of scandals (including the planned demolition of the National Theatre and the construction of the Tirana ring road) as well as growing popular discontent, the government had also come under pressure by the end of the year. This led Prime Minister Edi Rama to announcing a major government reshuffle on 28 December.

There was an active exchange of visits between Austria and Albania and a number of meetings were held on the margins of international events. Albania is a priority country of Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC). Furthermore, Albania was a priority country of Austrian international cultural policy with over a hundred events organised in Albania and Austria (Austria-Albania Cultural Year). Austria is the sixth largest foreign investor and one of four strategic partners for Albania.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The virtual standstill in reform efforts that had already started in 2017 continued. On 7 October, elections were held at all levels except for the municipalities. On 20 November, the new three-member Presidency, consisting of the Serb Milorad Dodik, the Croatian Željko Komšić and the Bosnian Šefik Džaferović, was sworn in. By the end of the year, the parliaments as well as the governments at state, entity and cantonal level had not yet been fully formed or constituted, which also holds true for the parliament and government of the Republika Srpska.

Work on Bosnia and Herzegovina’s application for EU accession made only sluggish progress over the course of the year. On 28 February, the government submitted the answers to the European Commission questionnaire to the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker. The Commission then began its work on the avis and submitted a series of additional questions, the answers to which are still outstanding.
The extremely complex constitutional system seriously impairs the functioning of state and democratic institutions. Ongoing secessionist signals sent out by the Republika Srpska are also problematic. Milorad Dodik, its former president and now Serb member of the Presidency, has repeatedly called into question the legitimacy of the state institutions created in accordance with the Dayton Peace Accords and thus also of the state as a whole.

Since 2009, the Austrian Valentin Inzko has served as the High Representative of the international community to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since 2004, Austria has contributed to the military CSDP operation for the stabilisation of the region, EUFOR Althea. With 304 personnel, Austria is currently the largest provider of troops to the mission. Since March, Major General Martin Dorfer has been commander of EUFOR Althea. On 6 November, the UN Security Council again extended the mission’s mandate.

Relations between Austria and Bosnia and Herzegovina were characterized by an active exchange of visits as well as the holding of a number of bilateral meetings. Austria remains the largest foreign investor in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Kosovo

Since the Kosovo Serb Srpska Lista was formally no longer part of the government following the short-term arrest of the director of the Serbian “Office for Kosovo and Metohija”, Marko Đurić, in March, the government led by Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj lacked a clear majority in parliament. Consequently, projects that required a two-thirds majority were hardly ever adopted by parliament. The border demarcation agreement with Montenegro, which was signed in Vienna at the Berlin Process summit in 2015, was, however, ratified on 21 March.

In a report presented on 18 July, the European Commission confirmed that Kosovo met all 95 benchmarks of the visa liberalisation roadmap and recommended that EU Member States lift visa requirements for Kosovo. The responsible committee in the European Parliament issued a positive opinion, the Council of the EU has not yet concluded its related discussions.

Relations with Serbia remained difficult. The EU-supported dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina did not bring about a breakthrough. Since spring, the question of a possible shifting or re-drawing of borders between the two countries has also been discussed as part of a final agreement. This approach is, however, rejected by parts of the international community and by most politicians in Kosovo.

Regarding its application for INTERPOL membership, Kosovo alleged that Serbia had conducted an aggressive negative campaign. For this reason, and on the basis of the allegation that Kosovo’s export products suffered a competitive disadvantage, Kosovo initially imposed import duties of ten percent on products from Serbia as well as from Bosnia and Herzegovina. After Kosovo failed to achieve the necessary two-thirds majority for INTERPOL membership in the vote on 20 November, the government raised import duties to 100 per cent. This measure also affects Austrian and international companies that produce goods in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.
On 14 December, the Kosovar Parliament adopted a package of laws on the long-term transformation of the Kosovo Security Forces into regular armed forces and the creation of a Ministry of Defence, which was strongly criticised by Serbia.

At the end of December, a number of former high-ranking members of the “Kosovo Liberation Army” (UÇK) were summoned by the Kosovo Specialist Chambers in The Hague. Based on a 2011 Council of Europe report, the Specialist Chamber & Specialist Prosecutor’s Office is to deal with crimes that allegedly occurred between 1 January 1998 and 31 December 2000 during the Kosovo conflict.

Austria contributes 427 personnel to the NATO-led Operation Kosovo Force (KFOR), which makes it the largest non-NATO troop contributor. Since October 4, Brigadier Reinhard Ruckenstuhl has held the position of Deputy Commander. In addition, Austria provided several law enforcement officers to the EU Rule of Law Mission EULEX Kosovo, which assists the Kosovar institutions in establishing a functioning legal, police, customs and judicial system.

Relations between Austria and Kosovo were characterised by an active exchange of visits and a number of meetings held on the margins of international events. Kosovo is a priority country of Austrian Development Cooperation. Austria is among the five most important investors in Kosovo.

**Macedonia**

The most significant foreign policy development was the agreement on the name dispute with Greece. After lengthy negotiations, an agreement was signed on 17 June, and ratified by the Macedonian Parliament on 5 July. Following a consultative referendum, parliament initiated the process for the necessary constitutional amendments in autumn. Under the agreement and upon its entry into force, which requires successful completion of the constitutional amendments and subsequent ratification by Greece, the country’s name will be Republic of Northern Macedonia.

As a direct consequence of the signing of the agreement, Greece lifted its blockade on further steps towards Macedonia’s integration into the EU and NATO. Subsequently, Macedonia was invited to start accession negotiations with NATO.

The government also continued its efforts towards implementing important reforms and in November adopted Plan 18, which seeks to ensure that sufficient progress to enable the start of EU accession negotiations is made by June 2019. Macedonia remained an important partner in the context of the closing of the Western Balkans route aimed at managing the refugee and migration movements. Since February 2016, Austria has assisted the country in the relevant efforts by providing a contingent of Austrian law enforcement officers based in Gevgelija. Relations between Austria and Macedonia were characterised by an active exchange of visits and a number of meetings held on the margins of international events. Austria is the largest foreign investor in Macedonia.
Montenegro

Montenegro continued on the reform path necessary for its rapprochement with the EU. Of crucial importance in this context is progress in implementing reforms in the rule of law sector, particularly with respect to freedom of the media. The country has played a constructive role in the fields of neighbourhood policy and regional cooperation. On 15 April, Milo Đukanović was elected new President. In the course of the year, most of the opposition MPs returned temporarily to parliament, which they had boycotted following the parliamentary elections on 16 October 2016 and subsequent rumours of an attempted coup. At the end of October, an interim parliamentary committee was set up to implement the necessary reform of the electoral law. The success of the committee’s work, however, depends on the opposition’s participation, which has not yet been secured. First instance proceedings aimed at clarifying the exact background and details of the attempted coup are to be completed in 2019.

Relations between Austria and Montenegro were characterised by an active exchange of visits and a number of meetings held on the margins of international events. Austria is among the five largest investors in Montenegro.

Serbia

Serbia continued its reform efforts, which are crucial for the country’s EU ambitions. In this context, a particular focus was placed on judicial reform as well as on the independence of judges and public prosecutors. At the beginning of the year, the Ministry of Justice presented a corresponding draft amendment to the constitution, which was examined by the Venice Commission and discussed with civil society. After this process had been completed, a revised draft was submitted to Parliament towards the end of the year. Another focus of attention was the situation of the media in Serbia, and in particular Serbia’s efforts towards developing a new media strategy in close co-operation with the OSCE Mission. These activities will be continued in 2019.

Relations with Kosovo remained difficult. The “internal dialogue” launched by President Vučić in 2017 did not contribute towards a solution between Belgrade and Pristina, neither at domestic nor at the government level. Serbia remained an important partner in managing refugee and migration movements.

Relations between Austria and Serbia were characterised by an exchange of high-level visits, especially in the context of Austria’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and a number of meetings held on the margins of international events. Austria is the second largest foreign investor in Serbia.

1.1.4. Cyprus

By adopting resolutions 2398 (2018) on 30 January and 2430 (2018) on 22 July, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) for half a year each, after holding non-public sessions with the troop-contributing
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Tensions with Turkey arose in the context of the planned gas exploration in the Exclusive Economic Zone in the southwestern part of the island, which is claimed by Cyprus. In February, ships belonging to the Turkish navy prevented a drilling ship from reaching the exploration area. On 22 March, the European Council urgently called on Turkey to respect the sovereign rights of Cyprus to explore and exploit its natural resources, in accordance with EU and international law.

After reunification talks had failed in July 2017 and following intensive UN mediation, the two ethnic leaders Nicos Anastasiades and Mustafa Akıncı met for the first time on 16 April. In July, UNSG António Guterres appointed Jane Holl Lute (USA) as his provisional Special Envoy. On the basis of consultations conducted with both ethnic group leaders, the guarantor powers Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom, as well as with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, the UNSG reported to the UNSC on 15 October that the number of confidence-building measures was scant and that popular opinion in both communities reflected either apathy and discouragement with respect to a return to talks. On 26 October, the two ethnic group leaders decided that two further crossings in the West and East of Cyprus would be opened on 12 November. They furthermore agreed to work out reference conditions for the resumption of talks. With a view to assisting in their preparation, Holl Lute returned for talks to Cyprus on 31 October and 17 December.

1.1.5. Turkey

With the presidential and parliamentary elections brought forward from November 2019 to 24 June 2018, the presidential constitution, adopted by referendum in 2016, fully entered into force. For the first time, parties seeking to run in elections were able to form electoral alliances, thus circumventing the ten percent hurdle for representation in parliament. After President Erdoğan and the leader of the nationalist MHP, Devlet Bahçeli, had agreed to form an alliance (“People’s Alliance”), the opposition also entered into an electoral alliance (“Nation Alliance”), consisting of the Kemalist Social Democratic CHP, the newly founded, civic-nationalist İYİ party and the Islamist Saadet Party. The leftist pro-Kurdish party HDP remained excluded from both alliances. The nationalist MHP supported Erdoğan’s re-election, while the parties of the opposition alliance each campaigned with their own presidential candidates. The leading opposition party CHP did not participate in the presidential campaign with its chairman Kılıçdaroğlu, instead putting forward Muharrem Ince as its presidential candidate.

In contrast to the run-off election expected by observers, Erdoğan prevailed in the first round of voting. Thanks to the MHP’s assistance, the People’s Alliance was also able to secure a majority in parliament. The HDP achieved 11.62%.

The state of emergency, imposed following the attempted coup on 15 July 2016, expired on 19 July. However, many of the special powers granted to the executive branch in this
connection were transferred by decree to the permanent body of law. The judicial sys-
tem, in particular, continued to be severely impacted by suspensions, dismissals and
arrests (approx. 4,000 of the 13,500 judges and public prosecutors). According to the
EU Progress Report, a total of approximately 235,000 persons were in prison. In 2007,
this figure stood at 91,000.

Implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016 and the associated Joint
Action Plan to curb irregular migration was continued by both sides. Within the frame-
work of this agreement, some 2,000 individuals were returned from Greece to Turkey
by December, of which 350 were of Syrian origin. Of the refugees living in Turkey some
18,600 Syrians were resettled in 18 EU Member States. The average number of new
arrivals in Greece amounted to 131 individuals per day. In order to support the almost
3.6 million Syrian refugees taken in by Turkey, the EU had paid out 1.94 billion euros
under the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey to fund humanitarian aid and projects in
fields such as medical care and education for refugee children.

While the economy had still recorded a GDP growth of 7.4 % in 2017, it slowed down
dramatically this year. The imbalances in the Turkish economy, caused in part by strong
but unbalanced growth (especially current account deficit and inflation), led to a two-
stage increase in the key interest rate to 24 %. This step had become inevitable after the
lira exchange rate, which had come under heavy pressure, had reached historic lows in
the summer. In the light of Turkey’s considerable dependence on imports in many
areas, this increase gave an additional boost to inflation, which reached 24.5 % in Sep-
ember.

Foreign policy continued to be marked by tensions in Turkey’s relations with the USA,
efforts to improve relations with the EU and individual EU Member States (the Nether-
lands, Germany), as well as further intensification of relations with Russia, especially
with regard to Syria. Turkey contributed pro-actively to the political process aimed at
settling the Syrian crisis and remained committed to the Astana Process as one of three
guarantor powers. Together with the Free Syrian Army, Turkey launched another opera-
tion (Operation Olive Branch) in the Afrin region in January. On 18 March, the city of
Afrin was captured.

The Federal Government’s continued call for the termination of EU accession negotia-
tions and the related passage in the government programme was met with criticism
from Turkish politicians. In the context of the visit Federal Minister Karin Kneissl paid to
Istanbul on 25 January, it was announced that permits for archaeological excavations
had again been granted to the Austrian Archaeological Institute. Austrian archaeolo-
gists were able to return and have been on site since the end of July. Within NATO/PfP,
Turkey continues to block cooperation with Austria. At the same time, Turkey empha-
sises its interest in improving relations, seeking to continue the exchange of visits and
to reactivate bilateral mechanisms. At senior officials’ level a number of bilateral con-
sultations took place.
1.1.6. The EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood

1.1.6.1. Russia

Already strained by the still unresolved crisis in Ukraine, Russia’s relations with the EU, the USA, other Western states and NATO, suffered a further serious setback this year as a result of the nerve agent attack in Salisbury, the cyberattacks inter alia in Switzerland and on the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague as well as the forced stop and seizure of Ukrainian ships and detention of their crews in the Black Sea on 25 November. In contrast, Russia’s relations with Turkey continued to ease. Through its military intervention and diplomatic activities, Russia was able to contribute to the survival of the Assad regime. It was also able to retain its military bases in Syria, thereby consolidating its position in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

The EU sanctions imposed against Russia in 2014 in response to the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, which constitutes a violation of international law, and the conflict in eastern Ukraine were extended. Likewise, the countermeasures imposed by Russia remain in force. Russia plays a key role in the conflict, which is mainly attributable to massive presence of armed forces and its influence on armed formations in eastern Ukraine. Despite extensive international efforts, implementation of the Minsk Agreements has been very slow. Since the opening on 15 May of the bridge over the Kerch Strait, built illegally by Russia, tensions in and around the Sea of Azov increased, leading to a dangerous military escalation between Russia and Ukraine in the Black Sea on 25 November.

Formal summit meetings, negotiations on a new EU-Russia Framework Agreement, and the visa dialogue remain suspended. Since March 2016, EU-Russia relations have been based on the following five guiding principles: implementation of the Minsk Agreements to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine; strengthening relations with the eastern partner countries and other neighbours, including in Central Asia; strengthening EU resilience; selective engagement with Russia on certain issues such as counter-terrorism; and increased support for Russian civil society and people-to-people contacts, especially with a view to the next generation. Within the EU, Austria advocated for a continuation of the dialogue with Russia and thus welcomed the three meetings held this year between the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

As a result of the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, the Russian delegation’s voting rights in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) were suspended in 2014/2015. Thereafter, Russia made no attempts to accredit a delegation of parliamentarians. Since then, the question of whether and when the Russian parliamentary delegation will return to the PACE has remained unresolved. Russia threatens to cease recognition of the legitimacy of PACE decisions, including electoral processes, in which the Russian delegation was unable to participate. These developments have led to Russia suggesting a possible withdrawal from the Council of Europe.

Relations between Russia and the USA have hit an all-time low. Even the summit meeting between President Vladimir Putin and President Donald Trump in Helsinki on 16
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July could not remedy the current status-quo. On 20 October, US President Trump announced his country’s withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty if Russia did not destroy its 9M729 missiles, which the USA considers to violate the treaty. Differences of opinion between Russia and the US over Syria, Ukraine and Iran remained, in which context Russia (like the EU) expressed its regret over the US’ withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

In view of the disputes with the US and the EU, Russia is increasingly looking to the East. Relations with China and Japan are better than ever. Moscow sees the Chinese “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) Initiative as a potential stimulus for the further economic development of the Eurasian region. Within the context of the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia is trying to promote economic links with Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

In the presidential election on 18 March, President Vladimir Putin won more than three-quarters of the votes. Considering a turnout of around two-thirds, more than half of the electorate supported another, fourth term until 2024. The other seven candidates who competed against Putin for the presidential office did not have a chance; the anti-corruption activist Alexey Navalny had already been excluded in the lead-up to the elections as a result of legal allegations. The OSCE’s ODIHR election observation mission stated that the election was conducted in an orderly manner despite certain irregularities relating to vote secrecy and procedural shortcomings that reduced transparency of vote counting, but also noted a lack of genuine competition among the contestants. The domestic political situation remained largely stable. However, the increase in the retirement age, which came into force on 1 September, triggered nationwide protests and a temporary drop in President Putin’s approval ratings.

The human rights situation in Russia remains a matter of concern. In the lead-up to the presidential elections of 18 March, freedom of opinion, assembly, religion, the media and information were further restricted. The head of the human rights organisation “Memorial” in Chechnya, Oyub Titiyev, has been in custody since 22 March on the grounds of alleged drug possession.

Despite measures aimed at implementing socio-economic improvements, the situation in northern Caucasus remained instable. The return of Russian fighters who had previously left for Syria or Iraq as well as the terrorist activities of militant extremists in northern Caucasus, who have pledged their loyalty to IS, pose a risk to security.

In the context of the working visit President Vladimir Putin paid to Vienna (5 June), green light was given to launching the Sochi Dialogue, aimed at strengthening civil society exchange. The high-level working visits paid to Russia included Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz’s trip to Moscow (28 February) and to St. Petersburg (3 October), that of Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache to Moscow (14 June), of Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl to Moscow (20 June), of Federal Minister Margarete Schramböck to St. Petersburg (24 May), of Federal Minister Herbert Kickl to Moscow (30 October) and of the President of the National Council, Wolfgang Sobotka, to Moscow (4-6 December).
1.1.6.2. Eastern Partnership States

The focus of activities in the context of the EU’s Eastern Partnership (EaP), the EU cooperation and support framework for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, was on implementing the joint declaration adopted at the Brussels Summit of 24 November 2017, in particular the “20 Deliverables for 2020” work programme, and the EaP’s new structure.

Armenia

After a far-reaching constitutional amendment to enable the change from a semi-presidential system to a parliamentary republic, outgoing President Serzh Sargsyan had himself elected Prime Minister by Parliament on 17 April. This triggered an unprecedented protest movement (“Velvet Revolution”) led by opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan. In the face of mounting public pressure, President Serzh Sargsyan had to announce his resignation on 23 April. On 8 May, opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan was elected as the new Prime Minister by Parliament. Some members of his new government had already belonged to previous cabinets.

Buoyed up by high hopes and popularity, the Prime Minister’s electoral bloc scored a resounding success in the mayoral elections in Yerevan on 23 September. In a tactical move, Nikol Pashinyan resigned on 16 October, forcing early parliamentary elections on 9 December. In these elections Pashinyan’s electoral alliance won a two-thirds majority, the Republicans – who had previously enjoyed an absolute majority – are no longer represented in parliament. The new government, which is now democratically legitimised, faces major challenges, including a sluggish economy, emigration and partial isolation in the region as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Especially with a view to economic development, the Armenian government places high hopes in the implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed with the EU at the end of 2017. Since 1 June, the agreement has been applied on a provisional basis and by the end of the year, it was ratified by Armenia and seven EU partners. Ratification by Austria has already been initiated. Armenia is a committed member of the Eastern Partnership and is also a priority country of Austrian development cooperation. Overall, bilateral relations between Austria and Armenia are very good. At the economic level, however, they are subject to major fluctuations and there is potential for improvement.

At the political and economic levels, the new, tougher sanctions imposed by the USA against Iran also hit Armenia very hard, as the country has traditionally close relations with Iran, with whom it shares the only open border (apart from Georgia). Great expectations were thus placed in the Free Economic Zone in Meghri, which is located on Iran’s border and was officially opened only in December 2017.

Historically, Armenia has always been at the dividing line between major spheres of interest. This is still true today. The challenge is to manage the balancing act between these – to some extent – very divergent spheres and to achieve a tangible improvement in people’s living conditions.
Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is striving for a balanced relationship with Russia, Iran and Turkey, while at the same time pursuing a moderate course of rapprochement with European structures. Since 2009, Azerbaijan has taken part in the Eastern Partnership. It does, however, not seek to conclude an Association Agreement but rather a comprehensive Strategic Agreement that would not prejudice its balanced foreign policy towards other partners. Negotiations on a new agreement that is to replace the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement of 1999 were started in February 2017. Likewise in 2017, negotiations on an air transport agreement were launched. Both negotiations are expected to be concluded in 2019. On 28 September, the EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council adopted the Partnership Priorities.

Azerbaijan seeks to counteract the impacts of the long-standing economic and investment crisis and the associated erosion of its currency by attempting to diversify its economy. The country is trying to position itself as a central transport hub on the international north-south and east-west axes along the new Silk Road, for instance by building the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars rail link, which was opened on 30 October 2017.

Although several human rights activists had been released, the human rights situation has remained problematic, especially in the areas of democracy, freedom of assembly and freedom of the press. Since 2013, the most prominent political prisoner was the opposition politician Ilgar Mammadov. Azerbaijan had for a long time refused to implement the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights, which prompted the Council of Europe for the first time ever to initiate a special procedure for the execution of the judgement. After five years of imprisonment, opposition politician Ilgar Mammadov was finally released in August, however only conditionally.

The efforts undertaken over many years by the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group in order to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have not translated into decisive progress. Most recently, however, several personal meetings between the Azerbaijani President and the new Armenian Prime Minister held on the margins of international events and meetings of the two countries’ foreign ministers have led to more restraint in terms of rhetoric and to a noticeable reduction in ceasefire violations.

Russia has continued its efforts to persuade Azerbaijan – an important country due to its geographical location and rich natural resources – to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). As of now, Azerbaijan has, however, shown little interest in this respect. Furthermore, the hostile relations between Azerbaijan and EAEU member Armenia stemming from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict may represent an insurmountable obstacle. Turkey is seen as a “brother state”. The motto “one nation, two states” continues to apply and historically Turkey is seen by Azerbaijan as a “geopolitical reassurance” vis-à-vis its immediate neighbourhood.

Azerbaijan seeks to maintain best possible relations and economic cooperation with Iran. This also with a view to the large Azerbaijani community in Iran as well as the exclave of Nakhichevan, which is best reached by land via Iran and also receives it supplies via Iran.
Belarus

President Alexander Lukashenko’s criticism of the government, particularly with regard to regional economic development, was followed by a comprehensive government reshuffle in August. President Lukashenko dismissed almost the entire government and declared that the new government was guided by the principles of “discipline, decency and unity”. Sergei Rumas, until then head of the Development Bank, was appointed as the new Prime Minister.

Likewise in August, over a dozen Belarusian journalists working for independent media were arrested in an unexpected move. Homes and offices were subsequently searched and technical equipment and data confiscated. Those affected were accused of infringing the copyrights of the state news agency “BelTA” and charges were brought against 15 persons. According to the Belarusian Association of Journalists, in over 90 cases journalists were convicted of administrative offences.

The most important event at bilateral level was the visit paid by Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen to Minsk, including his participation – together with former Federal President Heinz Fischer and Margit Fischer – in the opening of the second construction stage of the national memorial Maly Trostenets on 29 June. The joint commemorative event, attended by Belarusian host Alexander Lukashenko, German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and other official representatives, was dedicated to the victims of National Socialist mass executions that took place in this extermination camp. During the visit, there was a symbolic tree planting at the site where the Austrian memorial, whose inauguration is envisaged for 2019, will be erected.

At European level, Belarus showed increased interest in relations with the EU and in the Eastern Partnership. The fifth meeting of the EU-Belarus Coordination Group was held in Minsk from 26-27 April, and the sixth meeting in Brussels from 12-13 December. Although negotiations between the EU and Belarus on a visa facilitation agreement and a readmission agreement as well as on EU-Belarus Partnership Priorities were constructive and progressed quite far, it has not yet been possible to conclude these negotiations due to various national interests.

The few EU sanctions still in force since February 2016 – an embargo on arms and equipment that may be used for internal repression, as well as asset freezes and travel bans against four individuals involved in the disappearance of four opposition politicians in the years 1999-2000 – were extended by twelve months in February.

The overall human rights situation has not improved. The fact that the death penalty is still being imposed and executed remains particularly problematic. Two death sentences were passed in January, there were two secret executions in May and two further executions in November. As in previous years, Austria has in all political contacts with Belarus called for the abolition of the death penalty as well as a moratorium on executions as an initial step. The latest EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue took place in Brussels on 17 July, the next one is scheduled for June 2019 in Minsk.
**Georgia**

On 23 March, the Georgian Parliament adopted a new constitution, which entered into force after the presidential elections in autumn. The new constitution also provides for the introduction of proportional representation, which will be applied for the first time in the 2024 parliamentary elections.

In May, the party founder, businessman and former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili took over the chair of the governing party “Georgian Dream”. Following the resignation of Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili on 13 June, Minister of Finance Mamuka Bakhtadze took over. The new government was sworn in on 14 July. David Zalkaliani was appointed new Foreign Minister. The new government programme 2018-2020 places a key focus on inclusive economic growth.

Direct presidential elections were held in autumn. Salome Zurabishvili, formally independent but supported by the governing party, emerged as the winner in the second round. Although the election itself can, albeit with certain reservations, be described as free and fair, the campaign in the lead-up to the election failed to live up to these principles, as it was characterized by massive polarization on both sides.

At foreign policy level, the new government continued on the path towards European integration. Of particular symbolic importance was the first high-level meeting between the College of the European Commission and the Georgian Government in Brussels on 21 November at which participants agreed to intensify relations in a range of areas (economy, connectivity, trade, education, research, culture and justice).

Georgia also commemorated two events: at the end of May, the 100th anniversary of its independence, at the beginning of August, the 10th anniversary of the outbreak of conflict in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

**Republic of Moldova**

The government reshuffle announced in 2017 was effected at the very beginning of the year. Tudor Ulianovschi was appointed new Foreign Minister and Cristina Lesnic became the new Special Representative for the Settlement of the Transnistrian Conflict.

At the end of February, the Council of the EU adopted conclusions on the Republic of Moldova, which inter alia commended the country on the reforms achieved, particularly in the economic sector, and on the new anti-corruption legislation, while at the same time underlining the need to continue on this path.

A key event was the judicial annulment by three instances of national courts of the mayoral elections in Chișinău, which had been assessed as free and fair by international observers and were won by the representative of the extra-parliamentary opposition Andrei Năstase. The general deterioration in terms of rule of law and the government’s lack of willingness to reform led to the freezing of EU macro-financial assistance to Moldova and the cancellation of high-level visits, including the visit to Moldova by Federal Minister Karin Kneissl scheduled for July.

In response to the annulment of the mayoral elections, the opposition organised protests culminating in a large protest rally on 26 August in Chișinău, when thousands took
to the streets. The parliamentary elections, originally planned for autumn, were postponed until 24 February 2019.

Regarding the Transnistrian Settlement Process, the Italian OSCE Chairmanship built on the breakthrough achieved in 2017 during the Austrian Chairmanship, and further elements of the “Package of Eight” were implemented, which translated into tangible improvements in the affected population’s everyday life.

Ukraine

The ongoing, sometimes stalled, reform process along with the implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, which fully entered into force on 1 September 2017, and the crisis in and around Ukraine, which has been ongoing for almost five years now, were the key issues at domestic policy level and also dominated the country’s relations with the EU.

Compared to the previous years, domestic policy was marked by a certain degree of stabilisation, the positive impact of which could mainly be felt at economic level. Compared to 2017, the Ukrainian GDP grew by 3.3 %, thus producing the highest growth rate in seven years.

After impressive initial successes, the country did not succeed in fully tapping into its reform potential. The most visible progress so far was achieved in the field of public procurement, in the energy sector, through the creation of some new anti-corruption institutions and in the decentralisation process. The country also made progress in reforming its pension, healthcare and educational systems.

Little progress was, however, achieved in reforming the civil service, administrative and land reform, and especially in effectively fighting corruption. On 14 June, the law on the establishment of an anti-corruption court entered into effect. A transparent and credible selection process for the judges active in the new court remains essential and is ongoing. The court is expected to become operational in spring 2019.

In November, the Ukrainian parliament adopted a constitutional reform at first reading, which is to enshrine accession to both the EU and NATO as national strategic goals for Ukraine.

The 20th EU-Ukraine Summit was held in Brussels on 9 July and the fifth EU-Ukraine Association Council met in Brussels on 17 December. For the period 2014-2020, the EU earmarked a total of 13.8 billion euros to support reforms in Ukraine. Under macro-financial assistance programmes, 2.81 billion euros have been disbursed to Ukraine since 2014. However, after Ukraine failed to meet some of the conditions agreed with the EU, including the lifting of the ban on the export of round wood, the third Macro-Financial Assistance programme (MFA III) was suspended and its third and final tranche of 600 million euros was not disbursed. In July, a new MFA under which up to 1 billion euros is available to Ukraine was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. On 30 November, the European Commission decided to disburse the first tranche of 500 million to Ukraine under the new MFA.
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The Support Group for Ukraine (SGUA), set up in 2014, and the EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform Ukraine (EUAM) play an equally important role in the EU’s relations with Ukraine. The EUAM, whose mandate currently runs until 31 May 2019, is an unarmed civilian non-executive mission, based principally in Kyiv with regional presences in Lviv, Kharkiv and Odessa. The main pillars of the EUAM’s activity are providing assistance in the implementation of constitutional reform, police reform, judicial reform, decentralisation and the fight against corruption.

In October, the Ukrainian parliament dealt with a new language law in a first reading. Under this law, Ukrainian would be the only official language of Ukraine. This means that every Ukrainian should be able to speak it and it would be the only official language used in the exercise of power by all public authorities. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) took a critical view of the law, raising concerns regarding its compatibility with international human rights standards.

The conflict in the east of the country, which has been going on for almost five years, has already claimed some 13,000 lives and left approximately 30,000 people injured. Some 1.5 million people have been internally displaced and 3.5 million are in need of humanitarian aid. In the light of these developments, the OSCE and the EU continued their efforts towards defusing the situation and resolving the conflict.

At an Orthodox synod, held in Istanbul on 11 October, the Ecumenical Patriarchate agreed to the establishment of an autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox National Church. The new Ukrainian Church is to be independent of Moscow and open to all followers of the Ukrainian Orthodox religion. However, the relationship with the former Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate remained marked by certain tensions. At a unification synod held in Kyiv on 15 December, the Metropolitan of Pereyaslavl, Epiphanius, was appointed head of the new independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The tomos (decree of independence) will be handed over to Metropolitan Epiphanius and President Petro Poroshenko in January 2019.

Domestic policy discourse was increasingly dominated by the campaigns for the presidential elections scheduled for 31 March 2019 (second round on 21 April 2019) and the parliamentary elections scheduled for 27 October 2019.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko attended the Vienna Opera Ball on 9 February and met Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen and Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. Accompanied by Federal Minister Karin Kneissl and a large business, cultural and scientific delegation, Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen paid a state visit to Kyiv and Lviv from 13-15 March, during which he met, among others, President Petro Poroshenko and Prime Minister Volodymyr Hroysman. From 3-4 September, Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz visited Kyiv, where he held talks with President Petro Poroshenko and Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin. On 21 November, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin attended the Vienna conference on antisemitism and anti-zionism and met with Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Cardinal Christoph Schönborn.
1.1.6.3. Central Asia

In Central Asia, Uzbekistan demonstrated the most impressive developments. The country’s further opening and its ambitious reform programme added new momentum and contributed substantially to promoting the trend towards increased regional cooperation in Central Asia. On 15 March, the five Central Asian states met in Astana for their first summit meeting since 2009. In the course of the year, the Central Asian states were able to make progress on a number of bilateral and regional issues, including border demarcation and regional water management. Trade barriers, for instance, were dismantled and intra-regional trade was increased, transport links were improved and/or re-opened and the movement of persons was facilitated, e.g. by introducing visa-free travel between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Projects within the framework of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative also opened up opportunities for the development of regional infrastructure. While China continued to expand its economic influence in Central Asia, Russia remained the dominant security policy partner, enjoying considerable “soft power” due to the proliferation of Russian media services in Central Asia and the approximately four million Central Asian migrant workers in Russia.

With a new Central Asia Strategy to be completed by May 2019, the EU intends to support the reform efforts of its Central Asian partners and the increased interest in regional cooperation. As part of a comprehensive consultation process, the EU organised several workshops and seminars in cooperation with Central Asian partner countries. These events, which also involved civil society representatives, contributed to preparing the new EU Central Asia Strategy. As Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria participated pro-actively in the consultation process, organising a conference on the role and development of the private sector (Brussels, 18 September). The EU also started negotiations on new Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. On 23 November, the 14th EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting involving all five Central Asian foreign ministers was held in Brussels. Roman Haider, Member of the National Council, was appointed Special Representative of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on Central Asia on 11 October.

Until the end of the year, Kazakhstan was the first Central Asian country to be represented in the UN Security Council. By organising the conference “Empowering Women in Afghanistan” in Astana on 5 September, it drew special attention to topics relating to Afghanistan and addressed the topic of regional cooperation in Central Asia for the first time ever. As part of the events to celebrate Astana’s 20th anniversary, an international financial centre was opened on 5 July. Austria contributed to the anniversary celebrations by organising a “Kazakhstan-Austria Forum of Regions” event in Astana on 25 and 26 June. On 6 December, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl met Kazakh Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov for bilateral talks on the margins of the OSCE Council of Ministers in Milan. Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz met Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev on the margins of the ASEM Summit in Brussels (18 and 19 October). At domestic policy level, the Kazakh leadership placed a special focus on social policy issues.

In March, President Nazarbayev announced tax cuts for lower income groups, subsidised housing loans for home purchases and an expansion of scholarship programmes.
Subsequently, in October, minimum wage increases and higher spending on education, research and health (by 10 % of the GDP within five years) were announced. Economic growth stood at 4%.

In Kyrgyzstan, tensions between President Sooronbai Cheenbekov and his predecessor in office, Almasbek Atambayev, the leader of the governing party, dominated domestic policy and led to a number of government reshuffles. On 20 April, President Cheenbekov appointed Mukhammedkalyi Abylgaziev as the new Prime Minister. His predecessor, Sapar Isakov, was arrested on corruption charges a few weeks after his dismissal. On 17 October, Chyngyz Aidarbekov was appointed new foreign minister. On 6 December, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl met her new counterpart for bilateral talks on the margins of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Milan. The EU, one of the country’s largest foreign donors, launched negotiations on a new Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Kyrgyzstan. In the context of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the 16th EU Cooperation Council meeting with Kyrgyzstan was held in Brussels on 10 December, co-chaired by Federal Minister Karin Kneissl and her Kyrgyz counterpart Chyngyz Aidarbekov. Kyrgyzstan hosted the 17th Autumn Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (Bishkek, 3-6 October), which was also attended by a delegation of Austrian MPs.

According to official figures, the Kyrgyz economy grew by 3.5 %.

In Tajikistan, the first visit by an Uzbek head of state in 18 years on 9 March marked a symbolic highlight in the rapprochement process between the two countries. The new quality of Tajik-Uzbek relations was also reflected in the approach towards the Rogun hydropower plant, whose first turbine was inaugurated and went into operation – without Uzbek objections – on 16 November. During President Islom Karimov’s term in office, Uzbekistan had protested vehemently against Rogun, the largest hydropower plant project in Central Asia. Tajikistan also played a proactive role at international level, placing a special focus on water issues and hosting the international conference “Water for Sustainable Development” from 20 to 23 June. International human rights reports on Tajikistan were critical. During the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the 7th EU Cooperation Council meeting with Tajikistan took place in Brussels on 22 November, co-chaired by Federal Minister Karin Kneissl and her Tajik counterpart Sirojiddin Muchriddin. On the margins of the Cooperation Council, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl also met Foreign Minister Sirojiddin Muchriddin for a bilateral exchange of views. On 30 July, a terrorist attack was committed on the Pamir Highway south of the capital Dushanbe. The IS claimed responsibility for the attack, in which four foreign bicycle tourists were killed and another three injured.

The Tajik economy continued to face major structural challenges, especially in the banking sector and in state-owned enterprises. At the end of the year, international donor organisations linked their budget support to an agreement between the Tajik government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

According to official figures, economic growth in Turkmenistan reached 6.2 %. Unofficial sources, however, reported budget bottlenecks, high unemployment rates, supply problems and foreign currency shortages. In October, the hitherto free provision of the
basic supply of inter alia natural gas, electricity and water to the population, was suspended. The Turkmen government increasingly focused on measures aimed at import substitution and export diversification (e.g. the TAPI gas pipeline project). According to Chinese statistics, gas exports to China, by far the most important export market for Turkmen gas, rose by around 25%. There were indications that Russia (Gazprom) could resume buying natural gas from Turkmenistan in 2019. Under the heading of “Turkmenistan – The Heart of the Great Silk Road”, an investment forum was held in Vienna from 5 to 6 September involving more than 100 Turkmen business representatives, who had specifically travelled to the Austrian capital for the event. On 2 July, the Deputy Foreign Minister and son of the Turkmen President Serdar Berdimukhammedov met Secretary-General Johannes Peterlik for bilateral talks in Vienna. The EU decided to upgrade the existing EU Liaison Office in Ashgabat and to establish a fully-fledged EU delegation there in 2019. Internationally, Turkmenistan, as chair of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS), hosted a summit meeting of the five Central Asian heads of state on 24 August.

In Uzbekistan the top item on the domestic policy agenda was the implementation of the ambitious programme aimed at political, economic and administrative reform. At foreign policy level, the focus was placed on Afghanistan, relations with its Central Asian neighbours, and attracting foreign investment. Uzbekistan sought to pro-actively contribute to the peace process in Afghanistan, especially through infrastructure projects (railways, power supply), and by offering its mediation services, for instance by organising an Afghanistan conference on 26 and 27 March in Tashkent. With regard to powerful international players, Uzbekistan has been striving for balanced relations. In the context of the visit President Shavkat Mirsijoev paid to China on 14 and 15 May, investment contracts worth almost 20 billion euros were signed. One of the highlights of the state visit Russian President Putin paid to the country on 19 October was the signing of business contracts worth around 25 billion euros, a large part of which related to the military sector. During President Mirsijojev’s visit to Washington on 16 May, agreements totalling some 4.5 billion euros were signed. The EU further increased its activities in Uzbekistan. On 23 November the EU and Uzbekistan launched negotiations for a new, enhanced partnership agreement. On 22 November, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl and her Uzbek counterpart Abdulaziz Kamilov co-chaired the 14th EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council, on the margins of which the two foreign ministers also held their first bilateral meeting. An expression of the enhanced relations between Austria and Uzbekistan was also the fact that the two countries raised each other’s diplomatic representation to ambassadorial level. Uzbekistan continued its reforms in the human rights fields and organised an Asian human rights forum in Samarkand on 22 and 23 November, celebrating the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the end of the year, Uzbekistan abolished the visa requirement for travel outside the CIS.
1.1.7. The EU’s Southern Neighbourhood

The EU’s southern neighbourhood comprises the ten partner countries Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia. The European Southern Neighbourhood Policy provides a framework for bilateral political relations with these countries (although most EU Member States do not recognise Palestine bilaterally as a state and cooperation with Syria is currently suspended). Regional cooperation is supplemented and deepened by multilateral institutions such as the Union for the Mediterranean, which consists of all EU Member States and all Mediterranean countries.

1.1.7.1. North Africa (Maghreb)

In the presidential elections in Egypt in March, President Abdel-Fatah Al-Sisi was confirmed in office winning 97% of the valid votes with a turnout of 41%. The only opponent was the leader of the Ghad party, Moussa Moussa, who was considered close to Al-Sisi. One candidate was not admitted and several others withdrew their candidacies. On 2 June, Al-Sisi was sworn in for a second term in office.

The Egyptian government continued its IMF-supported reform program. Stronger economic growth and social measures adopted by the government were, however, only partially able to mitigate the effects of economic difficulties experienced by large parts of the population due to subsidy reductions and price increases.

Against the background of the fight against terrorism, involving tighter legislation and the declaration of a state of emergency, the human rights situation remained tense. Austria raised the issue of human rights in bilateral contacts at all levels – including during the visit President Al-Sisi paid to Chancellor Sebastian Kurz on 17 December. Besides, the visit also contributed to deepening bilateral relations, involving the signing of nine treaties and agreements. Together with the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz travelled to Cairo on 16 September, where they met President Al-Sisi for a preparatory meeting ahead of the informal summit of EU Heads of State and Government in Salzburg. President Al-Sisi attended the High-Level Forum Africa-EU in Vienna on 18 December and met Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen and the President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka. On the margins of the visit, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl met her Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry, who had previously paid a bilateral visit to Austria in July.

At foreign policy level, the Al-Sisi government sought to mediate behind the scenes in order to defuse tensions. Egypt’s relationship with Ethiopia and Sudan was marked by efforts aimed at negotiating and reaching compromises, as their relations have been strained for years due to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project. Egypt also acted as mediator between Israel and Hamas, seeking to ease the situation at the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip where clashes had been ongoing since March, and was indeed able to achieve an informal ceasefire in mid-November. Egypt also continued to contribute pro-actively to the inter-Palestinian reconciliation talks.
A number of meetings in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the EU-Egypt Association Council on 20 December contributed to fostering Egypt’s relations with the EU. The number of refugees registered with the UNHCR in Egypt rose to around 245,000 individuals, of which some 54 % were Syrian nationals. Egypt thus continued to host one of the largest registered refugee populations worldwide in urban areas.

In Algeria, a very relevant question at domestic policy level was a potential generational change at the head of state level. By the end of the year President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who has been in power since 1999 and is in poor health, had not yet decided whether he would stand for another – fifth – term in the presidential elections in April 2019. As the relevant political players in the country have so far not been able to agree on a new presidential candidate, it is, however, highly likely that Bouteflika may stand again. The related discussions have further contributed to increasing the population’s longstanding weariness with politics.

Due to stagnating foreign exchange revenue from oil and natural gas, which account for more than 95 % of exports and around 60 % of total government revenue, Algeria has come under pressure to step up its efforts to diversify its economy. State-owned enterprises and subsidies continue to dominate the Algerian economic model, and economic growth is not of a level that would enable absorbing the large number of young people pouring onto the labour market. Further structural reform of both the economic and the administrative system is thus urgently necessary, especially since the country’s reserves, used to offset the balance of trade and budget deficits, will – depending on oil prices – be used up in a few years’ time. Algeria is the second most important market in Africa for the Austrian economy. Austrian exports stood at around 300 million euros. Numerous Austrian companies maintain good business relations with Algeria.

Algeria is increasingly becoming a target destination for migrants from the Sahel region and regions further south, but also remains a country of origin and transit. Algeria reacted to the shift of migration routes to the west of the Mediterranean by tightening its national border controls and its removal practices. Algeria, like other Maghreb countries, is against the establishment of return centres for third-country nationals.

Libya again faced many challenges. The UN peace process, led by Special Representative of the UNSG Ghassan Salamé, and the international Libya conferences in Paris and Palermo facilitated a rapprochement of the main parties to the conflict – the action plan prepared by UNSMIL (United Nations Support Mission in Libya) was updated. The internationally recognised provisional “Government of National Accord” remained in office for the time being.

However, terrorist attacks and armed conflicts in Tripoli and the rest of the country repeatedly hampered progress in the political process. Work on a new constitution, parliamentary and presidential elections and the holding of a national conference remained unfinished and will continue. Despite consolidation efforts, the country remained fragmented.

June and December saw violent conflicts over Libya’s oil infrastructure in the geopolitically important Oil Crescent and in the south of the country. Libya’s dependence on oil
revenues again became apparent. In August and September, armed power struggles between rival militias, which had temporarily been ended by an armistice, again flared up in the capital.

Despite this difficult environment, UNSMIL made a significant contribution to stabilising the country. Against the background of the precarious migrant situation, the joint Task Force established by the African Union, the EU and the UN in 2017, seeks to provide an impetus to addressing the related problems. However, according to documentation put together by international organisations and institutions, the human rights situation in Libya remains disastrous. Austria contributed 1 million euros to UNHCR’s efforts aimed at covering the basic needs of refugees and internally displaced persons. Libya-related projects funded from the EU Trust Fund for Africa, which Austria now supports with 8 million euro, were further strengthened.

On 17 October, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl met a Libyan delegation led by Foreign Minister Mohamed Syala for talks in Vienna. The topics addressed in this working discussion dealt with the political and economic situation in Libya, the UN peace process, migration as well as security and human rights issues.

In Morocco, a number of major infrastructure projects were either taken forward or completed, for instance the opening of the Tangier-Casablanca high-speed rail link, the commissioning of new tramway lines in Casablanca, the launch of another Moroccan satellite, the completion of a new airport terminal in Casablanca and public infrastructure improvements in both Marrakech and Rabat.

The court proceedings against the leaders of the widespread social unrest in the Rif region (Al-Hoceima) in 2017 were still ongoing. A long period without terrorist acts in Morocco came to a sudden end in December when two northern European tourists were killed. Legislation covering the reintroduction of compulsory military service, which had been announced for some time, was passed in August and will come into force in 2019.

The first half of the year was marked by repeated tensions between Morocco and the Saharawi Frente Polisario. The Geneva 2+2 Talks, held in December and led by Horst Köhler, former German President and since 2017 Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Western Sahara, were the first direct diplomatic negotiations in a long time to involve Morocco, representatives of the Polisario and Algeria as well as Mauritania. Initial talks in this format, which will be continued in 2019, are considered a constructive contribution towards strengthening confidence between the conflict parties.

Bilateral relations between Austria and Morocco are marked by friendship and cooperation. Most recently, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl and Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita agreed to intensify diplomatic relations during a bilateral meeting held in the context of the World Policy Conference in Rabat in October. In the Mediterranean region, Morocco is a strategic partner for both Austria and the EU. The country is considered a regional anchor of stability and plays a constructive role in regional and international organisations.

The EU is Morocco’s most important trading partner and investor. An Association Agreement has been in place since 2009 and negotiations on a Deep and Comprehen-
sive Free Trade Agreement, launched in 2013, were continued. The conclusion of the adapted Agriculture Agreement served to strengthen relations between Morocco and the EU, who plan to deepen their relations also in other policy areas, including fisheries and air transport.

In the eighth year since the Arab Spring, Tunisia continued to face major economic and social problems. Although the security situation remained relatively stable after the terrorist attacks in Sousse and Tunis in 2015, and tourism – one of the country’s most important sources of income – slowly recovered, economic growth of around 2% was too weak to generate the upswing that would be necessary to combat rising youth unemployment rates. Ongoing monetary depreciation, loss of purchasing power, the growing budget deficit and the reform backlog are still the biggest economic problems facing the country.

Held for the first time in May, regional elections are to pave the way for the country’s decentralization. The low voter turnout, especially among the youth, however, reflected the population’s growing disillusionment with Tunisia’s democratization process. After President Beji Caid Essebsi had withdrawn his confidence in Prime Minister Youssef Chahed, who belongs to his own political camp, in the summer, the latter continued to govern with the support of his coalition partner, the Islamist Ennahdha Party.

At bilateral level, Tunisia remains an interesting partner for the Austrian economy, as is also reflected in significant export and import increases. Tunisia’s relations with the EU are based on a Privileged Partnership. Negotiations launched between the EU and Tunisia in 2015 on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA or ALECA in French), visa facilitation and a readmission agreement combined with a mobility partnership were still ongoing.

1.1.7.2. The Middle East

Nothing has changed in the political stalemate that has dominated political efforts towards a lasting peaceful solution in the Middle East since 2014. The situation on the ground was increasingly tense and marked by violence. In July, Israel’s governing coalition passed the “Jewish Nation-State Law”, which was heavily criticized especially by non-Jewish Israeli minorities and in the Arab world, and which was furthermore challenged before the Israeli Supreme Court. The government also pushed ahead with the construction of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

During his visit to Israel in June, Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz stressed Austria’s special historic responsibility for Israel’s security. For the first time, the government programme includes a commitment to Israel as a Jewish state, stipulating the aim of “a two-state solution with the State of Israel within recognised and permanently secure borders and an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state”.

In May, the USA moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, cut back its payments to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and announced that it would cut all funding from 2019 onwards. The USA also went on to stop all financial contributions to Palestinians, except those for security cooperation with Israel, and closed the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) office in
Washington. The announced peace plan, however, was not presented, and no information was disclosed as to its contents.

With regard to Palestine, the necessary preparations for a dissolution of the Palestinian Authority were launched. It has still not been possible to achieve inner Palestinian reconciliation. Condemned as overly harsh by the Palestinians, defensive measures taken by Israel in response to protests, some of them violent, on the borders of Gaza have since March claimed more than 100 lives and left several thousand wounded by gunfire. A number of people were killed and injured on both the Israeli and the Palestinian side in missile and fire kite attacks launched from Gaza against Israel as well as in individual terrorist attacks in the West Bank.

With Russian and Iranian support the regime in Syria was largely able to consolidate its control over the territories west of the Euphrates, except for the area around Idlib in the northwest. A border crossing to Jordan in the southwest was re-opened and there were first voluntary return movements of refugees, especially from Lebanon and Jordan. The terrorist organisation “Islamic State” (Da’esh) was pushed back except for a few small pockets of resistance.

A Turkish military intervention in Afrin in the northwest ongoing since the beginning of the year, combined with transfers of opposition fighters from other areas, led to a consolidation of the region around Idlib as a retreat area for the armed opposition, which largely consists of Islamist militant groups. In September, Russia and Turkey agreed to create a demilitarised buffer zone around this area. To this end, Russian and Turkish military bases were set up, which indeed led to a reduction in the fighting but could, however, not bring about an end to hostilities.

In December, US President Donald Trump surprisingly announced that US troops would withdraw from Syria within a very short time. Subsequently, this declaration of intent was somewhat curbed down.

Austria and the EU continued to support the efforts undertaken by UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura towards finding a political solution within the framework of the Geneva talks and/or on the basis of UNSCR 2254 (2015) and the Geneva Communiqué of 2012. The focus of these efforts was on the establishment of a committee that is to amend the current or draft a new Syrian constitution. De Mistura resigned from his office at the end of the year, and the Norwegian diplomat Geir Pedersen was appointed as his successor.

In several meetings, the Astana Guarantor States for De-escalation in Syria (Russia, Turkey and Iran) sought to contribute towards shaping the political process, as did the “Small Group”, made up of Western and Arab states. For the first time ever, a summit meeting held between Turkey, Russia, France and Germany in Istanbul in October enabled a bridge to be built between the two formats.

More than 13 million Syrians were dependent on humanitarian aid, of which six million were internally displaced persons and more than five million had fled to neighbouring countries. Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen visited Jordan in April and Lebanon in December. These visits not only highlighted the importance of the traditionally good bilateral relations with both countries, but both President Alexander Van der Bel-
len and Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl underlined during their visit to Lebanon in October how much Austria appreciated the countries’ hosting of numerous Syrian refugees and also re-iterated Austria’s commitment to contributing towards managing the associated challenges.

Hezbollah and its political allies won the parliamentary elections held in Lebanon in May. By the end of the year it had, however, not been possible to form a new government.

1.2. The Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula

In the context of its Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of the year, Austria played a special role in the region due to its local presence in Doha, Kuwait and Tehran. As there are no local EU delegations, Austria assumed on-site EU coordination and represented the Union in dealings with the host countries Qatar, Kuwait and Iran. Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz paid an official visit to the United Arab Emirates in April and Federal Minister Karin Kneissl to Kuwait and Oman in December, in which context, the planned reopening of the Austrian Embassy in Muscat, envisaged for the end of 2019, was also announced.

The economic opening of Iran, which had started following the lifting of the nuclear-related economic and financial sanctions on 16 January 2016 (“Implementation Day” of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – JCPOA), was substantially restricted as a result of the US’ withdrawal from the JCPOA on 8 May. In the course of the year, many Western companies left the Iranian market. The full scope of reinstated US sanctions finally came into force on 5 November. Sanctions are targeted at essential parts of the Iranian economy such as energy, shipbuilding and shipping as well as at the country’s financial sector.

The EU, together with the other contracting states, continued to underline its commitment to the JCPOA and adopted an updated blocking regulation on 7 August aimed at mitigating the impact the sanctions had on the interests of EU companies doing business in Iran in conformity with the law. In the second half of the year, the E3 (Germany, France and the United Kingdom) began preparations to set up a special purpose vehicle that would enable European companies to do business with Iran despite US sanctions. As a clearing-house, it will enable the offsetting of receivables from European companies against Iranian companies and vice versa.

The highlight with regard to bilateral relations with Iran was the visit President Hassan Rohani paid to Vienna on 4 and 5 July. Discussions held in the context of this visit focused on further developing relations at political, economic, scientific and cultural level as well as on the role played by Iran in resolving the Syrian crisis, in Yemen and in stabilizing the region, as well as on concerns about the Iranian missile program and the human rights situation. In these talks, Austria stressed the right of Israel to exist in peace.

On 12 May, parliamentary elections were held in Iraq (turnout 44.5%). The Saairun alliance, led by Muqdana Al-Sadr, emerged as the winner, followed by two other Shiite
lists: the pro-Iranian list Al-Fatah and the reform-oriented Al-Nasr alliance of former Prime Minister Haidar Al-Abadi.

Since the elections were challenged, the votes were recounted manually. As a result, the Kurd Barham Saleh, who is considered a moderate, was elected as the new president by parliament only at the beginning of October. In accordance with the constitution, he assigned 76-year-old designated Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi with forming a government, which, however, proved extremely complicated. At the end of the year, eight out of 24 ministries were still vacant, including the ministries of the interior and defence.

Baghdad’s relations with the autonomous region of Kurdistan-Iraq improved after having reached a low in 2017 in the aftermath of the Kurdish referendum on independence.

In line with the modernization agenda Vision 2030 of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, further social, economic and cultural reform measures, such as the reopening of cinemas or the final lifting of the driving ban for women in June, were implemented in Saudi Arabia. Vigorous measures were taken against the privileges enjoyed by the country’s religious establishment. The noticeable progress in the social sphere and in the country’s economic repositioning, however, stands in contrast with further restrictions on freedom of public opinion, the arrest of a number of well-known human rights activists, the continued military intervention in Yemen, the political stalemate with neighbouring Qatar, and an increasingly harsh anti-Iranian rhetoric.

With regard to the human rights situation, the EU states strongly intervened. The case of the imprisoned Saudi Arabian human rights activist Raif Badawi remained unresolved despite continuous and considerable efforts also by Austria. The assassination of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi in October at the Saudi Arabian consulate in Istanbul triggered fierce international reactions and considerably damaged the country’s reputation. 11 suspects, who were presumably involved in the killing, were arrested and tried in Riyadh.

In the economic sphere, Saudi Arabia was able to generate stable economic growth due to rising oil prices. However, this did not lead to a significant reduction in unemployment, which is particularly prevalent among young people. While the government intensified its measures aimed at increasing the proportion of Saudi labour in the economy, flotation of the state-owned oil company Aramco had to be postponed. From an Austrian perspective, the resumption of direct flights from Riyadh to Vienna by two Saudi Arabian airlines was particularly positive.

In Yemen, the fourth year of conflict between the internationally recognised government led by President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi and the Houthi rebels, who occupy the capital Sana’a, saw a further deterioration in the situation of the Yemeni population already suffering from hunger and epidemics. International organisations and independent observers continue to speak of one of the worst humanitarian disasters in the world.

From a military point of view, neither side was able to achieve decisive territorial gains, although the international coalition, which is allied with the government and led by
Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, continued its air strikes in Yemen unabated. The Houthis retaliated by firing rockets into Saudi territory. As a result of international pressure and a certain fatigue of the warring parties, the much-feared decisive battle over the strategically important supply port of Hodeidah on the Red Sea did not take place, but instead negotiations were held under the auspices of the UN. The peace talks in December led to the Stockholm Agreement under which both sides committed themselves to withdrawing troops and creating ceasefire zones in the Hodeida area, as well as to exchanging prisoners and to engaging in further negotiations. The agreements were endorsed by a UN Security Council resolution, and preparations were made for the deployment of a UN mission to monitor adherence to the agreement.

1.3. Sub-Saharan Africa and African Union

The African countries continued to face major political and economic challenges. The threat of Islamist terrorism, such as Al-Shabaab in East Africa and Boko Haram in West Africa, has also posed a major challenge to the stability and development of African states in the region as well as the international community.

Elections in Africa

After having been postponed a number of times, presidential and parliamentary elections were held on 30 December in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These elections were largely peaceful and offer an opportunity for the country’s more inclusive development. According to international election observers, presidential elections held in Angola, Madagascar and Zimbabwe were also largely peaceful. In Zimbabwe, the replacement of long-term president Robert Mugabe triggered huge hopes for political and economic reforms. The resignation of the President of South Africa, Jakob Zuma, also opened up prospects for a new economic and political beginning. According to international election observers, the first round of the presidential elections in Mali was peaceful. The second round was postponed until 2019. Compared with past elections, the change of power in Kenya also proceeded largely peacefully.

1.3.1. EU-Africa

In his State of the Union address, the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, suggested strengthening the economic and trade partnership between the EU and Africa. To this end, an Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs is to be set up. The priority objective is to create jobs, but also to improve the investment climate and investment protection as well as education and vocational training. This alliance now represents the core element of the EU-AU Partnership. At the same time, it marks a kind of paradigm shift, since it involves a shift from the donor-based approach to a partnership on equal terms.

The aim pursued by the Africa-Europe Alliance is sustainable investment that will create 10 million new jobs over the next five years. This is to be achieved primarily through private investment. To this end, the EU’s External Investment Fund will provide more
than 44 billion euros to be made available not only for public but also for private investment by European small and medium-sized enterprises in Africa. The goal is to promote investment, job creation, support for training and education as well as improvement of the overall economic climate. Investment in young people is particularly high on the agenda. The EU is investing approximately 1.34 billion euros in bilateral training programmes (2014–2020).

A total of 52 African countries benefit from trade agreements based on the EU Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) and other agreements (“Everything But Arms” and GSP as well as GSP+). Out of their total foreign trade volume, the African countries generate 36 % with the EU, followed by only 16 % with China and 6 % with the USA. The EU’s share in foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa amounts to 40 %, compared with only 7 % made up by the USA and 5 % by China.

An important Austrian contribution to the new Africa-Europe Alliance was the organisation and hosting of the High-Level Forum Africa-Europe that brought African and European heads of state and government to Vienna on 18 December at the invitation of Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and the Chairman of the AU and President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame. Under the heading of digitalisation and innovation, the meeting was the first concrete follow-up to the AU-EU Summit in Abidjan in November 2017 and focused on finding new ways of cooperation and promoting innovation as well as digitalisation. Attendance in the High-Level Forum involved representatives from 25 African countries and all EU Member States.

In March, the AU decided to create an African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), one of the most ambitious goals to date to support economic growth and stability in Africa. Its implementation is, however, not anticipated in the near future.

1.3.2. Developments in the Regions

East Africa and Horn of Africa

In Ethiopia, a national and regional policy restructuring process was launched following the election of Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister in April. Immediately after taking office, the new head of government initiated a comprehensive reform and opening process. The state of emergency was lifted, some ten thousand political prisoners including journalists were released, and opposition leaders were invited to return from exile. In the economic field, Abiy Ahmed announced far-reaching reforms, such as the partial privatisation of state-owned enterprises. With an offer of peace made to Eritrea in summer, the Ethiopian Prime Minister initiated a surprisingly positive turnaround in relations with the neighbouring country that had been considered hostile for over 20 years. On 16 September, Ethiopia and Eritrea signed a peace agreement in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), which includes the return of a disputed border area to Eritrea and in return gives Ethiopia access to the Red Sea. This was followed by further steps towards normalising bilateral relations, including the restoration of diplomatic relations, the opening of the borders and the establishment of direct air links, which also play a pivotal role with a view to regional policy and stabilising the Horn of Africa. Despite these positive develop-
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ments, the conflicts along ethnic lines, which have resulted in almost three million internally displaced persons, remain Ethiopia’s greatest internal political challenge.

At the beginning of December, Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz was the first Austrian head of government to visit Ethiopia since the establishment of diplomatic relations over 100 years ago. In addition to strengthening bilateral relations, talks with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and President Sahle-Work Zewde focused on preparations for the High-Level Forum Africa-Europe, held in Vienna in mid-December in the context of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Somalia

The constitutional provisions that are aimed at turning Somalia into a federal state are still only in the preliminary drafting stages. The constitutional process is dragging on and there are massive tensions between the Federal Government of Somalia and the Federal Member States. This is illustrated by the fact that the central government in Mogadishu, with the help of Ethiopian AMISOM soldiers, arrested Mukhtar Robow, the presidential candidate for South West State, on 13 December – just a few days before the elections – and had one of its favoured candidates elected by the local parliament. The move triggered violent riots and several people were killed. When the UNSG’s Special Representative for Somalia, Nicolas Haysom, criticised the developments, he was declared persona non grata. Somaliland, which declared itself independent in 1991, does not participate in the political decision-making process in Somalia. The EU endeavours to work towards stability in the country as well as in the region, both at policy level and through development cooperation measures.

Sudan

Although economic and financial sanctions imposed by the US were lifted in October 2017, hopes of a rapid economic upturn in Sudan did not materialise. Instead, the acute shortage of foreign exchange contributed to exacerbating the economic crisis. Sudan, which remained on the US list of state sponsors of terrorism, was largely denied access to international financial aid. The government implemented further austerity measures and pushed ahead with reducing subsidies, which triggered protest rallies in Khartoum and other parts of the country. Towards the end of the year, the protests, which had initially been directed against the rising cost of living and supply bottlenecks, turned into political rallies and calls for a regime change. The government reacted to these ongoing protests by using – sometimes fatal – violence, arrests and censorship. In August, President Omar Al-Bashir was nominated by the National Congress Party as its official candidate for the 2020 presidential elections.

In South Sudan, the year saw some progress in the efforts towards resolving the civil war that has been waged since the end of 2013 and has resulted in the deaths of some 400,000 people. In June, President Salva Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar agreed on a ceasefire. At the beginning of August, the government and the rebels signed a peace agreement in Khartoum, which provides for the formation of a transitional government and a power-sharing agreement. Machar is to join the government as the first of five
vice presidents and appoint several ministers. At a meeting held in Addis Ababa in September, the existing agreement was harmonised with the conclusion of a conflict settlement agreement, thus setting another important milestone in the peace process. At the end of October, Riek Machar travelled from his exile in Khartoum to Juba and attended a peace ceremony together with Head of State Salva Kiir Mayardit. Despite positive developments, the situation in South Sudan remains fragile, which is reflected in delays in implementing the agreements and recurrent renewed hostilities.

As the security situation in Darfur had improved, the UN Security Council decided to reconfigure the mission’s mandate and adopted a gradual withdrawal of the UN-AU hybrid operation (UNAMID), which had been deployed in Darfur since 2007. The mission now focuses on peacebuilding. The UNSC sanctions (since 2004: arms embargo on the Darfur region; since 2005: travel restrictions and financial sanctions against certain members of the Darfur regime and militias) remained in place. The mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) has been extended by the UNSC several times, most recently until 15 May 2019. In April, Aristide Nononsi, UN Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in the Sudan, paid his fifth country visit to Sudan. The mandate of the Independent Expert was extended by the UNHRC for another year in September, providing for a gradual transition to the establishment of an OHCHR country office.

Kenya

As a result of the 2017 election process, which culminated in the repetition of the presidential elections and the re-election of the incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta, the candidate of the opposition party NASA, Raila Odinga, had himself proclaimed “President of the People” in January. March saw the handshake between President Kenyatta and Raila Odinga, which was of high symbolic importance, as well as the launching of the Building Bridges Initiative, which seeks to gain the commitment of the Kenyan population to common development goals. At national level, President Kenyatta’s agenda is headed by the “Big Four” (universal health care, food security, affordable housing and strengthening the manufacturing industry). Widespread corruption remains a challenge and combating it ranks high on the president’s agenda, as he considers curbing corruption part of his political legacy. The threat posed by the Islamist terrorist militia Al-Shabaab, which operates from Somalia, remains a challenge to relative stability and prosperity in Kenya.

West Africa

The security situation in Mali deteriorated, particularly in the north and centre of the country. The number of attacks launched by extremist groups on the population, the Malian armed forces and the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSMA (Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali) increased. Implementation of the Algiers Peace Agreement continued to proceed only sluggishly, although the last few months saw some slight progress in the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process as
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well as in the reorganisation of the administration and in discussions on institutional reforms.

The international community seeks to stabilise the situation in Mali. The EU is active in Mali, providing military advice and training via its European Union Training Mission Mali (EUTM Mali), to which Austria contributes 12 staff including, since October, the Deputy Commander. Since 15 January 2015, the EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) has also supported the internal Malian security forces (police, national guard and gendarmerie). By adopting resolution 2423 (2018), the UN Security Council decided on 28 June to extend the mandate of MINUSMA, which is currently considered the most loss-making UN mission due to the high number of casualties. Austria contributes four staff to MINUSMA. By adopting resolution 2374 (2017) on 5 September, the UN Security Council unanimously established a sanctions regime (travel restrictions, financial sanctions) against persons and institutions that endanger peace, security and stability in Mali. At the end of December, the UN Security Council imposed the first individual sanctions based on this resolution against three individuals.

The clear winner of the presidential elections held on 29 July and 12 August was the incumbent Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. Standing against 23 opposing candidates, he was able to secure 41.70 % of the vote in the first ballot and 67.16 % in the second round. Several election observation missions (ECOWAS, AU, OIF, EU) were deployed on the ground and gave an overall positive assessment of the elections. The parliamentary elections scheduled for autumn were postponed until 2019.

In Burkina Faso, the security situation has increasingly deteriorated over the past three years and the country has regularly been shaken by terrorist attacks, particularly in the north and east. On 2 March, the army headquarters were hit by a bomb attack and an armed attack was carried out on the French embassy in Ouagadougou. Generally, there has been an increase in the number of violent attacks. Work on constitutional reform has continued.

As of yet, the joint 5,000-troops-strong G5 Sahel Force (involving Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad), which was set up in 2017 to protect the borders, has not been able to prevent the instability from spreading further. An attack directed against the headquarters of the intervention force in Sevaré (Mali) in June represented a serious setback for the Sahel Force’s effective operationalisation. To date, EU support for the force has totalled 100 million euros. The EU is also helping the Sahel states to implement their development priorities and strengthen their resilience.

In Gambia, the consolidation of democracy and of political system change has made progress since long-term president Yahya Jammeh was ousted in December 2016. The Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission commenced its work in early October. It is mandated with investigating human rights violations committed during the Jammeh era and starting a reconciliation process. In addition, work on constitutional reform continued and progress was made in the human rights field, for instance with respect to freedom of opinion and freedom of the press. Austria continues to support Gambia with training scholarships in the tourism sector.
In the context of an ECOWAS summit in April specifically dedicated to the situation in Guinea-Bissau, which had been caught in a longstanding political crisis, a breakthrough was achieved which led to the appointment of a new prime minister and a new government as well as the holding of the first parliamentary session in years. However, the parliamentary elections scheduled for November had to be postponed until spring 2019.

The political landscape in Côte d’Ivoire was already marked by preparations for the presidential elections in 2020. Discussions about the succession of President Alassane Ouattara led to the breakdown of parts of the coalition and to tensions within the party.

In Senegal, the political atmosphere between the government and the opposition became increasingly tense in the lead-up to the 2019 presidential elections, especially due to differences regarding the election process.

Migration from Niger continued to decline – by 90% according to official figures. After having reached a peak in 2015/16, when, according to the IOM, approximately 330,000 migrants crossed the Sahara heading for the Mediterranean coast, Nigerian authorities started to step up their efforts towards fighting human trafficking at the end of 2016.

The Great Lakes Region

The political and human rights situation in Burundi remained unchanged and worrisome. Austria and the EU have called on the country to urgently improve respect for and uphold human rights and to hold a national dialogue between government and opposition parties. In a constitutional referendum on 17 May, 73% voted in favour of an unlimited extension of the presidential mandate. President Nkurunziza, however, announced that he would not stand for another term in the 2020 elections.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, presidential elections and elections to the National Assembly were held on 30 December after having been postponed several times. The main presidential candidates were the government’s candidate Emmanuel Shadary and the two opposition candidates, Félix Tshisekedi and Martin Fayulu. Joseph Kabila’s regime largely rejected holding the elections as well as the UN peace mission MONUSCO. International election observation missions were deployed by the AU and SADC and at national level the elections were observed by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference (Justice et paix Congo-Conférence épiscopale) as well as an association of civil society organisations (Synergie des missions d’observation citoyenne électorale). However, no observer mandate was granted to an EU election observation mission. Due to an Ebola epidemic, the elections had to be moved to March 2019 in the electoral districts of Beni, Beni City, Butembo City in the province of North Kivu and Yumbi in the province of Mai-Ndombe. The elections, which proceeded largely peacefully according to international election observers, marked the end of Joseph Kabila’s era as the country’s president.

Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz visited Rwanda on 7 December and met with President Paul Kagame. Discussions focused especially on the preparations for the High-Level Forum EU-Africa in Vienna on 18 December, hosted by both Federal Chancellor
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Sebastian Kurz and President Paul Kagame, as well as the intensifying bilateral economic contacts.

In the parliamentary elections held from 2 to 4 September, President Kagame’s party (Patriotic Front, RPF) won 74% of the votes. The share of women in the newly elected parliament amounts to 61%. According to EU election observers, the elections were well organised and conducted largely peacefully, albeit with minor incidents.

Southern Africa

In the elections held in Angola on 23 August 2017, the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) again emerged victorious with a narrow two-thirds majority of seats in parliament, but lost a total of about 8% of its votes. As long-term president José Eduardo Dos Santos did not run as top candidate, former defence minister João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço was sworn in as the new president on 26 September. In a speech, he promised in particular to counter poverty and unemployment and to intensify the fight against corruption.

Immediately after taking office, Lourenço began to fill numerous government agencies with new people, in which context many Dos Santos confidants – including some of his predecessor’s family members – had to vacate their posts.

It was also reported that Angola was forcibly returning refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Furthermore, mass deportations of around 400,000 migrants from the DRC, who had been accused of having been involved in diamond smuggling, were effected – but as yet, no concrete evidence has been produced.

In Lesotho, the parliament of King Letsie III was dissolved prematurely after a vote of no confidence in March 2017. The All Basotho Convention (ABC) led by Thomas Thabane emerged victorious from the subsequent elections, winning 48 seats. International observers assessed the elections as having been largely free and fair. On 16 June, Thomas Thabane was sworn in as Prime Minister in Maseru.

On 5 September, the country’s chief of staff, Lieutenant General Khoantle Motsomotso, was shot and killed by army officers who had been close to the government led by Thabane’s predecessor. In response, the SADC decided to send troops, which arrived at the end of November in crisis-ridden Lesotho. The SADC mission’s mandate mainly focuses on ensuring stability in the country in cooperation with Lesotho’s security forces.

According to the EU Observer Mission, the first round of the presidential elections in Madagascar was conducted on 7 November without any major incidents. Having won just under 40% of the vote, each of the former presidents, Marc Ravalomanana (2002-09) and Andry Rajoelina (2009-13), stood for the run-off elections on 19 December. Madagascar’s incumbent Hery Rajaonarimampianina lagged far behind in third place. The run-off election was eventually won by Rajoelina who was able to secure 55.66% of the vote.

In Malawi, the challenges facing the government led by President Peter Mutharika, such as high population growth, massive increases in the cost of living, corruption and
the still noticeable consequences of the drought in 2015-2016, which affected 40% of the population, continued to increase.

In Mozambique, the first half of the year was mainly dominated by efforts to advance the peace process between the ruling FRELIMO and RENAMO parties. In March, President Filipe Nyusi and RENAMO leader Afonso Dhakama agreed on a second phase of talks. To this end, two working groups were set up, one for decentralization and one for military issues. Both working groups were supported by an international contact group.

At the 11th Congress held by the ruling FRELIMO in September, President Filipe Nyusi was confirmed in his position as chairman of the party, receiving 99.72% of the vote. This high approval rate was based on the progress Nyusi had achieved in the peace process with RENAMO as well as the pro-active way in which the state guarantees affair was addressed and dealt with.

Presidential elections are scheduled for 15 October 2019. The financial scandal, including the involvement of former Finance Minister Chang, who was arrested in South Africa on 29 December, weighs heavily on the shoulders of the governing party FRELIMO, which long sought to largely cover up the financial scandal.

In Zimbabwe, most of the year had been marked by the power struggle within the ruling ZANU-PF party over the succession of long-term president Robert Mugabe. Two factions had emerged within the party, the young guard or Generation 40 (G 40), who support Grace Mugabe, and the old guard led by First Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa (called “Team Lacoste”), who could rely on the support of the country’s security forces. After Mnangagwa had been dismissed on 6 November at the insistence of Grace Mugabe and briefly had to leave the country, the military launched a coup d’état in the night of 14-15 November 2017, but did not immediately overthrow the president. After several days under house arrest, President Mugabe voluntarily resigned on 21 November, whereupon Mnangagwa was sworn in as the new President of Zimbabwe on 24 November 2017.

In the general elections held in the country on 30 July, the ruling ZANU-PF party was able to retain a clear majority, although it lost some seats. After the votes for the House of Assembly had been counted, ZANU-PF was declared the winner. Due to delays in the official announcement of the election result, the opposition suspected fraud. This triggered violent protests in Harare, which were crushed by military force and militant supporters of the Zanu-PF party. The opposition’s challenging of the electoral result was examined by the electoral commission and dismissed by the Supreme Court on 24 August. Two days later, on 26 August, Mnangagwa was sworn in.

For decades, South Africa has been shaken by corruption and State Capture scandals surrounding former president Jacob Zuma. Zuma’s party, the ANC, is divided into Zuma supporters, led by Zuma’s ex-wife Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, and Zuma opponents, led by Vice-President Cyril Ramaphosa. At the ANC party congress, held between 16 and 20 December 2017, Vice-President Cyril Ramaphosa was eventually elected as the new chairman with 2,240 votes in favour and 2,216 against. At the same time, however, numerous individuals close to President Zuma were promoted to positions in the party’s highest bodies.
On 14 February, President Zuma finally resigned from office after the ANC had openly threatened to pass a vote of no confidence against him in parliament if he remained in office. The next day, Cyril Ramaphosa was elected president and reinstated many high-ranking experts who had been removed from their offices and positions as ministers by Zuma because they had refused to cover up the latter’s corrupt machinations. In the upcoming parliamentary, presidential and local elections scheduled for 8 May 2019, the ANC will mainly seek to defend the comfortable lead it has held since 2014. The fact that the public considers the ANC to have links to corruption due to its Zuma past represents a burden on both the ANC and President Cyril Ramaphosa. The opposition is divided.

1.3.3. African Union and Other Regional Organisations

The annually rotating chair of the African Union was held by the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame. Apart from the ordinary biannual summits, two extraordinary summits were held. At the 30th Ordinary Session of the AU in January, 23 Member States adopted a decision to establish a Single African Air Transport Market. The main topic on the agenda of the 10th Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the AU in Kigali was the planned African free trade area. The relevant agreement on the establishment of an African Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) was signed by 44 Member States. So far, the agreement, which will enter into force following ratification by 22 Member States, has been ratified by 15 countries. With a view to achieving joint coordination of their national migration policies, the AU heads of state and government agreed at their 31st summit in July to create the African Observatory for Migration and Development (OAMD) to be based in Rabat. Deliberations at the 11th Extraordinary Session of the AU Summit in Addis Ababa in November focused on the AU’s institutional reform. The decisions taken included a reduction in the number of AU Commissioners from eight to six and new modalities for the election of Commissioners.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) consists of Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Southern Sudan, Uganda and Eritrea. The latter had suspended its membership in 2007, but returned to the organisation after signing the peace agreement with Ethiopia. IGAD is particularly active in the field of conflict resolution in North East Africa. The peace agreement signed at an extraordinary IGAD summit in Addis Ababa on 12 September between the parties to the civil war in South Sudan can be deemed a measure of the organisation’s success.

Austria has been cooperating with IGAD for many years. Together with IGAD, ADA is implementing the project “IGAD Promoting Peace and Stability in the Horn of Africa Region/IPSHAR” that covers the period 2018-2022. The project, which is funded by the EU (35 million euros) and contributions from Austria, Sweden and the Netherlands (one million euros each) aims to contribute to promoting stability and peace in the East African region and the Horn of Africa.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) dealt inter alia with the crises in Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Togo and the Sahel region. As Nigeria has still not signed the agreement on an economic partnership between ECOWAS and the EU, its
entry into force has been further delayed. For the time being, only the interim agreements concluded with Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana have been provisionally applied.

The new President of the ECOWAS Commission, Jean-Claude Brou, took office in March. The community’s internal reform process aimed at increasing efficiency and strengthening control mechanisms made further progress. On behalf of the HR/VP Federica Mogherini, Herbert Fuchs, State Secretary for Finance, co-chaired the 22nd ECOWAS-EU Ministerial Meeting in Abuja on 30 November.

The South African Development Community (SADC) is a regional economic community comprising 16 Member States: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The SADC was founded in 1992 and is committed to promoting regional integration and fighting poverty in southern Africa through economic development and guaranteeing peace and security.

In 2008, Austria and SADC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on mutual cooperation in the field of good governance, with a special focus on land issues, and in the field of infrastructure, focusing on rail transport and renewable energies. As provided for in the MoU, the two parties meet regularly to discuss implementation issues. In addition, ADA funds regional projects in cooperation with other southern African partners. Under ADA’s SOLTRAIN programme (Southern African Solar Thermal Training & Demonstration Initiative) projects are supported in six countries in the SADC region: Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. To date, more than 60 internships have been organised to train over 1,800 specialists on how to install and maintain solar thermal systems. Furthermore, more than 100 solar thermal systems have been installed on social and healthcare facilities’ premises, on orphanages, nursing homes, student residences and a range of industrial buildings. Austria assumes up to 50 % of installation costs and of the costs for the necessary control systems.

The East African Community (EAC) consists of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Southern Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. To date, the European Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiated between the East African Community and the EU has been signed and ratified by Kenya and signed by Rwanda. As the other EAC member countries refuse to sign the agreement, they prevent its entry into force. Thus, national interests, protectionist economic policies and institutional weaknesses stand in the way of a greater economic and political role for the EAC in the region. Due to bilateral tensions with Rwanda, Burundi has blocked the holding of the Meeting of the Summit of the EAC Heads of State twice. The chairpersonship at this year’s summit was held by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and will subsequently pass on to Rwandan President Paul Kagame.
1.4. America

1.4.1. USA

After both the Senate and the House of Representatives had been in the hands of the Republican Party for two years, the Democrats were able to regain the majority in the House of Representatives in the mid-term elections on November 6. The Senate is still under Republican control.

In his second year in office, President Donald Trump and the still Republican Congress were much more active legislators than in the previous year. Despite the election year, a fundamental prison and criminal justice reform (First-Step Act) and measures against the opioid epidemics (Support Act) were passed, receiving support from both parties represented in Congress. With Brett Kavanaugh, another judge nominated by President Trump and confirmed by the Republican majority in the Senate became Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. With regard to his most important electoral promise, the construction of the controversial wall on the border with Mexico, which according to the government would be urgently needed to curb irregular migration, President Trump was unable to push through his ideas, despite a federal government shutdown starting on 22 December due to the conflict over the wall’s funding.

Registering an unemployment rate of 4 % and an economic growth of 2.9%, the US economy had a good year. The US Federal Reserve Bank raised key interest rates four times in total to a range between 2.25 and 2.5 % and was thus able to keep inflation rate close to the ideal level of 2 % and within a manageable range.

At trade policy level, some of President Trump’s protectionist campaign promises were implemented, including the introduction of protective tariffs of 25 % on steel imports and of 10 % on aluminium imports as well as the imposition of punitive tariffs on Chinese goods worth 250 billion US dollars. In the negotiations with Canada and Mexico, an agreement was reached on USMCA (United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement) as the successor to NAFTA. Ratification of USMCA by the US Congress is, however, still pending.

In the foreign policy field, the US-led coalition succeeded in largely destroying the “Islamic State” (IS/Da’esh) from a territorial point of view. In December, President Trump announced the withdrawal of the US troops based in Syria. By pulling out of the JCPOA and re-imposing as well as tightening its sanctions against Iran in November, the USA took a much tougher stance against Iran, whose influence in the region is all but welcome by the USA. The USA recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moved its embassy there. A US peace plan for the Middle East has been announced but not yet presented. The UN Human Rights Council’s critical relationship with Israel was the main reason for the US withdrawal from the body at the end of June. The relationship between the USA and North Korea saw a thawing. At the summit, held in Singapore between the two heads of state on 12 June, however, no progress was achieved on denuclearisation and the US sanctions against North Korea remained in place.

The USA further stepped up its pressure on Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. Transatlantic relations and NATO in the military field remained important elements of US foreign
and security policy, although demands on the allies were higher. NATO member coun-
tries were thus called upon to spend at least 2% of their GDP on defence by 2024. The
negative dynamic that has marked US-Russian relations could not be stopped, not even
by a summit held in Helsinki on 16 July. Adverse factors in this respect include the con-
flict in Ukraine, which is of key importance with a view to Europe’s security, Russia’s
role in Syria and the cyber-campaign against Western institutions. US withdrawal from
the INF Treaty, which is so important for Europe, is imminent. Deviating from its South
Asia strategy, the USA had to enter into direct negotiations with the Taliban to solve the
Afghanistan problem. The USA fears China, which is ruled by an increasingly authoritar-
ian regime, as an emerging global rival. Against this background, the USA imposed pro-
tective tariffs on Chinese exports of 250 billion US dollars, China imposed countermeas-
ures against US products amounting to some 60 billion US dollars. On the margins of
the G-20 summit, held in Argentina at the beginning of December, President Trump and
Head of State Xi agreed not to impose any new tariffs for 90 days and to step up their
negotiating efforts.

In total, 25 individuals were executed, two more than the year before. Capital punish-
ment as a legal penalty is currently used by 30 states, while 20 states do not allow the
death penalty. Public support for the death penalty was around 50%.

The **EU and the USA** enjoy very close economic ties. The USA is the EU’s main trading
partner. The bilateral trade volume amounted to 739.46 billion US dollars. The EU trade
surplus with the USA amounted to approximately 154.2 billion US dollars. Relations
have, however, been strained by the USA’s introduction of protective tariffs on steel
and aluminium imports from the EU and its threat of imposing additional tariffs to pro-
tect the US automotive industry. These topics also featured on the agenda of a meeting
between President Trump and the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude
Juncker in Washington D.C. on 25 July, where they agreed that no further tariffs were to
be imposed for the time being and that mutual duty reliefs would be negotiated.

The relevant negotiations have, however, not yet produced any concrete results. The
8th EU-US Energy Council, an annual meeting of US and EU Foreign and Energy Minis-
ters, was held in Brussels on 12 July. The Austrian Presidency of the Council of the
European Union was represented by Federal Minister Juliane Bogner-Strauß. Coopera-
tion between the EU and the US in the field of justice and home affairs has intensified,
which was also reflected by the meeting between the competent US and EU ministers
in Washington D.C. on 8 and 9 November, the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the
European Union being represented by Federal Ministers Josef Moser and Herbert Kickl.

**Bilateral relations** continued to evolve very positively and were marked by a large num-
ber of official visits (hosted inter alia by the President of the National Council Wolfgang
Sobotka, Federal Minister Margarete Schramböck, Federal Minister Hartwig Löger, Fed-
eral Minister Josef Moser, Federal Minister Herbert Kickl, Federal Minister Heinz Faß-
mann and State Secretary Hubert Fuchs). Vienna as home to the headquarters of many
international organisations again proved to be a very relevant hub. Austria’s expert
knowledge as an active political actor and important investor in Central Europe, the
Danube region and South East Europe is appreciated by the USA.
Bilateral economic relations saw an excellent development. Austrian exports to the USA rose to a record value of over 10 billion euros. The USA thus remains the second most important sales market for Austrian products.

In the field of research, technology and innovation, Austrian researchers were able to increasingly attract US subsidies, especially in the medical and biotechnology sectors. The Office of Science and Technology Austria (OSTA) at the Embassy in Washington oversees the Research and Innovation Network Austria (RINA), which comprises almost 3,000 members and is directed at Austrian researchers and innovators in North America. Within the framework of RINA, a mentoring platform was developed for start-ups, set up by Austrian students under the “Austria to Austin” programme launched by the US Embassy in Vienna.

In the cultural sector, the Cultural Fora in New York and Washington are well-established centres for the ongoing presentation of contemporary Austrian art and culture. Top-class presentations by the flagships of Austrian culture (the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the Vienna Boys’ Choir, Federal Museums, the Jewish Museum Vienna etc.) were supported by the Austrian representation authorities and services as required.

The development and expansion of future-oriented relations with the Jewish communities and institutions, inter alia with the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the World Jewish Congress (WJC), B’nai B’rith, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Lantos Foundation, is a central concern of the Austrian representations in the USA. There is also close cooperation with Holocaust museums and research institutes, especially those in which Austrian Holocaust Memorial Service representatives are active. Implementation of the comprehensive restitution and reparation measures, to which Austria had committed itself for instance under the Washington Agreement of 2001, is considered as exemplary by the US Administration.

To celebrate the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the commemorative year, the 180th anniversary of bilateral Austrian-American relations and the 70th anniversary of the Press and Information Service, the embassy, together with Johns Hopkins University, organised the “Austrian Lecture Series” on current and historical, mostly political topics.

1.4.2. Canada

In office since 2015, the government led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Liberal Party) continued to be considered the favourite in the federal elections for the members of the House of Commons in October 2019. Although its programme aimed at economic growth through debt-financed government spending and public infrastructure investments remains popular, the picture is clouded by setbacks in the implementation of important infrastructure projects (especially pipelines) and the – according to many critics – inadequate implementation of commitments made to indigenous peoples.

Canada’s export economy is almost 80 % dependent on the USA, accordingly the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement with the USA and Mexico was a
America

focus of public interest. Following conclusion of the 13 months of negotiations on 30 September, there was, however, some disappointment in Canada, as the protective duties, imposed by US President Trump for reasons of national security on Canadian steel and aluminium exports had not been lifted despite the agreement.

Bilateral relations with China, which the Trudeau government had originally sought to improve, are in serious crisis triggered by the arrest of the CFO of the Huawei Group in Canada at the beginning of December in response to a US request for her extradition. Subsequently and apparently in a retaliatory move by Beijing, two Canadians living in China were arrested and a Canadian imprisoned in China due to a drug offence was sentenced to death. Canada, led by Prime Minister Trudeau, sees itself in clear opposition to Russia led by President Putin and in terms of sanctions takes a tougher stance than the EU, which is mainly due to deployment of Canadian troops in Latvia and Ukraine. International attention was attracted by the deterioration of relations with Saudi Arabia that can be attributed to a tweet from Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland, in which she criticized the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia.

Since June, Canada has contributed to the UN Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) providing six helicopters and 250 troops.

Canada and the EU cooperate at many levels as like-minded partners. Numerous topics are dealt with comprehensively in regular meetings. The provisional application of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) commenced as early as 21 September 2017. According to initial experience, it looks as if European companies currently use the new opportunities created by the agreement more intensively than Canadian enterprises, the main reason being that the latter’s focus is rather geared towards the US market. The EU is also seeking to convince Canada of closer cooperation in the fields of Common Security and Defence Policy, particularly with a view to crisis management and the fight against terrorism. The Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), provisionally applied since 2017, provides the relevant framework. As the latest EU-Canada summit had been held in October 2016, the next summit was scheduled for 11 and 12 April 2019.

Austria and Canada have continued to enjoy very close relations, which are particularly intensive in the economic and cultural fields. Canada is one of Austria’s largest overseas export markets. Machines and mechanical equipment account for the largest share of Austrian exports. Currently 125 Austrian companies have subsidiaries in Canada. The provisional application of CETA has had a clearly positive effect, as almost all existing customs duties have been abolished and cooperation in the field of non-tariff trade barriers has now also improved. In June, Austria completed the parliamentary procedure for CETA ratification and initiated the ratification process for the SPA.

Austria enjoys an excellent reputation as a cultural nation in Canada, especially in the field of music. Established in 1998 at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies is unique in its field. In the context of the institute’s 20th anniversary, the underlying Memorandum of Understanding was extended for another five years on 31 August.
1.4.3. Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America has seen significant changes, triggered inter alia by presidential elections and/or changes of government especially in Mexico, Brazil and Colombia.

In Mexico, the general elections held on 1 July were won by the previously left-wing party MORENA (National Regeneration Movement), whose Andrés Manuel López Obrador has served as the country’s president since 1 December. Since the beginning of the new legislative period on 1 September, the party – together with the socialist Labour Party and the evangelical Social Encounter Party – has held the majority in both chambers of Congress. Mexico, which is already considered the 15th largest economy in the world, has been Austria’s most important economic partner in Latin America.

In Brazil, the turn of the year marked the end of the term of office of President Michel Temer, who had headed the state from 31 August 2016 to 31 December. The year was largely dominated by the election campaign between former president Lula da Silva, whose candidacy was finally declared invalid, and his challenger Jair Bolsonaro. Gaining 46.03 %, the latter won the elections on 7 October, placing a special focus in the aggressive election campaign on topics related to corruption, crime and the economic crisis.

In Colombia, Iván Duque emerged as the winner in the run-off election on 17 June and took over the presidential office from Juan Manuel Santos on 7 August. Despite initial criticism of the peace agreement, relating in particular to transitional justice and the right to political activity of former FARC fighters, his government reaffirmed during its first 100 days in office its willingness to work towards implementing the peace agreement. The EU continued its support for the Colombian peace process through the EU Trust Fund.

Despite these upheavals, it was possible to further intensify bilateral relations between Austria and Latin America as well as bi-regional relations between the two continents. This process was facilitated by high-level meetings with heads of state and government, including the visits President Santos of Colombia and President Varela of Panama paid to Vienna. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation was also deepened, especially in the context of meetings with the foreign ministers of Argentina, Chile, Peru, Mexico, Brazil and Honduras as well as with the Vice-President of Costa Rica.

Participants in the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly, convened in Vienna from 17 to 19 September, were welcomed by the President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl and State Secretary Karoline Edtstadler.

The highlight of bi-regional cooperation was the meeting of Foreign Ministers from the EU and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in Brussels on 16 and 17 July. Under the heading of “Building Bridges and Strengthening our Partnership to Face Global Challenges”, the foreign ministers, including Federal Minister Karin Kneissl, adopted a joint final declaration and agreed to update the chapter on environmental and climate protection.

In addition, the EU continued negotiations on updating the Global Agreement with Mexico and the Association Agreement with Chile, as well as negotiations with MERCO-
Austria also prepared the ratification of the Free Trade Agreement with Colombia, Peru and Ecuador.

Furthermore, implementation of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Cuba, which has been provisionally applied since November 2017, commenced. Particularly noteworthy in this context is the holding of the first formalised human rights dialogue in Havana on 8 and 9 October. Austria acceded to the agreement in December.

The humanitarian and political crisis in Venezuela was a special focus of attention. Major parts of the international community characterised the presidential elections of 20 May as having been neither fair nor free. Against this background, the EU called for new presidential elections to be held in accordance with internationally recognised democratic standards. The restrictive measures against Venezuelan decision-makers adopted in connection with human rights violations and undermining democracy were extended and renewed. The extent of the Venezuelan refugee crisis and the resulting burden on the affected neighbouring countries also became apparent. Against this background, Austria decided in December to make available one million euros through the Foreign Disaster Fund to UNHCR Colombia to support Venezuelan refugees.

Nicaragua also became an issue for Austria and the EU in the aftermath of the violent suppression of protests in May, and the subsequent suppression of free media and civil society organisations. The Foreign Ministry, in accordance with a motion for a resolution by Parliament of 25 October, supported re-establishing dialogue and called for the respect of human rights in Nicaragua.

Austria and the EU opposed the premature termination of the UN Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and stressed the importance of combating corruption and observing the rule of law.

The EU-LAC Foundation continued its extensive work and, with the growing number of ratifications by EU and CELAC states, moved another step closer to the planned transformation into an international organisation.

1.5. Asia

1.5.1. EU-Asia

The EU continued its efforts towards developing closer relations with the Asia-Pacific region. The EU maintains Strategic Partnerships with four countries in Asia, namely China, Japan, India and the Republic of Korea. With 53 countries participating at the Heads of State and Government level, the 12th ASEM Summit (Asia Europe Meeting), held in Brussels on 18 and 19 October, marked the highlight of the institutionalised dialogue between Europe and Asia. Austria was represented by Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. The meeting was characterised by clear commitments on the part of both Europe and Asia to multilateralism and rules-based order, to connectivity and to combating climate change. The Board of Governors’ Meetings of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), a foundation set up under private law by ASEM and mandated with
implementing concrete cooperation projects between Europe and Asia, convened in Bucharest on 7 and 8 June and in Singapore on 22 and 23 November.

Summit meetings were held with three of the Strategic Partners. The EU-China Summit took place in Beijing on 16 July. For the first time since 2015, a joint declaration was adopted together with a declaration on climate change and clean energy. The summit was preceded by an EU-China Human Rights Dialogue. China has evolved into the EU’s second largest trading partner and Europe has become the most important market for foreign direct investment by Chinese companies. On the margins of the EU-Japan Summit in Tokyo on 17 July, the EU and Japan signed both a Strategic Partnership Agreement and an Economic Partnership Agreement. The EU-South Korea Summit was held in Brussels on 19 October.

The 12th ASEM Summit provided the opportunity for an additional meeting between the EU and the Heads of State and Government of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In this context, a Strategic Partnership Agreement and a Free Trade Agreement were signed with Singapore on 19 October. The signing of a fully negotiated Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Malaysia was postponed by Malaysia. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the Philippines entered into force on 1 March. Negotiations on an interregional free trade agreement between the EU and ASEAN are still being considered.

On 22 May, the European Commission was given the mandate to open negotiations on free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand. Two rounds of negotiations have already been completed with each of these countries.

Two major EU strategies were adopted during Austria’s Presidency of the Council of the EU. The EU Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia, adopted on 15 October, seeks to promote connectivity between Europe and Asia and covers a very wide range of topics including transport, energy, digital services, education, research, culture and tourism, as well as Asia as a whole. It builds on the many existing initiatives and sets out the guidelines for the EU’s future Asia policy. By adopting a new EU-India Strategy on 10 December, the European Council and the Union at large are taking account of India’s role as a strategic partner, a rising economic power in Asia and an ally on shared values such as democracy, the rule of law and a rules-based world order.

European Council conclusions were also adopted inter alia on Afghanistan and Pakistan (19 November) and Myanmar (10 December). Through the former, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the two countries’ reform agendas. In the case of Myanmar, the EU expressed concern regarding the human rights violations reported by the UN Human Rights Council’s fact-finding mission.

1.5.2. General Developments

While Asia had to face numerous political crises and unresolved ethnic and social conflicts, it also continued to follow the geopolitical trend away from a transatlantic age towards a transpacific age. Against this background, efforts aimed at deepened political, economic and security cooperation with Asia play an increasingly important role.
North Korea put an end to a long series of nuclear tests and missile launches and signalled its willingness to engage in denuclearisation talks with both its neighbour South Korea as well as the USA. Other simmering conflicts, especially in the South China Sea and the Kashmir region, continued to trigger regular tensions in East and South Asia. The situation in Afghanistan, where parliamentary elections were finally held in October, continues to give cause for concern, not least because of the risk of massive migration movements. The highly precarious situation of refugees became especially apparent in Bangladesh where hundreds of thousands of Muslim Rohingya from Myanmar are still in camps.

In the economic sector, the trend towards further integration and networking among the Asian countries continued. Following the USA’s withdrawal, it was nevertheless possible to finally transform the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) into a Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) on 8 March. The summit meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Community (APEC) attracted particular attention, mainly because it was the first major event ever to be held in Papua New Guinea (15 to 18 November). A joint declaration was, however, not adopted due to significant differences of opinion between China and the USA.

1.5.3. China

At the annual meeting of the National People’s Congress in March, the decisions taken by the National Congress of the Communist Party in October 2017 were implemented. Prime Minister Li Keqiang presented the government programme, which focuses on further economic and financial consolidation, poverty reduction and environmental protection. President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Li Keqiang were confirmed in their offices for another five-year term. Some important amendments were enshrined in the Chinese constitution, including President Xi Jinping’s Thought on Socialism, and lifting the limitation of the president’s time in office to two consecutive terms. Consequently, Xi Jinping may remain President of the People’s Republic also after 2023.

Launched as an economic initiative, the “New Silk Road” (Belt & Road Initiative, BRI) is at the same time a top priority on China’s foreign policy agenda. By developing and expanding transport routes, China seeks to tap into new trade routes and export markets. Likewise, China seeks to develop its central and western provinces and prepare the ground for new China-centric production networks.

The simmering trade conflict that has been ongoing between China and the USA came to a head. Since the new trade tariffs were implemented in the summer, efforts have been underway to reach an agreement. At the same time, China has assumed a more active role on the foreign policy stage than in the past. On 3 and 4 September, Beijing organised a summit involving 53 African heads of state and government. China’s cooperation with 16 Central and Eastern European states in the context of the “16+1 format” was continued and the annual summit was held in Sofia on 7 July. Austria participated as an observer at public officials’ level.
In the context of the historic state visit Federal President Alexander van der Bellen paid to China (from 6 to 13 April), Austria’s bilateral relations with the People’s Republic of China were raised to the level of a Strategic Partnership. During this state visit, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl opened a new Austrian Consulate General in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province.

1.5.4. North East Asia

Japan remained stable on the domestic front. Despite some fluctuations in his popularity ratings, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was confirmed as the President of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in September, and the liberal-conservative course pursued by the government was continued.

On the security policy front, however, the environment was less certain. Although Japan welcomes North Korea’s new dialogue policy, it has only limited confidence in the thaw and particularly fears not being involved in potential new developments. Major efforts have therefore been launched to ensure that the alliance with its main ally, the USA, is sound and well-maintained. A visible sign of the détente with China was the visit Prime Minister Shinzo Abe paid to China, thus being the first Japanese Prime Minister since 2011 to visit Beijing. In contrast, the relationship with South Korea, an important partner in terms of security policy and economy, cooled again as new rifts emerged on issues relating to the past that had seemingly been considered resolved. This was especially the case with regard to compensation to be paid to former forced labourers and the issue of “comfort women”. With Russia, new attempts towards a peace treaty were made, but with regard to the unresolved territorial disputes, the positions held by both parties seem to remain frozen.

The world’s third largest economy continues to hold technological leadership in a number of sectors, although it faces competition. While there is almost full employment, the country seeks to counter the demographic phenomenon of ageing by increased use of automation in the production and service sectors and by creating incentives for older workers to remain active for a longer period and for women to play a more important role in working life.

In South Korea, President Moon Jae-in focuses fully on the inter-Korean dialogue with its northern neighbour. From the very beginning, he has been committed to reconciliation. His first summit with Kim Jong-un in Panmunjeom on April 27 was considered a milestone and further summits were to follow. Since then, work has been underway on possible peace-building measures such as dismantling border posts, a no-fly zone and a ban on military exercises on the border between North and South, construction of a border-crossing road and railway line, promotion of tourism and family meetings. This does, however, not meet with exclusive approval at home, and increasing criticism is being voiced. What is more, the attempt to reactivate relations with the North is also under constant risk of undermining the UN sanctions regime that remains in force and/or of clouding relations with the USA, its ally.
Asia

The successful Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Pyeongchang in February and March offered South Korea the opportunity to present itself as a tourist destination and organiser of major events.

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) showed the most startling development in the region. The new course was already outlined by leader Kim Jong-un in his New Year speech. Preceded by intensive preparations, the historic meeting with President Donald Trump took place on 12 June and included the adoption of a joint statement. Although it remained rather vague, the statement nevertheless reflected a general willingness to denuclearise the Korean peninsula. In the further course of the year, however, the dynamics somewhat weakened. North Korea is of the opinion that putting an end to all its nuclear and missile tests and the destruction of nuclear sites are huge commitments and that it was now the US’ turn. North Korea’s main concern in this context is to bring about at least a partial lifting of the sanctions, which would translate into a significant improvement in its very bleak economic situation. Such an easing might indeed be considered by China and Russia, while it is currently out of question for the USA or Japan.

The long-term goal is the complete and verifiable denuclearisation of the peninsula; another objective is concluding peace agreements, which as yet do not exist. The EU seeks to make a constructive contribution in this respect, always keeping in mind the sombre humanitarian situation and potential need for assistance.

Domestic policy continued to cause unsettlement in Mongolia. The split of the governing party MVP and corruption scandals translated into a vote of no confidence in parliament on 30 November and triggered public protests.

At foreign policy level, Mongolia always strives to ensure a balanced relationship with its large neighbours China and Russia. In April, Prime Minister Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh paid a state visit to China, and in September, Mongolian troops took part in the Russian military exercise “Vostok 2018”. For strategic reasons, Mongolia at the same time seeks to maintain relations with so-called “third neighbours” such as the USA, Japan and the EU.

1.5.5. South and Southeast Asia

On 1 January, Lim Jock Hoi from Brunei took over as ASEAN Secretary-General. Under the chair of Singapore, the ASEAN Smart Cities Network was founded and progress was made in the negotiations for the ambitious free trade agreement RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership). Negotiations between ASEAN and China on the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea were continued. The ASEAN Summit was held in Singapore from 11 to 15 November.

Brunei saw a major cabinet reshuffle in January. Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah replaced six ministers on the grounds of mismanagement and corruption. At the same time, the Sultan retained all key positions and thus remains Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Minister of Finance and Minister of Foreign Affairs.
Indonesia was severely hit by a number of very serious natural disasters. Earthquakes and tsunamis in Lombok, Sulawesi and the Sunda Strait claimed the lives of several thousand people. In the regional elections in June, more than 150 million people had the right to vote. Likewise in June, Indonesia was elected to the UNSC for the period 2019 to 2020. In summer, the Asian Games, a major sporting event, took place in Jakarta and Palembang. Terrorist attacks on three churches in Indonesia’s second largest city, Surabaya, killed 28 people. The situation in West Papua continued to deteriorate, culminating in the assassination of 16 workers and soldiers by separatists in December.

In Cambodia, parliamentary elections were held in a highly restrictive political atmosphere on 29 July. After the largest opposition party CNRP had been banned by a court decision and the opposition leader Kem Sokha had been arrested in 2017, the ruling party of long-term Prime Minister Hun Sen won a landslide victory in the elections and now holds all 125 seats in the National Assembly. Although some restrictions on civil society, NGOs and the media were somewhat eased in the aftermath of the elections, re-admission of former parliamentarians and members of the opposition will only be possible on the basis of individual motions.

Due to its geopolitical position, Laos is an important member of China’s Belt & Road Initiative. The rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression remain severely restricted in the communist one-party state. The expansion of hydropower, which is being vigorously promoted by the Laotian government, suffered a painful setback due to a flood disaster caused by a bursting dam in the southern province of Attapeu in July.

In Malaysia, the parliamentary elections on 9 May brought about the first change of political power since the country’s independence in 1957. The ruling party coalition Barisan Nasional was replaced by the opposition coalition Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope) led by the 92-year-old former Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad. Charges of abuse of power, corruption and embezzlement were brought against members of Barisan Nasional, including former Prime Minister Najib Razak and his wife. In this context, a key role was played by the country’s state investment fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MdB), which had – according to charges – been used for purposes of personal enrichment and election financing. Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad ordered an evaluation of all major Chinese projects, a revival of the “Look East” foreign policy in favour of Japan and the closure of the King Salman Center for International Peace, a Saudi Arabian counterterrorism centre. Relations with the EU were strained due to the palm oil conflict. On the International Day Against the Death Penalty on 10 October, the government announced a nationwide moratorium on capital punishment. A bill on the full abolishment of the death penalty has, however, not yet been submitted to parliament.

In Myanmar, no progress was made in repatriating hundreds of thousands of members of the Rohingya Muslim minority, who had fled from Rakhine State to Bangladesh in August 2017. Likewise, hardly any progress has been made in implementing a cooperation agreement on voluntary and safe return, concluded in June between Myanmar and two UN agencies. Humanitarian access to the northern part of the federated state
of Rakhine remains extremely limited. The continuing efforts of de facto Head of Government Aung San Suu Kyi to bring peace to the country have also been undermined by attacks launched by the Buddhist ethnic Arakanese group on police stations in Rakhine State and the resurgence of armed conflict in the ethnic federated states of Kachin, Northern Shan, Kayin and Chin.

On 17 March, the Philippines deposited a written notification of withdrawal from the Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The decision followed the ICC’s opening of preliminary examinations into the situation in the Philippines for crimes against humanity allegedly committed in the context of the “war on drugs” campaign. Martial law in Mindanao was extended until the end of 2019. President Rodrigo Duterte signed the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) on 26 July to create the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The government’s efforts to continue the peace process with the communist New People’s Army suffered a serious setback with the breaking-off of the peace talks. In the context of the reorientation of its foreign policy, the country was moved closer to China, Russia and Japan. Consequently, the traditionally strong relations with the USA saw a further reduction in importance. Reporting an economic growth of over 6 %, the Philippines remained one of the most dynamic markets in Southeast Asia.

As Singapore took over the rotating ASEAN chairmanship, the year was mainly marked by the coordinating role it played in this capacity. By hosting the Trump-Kim summit in June, Singapore was able to underpin its position as a neutral city-state. At domestic policy level, the appointment of the former Minister of Finance, Heng Swee Keat, as the first Assistant Secretary General of the ruling People’s Action Party set the course for the succession of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Long. The visit Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz paid to Singapore in August and the return visit of Prime Minister Lee to Vienna in mid-October marked highlights in bilateral relations.

Since the military coup in Thailand in 2014, the Prime Minister’s power to issue emergency decrees is still in force after martial law had been lifted. However, on 11 December the last organic law required for the holding of general elections came into force. Subsequently, the government lifted restrictions on parties’ political activities, including a ban on assembly. For 2019, parliamentary elections were announced for March and the official coronation of King Maha Vajiralongkorn (Rama X), who succeeded the late King Bhumibol in 2016, was announced for May.

The President of Timor-Leste, Francisco Guterres, dissolved the parliament in January and early parliamentary elections were held in May with Taur Matan Ruak becoming the new Head of Government. An agreement was reached with Australia on the maritime border in the Timor Sea and the submarine oil deposits located there.

Vietnam continued to generate economic growth at a high level. At domestic policy level, the most significant event was the death of the incumbent President Tran Dai Quang on 21 September. The Secretary General of the Communist Party, Nguyen Phu Trong, was elected as the new president by Parliament and took office on 23 October. He is thus the first figure since state founder Ho Chi Minh to hold the offices of both Secretary General of the Communist Party and President of State. On the foreign policy
front, Vietnam has continued its efforts towards achieving generally deeper integration across all areas as well as with regional and international organisations. In this context, the country placed a major focus on the signing of the free trade agreement with the EU, which is scheduled for 2019. On 15 and 16 October, the Vietnamese Prime Minister, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, paid an official visit to Austria and met with Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz as well as Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen.

Composed of eight member states (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is the most important forum for regional economic policy integration in South Asia. The EU has enjoyed observer status since 2006. However, no meeting at the Heads of State and Government level has been held since the 19th SAARC Summit in Islamabad was cancelled in November 2016.

The security situation in Afghanistan remained precarious. Terrorist attacks by the Taliban continue to claim a high death toll among the civilian population, and attacks launched by the regional branch of the Islamic State (IS) have also been on the rise. Although the parliamentary elections held in October were marked by organisational problems and acts of violence, they are nevertheless considered a further milestone on the way to greater normality. Out of a total of approximately 18 million eligible voters, approximately four million Afghans (33% women) cast their votes.

Austria extended its support for NATO’s Resolute Support Mission (RSM) until the end of 2019 and contributed 17 members of the Austrian Armed Forces based in the greater Kabul area. In December, US President Donald Trump declared his intention to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, thus signalling a possible end to the USA’s 17-year military mission. For the first time, direct peace negotiations between the Taliban and the USA seem to have brought some progress. In this context, the motto “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed” was regularly repeated. The mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was extended for another year to 17 March 2019. The return of approximately 800,000 Afghan refugees from Iran and Pakistan has posed a major challenge.

In Bangladesh, the government coalition led by the Awami League (AL) was able to score an overwhelming victory in the parliamentary elections on 30 December. The coalition headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina won 288 of the 300 available seats, while the united opposition led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) only gained seven. The pre-election period was, however, overshadowed by unrest and outbreaks of violence, and the election results were tainted by election fraud claims. The flow of refugees heading from Myanmar to Bangladesh has continued unabated, having increased again since August last year. With currently more than one million refugees in Bangladesh, the country has called for their return to Myanmar and for a solution to the problem to be found through the involvement of the international community.

In Bhutan, the elections to the National Assembly held in September/October resulted in a victory for the centre-left party DNT, which had been founded only in 2013. Winning 30 of the 47 seats in the country’s National Assembly, it prevailed over the incumbent DPT. The new government led by Prime Minister Lotay Tsehring was sworn in on 7
November. The Bhutan Strategy prepared by the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) for 2019-2023 is to be signed in 2019 and aims to facilitate the country’s transition to a middle-income country, placing a focus on sustainable energy and good governance.

**India** prepared for the campaign for the general elections scheduled for spring 2019. The result of the regional elections held in February in the states of Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland underpinned the positive trend for the BJP, which is in power nationwide, as well as regional parties. The regional elections in Karnataka in May, however, led to a stalemate between the rival major parties BJP and Congress. In the five provincial elections (Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram) in November and December, the Congress Party was able to achieve a surprisingly clear victory in the first three major states, while the BJP suffered losses in all states with regional parties winning in the latter two. Backed by these latest successes, the Congress Party was strengthened. This means that there are again two strong parties with good chances of competing in the 2019 general elections. Relations between India and Pakistan remained tense, with the Kashmir conflict continuing to be a crisis hot spot.

In the presidential elections held in the **Maldives** on 23 September, the candidate of the united opposition, Ibrahim “Ibu” Mohamed Solih of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), was able to score a surprising victory. In a ceremony, which was also attended by Indian Prime Minister Modi, he was sworn in on 17 November as the seventh President of the Maldives, which led to a calming of the previously tense domestic policy situation. The country’s withdrawal from the Commonwealth in 2016 was reversed on 19 November.

In **Nepal**, Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli, who is considered to be pro-China, was again appointed Prime Minister on 15 February. In May, the CPN-UML (Marxist-Leninist) led by Prime Minister Oli merged with the UCPN-M (Maoist) of ex-Prime Minister “Prachanda” to form a left-wing alliance under the name “Nepal Communist Party” (NCP), which means that – for the first time since the founding of the republic in 2008 – a certain level of stability may be expected in the country’s domestic policy.

In **Pakistan**, elections held around the middle of the year resulted in a change of government. Since 18 August, former cricket professional Imran Khan from the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has been the country’s Prime Minister and since 9 September, his party colleague Arif Alvi has held the office of President. Immediately after taking office, Prime Minister Khan was confronted with an acute balance of payments crisis. Seeking to counter this crisis, foreign policy efforts aimed at strengthening cooperation with Arab partners and China (cooperation within the framework of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) were launched and resulted in achieving the urgently needed financial support. The domestic policy agenda that the government has set itself is dominated by bringing about an economic upturn, fighting corruption and reforming the social system. Prior to the change of government, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz met then Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi for bilateral talks on the margins of the Bao Forum for Asia in April.
The ceasefire in force in the Kashmir region since 2003 was repeatedly violated and again claimed lives at the Line of Control, including many civilians. Following the acquittal of the Christian Asia Bibi, who had originally been sentenced to death for blasphemy, demonstrations by radical Islamists broke out in November.

In Sri Lanka, the local elections held nationwide on 10 February, brought substantial gains for the newly founded oppositional SLPF party of ex-President Mahinda Rajapaksa and triggered a crisis within the ruling coalition. In response, President Maithripala Sirisena curtailed the powers of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and ordered a cabinet reshuffle. Following the surprising withdrawal of the UPFA led by President Sirisena from the ruling coalition at the end of October and the dismissal of Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, the constitutional crisis was further aggravated. Parliament refused to recognise the swearing-in of Rajapaksa as the new prime minister. The Supreme Court furthermore declared the dissolution of parliament initiated by President Sirisena as well as the announcement of new elections illegal. Consequently, the Prime Minister Rajapaksa, who had not been recognised as prime minister, resigned and Wickremesinghe was reinstated on 16 December. Although this move formally put an end to the state crisis, the polarisation on the domestic policy front has remained.

1.6. Australia and Oceania

In Australia, the disputes within the Liberal Party led to the unexpected resignation of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. Elected by a crucial intra-party vote, former finance minister Scott Morrison became the country’s fifth prime minister in just five years on 24 August. On the foreign policy stage, the USA remains Australia’s main ally, but the country also enjoys partnerships with Japan in all areas. Relations with China, its most important trading partner, are far more complex. As in other regions of the world, Australia also seeks to prevent Chinese takeovers in sensitive sectors (e.g. raw materials). Due to its geographical proximity, Australia views the Chinese manifestations of power in the South China Sea as being particularly concerning.

New Zealand continued to be governed by the new tripartite coalition formed by Labour, the Greens and New Zealand First in September 2017. Led by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, the government attaches prime importance to relations with Australia. Furthermore, economic relations with China have registered a particularly steep increase. A bilateral free trade agreement with China has been in effect since 2008.

Climate change was once again the focus of attention for the countries of Oceania. After the past few decades had been marked by military coups, the parliamentary elections held in Fiji on 14 November represented a first step towards democratic normality.
2. Priority Topics

2.1. Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

From 1 July to 31 December 2018, Austria held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for a period of six months. Austria’s third Presidency after 1998 and 2006 was marked by different framework conditions than the two previous ones. With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 and the ensuing creation of the functions of President of the European Council and of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) as well as the extension of the competences of the European Parliament (EP), the position of the rotating Presidency had seen a number of changes. The meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), for example, have since been chaired by the HR. The chair of the European Council is held by the President of the European Council and no longer by the Head of Government of the Member State holding the Presidency. However, the Presidency provisions for all the other Council configurations have remained unchanged. Furthermore, holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union continues to involve a wide range of diverse and demanding tasks for the respective Member State. Austria was, for instance, responsible for drafting agendas, setting the topics to be addressed by Council meetings, chairing most of the preparatory bodies and working groups, and also for conducting triilogue negotiations with the European Parliament as well as the European Commission. Despite the changes in the overall framework, Austria was thus able to make a significant contribution to the legislative and political work of the Council of the European Union during its term as Presidency.

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union took place in an environment that was challenging for both the Union and its Member States. Not only was the EU faced with issues such as the imminent withdrawal of the United Kingdom, growing tensions between several actors in the field of international relations, increasingly fierce economic competition with other regions of the world as well as instability and insecurity in some regions in the EU’s immediate neighbourhood, but there were also tensions within the EU: rule of law infringement procedures had been initiated against two Member States. There were also clear differences of opinion among Member States on a number of fundamental questions concerning the necessary further development of the EU, the future of the Economic and Monetary Union or with regard to the sensitive area of European solidarity and responsibility.

Another important aspect to be considered in the context of the work of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union were the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament to be held from 23 to 26 May 2019. As the end of the EP’s legislative period was approaching, Austria was expected to close as many open dossiers as possible on time or to bring them at least close to conclusion.

2.1.1. Priorities

Led by its key motto “A Europe that protects”, Austria, seeking to bring the largest possible number of negotiations to a successful conclusion and to make progress on the
Priority Topics

specified priority areas has from the outset and in the citizens’ interest, pursued a very dense work programme at all levels. These priorities included the professional handling of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU, the next Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027, security and the fight against irregular migration, ensuring prosperity and competitiveness through digitalisation, stability in the EU’s neighbourhood – bringing the Western Balkans/South East Europe closer to the EU, as well as subsidiarity.

The foreign and security policy priorities defined by the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union were the promotion of effective multilateralism and strengthening a rules-based global order. In addition, the expansion of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and the strengthening of cooperation beyond the EU’s neighbourhood, especially the promotion of relations with Asia and Africa, were at the centre of attention. Other focal points were the external aspects of migration and, in the area of development cooperation, the linking of humanitarian aid with longer-term development policy measures and the topic of gender equality and development. In the area of security and defence, three main strands were pursued: implementation of the Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy, of the European Defence Action Plan and of the Joint Declaration on Cooperation signed by NATO and EU leaders.

2.1.2. Activities

A total of 2,722 events and conferences took place during the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. These included four meetings of Heads of State and Government, 36 formal and 14 informal Council meetings at ministerial level, 2,062 meetings of Council preparatory bodies, 161 trilogues with the European Parliament, and seven plenary sessions in the European Parliament involving the participation of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In total, 363 Presidency events were held in Austria and other European countries.

The highlight from the MFA’s point of view was marked by the informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers (also known as Gymnich Meeting) at the joint invitation of Federal Minister Karin Kneissl and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini in Vienna on 30 and 31 August. The meeting focused on long-term strategies with respect to the Middle East, transatlantic relations, South/East Europe and strengthening multilateralism. The EU accession candidates Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey took part in the working segment on effective multilateralism.

During its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria strongly supported the process of rapprochement of the countries of the Western Balkans/South East Europe with the EU. In the interest of bringing the countries of South East Europe closer to the Union, they were thus increasingly involved in EU processes, including in the context of a working lunch following the Gymnich meeting on 31 August. Together with her Albanian counterpart, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl opened a conference of ministers from the six South East European states with an EU integration agenda in Tirana on 4 October. At this meeting, a Memorandum of Understanding on closer cooperation on
the EU integration process was signed. An intensive exchange of visits between members of the Federal Government, the Federal President, the President of the National Council and their respective counterparts underlined Austria’s close ties with the candidate countries in South East Europe and provided valuable impetus. Chaired by Federal Minister Karin Kneissl, two accession conferences with Serbia and Montenegro were held.

Additionally, a special focus was placed on further developing the Eastern Partnership. During its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria hosted a meeting of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers in the Eastern Partnership format in Innsbruck. On 13 July, a meeting of Foreign Ministers was held in Luxembourg on 15 October and a meeting of Environment Ministers was convened in Luxemburg on 9 October. Other events in the context of the Eastern Partnership were the e-Democracy conference in Krems on 23 October and the events that took place in Vienna: the Eastern Partnership Youth Conference on 8 and 9 November, the Eastern Partnership Business Forum on 6 December and the Eastern Partnership Annual Conference on 7 December.

As the promotion of security and sustainable development in Central Asia is an investment in the EU’s own security, work towards preparing a new strategy for Central Asia continued during the Austrian Presidency. A conference held in Brussels on 18 September, focused on ways of involving the private sector more actively in the partnership between the EU and Central Asia. Furthermore, representing HR Federica Mogherini, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl chaired EU Cooperation Councils with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan held in Brussels in November and December.

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM Meeting), held on 18 and 19 October, highlighted the special focus the Austrian Presidency placed on Asia. At this high-level informal dialogue meeting between Asia and Europe, heads of state and government from over 50 European and Asian countries underlined their clear commitment to effective multilateralism. Furthermore, three successful summits between the EU and China, Japan and South Korea were held during Austria’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which contributed to strengthening relations with these strategic partners.

During its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria also hosted the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), which is made up of 28 EU Member States and 15 Mediterranean countries. At a working meeting held in Vienna on 20 September, the important activities launched by the UfM as well as main programmes and agenda topics were discussed. The annual meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the UfM Member States took place in Barcelona on 8 October. Austria supports the UfM in its objectives of promoting multilateral cooperation, political dialogue and economic integration across the Mediterranean region.

In the field of development cooperation, ‘gender and development’ was one of the priorities of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. On the initiative of Federal Minister Karin Kneissl, this year’s Nobel Peace Prize laureates, Nadia Murad and Denis Mukwege, were invited to the Development Cooperation Council on 26 November and were asked to inform ministers first-hand about violence against women in crisis areas.
With regard to Africa, the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union placed the foreign policy focus on dealing with crisis situations and supporting the continent’s economic development. Convened at the request of Austria and the African Union, the High-Level Africa-Europe Forum that brings together European and African heads of state and government, entrepreneurs and stakeholders, was held in Vienna on 18 December. Under the motto of “Taking cooperation to the digital age”, talks focused on promotion of innovation and digitalisation, measures to secure prosperity and competitiveness as well as deepening cooperation between Europe and Africa.

With a view to strengthening relations with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), a meeting between EU and CELAC foreign ministers took place in Brussels on 16 and 17 July. The meeting sent an important signal of unity after the summit originally planned for autumn 2017 had to be cancelled. Of particular importance in this context is that participants were able to agree on updating part of their joint action plan on environment and climate change.

In the interests of further strengthening the international rules-based order and international humanitarian law, a meeting was held at the initiative of Federal Minister Karin Kneissl between EU foreign ministers and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Peter Maurer, on the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on 10 December. The meeting sought to strengthen the EU’s role as an actor in international humanitarian law and international criminal law within the framework of an intensive, ongoing exchange with the ICRC in order to jointly meet current global humanitarian challenges.

After more than twelve years of preparatory work, negotiations were eventually launched at United Nations (UN) level on an international legally binding instrument under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. In addition, the Austrian Presidency, together with the European Commission, negotiated the resolution on oceans and law of the sea adopted by the 73rd UN General Assembly. The goal is to convince all states to better protect the oceans and ensure better coordination of and cooperation among the international community. Austria has thus succeeded in making an important contribution to strengthening the international rules-based order and consolidating the EU’s pioneering role in environmental protection.

2.1.3. Summary

Despite the challenging environment, the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union was able to live up to its role as a neutral facilitator and contribute towards reaching agreement on many dossiers. In total, 53 political agreements were reached with the European Parliament and 75 agreements in the Council, 56 conclusions and recommendations were adopted. In addition, the Council adopted 509 further decisions and 52 legal acts were signed by the Council and the European Parliament.
One of the greatest challenges of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union were the negotiations on the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU. As Presidency of the General Affairs Council (GAC Art. 50), Austria made an important contribution to securing the uniform position of the EU-27 vis-à-vis the United Kingdom and supported EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier. The Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration on the future relationship between the UK and the EU were endorsed by the heads of state and government on 25 November.

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union set a high pace for the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework for the period 2021-2027 and was able to submit not only a sound progress report but also a full negotiation basis (“negotiation box”) to the European Council on 13 and 14 December. Furthermore, agreement in principle was reached on almost 50 per cent of the sectoral programmes, including Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, the Single Market Programme, Digital Europe, the European Solidarity Corps, the Connecting Europe Facility, the European Defence Fund, Creative Europe and LIFE. Regarding external financing instruments, the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union was able to achieve significant progress. Thus constructive discussions on the controversial items of the planned comprehensive Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) were held, which were facilitated by a compromise proposal drawn up by the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Regarding the Instrument for the Association of the Overseas Countries and Territories including Greenland and the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III), agreement was reached on a large part of the respective texts.

One of the objectives pursued by the Austrian Presidency was promoting and enhancing the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. the European Union should focus on big issues which require a joint solution and take a step back when it comes to smaller issues where Member States or regions are in a better position to take decisions. By hosting the conference “Subsidiarity as the building principle of the European Union” in Bregenz on 15 and 16 November, Austria contributed to putting this important topic back on the European agenda. A declaration on strengthening and more effective application of the principle of subsidiarity in the EU was adopted, which will be considered in the debate on the future of the EU at the EU summit in Sibiu in May 2019.

In the field of asylum and migration, the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union – building on the European Council conclusions of 28 June – advocated a paradigm shift aimed at treating all three dimensions of migration policy equally: external border management, external aspects and the internal dimension, including a reform of the Common European Asylum System. The change of trend to this effect was consolidated by the Salzburg Summit on 20 September and the European Council meetings held in October and December. With respect to the further development of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), agreement was reached on strengthening its mandate in the fields of return and cooperation with countries of origin and transit. Intensified cooperation, especially with Egypt, and holding an EU home affairs ministers’ conference together with African partners on 14 September,
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enabled the opening of a new chapter with respect to cooperation with countries of origin and transit.

As regards the internal dimension, work on all the legal acts relating to the Common European Asylum System was pursued intensively and in the spirit of the paradigm shift, and final progress reports were presented. The Austrian approach of mandatory solidarity instead of mandatory distribution/relocation was incorporated into the ongoing work.

During the Austrian EU Presidency of the Council of the European Union, it was also possible to make important progress in the wider security field, including EU-wide rules against the dissemination of terrorist online content and on preserving electronic evidence online, strengthening the European Network of Immigration Liaison Officers posted in third countries, implementing the security of identity documents and residence permits, better access by the authorities to financial information for law enforcement purposes in order to fight terrorism and serious crime more efficiently, the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS), strengthening the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (rescEU) and improving cyber security in the EU.

With a view to a comprehensive security approach, the agreement on a civilian CSDP Compact aimed at bolstering the capabilities of civilian crisis management missions, to which the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union made a proactive contribution, is particularly noteworthy. Consensus was reached on a new list of Permanent Structured Cooperation projects, including an Austrian project that addresses the topic of defence against nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, and on the common position drawn up by the Austrian Presidency on the planned European Defence Fund. Within the framework of the ATHENA Special Committee, timely agreement was reached on the 2019 budgets of the European Union Training Mission (EUTM) Somalia, European Union Force (EUFOR) Althea, EUTM Central African Republic, EUTM Mali and European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) Atalanta. Furthermore, the discussion on enhanced cooperation between the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the area of justice and home affairs was also successfully advanced during Austria’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union and approaches towards improving cooperation between the EU and other relevant international organisations, in particular the UN and OSCE, were addressed.

On 5 October, the politically binding Joint Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkans was adopted, which focuses on strengthened cooperation between the EU and South East Europe and provides for the bundling of measures aimed at preventing and combating terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation.

By hosting the Conference on European Values on 19 and 20 November and the Conference on Europe beyond antisemitism and antizionism on 21 November, the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union was able to achieve an important breakthrough in the fight against antisemitism. Building on these conferences, a Council Declaration on the fight against antisemitism and the development of a common security approach to better protect Jewish communities and institutions in Europe was adopted by the Home Affairs Ministers Council on 6 December. The EU’s clear commit-
The Austrian Presidency addressed the topic of digitalisation both in the context of the relevant Council meetings and at numerous high-level conferences. The completion and deepening of the Digital Single Market is of major concern to Austria and was fostered intensively. Numerous negotiations on legal proposals were able to be concluded with the EP or agreements reached in the Council. The successes achieved in this context include the regulation on better mutual recognition of goods, the registration and administration of “.eu”-websites, the preparation of new regulations relating to online platforms and companies, and enhanced availability of public sector information in order to promote innovation and start-ups. In the context of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Member States also agreed to review foreign direct investment in the EU. Furthermore, the High-Level Forum Africa-Europe, held in Vienna on 18 December, also focused on the topics of innovation and digitalisation.

The Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union was able to break a long-standing deadlock in the Council on reform of the VAT system. The reforms adopted, including measures aimed at combating VAT fraud and reduced rates for e-books, represent an important contribution to modernising the tax system and deepening the internal market. With respect to taxation of the digital economy, Austria was able to overcome the broad-based opposition it was faced with at the beginning of its Presidency and bring about a change of opinion. The progress achieved in this area has prepared a sound basis for further work.

In the area of environmental and climate protection, important decisions were taken to set the course for the future. In the context of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, ambitious CO2 reduction targets were defined for cars and – for the first time at EU level – also for trucks and buses. With a view to reducing plastic waste in Europe, a ban on certain single-use plastic products was achieved. Presenting an ambitious EU position, the Presidency of the Council of the European Union was able to make a significant contribution to the agreement on a binding climate protection rulebook at the UN Climate Change Conference in Katowice from 3 to 14 December. The Austrian Presidency was furthermore able to bring years of negotiations to an end by successfully concluding the comprehensive “Clean Energy for all Europeans” package. The decisions adopted also include the early phasing out coal subsidies and improved framework conditions for the development and expansion of renewable energy.

In keeping with its traditional foreign policy focus, Austria paid considerable attention to its neighbourhood and, above all, to the gradual rapprochement of the Western Balkan and South East European states with the EU. In its position as Presidency, Austria maintained very close contacts with the region and pro-actively supported the countries’ process of rapprochement with the EU. In addition, participants from the region were involved at all levels in a number of Presidency events. The opening of further negotiation chapters with Serbia (economic and monetary policy, statistics) and with Montenegro (environment and climate change) reflected the very tangible progress achieved.
The Connecting Europe & Asia Strategy (Connectivity Strategy), adopted on 15 October, is the first such strategy to cover relations between the EU and Asia in an integrated, strategic and comprehensive manner. It builds on the numerous existing initiatives and sets out the guidelines for the EU’s future Asia policy. By adopting the EU-India Strategy on 10 December, the EU took account of India’s role as a strategic partner, an emerging economic power in Asia and an ally when it comes to shared values such as democracy, the rule of law and a rules-based world order. During the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements as well as the Free Trade Agreements were signed with Japan and Singapore.

In the field of CFSP, the discussion on the disastrous humanitarian situation in Yemen, held on the initiative of Federal Minister Karin Kneissl in the Foreign Affairs Council on 19 November, is of particular note. Apart from the humanitarian situation in the country, deliberations also focused on a possible ceasefire and the need for a political solution to the longstanding conflict.

Another major achievement were the jointly adopted Council conclusions on the development of the UN-EU Strategic Partnership on 18 September, and on women, peace and security on 10 December. Commemorating the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute, the General Affairs Council on 16 July adopted conclusions on the International Criminal Court (ICC), in which the EU and its Member States reaffirmed their political support for the ICC and the fight against impunity. In the light of strengthening effective multilateralism, Austria, as a long-standing supporter, attached particular importance to promoting the ICC. Austria expressed its great commitment to strengthening the EU’s institutional capacity in the field of international criminal justice and international humanitarian law.

With respect to development cooperation, the realignment of relations between the EU and the group of 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries was kicked-off with the negotiations on the follow-up to the Cotonou Agreement. In the priority area of gender equality and development, the Council adopted conclusions on the 2017 implementation report of the EU Gender Action Plan II 2016-2020 using clear language on combating all forms of violence against women, and in particular female genital mutilation.

In the global perception, Austria above all stands for culture, which meant that the relevant expectations of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union were high. Building on this image, Austria’s international cultural policy also promoted culture in presenting Austria as a positive and innovative country. The focus was primarily on musical and visual arts events in order to foster the sharing of Austrian art and culture across physical and linguistic borders, while at the same time integrating the key aspects of international cultural policy (intercultural and interreligious dialogue, dealing with migration, women in art, culture and science as well as supporting – especially young – artists). Austria thus reached out to EU representations and representations of European partners in order to implement joint projects. Particular emphasis was placed on projects launched by the Austrian Cultural Forum in Brussels. In the context of Austria’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the first-ever draft Council conclusions on an EU strategic approach to international cultural relations
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was presented and largely discussed in the EU Cultural Affairs Committee. The Council conclusions are expected to be adopted during the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2019.

In the field of consular affairs, Vienna hosted three EU dialogues on consular cooperation with Australia, Canada and the USA, in which Austria in its role as Presidency represented the interests of all EU Member States. The dialogues offered the opportunity for enhanced exchange of experience, inter alia on consular crisis communication, consular crisis exercises and general crisis management. Furthermore, compromises were reached on two regulations governing the visa system. These compromises, agreed on under the Austrian Presidency, focus inter alia on facilitating the visa application procedure and on promoting security in the Schengen area through improved exchange of information. Regarding the adaptations and amendments to the European travel document for return, a compromise text on the European Commission’s proposal for a directive was drawn up. The European travel document for return is the most common form of assistance EU Member States provide to non-EU citizens in distress or crisis situations in third countries. The relevant negotiations are to be concluded under the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

On 1 January 2019, Romania takes over as the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Its trio presidency partners are Finland (Presidency of the Council in the second half of 2019) and Croatia (Presidency of the Council in the first half of 2020). This is Romania’s first Presidency of the Council of the European Union, for which it has chosen “Cohesion, a common European value” as a motto. The special challenges to be addressed by the new trio presidency include ensuring an orderly transition to a new legislative period following the EP elections in May 2019, the Brexit process and the negotiations on the new Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027. Austria has endeavoured to ensure the smoothest possible transition of the Presidency’s agenda. To this end, numerous meetings were held in Brussels, Vienna and Bucharest, with a visit by Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz to Bucharest on 21 December marking the end of this process.

2.2. Effective Multilateralism and the Role of Austria

2.2.1. United Nations and its Specialised Agencies

2.2.1.1. Introduction

During the high-level week of the 73rd UN General Assembly (UNGA), the defence of multilateralism and a rules-based world order were at the centre of the discussions. Verbal attacks launched by the US administration led by President Donald Trump against the United Nations (UN), lack of progress on the numerous crisis hotspots (including Syria, Libya and Myanmar) and constantly dwindling financial resources have weakened the organisation and impaired confidence in the UN’s effectiveness and efficiency. In response to these developments, UN Secretary-General (UNSG) António Guterres continued his ambitious reform programme addressing the areas of “peace
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and security”, “development” and “management”. Austria actively supports these committed efforts towards fostering an effective, efficient and coherent organisation.

The UN management reform, neutral both in terms of cost and staff positions, to be implemented from 1 January 2019 onwards seeks to contribute towards modernising and de-bureaucratising the UN. The goals is to increase effectiveness and efficiency regarding mandate implementation. The planning and budgeting process will be simplified. In order to achieve these goals, the UNMS approved the creation of two new departments as proposed by the UNSG, namely the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Department of Operational Support. The latter department includes inter alia unified procurement and logistics management.

In the area of Peace and Security, the focus is on strengthening preventive diplomacy and maintaining peace. At the Secretariat level, this is to be achieved by creating two new departments, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations. The aim is to make better use of synergies between political, strategic and operational responsibilities. In the field of conflict prevention, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) also has an important role to play. As a joint subsidiary organ of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the UN General Assembly (UNGA), the PBC also met in five country-specific configurations (Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Central African Republic).

The reform in the area of Development seeks to improve coordination between the various actors within the UN Development System (UNDS) and ensure system-wide accountability. The reform is based on the reorientation of the system of Resident Coordinators and the country teams reporting to them. This will make the system more efficient and transparent and should enable the UN and its MS to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. On 31 May, the UNGA adopted the resolution on the reform of the UNDS by consensus. A corresponding implementation plan prepared by the UNSG was presented on 11 September and stipulated that the decoupling of the system of Resident Coordinators from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) is to be implemented as of 1 January 2019. The first Funding Dialogue was launched on 31 July. The objective is to adopt a Funding Compact based on mutual commitments between the UN system and UNMS.

The crises in the Middle East and North Africa remained dominant topics on the UN’s agenda. Due to the lack of political progress, the humanitarian situation in Syria and Yemen remained dramatic. The conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya and their negative consequences at both regional and international level, including above all the flow of refugees and the propagation of extremist groups, were reflected in the agendas of both the UNSC and the UNGA. In the course of the year, UNMS negotiated a UN Refugee Pact and a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (UN Migration Pact). The latter was endorsed by a large majority at the UNGA on 19 December. In accordance with the decision of the Council of Ministers of 31 October, Austria abstained from voting and presented the Austrian position in an explanation of vote.

The situation in the Middle East conflict deteriorated significantly. The Great March of Return, as it was called by the organisers, triggered violent clashes in the Gaza Strip
between Palestinian demonstrators and Israeli security forces, resulting in numerous deaths. The situation in Gaza was aggravated by the discontinuation of voluntary contributions by the USA to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The loss of the largest contributor meant that UNRWA found it very difficult to maintain its core services, particularly in the fields of education and health. It was only possible to offset the negative impacts through a substantial increase in funding and services provided by other donors, most notably the EU.

Positive developments were reported with respect to UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKO). More than 100 UN-MS support the UNSG’s initiative on Action for Peacekeeping (A4P), which aims to strengthen the UNPKO’s efficiency and effectiveness. Other positive factors included the COP24 climate conference in Katowice (Poland), the dialogue initiated on the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, the peace agreement in South Sudan, the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the successful completion of the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia after more than fifteen years.

Three years after the adoption of the relevant resolutions by the UNGA, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development remained at the centre of the UN’s substantive work in the field of sustainable economic, social and ecological development. The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the central platform for reviewing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focused on the topic of “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies” and reviewed in depth the level of implementation of a new group of global sustainability goals: water and sanitation for all (SDG 6); sustainable and modern energy for all (SDG 7); cities and human settlements (SDG 11); sustainable consumption and production patterns (SDG 12); sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss (SDG 15); as well as global partnership for sustainable development/means of implementation (SDG 17). Austria was represented by a delegation of members of the National Council, as well as representatives of several ministries and civil society. Austria co-hosted four side events (inter alia with the Austrian Court of Audit and UNIDO) and issued a national statement.

Building on its long-standing foreign policy priorities, Austria continued to pro-actively support disarmament, the protection of human rights, the rule of law, the protection of the civilians in armed conflict, as well as women, peace and security. On 12 October, Austria was elected to the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2019-2021.

2.2.1.2. General Assembly

General Matters

The general debate of the 73rd UNGA took place from 25 September to 1 October and was attended by 84 heads of state, four vice-presidents and 44 heads of government. Many of the eminent participants had gathered to attend the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit, held to mark Mandela’s 100th birthday, but also a number of other high-rank-
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Austria was represented both at the Ministerial Week and at the side events by Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen, Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Federal Minister Karin Kneissl, who jointly attended the opening of the 73rd UNGA and a meeting with UNSG António Guterres. Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz also took part in the UNGA session marking the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. The Federal Chancellor furthermore held bilateral talks with heads of state and government, focusing especially on Africa, and met high-ranking representatives from the business community. Federal Minister Karin Kneissl participated in the EU Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, the traditional transatlantic dinner at the invitation of the US Secretary of State and a high-level EU event on Syria. The Foreign Minister held bilateral talks with counterparts and UN special envoys, focusing especially on the Middle East, and gave a guest lecture at New York University on the impact and consequences of the First World War in the Middle East.

On 29 September, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl addressed the UNGA delivering the Austrian speech in Arabic, French, Spanish and English – which was met with a very positive response. In her multilingual speech, she called for effective multilateralism based on the rule of law and compliance with international law, highlighting that this is needed to facilitate concrete solutions to current global challenges. In her address, the Foreign Minister covered a wide range of topics spanning from the situation in the Middle East, especially in Syria, to nuclear disarmament, the rights of women and girls, the fight against gender-based violence and female genital mutilation.

Political Affairs

The impacts of the Middle East conflict have traditionally been a special priority of the GA’s work. Primarily on the initiative of Palestine, the GA adopted a total of 19 resolutions inter alia on the work of UNRWA and on various aspects of the political and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Territories. The resolution on assistance to the Palestinian people introduced by Austria in its capacity as Presidency of the Council of the European Union was the only resolution on the Middle East to be adopted by consensus by the UNMS. After a draft resolution, initiated on the escalation in Gaza due to the “Great March of Return” had been thwarted by a US veto in the UNSC, the GA, in an emergency meeting, adopted a resolution on the protection of the Palestinian civilian population. The GA called for measures to ensure the safety and protection of the civilian population, to grant humanitarian access and to end the blockade on Gaza. Like a number of other EU Member States, Austria abstained from voting. In December, a resolution to condemn Hamas, put forward by the USA and supported by Austria and the rest of the EU Member States, failed to secure the necessary two-thirds majority in the GA.
Disarmament and International Security

Disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction as well as arms control are central objectives of international security policy. The UNSG presented his disarmament agenda, which places particular focus on processes in which Austria plays a leading role, including nuclear disarmament, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA), lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) and small arms and light weapons. Thus, Austria became a “champion” of several agenda topics.

Following the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2017, in the promotion and development of which Austria played a leading role, the focus was on progress towards its entry into force. Austria was the eighth State Party to deposit the instrument of ratification on 8 May. In cooperation with like-minded partners from civil society, Austria also organised a signature and ratification ceremony on the margins of the UNGA High-Level Week, involving the President of the GA, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross as well as the head of ICAN who had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. By the end of the year, the number of ratifications had already reached 19 and 69 signatures had been achieved. A total of 50 ratifications is required for the treaty to enter into force.

In the UNGA’s First Committee (Disarmament), Austria, together with a core group of like-minded states, introduced the – now annual – implementation resolution for the Treaty, which was adopted by an even larger majority despite strong criticism from some nuclear-weapon states. Initiated by Austria, the resolution on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons was again adopted by a majority of more than three quarters of the votes. As last year’s chair of the Meeting of the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC), Austria, together with Norway and Afghanistan, introduced the resolution on APMBC and was able to gain additional supporters. Furthermore, Austria continued its efforts on banning lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS), promoting the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the preparation of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation and cyber warfare. In addition, Austria actively supported the preparation of a joint statement on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA), which was endorsed by 50 states.

Major differences of opinion between the USA and Russia became apparent on the topic of militarisation of outer space, with the US accusing Russia of having already carried out weapons tests, as well as in the cyber area. On the latter, irreconcilable differences of opinion eventually led to the adoption of two competing resolutions establishing parallel processes.

Austria organised side events on the margins of the First Committee, inter alia on international law in cyberspace, ethical aspects of nuclear weapons, and the entry into force of the TPNW, LAWS and EWIPA.

The UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC) started its work in a new cycle, which, unlike in previous years, will also address space security issues apart from dealing with confi-
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dence-building measures in the nuclear weapons field. In the first year of its three-year negotiation cycle, the UNDC has, however, not been able to reach agreements.

Economic, Development and Environmental Affairs

The Second Committee of the UNGA (Economic and Social Affairs) met from 4 October to 3 December. The topics addressed included sustainable development, development financing, globalisation, environment, poverty reduction, macroeconomic issues, partnerships and the situation of Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). A total of 36 resolutions were adopted in these areas. In its role as Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria introduced a resolution entitled Towards Global Partnerships on behalf of the EU. Also representing the EU, Austria chaired the negotiations on a resolution on industrial development and on a resolution on the follow-up to the Second UN Conference on LLDCs. In this context, Austria and the EU primarily focused on averting attempts to reinterpret the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA).

Human Rights

In the Third Committee of the 73rd UN General Assembly, 57 resolutions on human rights and social issues were dealt with and adopted. As in the previous year, the number of votes taken on resolutions remained at a high level of 20 out of 57 (i.e. more than one third).

Austria introduced a resolution on Human Rights in the Administration of Justice, which was co-sponsored by 68 countries from all regions and adopted by consensus. In this resolution, which builds on the corresponding resolution introduced in the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) by Austria in 2017, this important topic was further developed and expanded to include aspects of the latest resolution of the HRC, in particular on the issue of discrimination in the criminal justice system. At the same time, it was also possible to add new impetus on the situation of people with disabilities in the administration of justice and to invite the UNSG to prepare a report on this issue.

From the Austrian point of view, the adoption of the traditional EU initiatives on the human rights situation in the DPR of Korea and on freedom of religion can be considered a success. In cooperation with the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the EU was able to facilitate the adoption of a resolution on the human rights situation in Myanmar, condemning the displacement of the Rohingya minority and the associated human rights violations. Further positive results included the adoption of resolutions on the human rights situation in Iran, Syria and Crimea (Ukraine). Furthermore, it was possible to increase support for the resolution “Moratorium on the use of the death penalty”, which was further expanded and is to be considered a clear success for the EU. Austria also very much welcomed the adoption of resolutions on the right to privacy, on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions as well as on freedom of association and assembly.
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The resolution on the rights of the child, initiated by the EU and Latin American states, was adopted by consensus after two motions for amendment had been rejected. The resolution on religious freedom or belief, introduced by the EU, and the resolution on religious intolerance, introduced by the OIC, were again adopted by consensus. The negotiations on a resolution on contemporary forms of racism and glorification of Nazism and/or Neo-Nazism, initiated by Russia, resulted in only minor changes to the text as compared to previous years. The EU Member States thus again jointly abstained from voting on this initiative, in which context the EU condemned all crimes committed during the Nazi regime, especially the Holocaust, in the strongest possible terms. In its explanation of vote, the EU called for effective measures towards fighting neo-Nazism in all its forms. The Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, negotiated in the context of the UNHRC was adopted after a vote.

The Third Committee again adopted several resolutions on strengthening the rights of women, including on efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, on the elimination of female genital mutilation and the fight against trafficking in women and girls. Although some of the negotiations were controversial, particularly with regard to sexual and reproductive health, the resolutions were eventually adopted by consensus, however, sometimes only after various motions for amendments had been rejected.

Austria played a very visible role, particularly due to the substantive and procedural tasks it assumed in connection with the Presidency of the Council of the European Union and its role as rapporteur in the Bureau of the Third Committee. Based on agreed EU positions, Austria took over the role of EU chief negotiator on four resolutions and contributed to their successful adoption. On behalf of the EU, Austria submitted 20 statements on the adoption of resolutions. By introducing the resolution on Human Rights in the Administration of Justice, Austria was also able to raise its international profile. New resolution projects in connection with its position as seat and headquarters state (Cyber/ICT, UNGASS fight against corruption) were actively pursued by Austria, also promoting national interests in this respect.

Austria contributed pro-actively to the negotiations on the resolutions on the right to privacy in the digital age, against extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, on women’s rights and the rights of the child, the rights of older persons, combating people trafficking, combating corruption and countering the world drug problem. In addition to the respective statements by the EU, Austria also contributed five national statements on the topic of social development (presented by the Austrian Youth Delegate) and in the interactive dialogues with the Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, on Minorities Issues and with the Independent Expert leading the Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty. In cooperation with partner organisations and other UN Member States, Austria furthermore organised two side events on the topics of “Youth: Double Discriminated?” and “How can states achieve compliance with international standards on press freedom online and offline”.

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Social Policy

The resolutions on literacy and people with disabilities dealt with in the Third Committee under the agenda item “Social Development” were adopted by consensus at the UNGA in December. The resolution on the World Summit on Social Development, traditionally introduced by the Group of Developing Countries and China (G-77), was adopted after a vote, the resolutions on the International Year of the Family and the Second World Assembly on Ageing were adopted by consensus.

The 56th session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD), a subsidiary body of the ECOSOC, was held in New York from 29 January to 5 February and focused on the priority topic of “Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all”. The CSocD adopted four resolutions on poverty eradication, ageing, the social dimension of the new Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and on future organisation and methods of work of the Commission.

Commission on the Status of Women

The 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), held in New York from 12–23 March, considered the priority topic of “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and empowerment of rural women and girls”. As a formal outcome, the UN Member States’ political representatives adopted conclusions on the priority theme. In addition, resolutions were adopted on the Anniversary Year of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 2020, on the CSW’s methods of work, on women, girls and HIV/AIDS, on women and children taken hostage including those subsequently imprisoned, and on the situation of Palestinian women.

Austria contributed actively to the negotiations and delivered a national statement in the general debate. Austria organised four side events on “Women in the digital world”, “Challenging discriminatory social norms for more gender-transformative policies”, “Localisation of UNSCR 1325: A strategy for rural women’s empowerment” and on “The role of women in mountain areas”.

Within the framework of the Safety of Journalists Group of Friends, Austria furthermore contributed to a side event on this topic.

Humanitarian Affairs

The UNGA adopted thematic resolutions on the coordination of humanitarian aid, the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, cooperation in providing assistance following disasters, the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and on the participation of volunteers (“White Helmets”). Resolutions with a regional focus related to assistance to the Palestinian people and assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa. In the relevant negotiations on resolutions, the EU, as one of the most important humanitarian donors, again played a pivotal role. Austria supported five humanitarian resolutions as co-sponsor.
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Administrative and Budgetary Affairs including UN Procurement

During its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria contributed very actively to the work of the Fifth Committee of the UNGA (Administrative and Budgetary Affairs), chaired various resolution negotiations and assumed an important role in numerous EU negotiating teams.

A major topic on the agenda of the Fifth Committee was the scale of assessments for Member States’ contributions to the regular UN budget and peacekeeping operations (PKO). Following difficult negotiations, it was agreed to maintain the existing methodology. Consequently, the Austrian share for the period 2019-2021 will be reduced from 0.720 % to 0.677 %. As the Member States approved to increase the originally approved regular UN budget 2018-2019 (5.397 billion US dollars) by 415.4 million US dollars, Austria’s contribution will increase in absolute terms in 2019, despite the 6 % reduction in its share.

The annual budget adopted for PKO from July 2018 to June 2019 amounts to 7.02 billion US dollars, which falls below the level for the previous period by more than 300 million US dollars. This was attributable to both the gradual reduction of the UN-AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and efficiency increases in PKO, as has been called for by some UNMS. While it was once again not possible to reach agreement on a resolution on cross-cutting themes, twelve previously temporary positions in the regional investigation centre of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) in Vienna were converted into permanent staff positions within the PKO support budget.

With respect to UN reform, the UNGA was able to take all major administrative and budgetary decisions in time for the start of the implementation period on 1 January 2019. The UN management reform provides for the creation of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC) and the Department of Operational Support (DOS). Mandate implementation is to be improved through decentralisation and a higher level of decision-making powers granted to managers in exchange for increased accountability. The UN’s “Peace and Security” pillar also saw the creation of two new main departments, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and the Department of Peace Operations (DPO). In addition, a single political-operational structure with three regional main departments was established. With regard to the reform of the UN Development System, the Fifth Committee, chaired by Austria, agreed on the UN Secretariat’s share in financing the system of resident coordinators. On the issue of the Global Service Delivery Model (GSDM) for administrative support services, which is relevant to the Vienna headquarters, UNMS requested the UNSG to prepare a new proposal by March 2019.

Safeguarding Austria’s economic interests also includes supporting Austrian companies in participating in public procurement by the UN and its specialised agencies. According to the “2017 Annual Statistical Report on United Nations Procurement”, the total value of the orders awarded by the UN system in 2017 rose to 18.62 billion US dollars (2016: 17.7 billion US dollars). Of this total, 1.17 % of all orders (goods and services) were awarded to Austrian companies, which corresponds to an increase of about 60 % compared to the previous year. The total value thus amounted to 217.85 million US dollars.
(compared with 129.4 million US dollars in 2016). Amounting to 144.22 million US dollars, the value of services awarded to Austrian companies almost doubled compared with 2016.

**International Law**

The main topic on the agenda of the UNGA’s Sixth Committee (International Law Committee) was again the debate on the report of the International Law Commission (ILC). As a member of the Bureau and as the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria played a particularly active role and, sharing the burden with the EU delegation in the context of resolution negotiations and drafting of EU statements, it also supported the EU delegation in other respects in the proper performance of its tasks, and sought to facilitate compromises within the EU. Beside the International Law Week and the ILC report, the focus of Austria’s activities was placed on the topics of strengthening and promoting the international treaty framework, the rule of law, universal jurisdiction and the status of the protocols to the Geneva Conventions. Other topics dealt with by the Sixth Committee included the report of the UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) and applications for being granted observer status in the UNGA.

The International Law Week, named after an Austrian proposal, brings together legal advisers of the UNMS to discuss international law issues on an annual basis. This year’s meeting was held from 22 to 31 October. Discussions focused on the ILC report outlining its projects aimed at the codification and further development of international law, especially with respect to the impact of subsequent agreements and subsequent practice, establishment of customary international law, protection of the atmosphere, provisional application of treaties, *ius cogens*, protection of the environment in connection with armed conflict, succession of states in respect of state responsibility, and immunity of state officials from foreign criminal jurisdiction. Austria made detailed statements on all agenda items. As chair of the Council Working Group on International Public Law (COJUR), Austria was responsible for EU coordination during the International Law Week and organised the traditional EU-US Legal Advisers Dialogue. Under the Austrian-Swedish initiative aimed at revitalising the Sixth Committee, another interactive dialogue meeting was held with members of the ILC, which was also chaired by Austria. This dialogue provided considerable impetus for the future work of the ILC.

**Strengthening and promoting the international treaty framework**: The agenda item introduced by Austria, Argentina, Brazil, Italy and Singapore led the Sixth Committee for the first time in years to a concrete result on the updating of the regulations on the registration of international treaties. It can be considered a major success for the Committee that the necessary updates and adaptations of the regulations governing the registration of treaties, which were last reviewed in 1978, were adapted to reflect current practice. The problem of the lack of resources for translations, however, provides some potential for conflict (especially within the EU) and particularly francophone states were opposed to the implementation of the UNSG’s related proposals. As Coun-
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cil Presidency, Austria advocated for maintaining a uniform EU position and acted as burden sharer together with the EU delegation.

Rule of Law: In the context of the EU, Austria contributed actively to the negotiations on the resolution within the EU framework, and mobilised the Group of Friends led by Austria at the traditional meeting in the lead-up to the Sixth Committee. Nevertheless, interest in the topic has been constantly decreasing among MS and progress within the Committee seems increasingly unlikely.

Universal Jurisdiction: The debate proceeded along familiar lines, with opponents of the concept citing in particular the risk of misuse, politicisation and confusion between universal jurisdiction and immunity. The ILC included the topic of “universal criminal jurisdiction” in its long-term programme of work. The hope that this would lead to moving discussions out of the Sixth Committee was, however, thwarted by the African Group.

Status of the Protocols to the Geneva Conventions: The negotiations on a resolution proved particularly difficult due to the references to the International Criminal Court (ICC), and several UNMS called for deleting the wording that referred to the ICC. This could, however, be prevented due to resistance put up by a number of members, including Austria and other ICC supporters.

As host country, Austria traditionally coordinates the annual resolutions on the work of UNCITRAL. With the adoption of the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation by the UNGA, another UNCITRAL convention project was successfully concluded.

Once again, several international organisations were granted observer status in the UNGA. Based on the relevant proposals by the Sixth Committee, the UNGA adopted resolutions on measures to eliminate international terrorism, on criminal accountability of UN experts and officials on mission, on protection, security and safety of diplomatic and consular missions and representatives, on the administration of justice at the United Nations, the protection of persons in the event of disasters, the UN Programme of Assistance in Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law, and on the report of the Special Committee on the Charter of the UN as well as on the report of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country.

The presidents of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Residual Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals presented their annual reports to the UNGA.

In the context of its Presidency of the Council of the EU, Austria also played an active role in the field of the law of the sea, both within the framework of the two rounds of consultations on the annual omnibus resolution on oceans and the law of the sea, adopted by the UNGA, and the Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment and the Law of the Sea as well as within the framework of the first substantive meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) on the elaboration of an international legally binding instrument under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdic-
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The BBNJ (BBNJ), which was held between 4 and 17 September. In particular, Austria sought to facilitate compromises within the EU. As chair of the Council working group COMAR, Austria also coordinated EU activities, presented the EU statement on the subject and met with key delegations.

2.2.1.3. The UN Security Council

Introduction

As in previous years, Africa was at the centre of the deliberations in the UN Security Council (UNSC), accounting for almost 50% of country or region-specific situations and 70% of resolutions and Presidential Statements. The situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Sudan, in South Sudan and in the Central African Republic featured most frequently in the discussions. Another focus was on the crises in the Middle East, with the Middle East conflict, Yemen and the situation in Syria in all its dimensions (political process, humanitarian situation and use of chemical weapons) dominating the UNSC's agenda. At the same time, the Middle East remained the most divisive topic in terms of substance. Three draft resolutions dealing with the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the situation in Gaza and/or sanctions in connection with the situation in Yemen failed due to a veto. A new item was added to the agenda as the United Kingdom requested a meeting on the use of a nerve agent in Salisbury. Thematic priorities, which also correspond to those pursued by Austria, were women, peace and security, children and armed conflict as well as the effects of climate change on peace and security.

The debate on a reform of the UNSC, which has been ongoing for several years in the UNGA did not generate any progress. The positions of the various “reformers”, such as the African Group, the G4 (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan), L.69 (developing countries) or the “Uniting for Consensus” group (which includes Italy, the Republic of Korea, Argentina and Pakistan), sometimes differ widely and are also incompatible with the position held by Permanent Members of the UNSC such as Russia, China or the USA. There is no agreement on central issues, such as the size and composition of an enlarged Security Council and/or veto issues. The discussions on improvement of UNSC working methods looked more promising. As a member of a group of more than 25 like-minded states known as ACT, Austria advocates greater accountability, coherence and transparency of the UNSC’s activities. Likewise, the ACT Group calls for public briefings, better involvement of non-members and a strengthened presence of civil society representatives. A code of conduct promoted by the ACT Group to limit the use of veto in cases of suspected mass atrocities has meanwhile been endorsed by over 100 MS. From Austria’s point of view, the recent more coherent and stronger presence of the ten non-permanent members of the UNSC (E10) is positive. Despite political differences and differences of opinion on substantive issues, the E10 managed to draw attention to critical issues, such as the humanitarian disasters in Syria and Yemen.
Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (PoC)

Chaired by Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz, the annual open debate on the protection of civilians was held in the UNSC on 22 May. This year’s discussion focused on the issue of adherence to international humanitarian law by parties to a conflict. The UNSC was briefed by UNSG António Guterres, the ICRC and a representative of civil society. The problem of the use of explosive weapons in urban warfare in densely populated areas was highlighted by numerous UNMS, the UNSG and the ICRC. Austria delivered a national statement and contributed to the statements of the EU, the Group of Friends of PoC and the Human Security Network.

On 21 September, the UNSC adopted a Presidential Statement endorsing the aide-mémoire on the protection of civilians revised by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In the course of the revision, the focus was placed on the major problem areas of recent years, in particular attacks on health facilities and personnel as well as on starvation as a tactic of warfare. The UNSC also referred to the 20th anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 1265 (1999), which put the protection of civilians on the agenda. Therefore, the next report by the UNSG in 2019 will also include a review of 20 years of Protection of Civilians (PoC).

The interdisciplinary leadership training programme on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, developed in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Defence and the Federal Ministry of the Interior in 2012, was successfully continued with a national seminar held at the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR). This course was certified according to UN standards for the first time in December 2014. Austria remains ready and committed to cooperating with the DPKO on training measures aimed at improving the protection of civilians. At the same time, Austria, together with the ASPR, supported the UN Secretariat in holding a two-week training course directed at trainers (train the trainers) at the end of October/beginning of November on the publication of new training material on the protection of civilians and children, as well as on measures to prevent sexual violence in armed conflict.

Women, Peace and Security (WPS) – Combating Sexual Violence in Conflict

With a view to improving the implementation of UNSC resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and the seven other UN Security Council resolutions on this issue, a network of National Contact Points for Women, Peace and Security was established in 2016. On 26 September, Austria participated in a network meeting held on the margins of the 73rd UNGA’s High-level Week.

The annual debate on sexual violence in conflicts was held on 16 April. The discussion focused mainly on structural patterns and trends that act as key drivers for violence against women and girls, on accountability and law enforcement, and support for and rehabilitation of victims. Against the background of the listing of the Myanmar Armed Forces (Tatmadaw) in the current annual report and the address by a female Rohingya lawyer as a civil society representative, the topic of minorities as targets in conflicts was a particular focus of discussions and was dealt with more extensively than previously. Austria highlighted its international commitment to the protection of minorities in a
national statement. Austria also contributed to the statements by the EU, the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security and the Human Security Network.

On 27 September, Austria participated in an event organised by the Women’s Peace & Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) convened under the heading of “Accelerating the Women’s Movement for Peace & Humanitarian Action”. In the context of the event, the “WPHF 40 by 20” campaign was launched, which seeks to raise 40 million US dollars by the end of 2020 in order to promote the participation and empowerment of women and women in leadership roles. During the meeting, Austria was able to announce that it will make 1 million euro available through ADA to support the WPHF in its work in Iraq.

Chaired by Bolivia, the annual UNSC debate on WPS was held on 25 October. Discussions focused on the implementation of the WPS agenda and sustainable security and peacekeeping through the political and economic empowerment and engagement of women. As in previous years, the open debate met with substantial interest from UNMS. Austria delivered a national statement and contributed to the statements by the EU and the Friends of WPS. In its national statement, Austria presented the initiatives it had taken with regard to WPS: Austria’s contribution to the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund, its commitment to fighting gender-based violence and protecting women human rights defenders.

Together with civil society partner organisations, Austria again organised several side events in New York and was thus able to maintain its active profile in this thematic field.

**Children and Armed Conflict**

Chaired by Sweden, the UNSC held an open debate on children and armed conflict on 9 July. Austria delivered a national statement and contributed to the statements issued by the EU, the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict and the states that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. The debate focused on linking the protection of children from serious violations with preventing conflicts and establishing sustainable peace.

Co-sponsored by Austria, UNSCR 2427 (2018), a thematically comprehensive resolution on children in armed conflict was unanimously adopted by the UNSC.

**ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee**

Since its membership of the UNSC in the years 2009 and 2010, Austria has consistently remained committed to strengthening the rule of law in the UNSC, advocating in particular fair procedures and effective legal remedies in the sanctions committees. The Office of the Ombudsperson, established by the UNSC in resolution 1904 (2009), who reviews requests from individuals, groups, undertakings or entities seeking to be removed from the consolidated ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List, has enabled major progress in this respect. Within the framework of the informal Group of Like-minded States on Targeted Sanctions, Austria continues to advocate further improvements, particularly with respect to the ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee,
but also in the other UNSC sanctions committees. In this context, Austria successfully advocated the rapid filling of the vacant position of the Ombudsperson.

**Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs)**

This year marked the 70th anniversary of the establishment of UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKO). At the end of the year, more than 100,000 troops, police officers and civilian personnel were deployed in a total of fourteen missions worldwide. With a view to generating political and operational support among UNMS, UNSG António Guterres launched the initiative “Action for Peacekeeping” (A4P), which was endorsed by more than 150 states, including Austria, in September. In the corresponding Declaration of Shared Commitments, the UNMS and the UN system committed themselves to action-oriented approaches in the areas of protection and security, accountability, effective performance and strengthening the conduct of peacekeeping personnel, women, peace and security, and partnerships. UNSG António Guterres sustained the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeeping personnel on mission as such cases continue to be reported. These countermeasures include a Voluntary Compact on Preventing and Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse between the UNSG and MS that support UN operations on the ground, under which MS may commit themselves to practical measures. Austria signed this compact in June. Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen continued his commitment within the framework of the Circle of Leadership on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse, formed by heads of state and government. In this spirit, he also endorsed a joint statement calling for a zero tolerance policy against sexual assaults on the margins of the opening of the 73rd UNGA in September.

In the UNGA’s Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34), which is responsible for the political guidelines of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Austria played a leading role in negotiating the chapter on the protection of civilians in the annual report on behalf of the EU. Austria continued its commitment to PKOs, building on its long tradition in peacekeeping missions. Since 1960, more than 100,000 Austrians have participated as military or civilian personnel in more than 50 international peacekeeping and humanitarian missions. Within the framework of the UN, Austria has consistently contributed approx. 200 soldiers, including a contingent with the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), four military observers to the UN Truce Supervision Organisation in the Middle East (UNTSO), five staff officers to the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), six military observers to the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and four staff officers to the UN Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). By seconding one Austrian police officer to the UN Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK), Austria is also among the police troop contributing countries in a UNPKO.

### 2.2.1.4. The International Court of Justice

Of the six principal organs of the United Nations, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), responsible for settling legal disputes between states and for providing advisory opin-
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ions, is the only organ based in The Hague. Austria is one of 73 states that recognise the ICJ’s compulsory jurisdiction according to Art. 36 para. 2 of its statute. Currently, 17 cases are pending before the court and the court is consulting in two cases on which decisions are expected soon.

On 2 February, the ICJ pronounced the judgements on a number of proceedings instituted by Costa Rica against Nicaragua. Following the judgement of 16 December 2015 in the case “Certain Activities carried out by Nicaragua in the Border Area” and in the absence of agreement between the parties, the ICJ awarded Costa Rica compensation payments totalling USD 378,890.59, including for the first time compensation for environmental damage. On the same day, the ICJ delivered its judgement on the two pending (and joined) cases in the border dispute between the two countries and ruled on the marine delimitations in the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea.

As the ICJ was requested by the UNGA in resolution 71/292 of 22 June 2017 to provide an advisory opinion on the legal consequences of the separation of the Chagos archipelago from Mauritius, hearings were held from 3 to 6 September in which representatives of 23 states and the African Union (AU) were heard. The Court is currently deliberating the legal opinion, which is expected to be published in 2019.

After having submitted a declaration in July recognising the competence of the ICJ for the settlement of all disputes that may arise or have arisen covered by Articles I and II of the Optional Protocol to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, the State of Palestine initiated proceedings against the USA on 28 September with respect to alleged violations of the Vienna Convention by relocating the US Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

On 1 October, the ICJ delivered its judgement in the case Bolivia v. Chile, in which it found that Chile had no legal obligation to negotiate a sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean for Bolivia.

In the case of Iran v. USA for alleged violations of the Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations and Consular Rights (1955) by US sanctions against Iran, the ICJ delivered its order on the request of Iran indicating provisional measures in order to preserve certain rights claimed by Iran. These include, for instance, that the USA must remove any impediments caused by sanctions against Iran with respect to humanitarian aid and safe civil aviation, as well as ensure that licences and necessary authorisations are granted and that the relevant payment and transfers of funds are not subject to any restrictions.

In the case of Qatar v. United Arab Emirates (UAE), the ICJ delivered its order on Qatar’s request for provisional measures in the case concerning Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination on 23 July. The Court ordered that UAE inter alia end all forms of discrimination against Qatari nationals and enable the reunification of Qatari/UAE mixed families.

On 6 February, Judge Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf (Somalia) was elected as the new President and Judge Xue Hanqin (China) as the new Vice-President of the ICJ. Following the resignation of Judge Hisashi Owada, the UNGA and the UNSC elected Yuji Iwasawa (Japan) as his successor on 22 June.
2.2.1.5. The United Nations Specialised Agencies

Austria plays an active role within the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), having launched and contributing to numerous initiatives and projects. This active role is also reflected in Austria’s participation in five intergovernmental steering committees: the Intergovernmental Council of the International Hydrological Programme, the Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication, the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Country of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation, the International Bioethics Committee and the Coordination Council of the UNESCO Programme Man and the Biosphere, and the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Austria also seeks to participate in further steering committees.

Concrete Austrian projects that contribute to visibly shaping UNESCO’s work include projects on the protection of World Heritage, the safety of journalists, human rights education, education as a tool to prevent violent extremism, biodiversity and water as well as river management.

On the topic of the inscription of the historic centre of Vienna in the World Heritage in Danger List, it was possible to resume the dialogue with UNESCO thanks to intensive cooperation between the City of Vienna, the Federal Chancellery and the Foreign Ministry. Substantial progress towards better mutual understanding was achieved through an international experts’ workshop in March, and the visit of a high-level delegation from UNESCO and the International Council on Monuments and Sights.

Efforts towards establishing an International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels under the auspices of UNESCO in Graz (modelled on the European Training and Research Centre for Democracy and Human Rights – ETC Graz) were continued.

The Austrian contribution to UNESCO’s regular budget amounted to 0.72% or 1,243,958 US dollars (958,622 euros), an additional amount of 47,061 US dollars is made available to the World Heritage Fund and 26,005 US dollars are provided to the International Fund for Cultural Diversity.

The most important event organised by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in the first half of the year, still during the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, was the FAO Regional Conference for Europe and Central Asia from 16-18 May in Voronezh (Russia). This biennial conference brought together some 200 participants from 48 countries and focused on sustainable agriculture and food systems in times of climate change. The results of the discussions, for instance on agroecology and e-agriculture, will be further dealt with in the FAO Technical Committees.

The Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of the year also played a major role in the context of the FAO. The FAO team at the Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism (including contacts in the Permanent Representations in Brussels and Rome) represented the EU positions in a total of seven FAO bodies (Commodity Problems, Committee on Agriculture, Committee on World Food...
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Security, Council, Committee on Fisheries and Committee on Forestry as well as Codex Alimentarius). Led by Austria, a number of preparatory meetings were held, including several Council working group meetings in Brussels, nine Heads of Mission meetings, and 30 EU coordination meetings in Rome. Bringing about agreement on Catherine Geslain-Lanelle from France as the joint candidate of the EU and its Member States for the election of a new FAO Director-General in June 2019 was a major success achieved by the Austrian Presidency.

During the 45th session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) on 15-19 October, participants dealt with the two reports “State of Food and Nutrition (SOFI)” and “State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA)”. While the latter deals with migration, agriculture and rural development, SOFI highlights that the number of hungry and malnourished people worldwide has increased from 804 million (2016) to 821 million (2017). This increase is attributable to armed conflicts, extreme weather and climate conditions as well as economic difficulties. These issues were also addressed by numerous prominent speakers at the event celebrating World Food Day, which is held annually on 16 October. Of the 821 million hungry people, 60 % are women and 150 million are children under five. In total, 70% of the poor live in rural areas. At the same time, 1.9 billion people are overweight, including 38 million children under five years of age. Some 672 million people are obese, with an increasing number of these living in Asia and Africa. Taking account of the growing importance of animal husbandry, the FAO Committee on Agriculture decided to establish a separate subgroup. The Committee furthermore called for sustainable financing of Codex Alimentarius and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and for linking the huge number of international commemoration days/years proclaimed by the UN to certain criteria. After lengthy and controversial discussions, the Committee on Commodity Problems (CCP) adopted the FAO report on agricultural markets with a reference to the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The 160th session of the FAO Council, the organisation’s second most important steering and management body after the Conference, marked the end of the year. In the current period (1 July 2018 to 30 June 2020), Austria has both a seat and a vote on the FAO Council.

Established in 1951, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is the leading intergovernmental organisation in the field of migration and employs more than 10,000 staff worldwide. Austria joined IOM in 1952 as one of the organisation’s currently 172 members; a further eight states as well as numerous global and regional international organisations and NGOs have observer status. Since 2016, IOM has formed part of the UN family as a related agency. On 28 June, António Vitorino (Portugal) became new Director General, and on 10 September he came to Vienna to meet Federal Minister Karin Kneissl for bilateral talks.

In accordance with its mandate, IOM is committed to humane and orderly migration. Thanks to its global network of more than 390 offices and its strong local presence, where 97% of all staff are deployed, IOM is an important cooperation partner for Austria in regions where Austria lacks the necessary infrastructure. Alongside its country office in Austria, IOM has since 2011 operated a regional office in Vienna that is respon-
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The main responsibility of the IOM Country Office for Austria is to analyse national migration issues and emerging trends as well as to develop and implement Austria-specific projects and programmes. The IOM Country Office in Vienna is the “National Contact Point Austria” of the European Migration Network and cooperates with the relevant Austrian institutions. IOM supports migrants in their voluntary return to their region of origin and has assisted 3,469 people in their voluntary return from Austria to their countries of origin. Special attention is paid to vulnerable migrants, such as unaccompanied minors. The organisation has a long track-record in implementing projects to support the reintegration of voluntary returnees. In the field of integration, tailor-made training measures are made available to young refugees. Furthermore, IOM advises Austrian institutions on building-up capacities inter alia with respect to identification of victims of human trafficking during asylum procedures and training in intercultural skills.

The 107th session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in June, which was attended by a tri-partite Austrian delegation, adopted conclusions on how to better integrate the International Labour Organisation (ILO) into the UN development system, and held a first difficult round of negotiations on a new international legal standard on the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work. The plenary debate dealt with the ILO’s “Woman at Work Initiative: The push for equality”.

Austria participates as an observer in the sessions of the ILO Governing Body, where it has traditionally contributed to legal issues and the strengthening of the standards system. The central topics dealt with by this body were the termination of the infringement case against Guatemala, the issue of cooperation with the tobacco industry and the implementation of the reform of the UN development system.

Within the framework of its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria coordinated a common EU approach on the content of the future legal standard on the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work as well as on an EU position on the content of a political declaration on the 100th anniversary of the ILO and the future of work, which is to be adopted in 2019.

The 71st World Health Assembly was held from 21-26 May. The most important outcome was the approval of the World Health Organization (WHO)’s 13th General Programme of Work (GPW) for 2019-2023. This programme also reflects many new approaches and ideas launched by the organisation’s Director General Tedros Ghebreyesus, in office since July 2017. The new slogan articulates the WHO mission to “promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable”. Building on the UN Agenda 2030, the WHO defined three overarching strategic goals in this work programme: universal health coverage, addressing health emergencies and promoting a healthier population. Other topics addressed included poliovirus transmission, access to essential medicines and the use of digital technologies for public health.
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The WHO’s Global Action Plan to promote the Health of Refugees and Migrants, mandated in January 2017, was the subject of intense debate. Austria actively supported the improvement of the document. The text, which remains problematic from a refugee and migration perspective, is to be adopted by consensus at the World Health Assembly in May 2019.

Established in 1950, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) became part of the UN family as a specialised agency in 1951. It coordinates and supports the global development of a meteorological and hydrological measurement and observation network. The 70th session of the WMO Executive Council was held in Geneva from 20-29 June. The Council approved an administrative reform aimed at optimising the organisation’s efficiency and performance, redefining the Council’s subsidiary bodies and upgrading the work of the regional associations.

The Geneva-based International Telecommunications Union (ITU) is a specialised UN agency in which government and industry representatives coordinate the establishment and operation of global telecommunication networks and services, in particular the utilisation of the radio frequency spectrum and the satellite orbit. From 29 October to 16 November, the ITU’s highest policy-making body, the Plenipotentiary Conference, met in Dubai (UAE) and adopted 59 resolutions defining the future work of the ITU, including on new technologies, cyber security and bridging the digital divide. Participants were also able to quite successfully resolve political issues (related for instance to Palestine and Crimea). In the context of its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria assumed coordination within the EU. In March, the annual “World Summit on Information Society Forum” jointly organised by ITU, UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD convened in Geneva. The main topics on the agenda were the implementation of Agenda 2030, the impact of modern technologies, cyber security, environmental issues and the digital gender gap.

The London-based International Maritime Organization (IMO) is a specialized UN agency and comprises 174 Member States. Austria has been a member of the IMO since 1975 and even though it closed its shipping register for commercial deep sea shipping in 2012, Austria – as a strongly foreign trade-oriented economy – is nevertheless very much interested in safe and ecologically sound deep sea shipping.

The strategic goals pursued by the IMO for the period 2018-2023 include the integration of new technologies into its regulatory framework, minimizing the negative impact of the shipping industry on climate change, a more responsible approach to the world’s oceans and the reduction of bureaucracy in international trade.

The IMO was able to conclude an agreement with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) on the promotion of environmentally sustainable shipping. In addition, an international project to protect marine biodiversity in twelve developing countries was initiated together with international partners (GloFouling Partnerships).

The agenda of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) was already dominated by the preparatory work for the 40th Session of the ICAO Assembly in autumn 2019. In order to make available more time at the Assembly for strategic discussions,
inter alia on the presentation of the Cyber Security Strategy, numerous working papers relating to security and air traffic management were already discussed at the 13th Air Navigation Conference (9-19 October) and recommendations were drawn up. With respect to environmental aspects, the global Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) continues to dominate the organisation’s agenda.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) focused mainly on the situation in Syria and the chemical nerve agent attack in the United Kingdom.

As Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria assumed a decisive role, in particular with respect to the OPCW Review Conference (RC) and the Conference of the States Parties (CSP) held in November. Due to the pro-active approach taken by the Austrian Presidency – in close cooperation with the European External Action Service – it was possible to add significantly more weight to the EU and its positions. At the Review Conference, Austria furthermore supported joint statements on strengthening the OPCW and contributed joint papers on the Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons and on chemicals that target the central nervous system.

At a Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties on 26 and 27 June, the establishment of an “Attribution Mechanism” was adopted, supported by all EU Member States, including Austria. This mechanism will enable tracing back and clarifying responsibility for the use of chemical weapons.

On 21 February, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl met OPCW Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü in Vienna. On 25 July, Fernando Arias, Üzümcü’s successor took office as Director-General.

2.2.2. OSCE

2.2.2.1. Introduction

The increasingly confrontational political atmosphere, the ongoing crisis in and around Ukraine and the still unresolved protracted conflicts have led to increased mistrust and a prevalent inability among participating States to seek compromises.

In addition, the progressive erosion of the human dimension was further fuelled by the dispute over civil society access to OSCE events. As there had also been profound disagreement over the revision of scales of contribution, it was thus not possible to adopt the 2019 budget, which provides for maintaining zero nominal growth, by the end of the year.

In contrast to these developments, the Structured Dialogue on current and future challenges and risks to security was successfully continued. The OSCE’s practical and programme levels also function smoothly: the three autonomous institutions (ODIHR, HCNM, RFoM) and the 16 field missions as well as the thematic units in the Secretariat offer tailor-made, cost-effective programmes for the further development of democracy, the rule of law, economic foundations and security policy stability to participating States.
The OSCE Security Community in the Context of the Crisis in and around Ukraine

The crisis in and around Ukraine continues to substantially influence work within the OSCE. The annexation of Crimea, which violated international law, and Russia’s support for the armed formations in eastern Ukraine have led to a serious loss of confidence and a deep rift within the organisation. While highlighting the limitations of an organisation that is based on consensus, these developments have at the same time underlined the important role the OSCE continues to play as a security community and a platform for dialogue.

Particularly the establishment and work of a large Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) and the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) as a forum for political negotiation, continue to contribute to de-escalation, crisis management and improving the civilian population’s living conditions in eastern Ukraine. Here too, however, success is ultimately dependent on the will of the parties to the conflict. Led by OSCE Special Representative and Austrian diplomat Martin Sajdik, the TCG (Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE) was, for instance, able to achieve some temporary ceasefires, while it was not possible to make progress on the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. Likewise, the Normandy Format (Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine) was also unable to make any progress.

Consequently, the SMM, which involves some 1,200 observers and is by far the largest OSCE field mission, regularly reports numerous violations of the ceasefire agreements; the observers are often obstructed in their work and sometimes even threatened. On 27 October, a long-range drone disappeared over non-government-controlled territory in eastern Ukraine. The Border Observation Mission in Gukovo and Donetsk also continues to be faced with severe restrictions of its observation capabilities. In contrast, the OSCE Project Co-ordination Office in Ukraine has implemented numerous projects aimed at supporting the rule of law and fostering conflict prevention.

On 5 October, the Ukrainian Parliament extended the law on the special status of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions until the end of 2019. In breach of the Minsk Agreements, the de facto authorities in Donbas held regional elections on 11 November. On 25 November, the Russian navy seized three Ukrainian naval vessels off the Kerch Strait by force of arms for allegedly trespassing in territorial waters off Crimea. The sailors have since then been detained and the vessels were captured by Russia. In response, Ukraine imposed martial law on 26 November for 30 days in the border regions with Russia and Moldova. With respect to the call for a UN support mission to protect the SMM, issued by Russia last year, no progress was made — mainly due to lack of agreement on the operational area.

Regional Issues and Field Activities

South East Europe

With the exception of the SMM in Ukraine, the OSCE field presences in South East Europe, namely in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, are still the organisation’s largest field operations. Through their comprehensive security concept, these operations make a significant contribution towards sta-
Effective Multilateralism and the Role of Austria

bility in the region, supporting the transformation of societies based on democracy and rule-of-law, the consolidation of multi-ethnic societies – for instance in Macedonia where the Austrian diplomat Clemens Koja has headed the local OSCE Mission since September – and towards regional economic cooperation. The central task and objective pursued by the OSCE are strengthening human and minority rights, promoting freedom of the media, fostering an active civil society, strengthening democratic structures and control mechanisms governed by the rule of law at national and local level, and good governance. A particular focus was placed on de-radicalisation, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, as well as on migration flows and police cooperation. Albania will chair the OSCE in 2020.

The OSCE has continued its efforts towards resolving and/or containing the two protracted conflicts in the Caucasus – the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the conflict in Georgia.

Following a meeting between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan in September, hostilities decreased in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Subsequently, at the meeting of the Minsk Group held in the context of the Council of Ministers in Milan, the Armenian and Azerbaijani Foreign Ministers declared their intention to further intensify their talks along these lines. The Geneva International Discussions to address the consequences of the conflict in Georgia were continued, but no significant progress was made in defusing the conflicts over the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Austria contributes to the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM Georgia) by seconding three members of the Ministry of the Interior and four members of the Ministry of Defence (as of year-end).

Central Asia

The OSCE is active in all five Central Asian states with operations and missions that focus inter alia on regional co-operation. The OSCE Programme Office in Astana (Kazakhstan), the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan) and the OSCE Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan (Tashkent) are active in all three dimensions of the OSCE, focusing in particular on capacity building in the fight against corruption, border management and the fight against transnational threats such as terrorism and violent extremism.

Uzbekistan’s relationship with the OSCE has intensified considerably since President Shavkat Mirziyoyev took office and the ensuing opening of the country. Consequently, the mission’s activities and resources have been substantially increased.

Since 2017, the mandate of the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) has focused on the rule of law and the fight against corruption, the fight against terrorism, protection of human rights and gender equality. The OSCE Academy in Bishkek, which is co-funded by Austria, provides training on international relations with an OSCE focus directed at experts from the region, including from Afghanistan.

Re-designed in 2017, the OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe, supports Tajikistan, placing a special focus on border management, conflict prevention and the fight against transnational threats, corruption and violent extremism. The OSCE Border Manage-
Priority Topics

ment Staff College in Dushanbe, which is supported by Austria, offers further training courses directed at officials from the entire region.

2.2.2.3. Election Observation

The provision of support in implementing democratic elections in the OSCE area is one of the tasks assumed jointly by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). ODIHR organised nationwide election observations in nine participating States (Russia, Montenegro, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Armenia). Austria participated by seconding a total of 38 election observers (33 short-term observers and five long-term observers) as well as 18 members of the Austrian Parliament who took part in election observation in the context of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

2.2.2.4. The OSCE’s Human Dimension – Human Rights

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) plays a central role as an operational institution in the OSCE’s third – “human” – dimension. Alongside the promotion and observation of democratic elections, the ODIHR’s scope also covers provision of support to the 57 participating States in implementing their human rights commitments. Other important institutions are the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) based in The Hague (HCNM) and the Vienna-based OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) based in Vienna, whose extensive country-specific and thematic activities make a highly relevant contribution to work under the third dimension.

The Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) was held in Warsaw from 10-21 September. As the central human dimension event, the HDIM once again provided its more than one thousand participants with an important platform for exchange between the OSCE participating States and non-governmental organisations with a view to implementing OSCE commitments under the human dimension.

The three annual Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings (SHDMs), held in Vienna this year, dealt with child trafficking (28 and 29 May), combating violence against women (2 and 3 July) and human rights and education (8 and 9 October). The meetings provided an opportunity for exchange of views between experts, civil society and the participating States. This year, it was not possible to hold the special annual seminar of the Human Dimension as no consensus could be reached on the necessary decisions.

In contrast to these developments, consensus was reached for the first time since 2014 on the human dimension at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Milan, on decisions concerning the safety of journalists and on combating violence against women.

2.2.2.5. The OSCE’s Security Policy Dimension

With a view to conflict settlement, the security policy debate was determined by the crisis in and around Ukraine and the deteriorating security situation faced by OSCE
Effective Multilateralism and the Role of Austria

observers. With a view to the conflicts in Georgia, in Moldova and Nagorno-Karabakh, substantial progress, especially for the local population, was only achieved in the “5+2” format on the Transdniestrian Settlement Process. The continuing threat posed by terrorism and the issue of returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters topped the agenda of the OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference.

Convened under the Austrian Chairmanship, the Structured Dialogue on the Ministerial Council Declaration “From Lisbon to Hamburg. Declaration on the 20th Anniversary of the OSCE Framework for Arms Control and Risks to Security in the OSCE Area” dealt under Belgian Chairmanship, inter alia, with threat perceptions and with reducing the risk of unwanted military incidents and manoeuvres.

Within a group of friends, Austria continued to actively contribute to the “Steinmeier Initiative” on conventional disarmament in Europe, launched in 2016, and advocated for the establishment of a strategic security dialogue on conventional arms control in Europe.

Contributing proposals and national expertise, Austria supported the efforts aimed at modernising the “Vienna Document 2011” on confidence- and security-building measures as well as the implementation of the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security and the document on small arms and light weapons.

At the Ministerial Council in Milan, the OSCE participating States agreed on a declaration on small arms and light weapons. It was, however, not possible to reach agreement on texts relating to Foreign Terrorist Fighters, counter-terrorism, combating the smuggling of cultural goods and reducing the risk of conflict. In this context, differences of opinion with regard to the assessment of which grouping was to be considered terrorist were a major issue.

2.2.2.6. The OSCE’s Economic and Environmental Dimension

The priorities defined by the Italian Chairmanship under the Economic and Environmental Dimension of the OSCE, also known as the second dimension, related in particular to human capital development, strengthening good governance, optimising the digital economy and fighting corruption.

The three conferences of the 26th Economic and Environmental Forum (1st Conference in Vienna at the end of January, 2nd Conference in Venice at the end of May, and the final Conference in Prague in September) were dedicated to the motto of “Promoting economic progress and security in the OSCE area through innovation, human capital development, and good public and corporate governance”. The conferences addressed opportunities for overcoming global imbalances and provided impetus for sustainable, fair and inclusive societies. Discussions at the final conference in Prague focused on the topic of “Responsible Leadership for a fair Globalization”.

The annual Implementation Meeting of the Economic and Environmental Dimension in Vienna in October focused on environmental and energy issues. Discussions dealt in particular with approaches towards intensifying cooperation between the public and
private sectors in order to promote economic growth while ensuring sustainability and equality in society.

Chaired by Kazakhstan, the Economic and Environmental Committee set the following thematic priorities: development of resistant, sustainable smart cities, good governance and the fight against corruption, connectivity, sustainable development and combating transnational environmental crime. A special committee meeting focused on the exchange of experience on successful national policies in the field of economic participation of women and youth.

After lengthy negotiations, a Ministerial Declaration on “Digital Economy as a Driver for Promoting Co-operation, Security and Growth” and a Ministerial Decision on “Human Capital Development in the Digital Era” were adopted at the Ministerial Council in Milan. These decisions provide an important contribution to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda and form a basis for the closer involvement of enterprises, workers’ and business associations, civil society and academia in the OSCE’s work.

2.2.2.7. The OSCE’s Regional Policy Dimension – Chair of the Asia Contact Group

The OSCE maintains dialogues with partner states in Asia (Afghanistan, Australia, Japan, Korea and Thailand) and the Mediterranean (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia). Austria chaired the Asia Contact Group and, in addition to several thematic meetings, organised a high-level conference on strengthening multilateralism. Under the heading of “Effective Multilateralism in a Globalized World – The Case of Europe and Asia/Pacific”, the conference convened in Vienna on 16 May and covered all three dimensions of the OSCE’s work. The same held true for the 2018 OSCE-Asia Conference organised in Canberra on 5 November.

The topics addressed by the five meetings of the Asia Contact Group, each of which is organised in cooperation with a partner state, were cybersecurity (Japan); cryptocurrencies and new financial technologies (Thailand); regional connectivity and empowerment of women (Afghanistan); situation on the Korean Peninsula (South Korea); and trade facilitation (Australia).

At the Ministerial Council meeting in Milan, a declaration on security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region was adopted.

2.2.3. Council of Europe

2.2.3.1. Introduction

The work of the Council of Europe (CoE) was dominated on the one hand by worrying developments in some member States and on the other hand by the multiple internal crises. As in previous years, the CoE’s core topics, i.e. human rights, democracy and the rule of law, as well as the full application of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), were subject to an erosion process or were at least the subject of controversial political debate in a number of member States. This relates on the one hand to funda-
mental constitutional issues (Russia, Turkey, Hungary, Romania and Ukraine) and on the other hand to failure to implement judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) (Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Russia).

2.2.3.2. Key Political Issues

The internal crises the CoE is struggling with include the problem of corruption within the Parliamentary Assembly (PA) and the difficult relations with Russia, whose withholding of contributions has triggered a serious budget crisis and could in the long term lead to Russia leaving the CoE. In view of its upcoming 70th anniversary in 2019 and the current challenges, the CoE also focused on its own reform. At the same time, new topics on the CoE’s agenda, such as the human rights aspects of artificial intelligence, were also dealt with in great detail.

Developments in Turkey, particularly with regard to freedom of the press, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly as well as the general human rights situation and the question of the validity of the judgements pronounced by the Turkish Constitutional Court were continuously monitored by the Ministers Deputies Committee (MDC) and the PA. Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland made a high-profile trip to Turkey in February. Turkey lifted its state of emergency, thus ending the derogation of the ECHR under Article 15 in August. A national commission was set up to examine human rights violations that occurred during the state of emergency. If this proves to be an ineffective legal remedy, tens of thousands of cases will be referred to the European Court of Human Rights.

The situation in and around Ukraine continued to cause considerable tension in the CoE’s political committees. The human rights aspect was mainly covered by the Human Rights Commissioners who, like other CoE monitoring bodies, were denied access to the occupied territories.

The CoE has developed a Ukraine Action Plan 2018–2021, which supports the Ukrainian reform processes and was adopted after some delay in February with Russia’s approval. The language and education legislation concerning persons belonging to minorities in Ukraine was frequently addressed in the CoE’s work and has been criticised by both Russia and other neighbouring countries.

Russia continued to refrain from sending delegations to the PA’s meetings – and has done so since April 2014, when its annexation of Crimea was sanctioned by a withdrawal of voting rights in the PA. Russia linked the absence of its parliamentarians from the PA to the payment of further budget contributions and refuses to send a delegation as long as there is even the slightest possibility of sanctions. A proposal for a compromise by means of an amendment to the CoE’s rules of procedure, which would make it difficult to use sanctions within the PA, failed in the PA meeting week held in October. At the same time, a legal opinion commissioned by the Secretary General of the CoE and the Croatian Chairmanship called into question the general legality of such sanctions being imposed by the PA. This almost triggered an institutional conflict between the MDC and the PA.
Among the opinions issued by the Venice Commission on legal and constitutional issues, those on the “Stop-Soros legislative package” in Hungary as well as on the amendments to the Criminal Code, the Codes of Criminal Procedure and the service law applicable to the employment of judges and public prosecutors introduced by Romania, attracted particular attention.

The independent external expert panel, established in 2017 by the PA’s Bureau to investigate allegations of corruption within the PA, presented its report in June. The results were forwarded to the relevant committees and the national parliaments of the CoE member States. Reacting to this report, the PA introduced as an initial measure the obligation for members to report additional income, access bans on former members of the PA and partial revocation of the respective PA members’ rights. Further measures are expected to be introduced by national parliaments.

The CoE has been facing very serious budget problems since June 2017 when Russia announced the suspension of its budget contributions due to its continued absence from the PA. These problems have been exacerbated by Turkey, which discontinued payment of major voluntary contributions it had effected since 2016. As a consequence, the budget for the two years 2018/2019, which had been adopted by consensus in November 2017, had to be revised. The continued lack of Russia’s contributions led to the introduction of an internal austerity course by the Secretary General. Russia’s contribution to the budget, including partial agreements, amounts to 32.6 million euros and corresponds to 10.2% of the total budget. If the issue with Russia remains unsolved, it will be necessary to introduce rigid measures in order to reduce the budget by this amount in 2019.

At the 128th Session of the Committee of Ministers (CM), held in Elsinore (Denmark) on 18 May, Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland presented his fifth annual report on the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Europe, which focused on the role of institutions and their current challenges. As in previous reports, the Secretary General addressed positive and negative developments stating the individual countries’ names and dealt with the efficiency and independence of the judiciary, freedom of opinion, freedom of the press, as well as the threats to democratic institutions posed for instance by populism or new technologies.

The CoE held the following specialist ministerial conferences and conferences at ministerial level:

- Conference of the Danish Chairmanship of the Council of Europe in Copenhagen from 11 to 13 April on “Continued Reform of the European Human Rights Convention System – Better Balance, Improved Protection” at which the Copenhagen Declaration was adopted

- 17th Ministerial Conference of the Pompidou Group in Stavanger, Norway, on 17 and 18 November

- 15th Conference of Ministers on Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) in Tbilisi, Georgia, on 16 October
With the Protocol amending the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (CoE Data Protection Convention) a new Convention text was opened for signature.

The sixth World Forum for Democracy (WFD), held in November in cooperation with France, focused on “Gender Equality. Whose battle?”.

2.2.3.3. Monitoring Respect of Commitments by Member States

One of the CoE’s most important tools is monitoring member States’ compliance with the commitments undertaken in the fields of human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law (justice), which arise from their accession to the CoE. Monitoring is undertaken by the PA, the Committee of Ministers, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) and the Secretariat. Several CoE conventions provide for independent expert bodies to perform thematic country monitoring.

Monitoring by the MDC of the national implementation of the judgments passed by the ECtHR is based on Art. 46 of the European Convention on Human Rights and its Protocol No. 11 and takes place in four annual meetings that extend over several days.

The PACE Committee on Honouring Obligations and Commitments by member States of the CoE is currently monitoring ten states: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine. A Post-Monitoring Dialogue on strengthening the democratic institutions of the respective countries is being conducted with Bulgaria, Macedonia and Montenegro. Furthermore, a monitoring process on “The functioning of democratic institutions in Poland” is being conducted in Poland. Since 2015, the PACE Monitoring Committee has also reviewed CoE member States that are not subject to a monitoring process and prepares country reports and recommendations for the PA plenary.

Monitoring by the Committee of Ministers is also based on the obligations arising from the accession procedures, as in the cases of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Bosnia-Herzegovina. All monitoring processes are flexible and are performed over an extended period of time. The CLRAE also monitors compliance with commitments relating to promoting democracy at local and regional level, which involves all 47 CoE member States.

At irregular intervals, the Secretariat issues reports on Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia to the MDC and on “stock-taking” of the situation in Moldova. The impact of the armed conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation that broke out in August 2008 continues to feature on the agenda of the MDC, to which the Secretariat reports every six months on new developments. In addition, the local CoE offices also report on developments and implementation of CoE programmes in their host countries.

Thematic monitoring is related to commitments and obligations arising from member States’ accession to specific CoE conventions. Thus, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), to which all CoE member States are party, conducts periodic and ad hoc visits to national detention centres, prisons, police stations and psychiatric hospitals. The goal pursued by the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) is prompting legislative reforms at
national level through mutual evaluations and peer pressure to ensure that countries comply with CoE standards. The experts’ committee Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) monitors the implementation of the CoE Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. The Advisory Committees of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML) each assess the national implementation of these two conventions. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) primarily conducts country reviews and also addresses cooperation with civil society. The European Committee on Social Rights (ECSR) monitors compliance with the provisions set out in the European Social Charter by the states Parties. The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), established in 2015 by the CoE Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), has already completed six country reports. The reports on Austria and on Monaco were the first two GREVIO country reports to be completed.

Monitoring Visits and Country Reports on Austria

Austria was one of the first countries subjected to a country review under the Istanbul Convention conducted by GREVIO. The monitoring report on Austria was completed in 2017 and the relevant recommendations were adopted at a Conference of the state Parties in January. The 4th State Report on Austria under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML) was discussed in the MDC on 22 March and the recommendations of the expert committee were adopted in the form of a resolution. The conclusions of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on the implementation of the recommendations regarding Austria were adopted on 21 March and published in the MDC on 15 May.

The Council of Europe Conventions

To date, a total of 223 multilateral agreements (CoE Conventions) and 14 partial agreements have been drawn up in the context of the CoE. These conventions cover a very wide range of topics and in many areas form the backbone for pan-European cooperation and the management of intergovernmental processes.

2.2.3.4. The Council of Europe and Austria

Encounters at Political Level between Austria and CoE Officials as well as Signing and Ratification of CoE Conventions:

In January, Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen paid an official visit to the CoE. He delivered an address to the PA, which was followed by a question and answer session, and held working meetings with PACE President Michele Nicoletti, CoE General Secretary Thorbjørn Jagland and the President of the ECtHR Guido Raimondi.
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The Protocol amending the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (CoE Data Protection Convention) was signed by Ambassador Gerhard Jandl on 10 October.

European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz

Founded in 1994, the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz is based on an enlarged partial agreement. It supports member States in the implementation of language policy measures and promotes innovation in language learning. The centre’s current thematic priorities of work for the period until 2019 include education for children whose mother tongue is not the language of schooling, sign language, promoting foreign language education in schools, digital approaches to language education and establishing a frame of reference for language teachers. The ECML also dealt with the integration of Roma.

Austrians in the CoE

Austria has traditionally shown a high level of commitment in the CoE and has already been represented by three Secretary Generals, two Presidents of PACE and three presidents of the CLRAE. In total, some 20 Austrians are employed in the CoE.

From October 2016 to November 2018, the former President of the Salzburg Diet (Province Parliament) Gudrun Mosler-Törnström served as President of the CLRAE. Since November 2015, Gabriele Kucsko-Stadlmayer has been the Austrian judge at the ECtHR. Since 2006, Christoph Grabenwarter has been Austrian member of the Venice Commission and since 2010 Andreas Kiefer has held the office of Secretary General of the CLRAE.

2.2.4. Austria as Host Country of International Organisations and Institutions

2.2.4.1. Headquartered in Austria – an Overview

A dynamic and future-oriented host country policy is one of Austria’s foreign policy priorities. The goal is thus to attract international organisations and institutions that establish their permanent headquarters or other offices in Austria. Since the opening of the Vienna International Centre (VIC) in 1979, Vienna has served as one of the four headquarters of the United Nations. As home to the offices of many international organisations, Austria is a hub for the promotion of peace, security, sustainable development, energy policy and international dialogue. The fact that Vienna hosts more than 40 international organisations strengthens the city’s relevance as a venue for dialogue and multilateral diplomacy. Building on its efficient convention sector, Vienna enjoys an excellent reputation as one of the most important conference and congress venues in the world.

Under its pro-active host country policy, Austria continues to strengthen its legal framework conditions seeking to remain an attractive location for the established offices and attract new international entities.
Priority Topics

The VIC is home to a large number of UN organisations and specialised agencies, including the United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which is active in fighting crime, drug abuse and terrorism, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and its Liaison Office, the UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCTRAL), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) and an outposted office of the UNEP (UN Environment Programme) as well as the UNEP Regional Office which also administers the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention.

Apart from the UN units and specialised agencies based at the VIC, a number of other major international organisations are located outside of the Vienna International Center in the city of Vienna, including the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID), the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA), which focuses on promoting transparency in the field of disarmament, and the Secretariat of the Hague Code against the Proliferation of Ballistic Missiles (HCoC).

The Vienna office of the World Bank Group has significantly strengthened its presence recently: alongside organisational units of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Finance Corporation (IFC) in particular has expanded its operational activities in Vienna. The Joint Vienna Institute (JVI), an internationally recognised training institution of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has also been located in Vienna for many years.

Since 2012, the International King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) has been based in Vienna. Headquartered in Vienna, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) deals with strategic aspects of migration management. Apart from a country office, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) also maintains a liaison office in Vienna, which is responsible for Eastern and South East Europe as well as Central Asia.

With a view to tapping into synergy effects, several Vienna-based international organisations and NGOs that are active in the energy sector joined forces and formed the Vienna Energy Club. Among these organisations are the Energy Community of South East Europe as well as the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP). Vienna’s role as an energy hub and Austria’s commitment to sustainable energy played a key role in attracting the Sustainable Energy for All Initiative (SEforALL) that also established its offices in the city.

Founded in 2011, the International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA) chose to set up its headquarters south of Vienna in Laxenburg (Lower Austria), which is also home to the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). Since 2003, the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention (PSAC) has been based in Innsbruck.
Non-Governmental and Quasi-International Organisations

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are playing an increasingly important role, both in civil society and with respect to the area of activities of international organisations, whose thematic work they enrich and complement. Austria has therefore always endeavoured not only to attract international organisations but also to create an attractive environment for NGOs. As early as 1992, the necessary legal framework was created through the **Federal Act on the Granting of Privileges to Non-Governmental International Organisations**: upon request by a non-governmental international organisation and subject to fulfilment of the relevant legal conditions, the MFA may grant the legal status of an international NGO. Currently, more than 20 international NGOs have been recognised and granted this status.

In 2016, an amendment to this federal act came into force, which opens up the possibility for NGOs to be recognised as **quasi-international organisations**. The conditions to be fulfilled by the applicant include, among others: the organisation’s non-profit character must have been determined by decree, there must be a close connection between the organisation’s activity and that of an international organisation and it must have adequate office premises and personnel. The legal status of quasi-international organisation grants a number of privileges under tax law. Currently, six quasi-international organisations have been recognised. There is ongoing interest in this still young legal institution and the associated legal status.

### 2.2.4.2. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

Established in 1957, the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is an autonomous organisation within the UN system. Its main task is the worldwide promotion of the peaceful use of nuclear energy, increasing nuclear safety and security as well as verification of states’ compliance with the safeguards under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). It was the first UN organisation to set up headquarters in Vienna. With currently around 2,500 staff, it is also the largest of the Vienna-based organisations. Since 2009, Yukiya Amano from Japan has held the office of Director General. In recent years, the IAEA’s focus has increasingly shifted from the promotion of nuclear energy to nuclear safety and preventing the misuse of fissile material.

In the context of its project “Renovation of the Nuclear Applications Laboratories” (ReNuAL), the IAEA has modernised and updated its laboratories in Seibersdorf in order to be able to meet its members’ growing demand for scientific services. The initiative was supported by several states, including Austria. The IAEA also continued to verify and monitor implementation of Iran’s nuclear-related commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA) adopted in 2015 and, on the basis of quarterly reports from the Director General, confirmed the country’s compliance with and implementation of its commitments.
2.2.4.3. Preparatory Commission of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)

The Preparatory Commission of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) has been active in Vienna since 1997. Since summer 2013, the CTBTO has been headed by Executive Secretary Lassina Zerbo (Burkina Faso). The development of the CTBTO’s International Monitoring System, based on high-tech solutions for seismic, hydroacoustic, infrasound and radionuclide measurements, has made further progress. To date, the Treaty has been signed by 184 states and ratified by 168. The Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has, however, not yet entered into force as it has not been ratified by eight (Egypt, China, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and USA) of the 44 Key States listed in Annex 2.

The ground-breaking ceremony for the CTBTO’s new permanent Equipment Storage and Maintenance Facility (ESMF) in Seibersdorf was held on 25 January. As indicated by its name, these premises will primarily be used as a storage and maintenance facility for the equipment of the On-site Inspections department, but will, among other things, also house state-of-the-art training facilities and a media centre to be used by the entire organisation.

2.2.4.4. United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

The 3rd “Bridge for Cities-Belt and Road Initiative: Developing Green Economies for Cities” event, organised by UNIDO from 9 to 11 October was opened by its Director General Li Yong and the First President of the Vienna Diet (province parliament), Ernst Woller. Following the resumption of the 17th session of the General Conference of UNIDO on 29 November and a special session of the General Conference of UNIDO on 30 November, it was possible to reach a consensus on Israel’s country group change and also on the country group allocation of Palestine. Austria placed the focus of its project-related cooperation with UNIDO on initiatives aimed at creating employment and income opportunities in those regions of the Middle East and Africa that are under increased migratory pressure. Austria also maintains a long-standing partnership with UNIDO that focuses on establishing a global network of renewable energy centres in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

2.2.4.5. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

As the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is based in Vienna, the city has become an important venue for substantive discussions on international drug matters and the fight against crime. In this context, the main governing bodies are the two ECOSOC subcommittees, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ), which also meet in Vienna. Austria has been a member of the CND since 2000 and plays an active role as the host country.

Within the UN system, UNODC plays a key role in the fight against organised crime, illegal drug trafficking, HIV/AIDS, money laundering, corruption, human trafficking and
terrorism. In the interplay with other UN organisations such as the WHO, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) or the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), UNODC also assumes a central coordinating role on drug issues. Furthermore, UNODC is also responsible for programme and project planning and implementation, as well as providing technical assistance to states in the implementation of the UN conventions on drugs, organised crime, corruption and terrorism.

The beginning of the year was mainly marked by the 61st session of the CND (12-16 March). The negotiations on future drug policy after 2019 were continued and fundamental decisions on the course and objectives of the ministerial segment of the 62nd CND, scheduled for March 2019, were taken.

The 27th session of the CCPCJ, which was also attended by UN Secretary-General António Guterres on his first visit to the Vienna headquarters, was held from 14-18 May. Federal Minister Karin Kneissl took part in the high-level opening ceremony and the main topic on the session’s agenda was cybercrime. In the course of the session a number of resolutions were adopted, inter alia on combating human trafficking.

At the 9th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), held from 15 to 19 October, the participating states agreed on an intergovernmental mechanism to review the implementation of the Convention. As negotiations on this mechanism had already lasted more than ten years, this agreement was generally regarded as a great success. Austria has continued to provide voluntary contributions to the funding of numerous international drug control projects and programmes.

2.2.4.6. Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

Founded in 1960, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has been based in Vienna since 1965. The organisation currently has 14 Member Countries, the Republic of the Congo was admitted on 22 June and on 3 December Qatar announced its intention to withdraw from OPEC at the beginning of 2019.

Today, OPEC Member Countries together produce around 40 % of the world’s oil production and hold three-quarters of the world’s oil reserves. As enshrined in the organisation’s statutes, the OPEC’s objective “is to co-ordinate and unify petroleum policies among Member Countries, in order to secure fair and stable prices for petroleum producers”. Since 2016, OPEC Member Countries have coordinated oil production volumes with eleven non-OPEC oil producing countries with a view to reaching the declared objective of stabilising global oil markets (“OPEC plus”).

Attended by the oil ministers of the OPEC Member Countries, CEOs of numerous oil companies, NGOs and energy experts, the 7th OPEC International Seminar took place in Vienna on 20 and 21 June. Representing the Austrian Federal Government and as official representative of the host country, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl delivered the opening speech in which she addressed the challenges of energy transition and Vienna’s role as a hub for international energy dialogue.
The Vienna-based OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) is a multilateral development finance institution that was established in 1976 by the OPEC Member Countries. The Fund seeks to strengthen financial cooperation between OPEC countries and developing countries by providing financial aid. OFID currently finances projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America and is cooperating with the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) on a project aimed at facilitating the transition to sustainable energy supply in the SADC (Southern African Development Community) region.

OPEC and OFID are important members of the Vienna Energy Club, a platform of Vienna-based organisations dealing with international energy issues.

2.2.5. Human Rights

2.2.5.1. Introduction

The priorities of Austria’s human rights policy include freedom of belief and conscience, with a special focus on the protection of religious minorities, the protection of journalists and the promotion of the rights of the child as well as protecting children against violence and exploitation. Austria launches concrete initiatives with regard to these priorities both in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and in the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Other priorities pursued in the context of Austria’s international human rights policy include strengthening the human rights of particularly vulnerable persons and groups, such as minorities and women, strengthening the rule of law in international relations and at national level, the fight against impunity as well as the implementation and dissemination of international humanitarian law. Austria furthermore consistently supports the abolition of the death penalty. In October, Austria was elected as a member of the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2019-2021.

2.2.5.2. Human Rights in the United Nations

Human Rights Council

The UNHRC is mandated with promoting and monitoring human rights around the globe. To this end, it holds at least three regular sessions a year (in March, June and September) and may, in the event of particularly urgent human rights situations, convene ad hoc for special sessions. In addition, there are a number of other meetings, such as sessions of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group and of a number of other working groups. From 2011 to 2014, Austria held its first membership of the UNHRC, which is composed of 47 states.

Austria was able to provide a successful impetus to the 37th Regular Session of the HRC in the context of the visit Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen paid to the HRC in Geneva, during which he also addressed the high-level segment. In the course of his visit, he took part in a number of meetings to discuss human rights. Some of these discussions also focused on Austria’s candidacy for a seat on the HRC for the period 2019-2021. Besides delivering a speech in the high-level segment, the Federal President also met for talks with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Al
Hussein and a number of Geneva-based human rights NGOs. In addition to highlighting Austria’s special commitment to the protection of children’s rights, the Federal President – together with 14 youth ambassadors from Caritas Vorarlberg – opened an exhibition on children’s rights. The exhibition, which attracted a large number of visitors, was organised by the Permanent Mission of Austria to the UN in Geneva and Caritas Vorarlberg.

In the course of the 37th session of the HRC, the Austrian initiative for a resolution on the rights of minorities, which was introduced by a supra-regional core group, was again adopted by consensus. Building on the recommendations of the 10th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues, the resolution focused in particular on the rights of young people belonging to minorities and calls on states to implement concrete measures in the areas of inclusive education, participation in public life, protection of minorities in conflicts and their involvement in reconciliation and peace-building efforts.

The resolution on the right to privacy in the digital age, introduced by Austria as part of a supra-regional core group of main sponsors, was also adopted by consensus. The resolution extends the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, who was appointed three years ago, and was supported by more than 80 supra-regional co-sponsors. Furthermore, the core group also organised a discussion event on the topic of “Digital identity, smart cities and other data intensive systems: the implications for the right to privacy”.

During its 37th Regular Session in March, the HRC also adopted resolutions on Syria, the DPR of Korea, Iran, Libya, Myanmar and a number of African states. Several resolution initiatives dealt with the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. The negotiations on thematic resolutions focused inter alia on the EU resolution on the rights of the child, and on initiatives on the negative impact of terrorism on human rights, torture and prevention of genocide.

On the initiative of Palestine and the United Arab Emirates, the HRC on 18 May convened a special session on the deteriorating human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. The states that convened the session sought the condemnation of the ‘disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by Israel’ in the context of the protests on the Gaza-Israel border, to criticize the relocation of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, and to establish an international commission of inquiry that is to report to the UN Human Rights Council by March 2019 on possible violations of international law in the context of the civilian protests since 30 March.

The draft resolution submitted by Palestine was adopted by a clear majority (29 votes in favour, two against, 14 abstentions). The EU issued a joint statement but was split between yes and abstention (three votes in favour, five abstentions).

Federal Minister Karin Kneissl addressed the plenary at the 38th Regular Session of the UNHRC. In her speech, the Federal Minister referred to the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 and the high-level meeting organised by the MFA and the UN at the end of May, celebrating its 25th anniversary, as well as Austria’s commitment to the protection of women’s rights and the fight against female genital mutilation. Furthermore, the Federal Minister reaffirmed Austria’s commitment to effective multilat-
eralism, dealt with the US withdrawal and its criticism of the HRC and promoted Austria’s candidacy for the UNHRC.

The **38th Regular Session of the UNHRC** was marked by the US withdrawal. The timing of the resignation during the current session was viewed critically by many WEOG (Western European and Others Group) states, as it meant that the group of Western-minded states had one vote less during the voting process. The EU and other like-minded states were particularly committed to demonstrating the effectiveness of the UNHRC. Hence, a **large number of country situations was put on the UNHRC’s agenda**. There were joint statements on Venezuela, the Philippines and Cambodia, and resolutions on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Haiti, Belarus and Eritrea.

Concerns that the withdrawal might have an impact on some of the votes taken also proved unfounded. Quite on the contrary, the result of the vote on the EU resolution on Belarus, for example, was better than last year, and what is more, all hostile amendments proposed by Russia and other states were rejected.

Austria contributed actively to the work performed by the UNHRC and, together with Honduras and Uganda, organised a **panel debate in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement**. Attracting a large number of visitors, the event fully met its goal of giving more visibility to this topic. During the UNHRC session, Austria took over the **Presidency of the Council of the European Union** and thus assumed the lead on an initiative for a resolution presented by Venezuela on behalf of the NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) states and additional co-sponsors on “Enhancement of International Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights”, as well as on EU statements in the Interactive Dialogue on internally displaced persons, the panel debate initiated by Austria and individual EU statements in the general debates.

The **39th Regular Session of the UNHRC** was marked by a large number of country resolutions. Particular attention was paid to the resolution on **Myanmar**, which was jointly introduced by the EU and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and develops a mechanism to collect, analyse and store evidence of the most serious human rights violations in Myanmar and the resolution on **Venezuela**, which was the first resolution on a Latin American country since 2009. Resolutions were also introduced on Yemen, Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Sudan.

At this session, **Michelle Bachelet**, former President of Chile, took office as the new **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights**. In her inaugural address, she stressed the importance of multilateral cooperation for the promotion, universality and indivisibility of human rights. She also underlined the UNHRC’s prevention mandate and the interdependence between the UN human rights pillar and the 2030 Agenda.

For Austria, this meeting was dominated by the **Presidency of the Council of the European Union**. On behalf of the EU, Austria thus took over the **lead in the negotiation of three resolutions**, namely on the rights of peasants, on technical cooperation and capacity building, and on the initiative for a resolution on human rights and international watercourses which was eventually withdrawn. In addition, Austria as Presidency of the Council of the European Union delivered statements in the general debates of the UNHRC. Austria placed a focus on facilitating consensus within the EU, and it was
Indeed possible to achieve a uniform approach of EU Member States on a wide range of topics on which the EU was able to agree on joint statements. It was only in the vote on the resolution on peasants that EU Member States were not able to agree on a common position.

By introducing the resolution on the safety of journalists, which was again co-sponsored by a supra-regional core group of states, during the 39th Regular Session, Austria was able to set a thematic focus. The introduction of a number of new elements enabled an expansion of the resolution’s thematic focus. In addition to safety, the resolution now also deals with general aspects of freedom of the media. Although at times negotiations proved difficult, the resolution was once again adopted by consensus.

With a joint statement on the issue of child mortality, Austria, together with Ireland, Mongolia and Botswana, was also able to contribute to the UNHRC’s work in the traditional priority area of the rights of the child. The statement was endorsed by a total of 115 states, including all 28 EU Member States.

Every four years, all UN Member States undergo a review of their human rights situation (Universal Periodic Review, UPR) performed by the UNHRC. Making concrete recommendations for improving human rights protection, Austria actively participated in the reviews of France, Romania, Mali, Burundi, Montenegro, United Arab Emirates, Israel and Serbia during the 29th UPR session in January. During the 30th session, which took place in May, recommendations were made on Turkmenistan, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Bangladesh, Germany, Russia, Azerbaijan, Cameroon and Cuba and during the 31st Session in November, on China, Jordan, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and Senegal.

At the 73rd Regular Session of the UNGA in October, Austria was elected by 171 votes as a member of the UNHRC for the period 2019–2021. At the same time, this vote reflected Member States’ recognition of Austria’s consistent commitment to improving the protection of human rights worldwide. Membership of the UNHRC offers additional opportunities for implementing Austria’s active international human rights policy: during its term, Austria will continue to committedly pursue its traditional priorities (safety of journalists; protection of minorities; human rights of internally displaced persons; human rights in the administration of justice). Furthermore, Austria will place an even stronger focus on women’s rights, the rights of the child, strengthening the rule of law, the fight against human trafficking, the abolition of the death penalty, the protection of privacy on the Internet and respect for human rights in the context of new technologies and will further step up its related activities.

**General Assembly**

**The UN Security Council**

Chaired by the Polish Foreign Minister, Jacek Czaputowicz, the annual open debate on the protection of civilians (PoC) was held on 22 May. The debate focused on the topic of compliance with international humanitarian law by parties to a conflict. The UNSC was informed by UNSG António Guterres, the International Committee of the Red Cross...
Priority Topics

(ICRC) and a representative of civil society. A problem that was addressed by a number of Member States, the UNSG and the ICRC was the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas. Austria held a national statement and contributed to the statements of the EU, the Group of Friends for the Protection of Civilians and the Human Security Network.

On 21 September, the UNSC adopted a Presidency Statement endorsing the aide-mémoire on the protection of civilians reviewed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In the course of the review, the focus was placed on the major problem areas of recent years, in particular attacks on medical facilities and personnel and on starvation tactics. The UNSC also referred to the 20th anniversary of the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1265 (1999), by which the protection of civilians (PoC) was included in the agenda. Consequently, the next report by the UNSG in 2019 will therefore also take stock of 20 years of PoC.

The interdisciplinary leadership training programme on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, developed in 2012 in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Defence and the Federal Ministry of the Interior, was successfully continued with a national seminar at the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR). This course was certified according to UN standards in December 2014. With a view to the publication of new training material on the protection of civilians and children as well as on measures to prevent sexual violence in armed conflict, Austria together with the Austrian Study Centre also supported the UN Secretariat in holding a two-week training course in late October and early November that was directed at training personnel active in this field.

In order to achieve the goal of improved implementation of UNSC resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security (WPS) and the seven other UNSC resolutions on this issue, a network of National Contact Points for Women, Peace and Security (NCPs) was established in 2016. On 26 September, Austria participated in a meeting of the network on the margins of the 73rd UNGA’s high-level week.

The annual debate on sexual violence in conflict was held on 16 April. The discussion focused mainly on structural factors that contribute to violence against women and girls, on accountability and law enforcement, and on support and rehabilitation of victims. Against the background of the listing of the Myanmar Armed Forces (Tatmadaw) in the current annual report and the fact that the civil society statement was delivered by a female Rohingya lawyer, discussions focused more intensely than usual on minorities as targets in conflict. In a national statement, Austria presented its international commitment to the protection of minorities, making a substantial contribution to the debate. Austria also contributed to the statements by the EU, the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security and the Human Security Network.

On 27 September, Austria participated in an event organised by the Women’s Peace & Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) under the heading of “Accelerating the Women’s Movement for Peace & Humanitarian Action”. In the course of this event, the “WPHF 40 by 20” campaign was launched, which seeks to raise 40 million US dollars by the end of 2020 to promote the participation and empowerment of women as well as women in
leadership roles. During the event, Austria was able to announce that via ADA it will make available 1 million euros to WPHF as financial support for its work in Iraq.

Chaired by Bolivia, the annual UNSC debate on WPS was held on 25 October and dealt with the topic of promoting implementation of the WPS agenda and sustaining peace through women’s political and economic empowerment. As in previous years, the open debate met with lively interest from UN Member States. Austria contributed a national statement and also contributed to the statements by the EU and the Friends of the WPS. In its national statement, Austria presented the initiatives it had launched with respect to WPS, namely the Austrian contribution to the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund, its commitment to the fight against gender-based violence and its commitment to the protection of Women Human Rights Defenders.

Together with civil society partner organisations Austria again organised several side events in New York, thus maintaining its active profile in this thematic area.

Chaired by Sweden, the UNSC held an open debate on children and armed conflict on 9 July. Austria delivered a national statement and contributed to the statements by the EU, the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and by those states that support the Safe Schools Declaration. In the debate, special attention was drawn to the importance of linking the protection of children from serious violations with the prevention of conflicts and building sustainable peace.

By adopting UNSC resolution 2427 (2018), the UNSC unanimously adopted a resolution on children and armed conflict that was co-sponsored by Austria.

**Commission on the Status of Women**

The 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), held in New York from 12 to 23 March, dealt with the topic of “Challenges and Opportunities in achieving Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls in Rural Areas”. The formal outcome produced by this meeting were conclusions on this topic, adopted by the UN member states’ political representatives. In addition, resolutions were passed on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 2020, on methods of work of the CSW, on women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS, on women and children taken hostage including those subsequently imprisoned as well as on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women.

Austria contributed actively to the negotiations and delivered a national statement in the general debate. Austria furthermore organised four well-attended side events, on “Women in the digital world”, on “Challenging discriminatory social norms for more gender-transformative policies”, on “Localisation of UNSCR 1325: A strategy for rural women’s empowerment” and on “the role of women in mountain areas”. In addition to that – and within the framework of the Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists – Austria contributed to another side event on “dangerous assignments: safety of women journalists”.

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2.2.5.3. Human Rights in the European Union

The European Union Human Rights Policy

Pursuant to Article 21 TEU, the objectives of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) include the development and consolidation of democracy and the rule of law, as well as the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Issues related to EU human rights policy within the EU are dealt with by the Council Working Party on Fundamental Rights, Citizens’ Rights and Free Movement of Persons (FREMP). The EU’s uniform approach in the field of human rights has come under pressure within the Council Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM) that deals with all human rights aspects of the EU’s external relations, as Member States held partly differing views inter alia on issues related to the EU’s human rights policy towards third countries. Austria continued its commitment towards achieving better integration of human rights in all EU policy areas in order to ensure a consistent EU human rights policy both inside and outside of the EU.

During the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, work on the development of Guidelines on Non-Discrimination was continued, informal consultations on EU guidelines on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation were held, and a discussion of the reports on the implementation of the EU Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and of the EU Guidelines on LGBTI was held. The informal meeting of FREMP and COHOM was also organised by the Austrian Presidency in Vienna. Regarding the EU’s positions in UN human rights fora, both the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan for UN fora for the 39th session of the UNHRC as well as the EU Strategic Action Plan for the 73rd session of the UNGA were updated. Furthermore, the topics to be addressed by the resolution on the rights of the child sponsored by the EU-GRULAC (Latin American and Caribbean Group) in 2019 were selected and the EU position for the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women 2019 was prepared.

In the field of business and human rights, agreement was reached on a common EU approach with regard to the 4th meeting of the intergovernmental working group on the development of an international legally binding instrument on transnational corporations and human rights.

The EU Strategy and the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for the period 2015-2019 continued to be implemented as a priority in order to further strengthen the effectiveness and coherence of the EU as a global power for the promotion of human rights. The focus is on establishing coherent links between human rights and other EU foreign policy areas, such as trade, the fight against terrorism, migration and development cooperation. The concrete measures foreseen in this plan aim at promoting freedom of expression and protection of journalists, strengthening freedom of religion and belief, combatting torture and the death penalty, promoting women’s rights and gender equality, children’s rights, non-discrimination, human rights and the economy. The EU Special Representative for Human Rights Stavros Lambrinidis continued his dialogue efforts in the human rights field, visiting Myanmar, Mexico, South Africa, Iran and the USA as well as participating in a meeting with the AU.
Effective Multilateralism and the Role of Austria

Identifying eleven priority areas, the EU Guidelines on Human Rights are designed to enable players at EU level and EU Member States to support enhanced protection of human rights with regard to third countries in a more coordinated and coherent manner. Each of these guidelines comprises a catalogue of concrete measures for the EU’s permanent commitment to third countries on individual human rights issues such as combating the death penalty, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, human rights dialogues with third countries, the protection of children in armed conflict, the protection and promotion of human rights defenders, combating violence against women, international humanitarian law, the human rights of LGBTI persons, freedom of religion and belief, and the protection of freedom of expression online and offline. Austria advocates the full implementation and further development of the EU Guidelines.

The main responsibility for implementing concrete projects and programmes in the field of EU human rights policy lies mainly with the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The European Commission is responsible for implementing the work of the EIDHR and is guided and supported in managing this task by the Committee on Democracy and Human Rights. A concrete contribution to strengthening democracy at global level is being made by the EU election monitoring missions, which have been conducted since 2000. To date, a total of 31 Austrians have been selected to participate as short- and long-term observers in the nine missions to El Salvador, Sierra Leone, Paraguay, Lebanon, Tunisia, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Mali and Madagascar. Compared with other EU Member States, Austria thus again assumes a very prominent role.

The Vienna-based European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) provides advice to the European Commission, the Council, other EU organs and institutions as well as the Member States. From the very beginning, Austria has cooperated closely with the FRA and its Director Michael O’Flaherty (Ireland). The FRA collects information on the fundamental rights situation in the entire EU and based on this information draws up recommendations for improvement. The FRA has increasingly focused on victim protection, legal cooperation, anti-discrimination, the rights of the child, the integration of Roma, migration, asylum, and racism, and has provided the EU Member States with practical advice and reports.

Structured Human Rights Dialogues

The EU applies special Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues under which it defines different forms of dialogue, i.e. structured human rights dialogues, ad hoc dialogues, dialogues with groups of states and expert meetings with like-minded states in preparation for major human rights events. The EU holds such human rights dialogues with more than 40 states and groups of states. The respective topics, problematic issues and opportunities for cooperation addressed during these dialogues are defined individually on a case-by-case basis. The topics that feature frequently in these talks include, for instance, minority rights, women’s rights, the death penalty, freedom of religion and belief, democratisation, the rule of law, children’s rights and civil society development.
Priority Topics

The EU also endeavours to actively involve civil society in these dialogues, for instance by holding joint preparatory meetings in the lead-up to human rights dialogues, which are usually held on an alternating basis in the EU and in the respective partner country. The EU held human rights dialogues and consultations as well as sub-committee meetings with the AU, Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Canada, China, Cambodia, Egypt, Georgia, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Korea and Cambodia, Qatar, Kyrgyzstan, Cuba, Laos, Lebanon, Macedonia, Mexico, Montenegro, Moldova, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, Serbia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Tajikistan, Taiwan, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and the United Arab Emirates. The dialogue with Iran has been suspended since 2004. The possibility of a resumption is, however, being examined in exploratory talks. No dialogue has been scheduled with Russia.

2.2.5.4. Human Rights in the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe’s human rights protection system is based on the ECHR and the legally binding effects of the judgments passed by the ECtHR. As a result of the ECtHR reform, which has been underway since 2010, it has been possible to substantially reduce the very high number of pending cases – from originally over 160,000 to approximately 56,000 cases. Initially, this reduction was primarily achieved through improvements in the Court’s procedures. Since the reform conference held in Brussels in 2015, the focus of the related activities has been on the implementation of ECtHR judgments by the member States.

Under the Danish Chairmanship, the Copenhagen Declaration on the Reform of the European Convention on Human Rights System was intensively negotiated and adopted in Copenhagen on 13 April. Austria was represented by State Secretary Karoline Edtstadler. This declaration essentially continues the previous process and seeks to further strengthen the system.

On 1 August, Protocol No. 16 to the ECHR entered into force for the ten states that have ratified it to date. It enables the highest national courts and tribunals, as designated by the member States concerned, to submit requests to the ECtHR for advisory opinions on questions of principle relating to the interpretation or application of the ECHR.

In 2015, Ukraine and France had suspended the application of individual provisions under the ECHR in accordance with Art. 15 (emergency clause). The derogation of Ukraine due to the conflict in the eastern part of the country and in Crimea continues to this day. The suspension introduced by France due to terrorist attacks was terminated at the end of 2017. After the attempted coup in July 2016, Turkey also suspended the application of individual provisions of the ECHR in accordance with Art. 15 ECHR. On 8 August, Turkey formally informed the Secretary General of the end of this suspension.

The non-implementation of ECtHR judgments continues to be the subject of controversial debates in the CoE. At the end of 2017 Art. 46 (4) of the ECHR was applied for the first time in the case of Ilgar Mammadov against Azerbaijan. Introduced by Protocol
No. 14, it enables the Committee of Ministers to refer the question of whether a state Party has fulfilled its obligation to implement the judgments to the ECtHR. The corresponding decision of the ECtHR in these proceedings is pending. However, Ilgar Mammadov has meanwhile been conditionally released from prison, which means that the use of this “leverage” can be considered quite effective. The conditions of the release and the further implementation of the judgement remain the topic of discussions and of the ECtHR’s still outstanding decision under the Art. 46 para. 4 proceedings. The case is of such significance because of the precedence effect it creates with a view to the future application of this article should a state Party fail to implement the judgements passed by the ECtHR.

In the reporting period, the ECtHR concluded a total of 18 cases pending against Austria, in six of these cases a judgement was delivered, in four cases the Court found a violation of the ECHR by Austria.

The Treaty of Lisbon provides for the EU’s accession to the ECHR. The goal is to enable the revision of EU legal acts by the ECtHR with regard to their compatibility with the ECHR, also on the basis of individual complaints. Following its finalisation in April 2013, the draft agreement on the EU’s accession was submitted by the European Commission to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) for review. In its opinion, issued on 18 December 2014, the ECJ found that several items in this draft agreement were not compatible with Union law. Notwithstanding these developments, the EU continues to highlight the priority its accession to the ECHR enjoys at political level, to which new impetus was added under the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

In office until the end of March, Nils Muižnieks, visited inter alia Macedonia, Serbia and Slovakia in his role as Commissioner for Human Rights of the CoE. His successor Dunja Mijatović visited Germany, Albania, Spain, Greece, Armenia, Turkey and Romania. Their respective reports and statements on both country-specific and thematic developments contribute to raising awareness of human rights in the member States.

The Austrian members currently represented on monitoring bodies are: Brigitta Busch (Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities – FCNM), Dieter Halwachs (Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages), Karin Lukas (European Committee of Social Rights – ECSR) and Rosa Logar (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence – GREVIO).

2.2.5.5. Austrian Priorities in the Field of Human Rights

Freedom of Religion and Protection of Religious Minorities

Religious conflicts, discrimination and violence against members of religious minorities are on the rise worldwide. In response to these developments, Austria has stepped up its commitment to promoting religious freedom and the protection of religious minorities at bilateral and multilateral level. Committed efforts towards promoting freedom of religion was also a topic discussed by Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Pope Francis during their meeting in the Vatican on 5 March.
Priority Topics

Austria has made this topic a priority of its work in the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and regularly addresses the difficult situation of religious minorities in the country debates and in the context of Universal Periodic Reviews (UPRs). This approach is also in line with the increasing focus the EU has placed on this topic. At the multilateral level, the EU again introduced the annual thematic resolution on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in both the UNGA and the UNHRC, which together with the resolutions introduced by the OIC generally cover the topic of freedom of religion.

At the EU level, the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief, which are based on an Austrian initiative and were adopted by the Council in 2013, define the priorities for implementation in the individual countries. Austria is a member of the Task Force on FoRB, set up within the EU to address this issue, and specifically advocates maintaining a focus on religious minorities, inter-religious dialogue and the improvement of the related flow of communication within the EU.

Within the framework of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU, Austria made combating antisemitism a special priority of its activities. Austria thus organised events in Geneva and Brussels in the context of which the second study prepared by the FRA on antisemitism in Europe was presented. The events sought to raise awareness and highlight a topic that had received little attention in recent years, particularly at UN level.

Human Rights of Children

The promotion and protection of the rights of children are a major priority of Austria’s international human rights policy. At international level, Austria therefore actively supports strengthening and promoting children’s rights.

At the 73rd UNGA, Austria again supported the adoption of the resolution on the rights of the child. In the context of the 37th session of the UNHRC in Geneva, Austria contributed pro-actively to the annual negotiations on the resolution on the rights of the child. Furthermore, it delivered a national statement in the interactive dialogue, in which it inter alia expressed its appreciation for the work of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children and Children in Armed Conflict. In cooperation with Caritas Vorarlberg, Austria also organised an exhibition on the rights of the child entitled “Too Tall to Overlook” on the margins of the 37th session of the UNHRC.

Since 2017, Austrian Renate Winter has chaired the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its three Optional Protocols by the State parties and prepares legal opinions on the Convention.

Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) also promotes the rights of the child, based on a targeted two-level approach. In implementing the human rights approach, ADC on the one hand takes special account of the needs and rights of children in all activities, including political dialogue. On the other hand, ADC promotes specific projects and programmes that are specifically tailored towards protecting and promoting the rights of children, including through family strengthening programmes in Armenia, Bosnia
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and Herzegovina and Georgia. Other projects aim to improve the living conditions and reintegration of migrant children in Albania and to support refugee children and their host communities in Burkina Faso in cooperation with UNICEF. In the negotiations within the Open Working Group on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, Austria advocated for greater consideration of children’s rights. Through multilateral development cooperation, Austria furthermore supported UNICEF projects aimed at strengthening children’s rights. Since 2017, UNICEF has been conducting a technical advisory mission in Austria on unaccompanied refugee minors.

Represented by the Austrian Ambassador Karin Proidl, Austria took part in the second international conference on Safe Schools hosted by Argentina in Buenos Aires from 27 to 29 March. The conference dealt with the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, which Austria has supported from the outset, and discussed the need to better protect children, teachers and educational institutions during conflicts.

Human Rights of Women

Improving the human rights situation of women has been a long-standing, central concern of Austrian foreign policy. Austria contributed actively to the 62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, as well as in the open UNSC debates on women, peace and security in April and October.

Within the framework of the Third Committee of the 73rd session of the UNGA, Austria again advocated strengthening women’s rights, particularly in the context of the negotiation on the resolutions on the elimination of violence against women and girls, the elimination of female genital mutilation and the fight against trafficking in women and girls.

Austria participated actively in the network meetings of the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points. The first of these meetings was held in Berlin in April under the heading of “Building Alliances to Advance the Women, Peace and Security Agenda”. The second network meeting in New York in September dealt with “The UN Security Council and Women, Peace and Security: promoting concrete action”.

In the context of the sessions held by UNHRC, Austria participated actively in the negotiations on a number of resolutions on women’s rights, in particular on ending violence against women, ending discrimination against women, eliminating female genital mutilation and maternal mortality.

Within the framework of the UPR carried out by the UNHRC, Austria in its statements on a number of countries regularly advocated recommendations on gender equality, greater political participation of women and ending discrimination and violence against women.

At EU level and in the context of its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria co-chaired the EU High Level Task Force on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (2000) in Brussels. Following lengthy preparatory work, an EU Strategic Approach to the implementation of UNSC resolution 1325 was adopted, replacing the previous ‘Approach to the EU Implementation of the UNSCRs 1325 and 1820 on WPS’ from the
year 2008. Furthermore, Austria actively supported the adoption of Council conclusions on the topic of women, peace and security. Adopted on 10 December, they underline the EU’s commitment to this topic. Austria also participated in the discussions on women, peace and security in the EU Political and Security Committee in March, October and December. Talks focused mainly on necessary preparations for the adoption of the EU Strategic Approach to the Implementation of UNSCR 1325, the Council conclusions, and updates on the efforts undertaken by the Principal Adviser on Gender, Ambassador Mara Marinaki, to enshrine the promotion of gender equality and the WPS agenda at all levels of EU foreign policy.

In the context of its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria chaired the Working Party on Fundamental Rights, Citizens Rights and Free Movement of Persons (FREMP) and pro-actively fostered the negotiation process for the EU ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). Considerable progress was made in the negotiations on the technical documents required for EU ratification, the Code of Conduct laying down the arrangements for the exercise of rights and obligations of the EU and its Member States, and the Council draft decisions on the conclusion on behalf of the EU of the Istanbul Convention in the fields of mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, asylum and non-refoulement, which have almost been completed. Nevertheless, fundamental legal and political problems in some Member States have so far prevented the EU from concluding the Convention.

On the margins of the informal meeting of the EU Foreign Ministers (“Gymnich”), a panel discussion on the topic “Defending women, defending rights – women human rights defenders’ perspectives and challenges” took place on 29 August, organised and opened by Amnesty International.

The 9th Implementation Report on the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSC resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security was adopted by the Federal Government on 19 December and subsequently forwarded to Parliament. Alongside a voluntary contribution to the core budget of UN Women, Austria also made a financial contribution to the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women.

From 25 November (the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10 December (International Human Rights Day), the MFA participated in the international campaign “Orange the world”. Throughout these 16 days of taking a stand against gender-based violence, the MFA launched targeted activities to raise special awareness of the importance of fighting violence against women. Based on a wide range of nationwide events, the presentation of best practice projects as well as numerous social media activities and press releases, it was possible to reach out to the public at large, raise broad-based awareness for this topic and draw attention to offers of help. Furthermore, an expert discussion on the topic of “Culture-based violence and women’s right to self-determination” was held on 7 December at the MFA. In her opening remarks, Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl emphasised that Austria had for some years now witnessed a rise in culture-based violence, such as forced marriage or female genital mutilation. She highlighted that it was necessary to take decisive action in order to
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combat these forms of violence. The overriding goal was to strengthen women’s self-determination, for which Austria was campaigning both at home and abroad.

Gender equality, the empowerment of women and the protection and promotion of their rights are also among the declared objectives pursued by ADC. Apart from taking special account of the needs and rights of women and men with respect to all activities, specific projects and programmes to strengthen the rights and participation of women and girls were supported. In Kosovo, for instance, ADC has been working on countering gender-specific violence, promoting political participation and economic empowerment, on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) in South East Europe and the Southern Caucasus, and on increasingly involving boys and men in the prevention of violence against women and promoting gender equality in South East Europe. Austria also contributed 2 million euros earmarked for Iraq to the UN Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF). This is the only global funding mechanism dedicated exclusively to promoting the participation and involvement of women in peacebuilding and humanitarian activities. The WPHF supports women’s organisations in selected countries in the implementation of UNSC resolution 1325.

Freedom of the Media and Protection of Journalists

In view of the global rise in targeted attacks on journalists and the problem of widespread impunity as well as following up on its recent membership of the HRC, Austria made the improvement of journalists’ safety and defending freedom of the press and the media a major focus of its human rights activities. Building on the first resolution on the safety of journalists, introduced by Austria in September 2012 and adopted with broad support from the international community in the UN Human Rights Council, Austria launched numerous activities aimed at better enshrining this important topic in the work of the UN human rights bodies and to further develop its content.

By introducing the resolution on the safety of journalists, again co-sponsored by a supra-regional core group of states during the 39th session of the HRC, Austria was able to place a strong emphasis on the topic. As a number of new elements had been added, it was possible to expand the resolution’s thematic focus. In addition to the safety of journalists, it thus now also deals with general aspects of freedom of the media. Although at times negotiations proved difficult, the resolution was once again adopted by consensus.

At UNESCO level, Austria organised an information and coordination meeting of the Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists at ambassadors’ level in September. Within the framework of the 31st session of the Intergovernmental Council of the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) in November, Austria successfully coordinated and led the negotiations for the adoption of the decision on the Director General’s report on the subject. This decision contains a clear focus on gender aspects and a broad-based definition of journalists. UNESCO also has an important role to play in monitoring and collecting data for the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, particularly with respect to
access of information and safety of journalists. This role was confirmed and strengthened by the decision of the IPDC Council.

Within the framework of the OSCE, a Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists was founded in Vienna. The group, of which Austria is an active member, seeks to primarily facilitate the exchange of information and to promote joint initiatives as well as to cooperate closely with Vienna-based organisations dealing with the topic.

Protection of Minorities

The protection of the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities has traditionally been a priority of Austria’s international human rights policy. Austria regularly introduces resolutions on this issue both in the HRC and the UNGA. The resolution introduced at the 37th session of the HRC focused on the rights of young people belonging to minorities. From a thematic perspective, this resolution builds on the recommendations of the 10th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues. This Geneva-based forum was initiated and supported by Austria as a platform for dialogue on the implementation of the UN Declaration on Minority Rights, which focuses on involving civil society and minority representatives from all around the world. The resolution covers a wide range of measures aimed at the protection of young members of minorities and contributes to further specifying political commitments. It calls, for instance, on states to implement concrete measures in the areas of inclusive education, participation in public life, protection of minorities in conflicts and their involvement in reconciliation and peace-building efforts.

Meeting in Geneva from 29 to 30 November, the eleventh session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues was convened on the theme “Statelessness: A Minority Issue”. Bringing together some 500 participants (representing governments, minorities, NGOs, national human rights institutions, UN agencies and regional organisations), it was very well attended.

The connection between statelessness and minority status was discussed in four thematic units: root causes and consequences of statelessness affecting minorities, statelessness resulting from conflicts, forced population movements and migration affecting minorities, ensuring the right to a nationality for persons belonging to minorities through facilitation of birth registration, naturalisation and citizenship for stateless minorities, as well as minority women and children affected by statelessness.

Austria contributed actively to the work of the Forum and in cooperation with the NGO Minority Rights Group International (MRG) organised a well-attended side event on “Intersectional and aggravating factors affecting the rights of stateless minorities”. As the Minority Forum continues to be clearly associated with Austria, it offered another opportunity to raise Austria’s profile within the HRC.

Within the EU context, major importance is attached to the protection and integration of the Roma. This is also highlighted by the review of the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies by 2020. Austria works consistently on the implementation of its National Roma Integration Strategy and regularly reports to the European Commission on progress made. The National Contact Point at the Federal Chan-

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cellery is responsible for this reporting and it also reviews implementation of the national concepts for the inclusion of Roma in Austria. It additionally organises regular meetings of the Roma Dialogue Platform on specific topics related to the inclusion of Roma.

Austria cooperates closely with the CoE monitoring mechanisms. Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the two main instruments, the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, a conference addressing the changes witnessed over the last 20 years and new challenges to be faced was organised in Strasbourg in June. In addition to technical and social developments, discussions also focused on growing tensions and the role of multilateralism in this area. This also includes increasing delays in monitoring due to disputes in the CoE’s political committees. With respect to the Charter, negotiations – to which Austria actively contributed – were held and slight improvements to the monitoring procedure were adopted.

The Fourth Austrian National Report on the implementation of the obligations under the ECRML was discussed on 22 March and the recommendations made by the Committee of Experts were adopted in a resolution on 17 October.

Human Rights Education

Human rights education aims to share knowledge and information on human rights and to develop an understanding of the importance of respecting, protecting and actively implementing human rights in one’s own community.

Based on this comprehensive and informed understanding, awareness of human rights shall thus be sustainably strengthened and implemented in society. The “Understanding Human Rights” manual, published by the ETC Graz, has enabled Austria to provide an important tool that is used worldwide in meeting this goal. The manual has already been translated into 17 languages and is used successfully by numerous countries and regions in their respective training and education programmes.

Death Penalty

The consistent efforts towards the worldwide abolition of the death penalty enjoy top priority on Austria’s international human rights agenda. Together with a large group of states from all regions, Austria committedly advocates and calls for the worldwide abolition of the death penalty.

For Austria, the relevant efforts by the UN, the establishment of the World Coalition against the Death Penalty, and the EU Guidelines on the Death Penalty are key instruments in combating capital punishment. During its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria attached particular importance to this topic and was also among the sponsors of the initiative for a resolution on the moratorium on the use of the death penalty introduced in the 73rd UNGA in New York and adopted with a record 121 votes.
**Priority Topics**

The Ministers’ Deputies Committee (MDC) of the CoE regularly deals with the full and universal abolition of the death penalty worldwide and adopted two declarations on executions in Belarus, Japan and the USA. On the International Day against the Death Penalty on 10 October, the Secretary General of the CoE and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy issued a joint statement.

The issue of the death penalty is regularly raised in bilateral contacts with states that use capital punishment. In the context of the UPRs of states conducted by the HRC, Austria recommended abolishing the death penalty and/or introducing a moratorium to the United Arab Emirates, Bangkok, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the MFA also cooperated closely with local and international civil society organisations working towards the abolition of the death penalty.

**Combating Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking is a grave violation of the most fundamental human rights. According to estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO), approximately 24.9 million people worldwide were in a situation of labour exploitation in 2017. UNODC reports in its Global Report on Trafficking in Persons that between 2003 and 2016 over 225,000 victims of human trafficking were identified worldwide, reaching a new peak in 2016 with 24,000 victims.

Austria is affected by human trafficking both as a transit and destination country. Cases of human trafficking in Austria predominantly involve human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, but cases of exploitative labour conditions and child trafficking have also been repeatedly detected.

At the national level, efforts towards combating human trafficking are coordinated by the Task Force on Human Trafficking based on National Action Plans. In 2018, Ambassador Petra Schneebauer was appointed National Coordinator on Combating Human Trafficking and Chairperson of the Task Force. The Task Force is responsible for drawing up National Action Plans on combating human trafficking and monitors their implementation. The fifth Austrian National Action Plan on Combating Human Trafficking (2018-2020) is currently being implemented. The National Action Plans pursue a comprehensive approach to combating human trafficking and include measures aimed at national coordination, prevention, victim protection, law enforcement and international cooperation. All relevant public and government institutions, the federal provinces, social partners and non-governmental organisations cooperate closely within the Task Force. In order to be able to also address and focus in detail on such complex issues as child trafficking, prostitution and labour exploitation, the Task Force has set up separate working groups on these topics that are led by the respective ministries.

With a view to raising awareness of the topic among the general public, the Task Force organises a major annual public event marking the EU Anti-Trafficking Day (18 October). Focusing on “Human Trafficking and Human Rights – Access to Rights for Victims of Human Trafficking”, this year’s conference was held in the Vienna Hofburg Palace on 29 October.
Austria is a party to all international legal instruments on combating human trafficking, including in particular the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children Supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (2005) and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2006). Austria has continued its intensive cooperation with international organisations such as the UNODC, the OSCE, the CoE and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). During its Presidency of the Council of the EU, Austria placed a special emphasis on the improvement of statistical data in general and on promoting networking between South East European national coordinators and their counterparts in the EU Member States.

Within the framework of Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC), Austria supported projects aimed at preventing human trafficking and protecting victims in the countries of origin, for instance in the Arab region, North and East Africa and South East Europe. Furthermore, Austria supported OSCE projects focusing on combating human trafficking along migration routes and labour exploitation in international supply chains.

In order to increase the protection of private domestic staff of diplomats or international officials accredited to Austria and to prevent potential labour exploitation, the MFA has for some years now launched regular prevention and control measures in cooperation with victim protection institutions. At international level, Austria has assumed a leading role in the related efforts.

### 2.2.5.6. The International Criminal Court

The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague is a permanent international court established by the Rome Statute (RS) of 1998. It has jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and, since 17 July 2018, also the crime of aggression. The RS stipulated that the ICC shall be based on the principle of complementarity. This means that the Court will only act if the affected states – which are responsible for trying the perpetrators – are either unwilling or unable to carry out the investigation or persecution of crimes. In March, Judge Chile Eboe-Osuji (Nigeria) was elected as the new President of the ICC and Peter Lewis (UK) as the new Registrar.

In total, 123 states are party to the RS. After the Prosecutor had opened preliminary investigations on 8 February into alleged crimes committed in the Philippines in the course of the “war on drugs” campaign, the Philippines declared its withdrawal from the RS on 17 March. Under Art. 127 (1) RS, the withdrawal shall take effect one year after deposition of the written notification.

A total of 11 situations were pending with the ICC in 2018: DR of the Congo, Uganda, Darfur/Sudan, Central African Republic I and II, Kenya, Libya, Cote D’Ivoire, Mali, Georgia and Burundi. On 20 November 2017, the ICC Prosecutor requested judicial authorisation from the Pre-Trial Chamber for an investigation into alleged crimes committed on the territory of Afghanistan in the period from 1 May 2003; by the end of the year the decision was still pending. There were three arrests of individuals allegedly responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity: Al Hassan (Mali), Yekatom and Ngaïssona (both ZAR II). On 8 March, the Appeals Chamber delivered its judgement, con-
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firming, for the most extent, the reparations orders in the Katanga and Al Mahdi cases. On 8 June the Appeals Chamber decided by majority to acquit Bemba Gombo in the main case due to errors that affected the decision of Trial Chamber III and incorrect legal assessment by the first instance.

In the trial for corruptly influencing witnesses (Bemba et al. case), the guilty verdicts pronounced by the first instance were almost fully confirmed by the Appeals Chamber on 8 March, and only the question of the sentences for three of the defendants was referred back to the Trial Chamber, which delivered its re-sentencing decision on 17 September.

In addition, the Prosecutor of the ICC was conducting preliminary examinations into ten situations. After the Prosecutor had already opened preliminary examinations on Venezuela on 8 February, six States Parties (Argentina, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru) formally referred the situation to the ICC on 26 September. This was the first time ever that states had submitted the situation in another state Party to the Court. However, this does not automatically lead to the opening of investigations. On 22 May, Palestine referred the situation in the country since 13 June 2014 to the ICC, although a preliminary examination of Palestine had also been underway prior to that date. The Pre-Trial Chamber ruled on 6 September that the ICC may exercise jurisdiction over the alleged deportation of the Rohingya people from Myanmar (not a party to the RS) to Bangladesh (party to the RS), whereupon the Prosecutor opened a preliminary examination. On 21 September, the Office of the Prosecutor closed the preliminary examination into the situation in Gabon.

On 17 July, ceremonies were organised in The Hague and in New York to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the RS. In the context of its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Austria took part in the symposium held at the ICC headquarters. On the same day, the ICC’s jurisdiction over the crime of aggression was activated. Based on an Austro-Bulgarian initiative on 16 July, the EU Foreign Affairs Council adopted Council conclusions on the occasion of this anniversary in which the EU and its Member States expressed their strong support for the ICC.

In general, the political climate regarding the ICC has deteriorated considerably, particularly as a result of the position adopted by the US, which in September threatened sanctions to the Court and its staff if examinations into alleged war crimes committed by US citizens in Afghanistan were to be launched. In the context of negotiations on resolutions at UN level, it has become noticeably difficult to retain text elements referring to the ICC. Against the background of these developments, Austria, as a traditional supporter of the ICC, has pro-actively supported the Court in various fora.

In the second half of the year, Austria chaired the EU Council Working Group on international criminal law (COJUR-ICC, International Criminal Court Sub-area of the Public International Law Working Group), and meetings were held in Brussels and The Hague. The priorities pursued by the Austrian Presidency were institutional strengthening of the EU in the areas of international criminal law and international humanitarian law, the active implementation of the EU Action Plan on the ICC, with a special view to the objective of mainstreaming the ICC in EU external relations and promoting the univer-
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sality of the RS as well as the preparation of EU statements for the 17th ICC Assembly of States Parties (ASP). In addition, Austria launched an initiative (i.e. a regular ICC Newsletter) aimed at enhancing the exchange of information within the COJUR-ICC Group both in between the group’s meetings and with The Hague as well as New York.

During the 17th SPC, Austria took part in the daily meetings of the SPC Office and organised four EU coordination meetings, which served to finalise the EU positions and exchange information among the EU Member States. Furthermore, Austria, in cooperation with the organisation “Coalition for the ICC (CICC)”, organised a side event on the topic “Global Civil Society and European States: Advancing International Justice in the 20 Years to come”. Discussions focused on how to counter negative narratives and misinformation about the ICC and on identifying approaches for initiating a positive public debate. Austria again supported the ICC Victim Assistance Fund by making available 20,000 euros.

2.2.6. Global Environmental and Climate Policy as well as Energy Issues

2.2.6.1. Introduction

2.2.6.2. Climate Change and Climate Policy

Following the historic consensus on the Paris Agreement in December 2015, the international climate process continued to be dominated by the development of detailed decisions on its implementation. The relevant efforts focus on keeping the increase in the global average temperature at well below 2°C, preferably at 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels. At the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24) from 2 to 14 December in Katowice, a comprehensive package of detailed rules and guidelines for implementing the Agreement (Katowice Rulebook) was adopted following intensive negotiations. Apart from the topic of Market Mechanisms, all mandates defined in the Paris meeting were thus fulfilled. From the EU’s perspective, the outcome of the conference may therefore be considered a major success.

Furthermore, the Talanoa Dialogue initiated by the Fijian Presidency was successfully completed by the conference. The dialogue sought to address the question of how global ambition in climate protection can be increased in order to achieve the goals set out in the Paris Agreement. “Talanoa” refers to the South Pacific tradition of a joint and inclusive discussion process. The Austrian delegation attending the conference in Katowice was headed by Federal Minister Elisabeth Köstinger.

2.2.6.3. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

The global fight against environmental pollution topped the agenda of the Third Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) on 4 to 6 December 2017 in Nairobi (Kenya). From an operational point of view, UNEP is mainly active in the fields of climate change, natural disasters and conflicts, management of ecosystems, harmful
chemical substances and hazardous waste, as well as resource efficiency and sustainable consumption and production.

The Vienna office of UNEP (UN Environment Programme) launched the “CLIMAPROOF” project, which supports the countries of South East Europe in adapting their transport infrastructure to climate change. The necessary state-of-the-art know-how and a special software solution will be provided by the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences Vienna. The project itself is co-financed by ADC.

2.2.6.4. Global Environmental Protection Agreements and Initiatives

The Sixth Session of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), which serves as an interface between research and policy on biodiversity, was held in Medellín (Colombia) from 17 to 24 March. The meeting dealt with the adoption of the four regional assessments, including the summaries for policymakers on biodiversity and ecosystem services (Europe and Central Asia, Africa, America, Asia and the Pacific) and the assessment report on land degradation and restoration. Other decisions taken related to the review of the Platform, the development of the work programme from 2019 onwards and the initiation of further, pending assessments. To this end, approval was given for the launch of the assessment on sustainable use as well as of the methodological assessment regarding the diverse conceptualisation of multiple values of nature and its benefits, including biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services.

Following more than twelve years of preparatory work, the first Intergovernmental Conference on an international legally binding instrument under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction convened from 4 to 17 September.

The 67th Meeting of the International Whaling Commission, held in Florianopolis, Brazil, from 10 to 14 September, set whaling quotas for indigenous peoples (USA, Russia, Greenland and St. Vincent and the Grenadines) for the next seven years. The majority of the participating states clearly expressed their opposition to the resumption of commercial whaling.

The Biodiversity Conference, held in Sharm-El-Sheikh, Egypt, from 17-29 November, included three Conferences of the Parties and a High-Level Segment. In this context, the 14th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the third meeting of the Nagoya Protocol and the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety were held. The numerous decisions taken also included the definition of the process for the development of a post-2020 framework for action for global biodiversity policy.

The eighth Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, held in Astana (Kazakhstan) from 10-12 October, was the first global conference of the parties after Chad and Senegal had become the first state parties outside of the UNECE (UN Economic Commission for Europe) region to join the Convention. At this conference, a number of decisions aimed at facilitating the Convention’s global opening process and
adapting it to the related requirements were taken and the work programme for the period 2019-2021 was established.

In cooperation with IPBES and the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre (JRC), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) focused on the preparation and publication of scientific results and the status quo of the global, regional and national situation of land degradation and the possibilities of restoration.

The second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury convened in Geneva from 19 to 23 November and produced very successful results. Guidelines for the environmentally sound interim storage of mercury were adopted and further decisions were taken on the environmentally sound handling of mercury waste and mercury-contaminated sites. Furthermore, framework conditions for a future evaluation of the Convention’s effectiveness were created. The Secretariat of the Convention was established as an independent secretariat in Geneva and cooperation with the secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions was stipulated. Finally, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Global Environment Facility and the Conference of the Parties was adopted.

The 30th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer was held in Quito (Ecuador) from 5 to 9 November and the entire event was marked by a spirit of renewal aimed at adapting the Protocol to current needs. Key negotiation results included implementation measures for the reduction of climate change-inducing substances (HFCs; partially halogenated fluorohydrocarbons), the improvement of the energy efficiency of these implementation measures as well as their financing. Furthermore, initial steps were taken to solve the problem of recently identified increased emissions of the substance CFC-11, which indicate illegal production in China. Budget planning for the Protocol’s Trust Fund was streamlined and made more transparent.

The EU and a large number of its Member States, including Austria, ratified the above-mentioned amendment in September at the UN General Assembly held during Austria’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The Global Pact for the Environment is an initiative launched by the French President Emmanuel Macron and the French “Club des Juristes” and was presented in summer 2017. The initiative pursues the goal of increasing coherence of highly fragmented international environmental law with a view to strengthening and improving its implementation. Discussions focused inter alia on the question of whether general principles should be laid down in a legally binding way in a global treaty.

The United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF), which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 27 April 2017, will be implemented in the period 2017-2020 on the basis of a work programme. The main items on the agenda of the 13th Session of the UN Forum on Forests, which convened from 7 to 11 May, were developing guidelines for the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network of the UN Forum on Forests (GFFFN), finalizing a communication strategy for the UNSPF and providing contributions for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, with a focus on SDG 15 “Life on Land” and sustainable forest management.
In the context of its **Presidency of the Alpine Convention**, the Austrian Presidency, in cooperation with the Province of Styria, initiated a conference on the protection of peat bogs and marshlands or mires that drew attention to the important role they play in climate protection.

The **Alpine Climate Board** (Advisory Committee on the Alpine Climate) set up in the context of the Austrian Presidency, developed a complex target system aimed at climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptation in the Alpine region (Climate Target System 2050 of the Alpine Convention). The first-ever Alpine-wide competition for climate and energy-efficient hotels and restaurants was held. In addition, statements on the topics of energy and mountain farming as well as on the topic of “Alpine pasture/alpine farming as a contribution of the Alpine Convention to the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018”, both prepared by the Mountain Farming Platform of the Alpine Convention, were finalised. Discussion as well as the sharing of information and knowledge relating to the EU Alpine Strategy (**EUSALP**) was further promoted and the areas of cooperation were deepened.

Another very relevant measure aimed at raising awareness of the importance and beauty of the alpine region is the cooperation with young people in the Alpine region. In this context, an Alpine Interrail Ticket was developed, funded and for the first time implemented in cooperation with 100 young people.

### 2.2.6.5. Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL)

Currently, almost one billion people live without electricity and three billion without the possibility of cooking with clean energy sources. **Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL)** develops concepts to supply these people with clean energy. SEforALL was founded in 2011 as a global initiative by the former UNSG Ban Ki-moon and has been based in Vienna since 2013. It is an important member of the Vienna Energy Hub and achieved the status of a Quasi-International Organization (QuIO) in 2016.

From the outset, SEforALL was conceived as a multi-stakeholder platform that brings together governments, development banks, the private sector, investors, civil society and international institutions. In concrete terms, SEforALL pursues three overarching goals: ensuring universal access to energy, doubling the share of renewable energies in the global energy mix and doubling energy efficiency. SEforALL has made a significant contribution towards enshrining universal access to affordable, sustainable and modern energy as a sustainable development goal (SDG 7) and is doing valuable work in the areas of advocacy and awareness-raising, particularly among decision-makers in politics and business.

Against the background of the Paris Agreement adopted at the COP21 in December 2015, the focus was placed on decarbonisation and ending energy poverty, in particular by identifying regions affected by extreme energy poverty and taking effective measures to counter it. At the Africa-Europe High-Level Forum in Vienna on 18 December, a panel co-organised by SEforAll underlined the important role the transition to a digitalised, decarbonised and democratic energy future played in addressing and eliminating the energy access gap.
2.2.6.6. Nuclear Safety

Austria has remained committed to maintaining its clear position against nuclear energy, both bilaterally and within the framework of the EU and international organisations. For Austria, nuclear power is neither a sustainable form of energy nor is it a viable or acceptable option for tackling climate change.

Taking into account the entire fuel cycle – although the costs of the globally unresolved question of final storage remain wholly uncertain – and the costs involved in building, operating and finally decommissioning the plants, the operation of nuclear power plants (NPPs) has proven economically unviable. Consequently, calls for public subsidies have increased in operating countries.

Against this background on 22 February, Austria brought an action for annulment against the decision of the European Commission according to which the granting of state aid for the expansion of the Paks II nuclear power plant was legally compatible. Austria’s action for annulment of the European Commission’s decision that the granting of British state aid for the construction of the Hinkley Point C reactor units was compatible with EU law was dismissed by the EU Court of First Instance on 12 July. Austria appealed against that decision.

Within the framework of EURATOM, Austria also consistently opposes an EU-funded direct and indirect promotion of nuclear energy. This holds particularly true for EURATOM research.

With respect to all cases of nuclear facilities that could have negative effects on Austria, Austria continues to make full use of all available means of protecting its safety interests. Thus, Austria participated in the following cross-border proceedings:

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) – procedure for the extension of the Dukovany nuclear power plant,
- EIA process decommissioning NPP Gundremmingen, Unit B,
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) procedure for the National Waste Management Programme of Italy and the Czech Republic,
- and further EIA procedures in the UK and Ukraine.

Once again, not a single repository (deep geological repository) for high-level radioactive waste and spent fuel was put into operation worldwide. Austria continued to make the search for repositories in neighbouring countries a focus of its attention. This held particularly true for the Czech Republic, where among the nine possible sites identified, some that are located close to the Austrian border are also being considered.

Safety improvements at existing nuclear power plants were of particular concern to Austria, and have consistently been highlighted at international, European and bilateral level. At the bilateral level, the regular meetings held within the framework of the “Nuclear Information Agreements” provide the necessary basis. Regular meetings of nuclear experts were held with Switzerland, Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary and the Czech Republic.
2.2.7. Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation

2.2.7.1. Introduction

Disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction are central objectives in the pursuit of international security policy. Austria, which plays a leading and pro-active international role in this context, places its main focus on the humanitarian dimension and the protection, safety and security of the civilian population.

In the field of nuclear disarmament, Austria has most recently played a leading role in the facilitation and successful conclusion of negotiations within the UN framework on a legally binding instrument to ban nuclear weapons. On 7 July 2017, a total of 122 states voted in favour of the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which has been open for signature since 20 September 2017 and will enter into force after the 50 instruments of ratification have been deposited. Austria ratified the Treaty on 8 May. By the end of the year, a total of 69 states had already signed the Treaty and it had been ratified by 19. Austria is strongly committed to the treaty’s rapid entry into force.

In the field of chemical weapons, Austria has joined the international Partnership against Impunity for the use of Chemical Weapons, initiated by France, and supports the implementation of a sanctions mechanism against chemical weapons use, developed by the European Union in order to prevent any use of these dangerous and long-banned weapons of mass destruction.

Austria is also active in the field of conventional weapons, inter alia as head of a core group for the protection of civilians against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) and supports a legal ban on lethal autonomous weapons systems without sufficient and effective human control (LAWS).

2.2.7.2. Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction

Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

Austria is of the view that the effects of the use of nuclear weapons and the inherent risks of these weapons are unacceptable and can only be prevented by an absolute prohibition and the complete destruction of this last category of weapons of mass destruction. Nuclear disarmament is furthermore indispensable in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Building on the humanitarian initiative on nuclear disarmament and the results of the “Open-Ended Working Group to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons” that met in Geneva in 2016, the UNGA decided in 2016, on the initiative of Austria and a number of other states, to convene a conference with a view to negotiating the prohibition of nuclear weapons under international law. These negotia-
Effective Multilateralism and the Role of Austria

tions were successfully concluded on 7 July 2017 in New York and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was adopted with the votes of 122 states.

The treaty has been open for signature in New York since 20 September 2017 and will enter into force once the 50th instrument of ratification has been deposited. The current status of the signatures/ratification process can be found on the website of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). Austria ratified the treaty on 8 May 2018.

The treaty, which comprises a preamble and 20 articles, is the first concrete result of multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations since the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996. This new legal instrument strengthens and complements the existing international regime on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament and represents a substantial contribution towards facilitating the implementation of the disarmament requirement under Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In essence, the treaty focuses on the prohibition of the acquisition, possession, use and other activities related to nuclear weapons. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons opens up an opportunity for nuclear weapon states to irreversibly and verifiably eliminate their arsenals. Likewise, it also contains provisions for victim assistance and for remedying environmental damage caused by the use or testing of nuclear weapons.

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

Since it entered into force in 1970, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) has formed the legal basis and cornerstone of the international nuclear regime. The treaty obligates its 190 States Parties – with the exception of the five nuclear weapon states recognised in the treaty, namely China, France, Great Britain, Russia and the USA – to renounce nuclear weapons and at the same time establishes the right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

For their part, the five nuclear weapon states recognised in the NPT commit themselves to nuclear disarmament and the goal of complete elimination of nuclear weapons. India, Israel and Pakistan have not joined the NPT, while the DPR of North Korea declared its withdrawal from the treaty in 2003. The States Parties convene every five years for a review conference.

At the last review conference in 2015, it was not possible to reach consensus on a final document. From 23 April to 4 May, the second preparatory committee meeting for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT convened in Geneva. The greatest challenge for the NPT is the limited progress in implementing the disarmament commitments undertaken by the nuclear weapon states under Article VI and compliance with the non-proliferation obligations.

Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) provides for a comprehensive ban on all nuclear explosions. Since the adoption of the draft treaty by the UNGA in 1996,
the CTBT has been signed by 184 states and ratified by 167. Thanks to its global monitoring and verification system, the CTBT will make the secret development of operational nuclear weapons impossible once it has come into force. However, eight of the key States listed in Annex 2 of the treaty (Egypt, China, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and the United States of America) have not yet ratified the CTBT.

The CTBT Preparatory Commission has in the meantime made great progress in setting up the verification system whose worldwide network of monitoring stations is 85% complete and largely operational. The monitoring system consists of high-tech facilities for seismic, hydro-acoustics, infrasound and radionuclide measurements. It is already in use today, including for civilian applications, such as tsunami early warning services and for radiological measurements following the nuclear power plant disaster in Fukushima (Japan). The capabilities of the international monitoring stations were also repeatedly demonstrated during the nuclear weapons tests conducted by North Korea, most recently in the context of the test in September 2017.

Austria participates in the efforts aimed at promoting the Preparatory Commission, most recently by supporting the establishment of the permanent Equipment Storage and Maintenance Facility (ESMF) in Seibersdorf, where the CTBTO’s specialised equipment can be stored and maintained properly. Seibersdorf also houses one of the CTBTO-certified radio-nuclide laboratories for the analysis of samples.

The office of the Executive Secretary of the CTBTO is currently held by Lassina Zerbo (Burkina Faso), who was re-elected for a further four-year term in autumn 2016.

**Geneva Conference on Disarmament**

Set up in 1979, the Geneva Conference on Disarmament (CD) is the multilateral forum designated by the UN for negotiating disarmament agreements and treaties. Austria has been a state party to the CD since 1996. As had been the case in the past 20 years and due to the consensus principle, the 65 member states have – again this year – not been able to agree on opening concrete treaty negotiations.

**Chemical Weapons Convention**

The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which entered into force in 1997, introduced a ban on all chemical weapons and stipulates their phased destruction by all States that possess such weapons. With 193 States parties, the CWC has now come close to reaching its stated objective of having universal validity. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague is currently headed by Director General Fernando Arias González (Spain). On 10 December 2013, the OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The use of chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war has presented the CWC with its greatest challenge to date. By adopting resolution 2118 on 27 September 2013, the UNSC required Syria to fully destroy its chemical weapons arsenal by 30 June 2014. Syria then became a States party to the CWC and by the end of 2013, agreements were reached under which Austria provided air transport capacity to support the mission
monitoring the chemical disarmament in Syria and also seconded an expert to the OPCW. Although the destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons arsenal was largely completed in the course of 2014, poison gas (mostly chlorine gas) was repeatedly used in the Syrian civil war, also in 2015. On 7 August 2015, the UNSC adopted resolution 2235, by which a Joint Investigative Mechanism involving both the UN and the OPCW was set up to ascertain responsibility for these incidents. In 2016, the Joint Investigative Mechanism submitted four reports, identifying Syrian government forces as being responsible for the use of chlorine gas in three cases in 2015 and IS forces as being responsible for the use of mustard gas in one case in 2015. Another chemical weapons attack, probably sarin, on 4 April 2017, again claimed dozens of civilian lives. Although responsibility for this attack has not yet been fully ascertained, Western states indicate that it was perpetrated by the Syrian Arab army.

The mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism expired on 17 November 2017, and was not extended, which was also attributable to Russia’s veto in UNSC. Subsequently and on the initiative of France, the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons was established and seeks to hold to account all those responsible for the use of chemical weapons. Austria, that has committedly been advocating a ban on chemical weapons and the fight against impunity for violations of international humanitarian law, joined this partnership as a participating country. At an extraordinary Conference of the States Parties to the OPCW in The Hague, held from 26 to 27 June, participants also decided to grant the OPCW the power to conduct investigations in order to facilitate the attribution of chemical weapons use. At the ordinary Conference of the States Parties to the OPCW on 19 and 20 November, the budget to fund this attribution mechanism was adopted. The third of the Review Conferences that take place every five years was held from 21 to 30 November.

### Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

Signed in 1972, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) provides for a ban on the development, production and stockpiling of biological and toxin weapons. Currently, 178 countries are States Parties to the BTWC and six countries are signatory States. In the annual experts’ meetings and meeting of the States Parties, deliberations focus on the development of measures aimed at enhancing biosafety, monitoring, training and the sharing of experience. The Conference of the States Parties to the BTWC met in Geneva from 4 to 7 December and adopted a work programme for 2019. Austria co-sponsored the working paper “Confidence in Compliance”. An Austrian expert took part in the Peer Review of the Richard Lugar Research Center at the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health in Tbilisi (Georgia), thus Austria also co-sponsored the related peer review report.

### Ballistic missiles

The Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCoC) was developed based on enhanced efforts on the part of the international community to establish an international control mechanism for ballistic missiles capable of carrying weapons of
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mass destruction. Along with the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the HCoC is the only multilateral instrument in this field. Chaired by Sweden, the 17th Regular Meeting of Subscribing States was held in Vienna.

Since 2002, Austria has been entrusted with the function of Immediate Central Contact (Executive Secretariat), thus acting as an interface for the entire exchange of information in the context of the HCoC mechanism. A total of 139 states have subscribed to the HCoC. Austria has assumed a leading role in its universalisation efforts.

2.2.7.3. Arms Control and Disarmament in the Field of Conventional Arms

Protection of civilians in armed conflict has been a long-standing thematic priority of Austrian foreign policy. The committed course Austria has pursued for many years now in fighting the use of anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions is a very important humanitarian contribution in this respect, as these weapons continue to pose an acute risk to civilians and claim innumerable lives – even decades after fighting has stopped.

Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention

The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction (Ottawa Convention) entered into force in 1999. Currently, 164 countries are States Parties to the convention. The Ottawa Convention’s success is reflected in the fact that only one state laid anti-personnel mines this year, trade has virtually been brought to a halt, major stockpiles have been destroyed and large contaminated areas have been cleared of mines. Most importantly, the number of people who fall victim to anti-personnel mines every year around the world has significantly declined. Recently, however, the use of improvised explosive devices by non-state actors in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan has again led to an increase.

The 17th Conference of the States Parties to the Convention met in Geneva from 26 to 30 November and focused on the implementation of the goal of an anti-personnel mine-free world by 2025.

Austria’s Commitment in the Field of Mine Clearance

The protection of civilians in and after conflicts is a priority of Austrian foreign policy. In this spirit, Austria contributed to and played a major role in bringing about the ban on anti-personnel mines under international law and is committed to an anti-personnel mine-free world.

In 2017, when Austria held the Presidency of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, and this year too, Austria – in cooperation with the ICRC – supported mine action projects, mainly in Ukraine, amounting to 1.5 million euros. Austria also made available 1 million euros to support the activities launched by the ICRC in Syria in the field of victim care and the provision of training seminars in order to raise people’s awareness of the dangers of mines and other explosive remnants of war.
In December, the Council of Ministers resolved to make available 2 million euros from the Foreign Disaster Fund for mine clearance and educating the population on the dangers of mines and other explosive remnants of war in North-East Syria.

In this context, Austria cooperates with the International Trust Fund (ITF) Enhancing Human Security, a humanitarian organisation with over 20 years of experience in the field of mine action.

**Convention on Cluster Munitions**

The Convention on Cluster Munitions (Oslo Convention) entered into force in 2010. By the end of the year, 104 states out of 120 signatories had ratified the Oslo Convention. It provides for a categorical prohibition of the use, development, production, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions, which inflict unimaginable harm and suffering on the civilian population. In the field of victim assistance, the Convention – not least due to Austria’s committed efforts – sets new and forward-looking standards. The 8th Conference of the Parties took place in Geneva from 3 to 5 September.

**Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas**

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) has claimed an increasingly high death toll worldwide, with international statistics showing that 90% of the victims are indeed civilians. In recent armed conflicts (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Ukraine etc.), the use of explosive weapons (including aircraft bombs, artillery shells, rockets, but also improvised explosive devices – IEDs) in populated areas has demonstrably been one of the main causes of casualties, pain and suffering among the civilian population.

What is more, such weapons destroy civilian infrastructure (means of transport, schools, medical care, water and electricity supply), which has a lasting impact on the livelihoods of the affected population. Therefore, explosive weapons in populated areas are also one of the main reasons for conflict-driven migration or flight.

In Syria, for example, the suffering and damage caused by explosive weapons in populated areas is the main reason why people have to leave their homes. In the first half of the year, at least 14,065 civilians were killed by explosive weapons worldwide. It is, however, to be assumed that the actual number of victims is much higher.

Together with a group of like-minded countries, Austria is working towards shifting the topic of EWIPA more into the limelight of related discussions with a view to avoiding human suffering and to promoting compliance with international humanitarian law. Austria thus supports the drawing up of a political declaration on EWIPA, as proposed by UNSG António Guterres.

**Autonomous Weapons Systems**

Autonomous operating systems and artificial intelligence (AI) are not only widely used for civilian purposes but are on the rise in the military field as well. Technological progress does not stop short at weapons systems. It is, for instance, possible to work on
developing autonomous weapon systems (AWS), which could potentially select and attack targets independently without human intervention. This gives rise to moral, ethical and legal concerns, which are among the most pressing challenges in the field of disarmament today. In the context of the Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CHP) in 2013, an informal group of experts was set up to deal with this issue for the first time in greater detail. This group met in April and in August.

Although it has not yet been possible to agree on a clear and precise definition of autonomous weapons systems. Some states regard these as fully autonomous systems, while others rather see them as systems that have a level of autonomy when it comes to critical functions, such as target selection and use of force. However, there is consensus that international humanitarian law is in principle applicable to such systems and that a minimum degree of human control over weapons systems must be maintained.

Austria is among the states that advocate a legally binding instrument which would – in a preventive move – prohibit AWS that do not provide for sufficient and effective human control.

At the meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), which took place in Geneva from 12 to 16 November, Austria and a number of like-minded states introduced a draft for opening negotiations on a legally binding protocol. Since the principle of consensus applies within the CCW, and especially since states working on relevant weapon systems do not want any restrictions, it was not possible to agree on a mandate.

2.2.7.4. Export Control Regimes

Multilateral Export Control

The objective of the five current control regimes is to prevent – through the coordination of national export controls – sensitive technologies and knowledge from falling into the hands of states that could use them for military purposes. The main instruments of these regimes are lists of relevant goods and/or substances and guidelines governing exports to non-Member States. Austria is a member of all five regimes. The national implementation of these instruments is largely covered by the Foreign Trade Act and the War Material Act.

The relevant regimes in the nuclear context are the Vienna-based Zangger Committee (ZC), which has 39 members, and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) with 48 members. The ZC and the NSG draw up and maintain control lists of sensitive nuclear goods and equipment, seeking to prevent uranium enrichment and plutonium processing activities for non-peaceful purposes. The 28th NSG Plenary Session was held in Jūrmala, Latvia, on 14 and 15 June.

The 43-member Australia Group (AG) seeks to ensure by means of export controls that certain products will not contribute to the development of chemical and biological weapons. The Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) consists of 35 members, who
have committed themselves to preventing the proliferation of missile technology capable of carrying weapons of mass destruction.

Founded in 1996, the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA), which comprises 43 Participating States, aims to prevent destabilising accumulations of conventional weapons and dual-use goods and technologies by coordinating national export controls and increasing transparency. The Secretariat, headed by Ambassador Philip Griffiths (New Zealand), is based in Vienna, where it also held its annual plenary session of the participating states on 5 and 6 December, involving for the first time India.

**Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)**

The text of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which sets out the rules for international trade in conventional arms, was adopted by the UNGA with an overwhelming majority in 2013. Austria, which had supported a robust ATT, was among the first states to sign the treaty. Signed by 135 states and ratified by 100 (including Austria) by the end of the year, the treaty entered into force on 24 December 2014.

The ATT is the first treaty to define international standards for the transfer of conventional arms, thus contributing to fighting and/or limiting the negative impact of illicit and irresponsible arms trade on stability, security and human rights, but also on sustainable economic and development policy. Under the treaty, arms exports are banned if they have been or could be used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. In export decisions, criteria such as their impact on peace and security, the risk of illicit transfer or trafficking (including the exchange of information on corruption) or gender-based violence are to be taken into account.

The ATT does, however, not include a ban on weapons nor an obligation to destroy existing weapons. The right to individual or collective self-defence according to Art. 51 of the UN Charter remains unaffected by the treaty.

Austria has successfully advocated ensuring that the international Arms Trade Treaty lives up to the highest possible standards. These include inter alia the development of mandatory human rights criteria in approval procedures, a comprehensive and complete scope, as well as efficient enforcement mechanisms.

Chaired by Japan, the Fourth Conference of States Parties to the ATT was held in Tokyo from 20 to 24 August. By the end of the year, the ATT had exceeded the threshold of 100 States Parties.

**National Export Controls**

In Austria, the Foreign Trade (main responsibility: Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs) and the War Material Act (main responsibility: Federal Ministry of the Interior) form the legal basis governing the export of conventional arms. The MFA and the Federal Ministry of Defence are involved in the approval procedure. Defence equipment subject to approval is defined on the one hand in the Foreign Trade Act of 2011 and/or by the items listed in the EU Common Military List, the Second Foreign Trade Regulation of 2011 in conjunction with its annex, and by the War Material Regulation,
on the other hand. In addition, Austria is committed to adhering to the EU Common Position of December 2008 which defines common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment, and also makes a significant contribution towards further harmonisation of national export regimes and implementation activities.

2.2.8. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Since 1995, Austria has been a member of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and since 1997 a member of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), the dialogue and consultation forum between NATO and the Euro-Atlantic partner states. Cooperation with NATO on the one hand facilitates addressing important security policy issues in a trans-Atlantic framework and on the other hand fosters the further development of the Austrian Armed Forces. Austria has participated in various forward-looking NATO programmes (e.g. in the cyber area) and is an important and recognised troop contributor.

Building on the Joint Declaration of 2016, a second Joint Declaration on Cooperation signed by NATO and EU leaders in July includes an additional focus on military mobility, counter-terrorism and resilience to NBC threats. Austria supports a deepening of EU-NATO cooperation both in its own interests and out of solidarity with other Member States and therefore welcomes the progress made in implementing all strands of work set out in the Joint Declaration of 2016.

With around 430 soldiers, Austria continued to provide the largest contingent of any partner country for the NATO-led peace operation in Kosovo (KFOR) and was thus the largest non-NATO KFOR troop contributor. Together with the Kosovar police and EULEX, KFOR contributes towards maintaining a safe and secure environment, ensuring freedom of movement for all ethnic groups in Kosovo and providing training and knowledge-sharing with the Kosovo Security Force. Since June 2009, NATO has gradually reduced the KFOR force level on the ground. Current levels stand at some 3,800 soldiers under KFOR command plus about 600 further soldiers under national command.

Austria contributed 20 soldiers to the NATO-led training, advice and assistance mission Resolute Support (RSM) that has a total strength of around 16,200 troops. Austria’s scope of responsibility includes above all support provided by staff members to the headquarters and within NATO’s Special Operations Component Command, to the German Bundeswehr in the fields of training and advice (including alpine training), to the Afghan armed forces as well as mutual logistic support of the C-130 air transport system in the context of air transports and Aeromedevac.

Since August 2016, Turkey has been blocking Austria’s cooperation with NATO, which particularly affects the Partnership Cooperation Menu (PCM). Some progress towards resolving this issue has, however, been achieved as a result of intensive efforts undertaken by Federal Minister Karin Kneissl.

At a meeting between Federal Minister Karin Kneissl and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the NATO headquarters in November, discussions focused on Austria’s contributions to NATO-led missions, Turkey’s blocking action, Austria’s neutrality, the
Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and developments in the EU in the field of security and defence.

2.3. Efficient Austrian Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs

2.3.1. Introduction

Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) creates perspectives on the ground. The key objectives of ADC as enshrined in the Development Cooperation Act (DCA) are combating poverty in developing countries, safeguarding peace and human security, preserving the environment and protecting natural resources. Relevant activities in the field of development policy are coordinated by the Austrian Foreign Ministry (MFA), which also holds responsibility for the strategic orientation of ADC. The Austrian Development Agency (ADA) plans, finances and supports programmes and projects in priority countries and key regions. As a member of the EU, the OECD, the UN and the World Bank Group, Austria also contributes pro-actively to shaping international development policy within the relevant bodies.

Policy Coherence

Development policy is a whole-of-government approach. This principle is also enshrined in Article 1 paragraph 5 of the Development Cooperation Act. Policy coherence has become increasingly important in the context of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, as its successful implementation requires a particularly high degree of policy coherence. In order to achieve this goal, all relevant actors and stakeholders are involved in strategic planning processes such as the Three-Year Programme on Austrian development policy, country and regional strategies as well as thematic-strategic guidelines. Austria furthermore participates in both the EU’s and the OECD’s policy coherence networks.

Budget for Development Cooperation

According to preliminary data, Austrian Official Development Assistance (ODA) amounted to 995.73 million euros or 0.26 % of gross national income in 2018.

Evaluation

Strategic evaluations of ADC are planned and carried out and/or commissioned by the MFA in cooperation with ADA. Strategic evaluations cover country and regional strategies, themes and sectors and ADC instruments. In accordance with international standards, all strategic evaluations conducted since 1999 can be accessed on the ADA website.

The two-year programme for strategic evaluations of ADC for 2019-2020 and a preview of potential themes to be covered from 2021 onwards were prepared. The evaluations of the country strategies for Kosovo, Georgia and Armenia were completed and prepa-
rations for the thematic good governance evaluation as well as for the evaluation of ADA's Environmental and Social Impact Management System (ESIM) were initiated.

Furthermore, implementation plans were drafted for the two completed evaluations and implementation monitoring regarding the recommendations of previous evaluations was continued. At international level, the MFA and ADA were jointly represented on the relevant evaluation bodies, i.e. the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and in the extended DACH group (consisting of the German-speaking evaluation bodies of Germany, Austria, Switzerland plus Belgium and the Netherlands).

2.3.2. Thematic Priorities

The common consideration of the topics water, energy and food security, covered in the nexus approach in development cooperation programmes and projects, reduces the risk of conflicting goals being pursued in these three areas. New development policy guidelines for the energy, water, food security and rural development nexus are currently being prepared.

In the water and sanitation sector, Austria is active at bilateral level primarily in Albania, Moldova, Mozambique, Uganda and Palestine. In Moldova, Austria has for many years cooperated with Switzerland on a joint programme aimed at strengthening the institutions in this sector and is responsible for the construction of an EU-funded sewage treatment plant in the small town of Cantemir. In Uganda, preparatory work for a further nationwide sector programme was underway. In addition, ADA supports the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis based in Laxenburg. In this context, the focus is placed on local and global approaches to strengthening water supply security, particularly in East Africa. ADA assumed the role of donor representative (seat and vote) in the Steering Committee of the Global Water Partnership.

In the field of sustainable energy, activities continued to focus on supporting the establishment of further regional centres for renewable energy and energy efficiency. The goal is to promote the political and economic framework conditions for the increased use of sustainable energy solutions in the regions, strengthen local and regional capacities and develop regional markets and value chains. The regional centres in West and East Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific are already operational. Preparations are underway to establish further regional energy centres in Southern Africa, the Himalayas-Hindu Kush, Central America and Central Asia. Simultaneously, efforts towards establishing a global platform, which serves the exchange of knowledge between the centres and the strengthening of their political and strategic relevance, have commenced. Under the umbrella of this platform, a very successful high-level conference on “Regional Cooperation to Accelerate Sustainable Energy Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Developing Countries” was held on 3 October during the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

In issues relating to food security, particular importance is attached to reducing the impacts of climate change, increasing the resilience of economic and social systems, strengthening local value creation and developing common guidelines for the use of
and access to land and other natural resources. ADC supports these strategic approaches in most partner countries, including Ethiopia, Burkina Faso and Mozambique as well as in the context of agricultural projects that are being implemented in Armenia and Georgia. A project aimed at promoting organic farming and mountain tourism in Georgia was prepared and a project to support sustainable, green agriculture in Armenia was initiated. Both projects are being implemented in cooperation with the EU.

ADA supports partner countries in building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, realising human rights and fostering a vibrant civil society (SDG 16). The celebration of the 25th anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna brought together stakeholders that represented a wide range of perspectives on current challenges and prepared practical recommendations for states and institutions. In the context of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, ADC contributed pro-actively to the meeting by submitting written technical statements and addressing the meeting as well as sharing its expert knowledge on sustainability goals and human rights.

In the field of peace promotion and conflict prevention, ADC is particularly active in the regions of West Africa, East Africa/Horn of Africa, the Western Balkans, the South Caucasus and the Near and Middle East. A new programme, which seeks to support the regional organisation Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in implementing its peace and security strategy in the Horn of Africa was launched. Funded with 38 million euros until mid-2022 by the EU, Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands, the programme is being implemented by ADA in delegated cooperation. In the context of efforts aimed at improving coordination between players active in the fields of humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peace/security, Austria is playing a pioneering role. Within the framework of the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) of the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee, representatives of the MFA, the Federal Ministry of Defence and ADA presented Austria’s experience in joint project implementation in West Africa.

In the education and science sector, the priorities pursued by ADC relate to higher education and vocational training. The higher education cooperation programme ‘Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research for Development’ (APPEAR) enables multi-annual partnerships between higher education institutions in the priority countries of ADC and Austria, and also seeks to enable comprehensive capacity development. Since 2010, a total of 43 multi-annual projects have been funded. In Eastern Africa, a regional master’s programme between universities in Ethiopia and Kenya is being initiated in the field of limnology. In cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy, partner countries in the key region Danube Region/Western Balkans were supported in their efforts towards approximation with and/or integration into the European Higher Education and Research Area. Furthermore, partner countries in this region as well as Moldova and Burkina Faso were supported in the reform of their respective vocational training sectors. In this context, importance is attached to ensuring that training and education increasingly focus on practical and needs-oriented aspects.
In the thematic area of **environment and natural resources**, the MFA chaired the Council Working Party on International Environment Issues/Desertification during Austria’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Austria has for many years now also played an active role in the Network on Environment and Development of the OECD Development Assistance Committee, which has been vice chaired by ADA since October.

### 2.3.3. Bilateral Development Cooperation

#### Key Region East Africa

In the priority country Ethiopia, the focus is on food security, sustainable natural resource management and good governance. Democratic participation and promotion of women at local level are key elements. In addition and due to the ongoing drought in Ethiopia, humanitarian aid projects are also being promoted.

In Uganda, projects are being implemented in the water supply and sanitation sectors as well as in the fields of law, justice and peace. The priority region is northern Uganda.

Regional cooperation includes a joint programme with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) supporting stability and strengthening early warning in the region. In the environmental sector, support is provided to measures launched by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in order to strengthen the resilience of local village communities in Uganda and Kenya. In the energy sector, a regional centre for renewable energies and energy efficiency based in Kampala (Uganda) is being established in cooperation with the East African Community (EAC).

#### Key Region West Africa

In the key region West Africa, ADC focuses on renewable energy/energy efficiency, peacebuilding/conflict prevention and resilience/food security. In the energy sector, Austria is one of the partners of the regional ECOWAS Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE) based in Praia (Cape Verde). Together with the Federal Ministry of Defence, training courses on civil-military cooperation in humanitarian crisis missions were conducted at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center (KAIPTC) in Accra (Ghana). Furthermore, support is made available in Mali to the Trust Fund for Peace and Security of the UN peace mission MINUSMA.

In the thematic area of resilience/food security, ADC cooperates especially with the OECD’s Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) and the three regional organisations ECO-WAS, West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS). In the context of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, a conference on the role of women in the Sahel region was organised in cooperation with SWAC.

In Burkina Faso, Austria provides support in the areas of vocational training, promotion of micro and small enterprises as well as sustainable rural development. In the Boucle du Mouhoun region, a regional development fund was supported.
Key Region Southern Africa

In the key region Southern Africa, activities launched by ADC focus on the rule of law, land use and renewable energy. This thematic focus of cooperation is outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding between Austria and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

ADC involvement is based on the SADC regional development plans, the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan 2015-2020 (RISDP) and the Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security (SIPO), the Regional Indicative Programme 2014-2020 concluded between the European Commission and the SADC as well as the strategic plan of the SADC Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (SADC-CNGO).

ADC contributed to the research programme launched by the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) at the University of the Western Cape. Together with other donors, ADC also supported the SADC-UNODC regional programme “Making the SADC Region Safer from Drugs and Crime”.

Access to affordable, sustainable energy services is a further prerequisite for sustainable development in the SADC region. ADC therefore also contributes to the Second Phase of the Energy and Environment Partnership Programme with Southern and Eastern Africa (EEP S&EA) in delegated cooperation with Finland and the United Kingdom. The partnership improves the green energy balance of the 13 participating countries and makes an important contribution towards poverty reduction through economic development. The third phase of the Southern African Solar Thermal Training and Demonstration Initiative in the SADC region (SOLTRAIN), aimed at sharing knowledge and know-how on solar thermal solutions, is being implemented in six SADC member states. The OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) provides supplementary financing for SOLTRAIN.

In cooperation with SADC, ADC is furthermore establishing a regional Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (SACREEE) based in Windhoek, Namibia.

ADC’s involvement in the priority country Mozambique is based on the country’s current government programme 2015-2020. The focus is placed on agriculture and food security, rural water supply and sanitation. In the ADC priority region, the province of Sofala, the use of conservation agriculture and irrigation through small-scale systems are promoted.

Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood

As the third largest donor among the EU Member States, Austria made available 13.5 million euros to the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis (MADAD Fund). The MADAD Fund supports refugees from Syria and their host countries and host communities especially in the fields of education, strengthening the local economy and improving healthcare and water supply.

In the context of the Global Coalition against ISIL/Da’esh, Austria contributed under the “Stabilisation” working group to the UNDP Funding Facility for Stabilization in Iraq,
which seeks to contribute to promoting the quick stabilisation of the liberated areas. Funding made available to Iraq has amounted to approximately 17.97 million euros since 2014. Out of this total, 6 million euros were allocated to the UNDP Stabilisation Fund for the stabilisation of the areas liberated from ISIL/Da’esh and for care provided to IDPs and returnees, and 2 million euros were made available to the UNDP Emergency Response and Resilience programme. Since the outbreak of the crisis in Syria, humanitarian assistance totalling 122.9 million euros has been provided to Syria, Iraq and neighbouring countries affected by the refugee crisis.

Another instrument in this context is the EU Emergency Trust Fund set up at the EU summit in Valletta on 12 November 2015 with a view to addressing the root causes of migration and flight in Africa. The goal pursued by this fund is to improve people’s living conditions in the three most important regions of origin and transit of refugees in Africa. In this context, Austria places a special focus on providing support to the ADC priority countries in the Horn of Africa, such as Ethiopia, and to North Africa. Austria currently contributes 6 million euros, which makes it the eighth largest donor among the EU Member States.

**Priority Palestinian Territories**

In accordance with the Palestinian National Policy Agenda 2017-2022, ADC involvement covers the areas of health, water, humanitarian aid and the co-financing of a multi-donor programme in Area C. ADC programmes are coordinated with the relevant ministries and other bilateral donors and implemented largely through Palestinian ministries, the European Commission and international organisations (including UNRWA, UNDP and ICRC). Other projects currently in place relate to NGO co-funding as well as cooperation in the higher education sector in the context of the APPEAR programme. A particular focus is placed on improving water supply, which is becoming increasingly precarious particularly in the Gaza Strip, by supporting the Palestinian Water Authority with advice, training and equipment. Under the European Joint Strategy 2017-2020, which rests on five pillars (governance reform, rule of law, sustainable services, water and energy, sustainable economic development), Austria is an active European donor in the areas of sustainable services, social protection, and water and energy.

**Key Region Danube Region/Western Balkans**

The objectives defined for the whole-of-government regional strategy Danube Region/Western Balkans (2016-2020) are to intensify regional cooperation and to support the EU pre-accession process. The focus is placed on pursuing three key development policy areas, namely economy and development focusing on employment; education focusing on labour market-oriented, socially inclusive vocational training and higher education; as well as governance, human rights, the rule of law and institution building in the context of EU pre-accession.

In **Albania**, governance and the rule of law, labour market-oriented vocational training/employability as well as integrated water management are promoted, while in **Kosovo** support is provided to education focusing especially on tertiary education, as well as to
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economic and private sector development focusing on rural areas – with special account being taken of the cross-cutting theme of governance. As set out by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in Sarajevo and the Berlin Process, this is supplemented by the intensification of regional cooperation in the six Western Balkan states and in Moldova. The Kosovo Country Strategy (2013-2020) was evaluated in a mid-term review.

**Key Region Black Sea Region/South Caucasus**

The meeting of the Eastern Partnership Foreign Ministers in Luxembourg on 15 October was convened in the context of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and served, among other things, to prepare for the tenth anniversary of the Eastern Partnership in 2019.

Austria’s development involvement in the South Caucasus focuses primarily on combating poverty in the border regions between the two ADC priority countries Georgia and Armenia.

Particularly noteworthy in this context is the ongoing implementation of the Organic Agriculture Support Initiative Project (OASI), funded by the EU and ADA, in Armenia and cooperation in the agricultural sector in Georgia. The Armenia and Georgia country strategies (2012-2020) were evaluated in a mid-term review.

The whole-of-government country strategy 2016-2020 coordinated with the ADC priority country Moldova is directed at supporting the development and EU association of the Republic of Moldova.

ADA implements EU-financed delegated cooperation in Moldova focusing on “Development of Rural Areas” and aimed at promoting the competitiveness of the agri-food sector and improving drinking water supply as well as sanitation in rural areas over a project term of four years until 2021.

**Special Programme Ukraine**

In conflict-ridden Ukraine, Austria has provided one million euros in humanitarian aid for mine clearance and support to internally displaced persons. In the context of the OSCE Chairmanship in 2017, three development cooperation projects were implemented in the regions of Odessa, Chernivtsi and Luhansk. Total funding made available for these projects, of which the regional projects in Odessa and Chernivtsi will be continued until September 2019, amounted to 1.07 million euros.

**Key Region Caribbean**

The Caribbean region has been a priority region of ADC since 2007. With the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) as the main cooperation partner, projects are implemented in the areas of disaster risk management, renewable energies and energy efficiency.

The central element of cooperation with the Caribbean states is the Caribbean Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (CCREEE) in Bridgetown (Barbados), a
regional cooperation centre, initiated in cooperation with UNIDO and also supported by the European Commission. Apart from CCREE, ADA also provides funding – based on an agreement with UNIDO and until November 2019 –to the first operational phase of the Central American Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (SICREEE). In the field of disaster risk management and countering climate change, ADA cooperates with the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, UNISDR) and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA).

Key region Himalayas – Hindu Kush

ADC supports common goals pursued by the region in the context of cross-national programmes launched by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) with a view to strengthening resilience with regard to environmental and climate change. The Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Centre of the Himalayas (REEECH) was launched by UNIDO and ICIMOD on 13 November.

Efforts towards rebuilding and reconstruction launched in the aftermath of the severe earthquakes that hit Nepal in 2015 were continued in the areas of cultural heritage (Patan Museum) and energy (economic partnership with the Namche Bazaar power plant).

The country strategy for the priority country Bhutan 2015-2018 placed the main emphasis on the priority sectors energy, tourism and governance. In the energy sector, a maintenance and safety system was established, engineers were trained – for instance in the field of tunnel construction – and a programme focusing on energy-efficient construction and renewable energies in households, hotels and public buildings was launched. The Dagachhu hydropower plant, which has been in operation since 2016, is regarded as a model power plant in the region thanks to its cost efficiency and sustainable technology.

In the tourism sector, cooperation was continued with the training centre for tourism and hotel management that also has an affiliated training hotel. The training centre commenced operation in autumn 2017 and cooperates with ARGE Salzburg. By the end of the year, 223 students had already graduated, while 102 others were still undergoing training. In the legal and judicial sector, ADC assistance has contributed to the establishment of a total of eight courts in central and southern Bhutan. The training seminars for judges and court clerks will be continued and the first private law school at which Austrian expert knowledge is also taught, commenced operation in summer 2017.

The development of a first national disability policy is supported and an exchange between Bhutan and Austria on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is being prepared. Furthermore, Bhutan will be supported in efforts aimed at improving audit control in specialised areas such as gender and risk-based auditing and in results-oriented performance management in public administration. With the support of the EU and the World Bank, a contribution is being made to a decentralised system of public financial management.
Promotion of Civil Society Participation

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are important partners of ADC. Making available a mix of tailor-made promotional instruments and a budget of 14 million euros, Austria supported some 120 programmes and projects in 50 countries.

Eleven CSOs held contracts for framework programmes and strategic partnerships involving a total contract volume of 24.3 million euros and covering three to five years. In the field of Personnel Development Cooperation, the posting of experts on capacity building for local development organisations was promoted. Under the funding instruments Individual Projects South and Individual Projects East, 40 projects were implemented in developing countries of the South as well as in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. In addition, 38 ongoing EU co-financing projects were supported by ADA. Co-funding of 3 million euros was made available to six projects of Austrian CSOs dealing with the issue “migration and development/flight-asylum-return”.

Under the call “FGM/ Female Genital Mutilation, Women’s Health and Family Planning”, four projects received funding of 1.2 million euros.

A multi-year programme is being successfully implemented in cooperation with the Austrian CSO umbrella organisation AG Globale Verantwortung (WG global responsibility). The project aims to strengthen the competences of Austrian CSOs and to actively participate in shaping the development policy framework at European and international level. The programme has been expanded to offer members training in professionalization and inclusive market system development.

Promotion of Entrepreneurial Commitment

The private sector is an important development policy actor. Not only with respect to direct economic objectives but also with a view to other areas included in the 2030 Agenda. Consequently, ADC uses market systems and enterprises in a wide range of different sectors. By pursuing the approach of inclusive market system development, the ground is prepared for enterprises to contribute to sustainable development and to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda: favourable framework conditions that facilitate economic activity, as well as access to financing and information.

In order to promote direct cooperation with enterprises, ADA relies on economic partnerships. About 90 such projects are currently being implemented and funding of 6 million euros has already been paid out for these projects. A total of 22 new projects were started involving a further 6 million euros. In addition, support in the form of advice and assistance is provided to these companies. More than 5,000 advisory meetings have already been held, providing the key to concrete results. Locally, more than 2.9 million people and around 73,000 companies have benefited from these projects and more than 7,500 jobs have been created.

Laos, for instance, boasts a high hydropower potential. The Laotian government thus seeks to triple electricity production by 2030 and hopes to attract support from private international investors. The former does not only look for an attractive return, but also
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attaches importance to ensuring that standards and quality criteria are met. In coordination with a project development entity of the Austrian Development Bank, staff of the local Laotian partner thus receive training on relevant matters such as hydraulic engineering, geology and hydrology as well as on environmental and social standards. By joining forces, partners have set themselves the goal of submitting profitable power plants of 20 to 80 megawatts for financing and implementation within five years.

2.3.4. Multilateral Development Cooperation

The European Union

The EU (Member States and European Commission) is still the largest donor of Official Development Assistance (ODA). Austria’s financial contribution to EU development cooperation is one of the largest single items of Austrian ODA. Austria contributed 320.56 million euros to development cooperation under the EU budget and the European Development Fund (EDF), equalling 32.19 % of Austria’s total ODA.

During the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the main topic on the EU’s development policy agenda was the reorganisation of Europe’s relations with Africa. The discussion among the Member States was based on the proposal for an Africa-Europe Alliance put forward by the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker. The underlying idea of the alliance was in principle to achieve sustainable economic growth in Africa through massive increases in investment. In this context and with a view to promoting transcontinental cooperation in the fields of digitalisation and innovation, Austria organised an Africa-Europe Forum in Vienna on 17 and 18 December.

During its Presidency, Austria placed particular emphasis on gender equality and highlighted the need to fight all forms of violence against women, including female genital mutilation. At the Foreign Affairs (Development) Council in November, the issue of violence against women was dealt with in detail with Nobel Peace Prize laureates Nadia Murad and Dr Denis Mukwege.

Negotiations on the new EU instruments for financing external action under the future Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2021–2027) focused on the proposal for a new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). The underlying goal in this context is to bring together most of the existing external financing instruments in order to achieve greater coherence, transparency, flexibility and effectiveness. During Austria’s term at the helm of the Council of the European Union, negotiations on the Post-Cotonou Agreement commenced, which is to put relations between the EU and the Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries on a new footing.

The informal meeting of the EU-Development Cooperation Directors-General in Vienna also enabled an exchange of views with speakers at the High-Level Conference on Sustainable Energy and Development, which took place at the same time. The need for a stronger link between humanitarian aid and development cooperation was illustrated by the example of education during long-term, protracted crisis situations. In
order to counter the risk of a “lost generation” without education, it is thus necessary to adopt a new, comprehensive approach, as emphasised by the European Council in its Conclusions on education in emergencies and protracted crises.

During the first half of the year, the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union dealt in detail with the mid-term review of EU external financing instruments 2014-2020 and the issues of financing for development, migration and energy. By establishing the Council Working Party on the 2030 Agenda, the institutional prerequisite for promoting and fostering the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the EU context was created.

The United Nations

In the course of the ongoing UN reform process, the UN worked on restructuring its development system in order to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Between 4 and 8 June, the UNDP/UNOPS/UNFPA Governing Boards thus dealt specifically with the planned restructuring of the Resident Coordinators system. The topic of financing for development was discussed at a high-level meeting on 11 June focusing on “Financing for SDGs – Breaking the Bottlenecks of Investment, from Policy to Impact”.

From 9 to 19 July, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) met in New York. Under the heading of “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”, it examined the status of implementation of SDG 6 (Water and Sanitation), SDG 7 (Energy), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities), SDG 12 (Sustainable Consumption and Production), SDG 15 (Rural Ecosystems) and SDG 17 (Means of Implementation). In the ministerial segment, 46 countries presented their national efforts to implement the agenda. Austria was represented by a delegation involving members of the National Council and representatives from various ministries as well as civil society. Austria contributed to four side events.

2.3.5. Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief

2.3.5.1. Bilateral Humanitarian Aid

Bilateral humanitarian aid provided by Austria is funded and overseen by the MFA and other federal ministries, including the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism, the Federal Ministry of Defence, the federal provinces and municipalities as well as other public bodies and institutions.

Bilateral humanitarian aid responds to extraordinary crisis situations, which are mostly triggered by natural disasters or armed conflicts. Massive flows of refugees and famine are the most obvious consequences of such extreme crisis situations. These included the refugee crises in Syria, Iraq and Uganda as well as the famine and drought disasters in Africa. In response to and with a view to mitigating the impacts of the crisis in Syria, a total of around 19 million euros was made available for the provision of basic care and services, mine clearance and rehabilitation of mine victims as well as regional refugee assistance. This figure also includes the 10 million euros provided by the MFA
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to the Turkey facility and 2 million euros from ADA funds for the EU regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian crisis (MADAD Fund). Due to the humanitarian emergency in Iraq, a total of 3.5 million euros was made available by the ADA to the Crisis Response and Resilience Programme overseen by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund of UNDP and UNWOMEN as well as to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for the provision of basic care and services, return and strengthening of the resilience of internally displaced persons and refugees.

As a result of the ongoing refugee crisis, Uganda received 2 million euros from the Foreign Disaster Fund (FDF) and ADA to support refugees from South Sudan and the affected host communities. In order to alleviate the consequences of the drought disaster in Ethiopia, a total of 3.1 million euros was made available to the suffering population, of which 2 million euros was provided for basic humanitarian aid from the FDF and 1.1 million euros from the Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism for food aid. In view of the serious humanitarian crisis in South Sudan, a total of 1.5 million euros was made available from the FDF and by the Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism for access and coordination of humanitarian aid as well as for the provision of basic care and services, especially food and water, to the affected population. Support of 1.9 million euros from the FDF and ADA funds was made available to the UN International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the UN World Food Programme to provide assistance to Burkina Faso. Funding from the FDF food aid programme was also made available to Chad.

Due to the humanitarian emergency situation in Libya, one million euros was made available from ADA funds for the provision of basic care and services to internally displaced persons and refugees. In order to mitigate the consequences of the humanitarian crises in North Africa and to address the root causes of migration, one million euros each was made available from the FDF and ADA funds to the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. With a view to contributing towards combating Ebola, support of 100,000 euros was made available to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In view of the chronic humanitarian crisis in Yemen, two million euros were made available from the FDF for basic care and services as well as food aid. Funding of 2.5 million euros was granted from ADA funds to support internally displaced persons, returnees and the affected host communities in Afghanistan. The victims of the tsunami and earthquake disasters in Indonesia were supported with one million euros made available from the FDF. An amount of 700,000 euros was provided from ADA funds for the provision of basic care and services to the suffering population in Myanmar. An amount of 500,000 euros each was made available for the rehabilitation of mine victims and for the provision of basic care and services from the FDF to the people of Ukraine. Support of one million euros was made available from the FDF for the provision of basic care and services to Venezuelan refugees in Colombia.

In 2018, total bilateral humanitarian aid, which also includes humanitarian aid for international disasters coordinated by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, amounted to 22.58 million euros. The funds and assistance provided were channelled through
humanitarian organisations, such as the UN, the Red Cross movement and Austrian NGOs.

**International Disaster Relief**

Austria also provided international disaster relief in response to requests for assistance under the EU mechanism and in direct coordination with the European Commission/Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC).

In March, Austria supported Romania that was facing a shortage of immunoglobulin. In response to the migration crisis that hit Bosnia and Herzegovina, Austria provided in-kind disaster relief, such as tents, camp beds, woollen clothes and hygiene kits in June. In the aftermath of the devastating consequences of the earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia, Austria provided ten electricity generators in October.

All these international disaster relief missions were organised by the Federal Ministry of the Interior as the body responsible for international disaster relief and national crisis and disaster protection management.

**Austrian Food Aid**

The major political importance attached by Austria to international food aid provided to regions suffering from hunger and acute food insecurity is reflected in Austria’s decades-long membership of the Food Aid Convention. Involving the contribution of the Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism, this convention was transformed in 2013 to the more up-to-date Food Assistance Convention (FAC). By ratifying the new FAC in early 2013, Austria committed itself to providing at least a minimum amount of food assistance to food-insecure third countries on an annual basis. In the context of the reorganisation of food aid in 2015, cooperation between the MFA and ADA was optimised with regard to project selection and project support, based on a coherent Austrian overall strategy. Led by the Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism and in cooperation with the MFA and ADA, Austria provided support of 1.6 million euros to relief projects implemented by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) in South Sudan and Ethiopia.

2.3.5.2. Multilateral Humanitarian Aid and Assistance provided by the European Union

**Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is responsible for the international coordination of humanitarian aid, disaster relief and emergency response, for the development of the UN’s humanitarian policies as well as for the advocacy of humanitarian issues with other UN departments. In addition to its headquarters in New York and Geneva, OCHA operates a network of field offices and regional support offices. Only about 5% of OCHA’s financial requirements are covered by funds from the ordinary UN budget, while the rest is made available through voluntary contributions from
the Member States, including Austria. Since 2010 Austria has been a member of the **OCHA Donor Support Group**, a forum made up of top donors to OCHA. Austria supported OCHA’s work through an untied contribution to the core budget. In addition to these contributions, OCHA received funding to coordinate refugee assistance and relief in South Sudan.

In November, an OCHA delegation headed by Ursula Müller, Assistant Secretary General and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator of OCHA, visited Vienna and met representatives of Parliament, ministries and civil society.

**Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

The Office of the **UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** is one of the largest UN relief organisations. It operates in 123 countries, employs some 9,300 staff and funds its activities mainly through voluntary contributions from its member states. As has already been the case in previous years, Austria provided an untied core contribution to UNHCR. In addition, Austria supported relief activities launched by UNHCR in the field of provision of basic care and services to internally displaced persons, refugees and returnees as well as the host communities in Egypt, Libya and Colombia.

**United Nations World Food Programme (WFP)**

Set up in 1961, the Rome-based WFP is the UN’s largest humanitarian organisation. By way of the WFP, the Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism provided food aid to combat the impact of the drought disaster in Ethiopia with the relevant funding being handled by ADA. Furthermore, funding from the FDF and ADA was made available to the WFP in order to provide food aid to Yemen and Burkina Faso.

**United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East**

As in previous years, Austria made a core payment to the **UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)** for projects in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In addition, the ADA also provided financial support to the UNRWA healthcare programme.

**International Committee of the Red Cross and International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies**

Set up in 1863, the **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** is the only organisation mandated with monitoring compliance with international humanitarian law. The Assembly, which oversees all ICRC activities, is a collegial body consisting of a maximum of 25 Swiss nationals. The ICRC is active in more than 80 countries. Together with the International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) as well as national organisations and societies, it has made a significant contribution to alleviating humanitarian emergencies and suffering worldwide. Since 2017 Austria has been a member of the **ICRC Donor Support Group**, an informal forum bringing together the most important donors to the ICRC.
Austria supported the ICRC’s operational work in the field of provision of basic services, including food, drinking water as well as healthcare and cash aid, to the affected population in Syria, Afghanistan, Uganda, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Myanmar, Chad, Yemen and Iraq as well as for the Mine Action appeal in Ukraine. Austria also contributed to the ICRC’s headquarters budget. Funds were made available to the IFRC for the provision of assistance to the victims of the tsunami and earthquake disasters in Indonesia. Funding was also made available to the IFRC to combat Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**Humanitarian Aid in the European Union Context**

Austria contributed its share to humanitarian aid worldwide through the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), whose operational budget amounted to around one billion euros. The largest portions of funds were used to provide aid to alleviate the humanitarian crises on the African continent and in Syria.

The **priorities pursued by the Austrian Presidency** of the Council of the European Union included drafting Council conclusions on *Education in emergencies and protracted crises* and the co-negotiation of the humanitarian part of the EU Council’s mandate for the negotiations with the European Parliament on the European Solidarity Corps 2021-2027. Further priorities included in particular the **humanitarian aid and development cooperation nexus**, i.e. better coordination between humanitarian players and those active in the field of development cooperation, gender, protection of the civilian population and international humanitarian law.

**2.3.6. International Humanitarian Law**

Austria continued to play an active role in the **consultation process aimed at strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL)** initiated by the ICRC and Switzerland in 2011. Discussions focused in particular on the establishment of a forum of states specifically concerned with compliance with IHL, in which politicised discussions and contextualisation are to be largely avoided. Despite ongoing commitment, reflected also in meetings with states in April and December, it was again not possible to reach an agreement among the states on how to proceed, which is why the process will be declared concluded in spring 2019. Despite this regrettable development, Austria will continue to work actively towards improving compliance with IHL and to contribute to alternative initiatives and measures, especially with regard to the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent to be held in December 2019.

Within the framework of its **Presidency of the Council of the European Union**, IHL issues were dealt with in various forums and promoted by Austria, in particular in the Council working parties on international law, public international law/ international criminal law and humanitarian aid as well as in the Political and Security Committee. The Austrian Presidency endeavoured to promote a unified EU approach and to strengthen the EU’s common position, organised EU coordination meetings and prepared a position paper to support the above-mentioned consultation process. Austria
also advocated institutional strengthening of the EU in the field of IHL and public international law/ international criminal law.

Austria continues to advocate that violations of IHL should not go unpunished. The **fight against impunity** also requires **objective establishment of facts**. For this reason, Austria supports investigation and fact-finding commissions, such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) to assist the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, initiated by UNGA resolution 71/248. After the International Humanitarian Fact Finding Commission (IHFFC) set up under Article 90 of Additional Protocol I of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions became active for the first time on the initiative of the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship in the previous year, Austria continues to advocate using this independent commission of experts and specialists.

There is excellent cooperation between the Austrian authorities and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as well as the Austrian Red Cross. Due to its increased financial contributions, Austria has since last year been a member of the ICRC Donor Support Group and has actively contributed to the development of the ICRC Strategy 2019-2022.

IHL issues are regularly addressed in the **Austrian National Commission for the Implementation of IHL**, which was established in 1988 and meets under the joint chairmanship of the MFA and the Austrian Red Cross. In April, the Commission dealt in detail with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), in whose development it had played an active role and of which Austria was one of the first ten states to ratify. In addition to its commitment to a nuclear weapons-free world, Austria is also leading a core group for preparation of a political declaration on the protection of civilians against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA), and supports a preventive legal ban on lethal autonomous weapons systems without sufficient and effective human control (LAWS).

### 2.4. Foreign Trade

#### 2.4.1. Introduction

Austria is a small, open economy; exports and imports of goods, services, capital and know-how are decisive factors in the country’s economic development. The Austrian export economy safeguards and creates jobs, prosperity and tax revenues. About 60 % of the gross domestic product (GDP) is generated by export-oriented companies and every second job is related directly or indirectly to foreign trade. The number of exporting companies has more than quadrupled in the past 25 years, increasing from 12,000 to about 58,000. Around 80 % of the exporting companies are small and medium-sized enterprises that are active in a wide range of industries and sectors.

Together with its network of representations abroad, the MFA also makes a significant contribution to the success of the “export nation Austria”. The promotion of Austrian economic interests within and outside of the EU is part of the MFA’s mission and an
important objective pursued by the MFA, whose Foreign Trade and Business Services Departments deal with foreign trade matters, relevant issues raised by enterprises and answer questions related to foreign trade. In more than 2,000 concrete cases, the Austrian embassies have provided assistance and support in the interest of the economy and Austria’s position as a business location. This included interventions and meetings with authorities, handing over of company memoranda, promotion of Austria as a business and tourism location, consulting, information procurement and establishing contacts. These daily services were provided by the embassies in close cooperation with the international trade offices (AußenwirtschaftsCentres), operated by the Austrian Economic Chambers.

2.4.2. Foreign Trade Strategy

The Austrian Government Programme 2017–2022 provides for the development of a new Austrian foreign trade strategy. The process and the thematic core issues were defined in the joint submission by the MFA and the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs on 4 April. In a broad, inclusive process, the contents were prepared in seven working groups and finally condensed into a total of 63 measures for further strengthening the competitiveness of foreign trade and Austria’s position as a business location. On 17 December, the strategy was presented under the heading of “An innovative foreign trade policy for a successful Austria”. The new strategy will form the basis for Austria’s foreign trade policy in the coming years. Many aspects that are important from a foreign policy point of view, such as policy coherence and value orientation, human rights, sustainability and responsible corporate action in line with the OECD guidelines were incorporated into the strategy. It furthermore explicitly highlights the commitment to value orientation and upholding European standards in international negotiations and agreements, including EU trade agreements as a factor for economic success. Other important topics are effective implementation of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, strengthening the partnership between business and development as well as the promotion of fair and sustainable economic partnerships. The MFA also attached importance to establishing a pro-active exchange of information that is as comprehensive as possible on the foreign travel activities of all relevant actors, including representatives from Parliament and the federal provinces, with a view to ensuring that travel diplomacy is as strategically aligned as possible. The Austrian embassies will play an important role in communicating and implementing the strategy abroad.

The objectives pursued in the implementation of the new foreign trade strategy were

- providing Austrian entrepreneurs with even more targeted support than before on their path towards international excellence;
- creating a fact-based understanding of Austria’s foreign trade policy interests and the scope for action to implement these interests;
Priority Topics

– improving the optimisation and coordination of Austria’s foreign trade image and the visibility of the Austrian economy abroad as well as the range of services and support provided to Austrian companies that are active internationally;

– fostering systematic networking and interlinking of foreign trade policy and other aspects of Austria’s international activities (such as development cooperation, promotion of tourism, company settlement policy, foreign cultural policy, recruitment of specialists);

– identifying priority markets through cooperation between public and private players;

– setting up a new coordination body for internal Austrian coordination, which meets at least quarterly and organises an annual workshop to coordinate annual planning, visiting diplomacy (including at province level) and relevant media content.

The strategy’s primary goal is to safeguard the Austrian people’s prosperity and interests in a constantly and rapidly changing global environment, to anticipate future trends, to raise people’s awareness of opportunities and to create the necessary economic policy framework for the Austrian economy and for Austria as a business location. In this context, the new foreign trade strategy will take account of the Austrian economy’s typical structure – which is characterized by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – and will tap into the opportunities offered by digitalisation as well as the potential of global growth markets.

Led by the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs, the MFA and the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the objectives and concrete measures enshrined in the new strategy will be implemented and evaluated in an ongoing manner by the competent institutions.

2.4.3. Bilateral Foreign Trade Policy

Bilateral Foreign Trade Policy – Austrian Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs)

On 6 March, the ECJ ruled in a request for a preliminary ruling from the German Federal Court of Justice with respect to an action brought by Slovakia regarding the legality of an arbitral award against provisions on arbitration tribunals, as contained in the bilateral investment treaty (BIT) between the Netherlands and Slovakia, that this was inconsistent with the ‘autonomy of Union law’ and therefore incompatible with EU law. Thus, Austrian bilateral investment treaties with other EU Member States are no longer applicable. From the Austrian point of view, the need for legal protection of (not only) Austrian investors, which led to the conclusion of intra-EU BITs, is still valid. In the context of the EU, Austria consequently contributes actively to the negotiations on a plurilateral agreement and has also agreed on drafting a new model BITs governing investment protection agreements with third countries as part of its new foreign trade strategy.
2.4.4. **Multilateral Foreign Trade Policy**

**EU – Free Trade Agreement**

The European Commission (EC) has conducted negotiations on trade agreements with Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Chile, Tunisia and Mercosur and held negotiations on an investment protection agreement with China. The EC also negotiated trade agreements with Japan and Singapore that are ready for signature.

After negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the 2017 Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) between the EU and Japan had been finalised, both agreements were signed by the EU and Japan on 17 July. Following approval by the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament, the EPA and part of the SPA between the EU and Japan will enter into force on 1 February 2019. The EPA eliminates the vast majority of customs duties (on around 97% of EU products) and abolishes many non-tariff barriers. The SPA is to foster political and sectoral cooperation and joint actions on issues of common interest. Ratification by the EU Member States is still required for its full implementation.

The EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement and the EU-Singapore Investment Protection Agreement were signed by the EU and Singapore on 19 October. These are the first agreements of this kind to be signed between the EU and an ASEAN state. Singapore is the EU’s largest ASEAN partner, accounting for almost a third of EU-ASEAN trade in goods and services. The FTA dismantles import tariffs and taxes, simplifies market access for services and to public procurement, strengthens cooperation on customs and trade facilitation, eliminates trade barriers, implements sanitary and phytosanitary measures, enables better protection of intellectual property rights, strengthens competition rules and supports sustainable development. Following approval by the European Parliament and the EU Council, the FTA may enter into force in February 2019.

The Investment Protection Agreement contains modern provisions for the protection of investors and will replace the twelve existing bilateral investment agreements between EU Member States and Singapore. In order to enter into force, the Investment Protection Agreement requires ratification by the EU Member States. After large parts of the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) had already provisionally entered into force on 21 September 2017, the Austrian parliament approved the agreement’s ratification on 13 June. The Federal President decided to wait for the confirmation of legal conformity by the ECJ before signing the ratification.

**WTO**

The Doha Development Agenda (DDA) negotiations have still not been concluded due to differences of opinion among WTO members. Initiatives concerning e-commerce, investment facilitation and measures in favour of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises were presented at the Ministerial Conference. However, discussions in and around the WTO were dominated by the crisis in the WTO dispute settlement mechanism. As the USA has refused to appoint members to the Appellate Body (AB), a potential blockade of the body is looming. The regulatory minimum of three judges for deal-
Priority Topics

Work on a fundamental reform of the WTO is being performed mainly on the initiative of the EU, but also of Canada. Discussions on further accessions have been held; specifically with Belarus, Iraq, Sudan, Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan, the Comoros, Bahamas, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Group of States of the Horn of Africa.

2.4.4.1. OECD

Developments and General Trends

With the entry into force of the Federal Ministries Act on 8 January, responsibility for OECD matters was transferred from the Federal Chancellery to the MFA. At the annual Ministerial Council meeting (MCM), which was held under the French Presidency, Austria was thus represented for the first time by Federal Minister Karin Kneissl. Thematically, the importance of a multilateral approach in international relations based on clear rules was stressed. At the meeting, Lithuania and Colombia were the 36th and 37th member countries to sign the OECD accession treaties. Further requests for accession had been submitted by Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Croatia, Peru and Romania. However, due to different geographical focuses, the accession process has come to a standstill. Like the other OECD EU Member States, Austria supports the three EU candidates. Apart from the enlargement debate, the controversial budget negotiations were a key topic on the OECD’s agenda. The budget for the financial years 2019-20 was, however, adopted in December, which guarantees the financial stability of the OECD.

Economic and Financial Policy

The economic policy discussion within the OECD was influenced by the worldwide trend towards reciprocal raising of trade barriers in response to the economic problems attributed to globalisation in individual countries, especially in the USA. Recognising certain undesirable developments, the OECD reacted to this trend by calling for more multilateral cooperation, targeted addressing of individual problem areas and the dismantling of the trade barriers that had been raised. In response, the US replied that it did not seek to restore the previous economic world order, but rather sought to redefine it and therefore wanted to rely more on bilateral instruments. At the same time, towards the end of the year there were increasing signs that the economic downturn would take effect earlier than originally expected: OECD economists responded to these indications by recommending that OECD member states should essentially allow automatic stabilisers to work and keep fiscal policy neutral. The assumption of office by the new Chief Economist, Laurence Boone (France) has led to only minor changes in the OECD’s overall orientation.
Foreign Trade

International Tax Policy

From a tax policy point of view, the whole year was marked by the initial work on alternative approaches to taxing an increasingly digitalised economy, in which the previous concept for taxing the profits of multinational companies – transfer pricing regimes based on the arm’s length principle – had become increasingly obsolete: an increasingly larger number of Internet and other multinational companies with a high share of intangible goods shifted their profits to low-tax countries and were thus able to push down their overall effective tax rate well into the single-digit range. In order to address this issue, the OECD Tax Committee discussed new approaches, which at the end of the year resulted in three possible solutions: firstly, the approach pursued by the United States, which attributed most of the value added to the owner of the production know-how; secondly, that of the United Kingdom, which attached particular value to user behaviour and data; and thirdly the approach pursued by Germany and France, which wanted to preserve the old transfer pricing regime and aimed at introducing some form of minimum taxation. In the year to come, the OECD will produce a second and final interim report, and in 2020 will present a final report to the G20. At the end of the year, however, the views held by the three blocks were still very far apart and the prospect of early agreement was slim.

Trade, Industry and Enterprise

The main topic on the trade and industry agenda was to complete the work of the expiring budget and work period. As had been the case in the previous year, the focus was therefore on topics such as global value chains, export restrictions (with a focus on raw materials), overcapacities in the steel sector, trade flows and their contribution to value added (Trade in Value Added) as well as the challenges progressing digitalisation posed to companies. The work performed in the OECD expert committees in the context of the horizontal project “Going Digital” is particularly worth mentioning. A highlight in the field of SME-related activities was the Ministerial Meeting in Mexico City on 23 February, at which a Declaration on Strengthening SMEs and Entrepreneurship for Productivity and Inclusive Growth was adopted. The end of the year was marked by the OECD-G20 High-Level Conference in December, which was chaired by the Japanese G20 Presidency and focused on global steel overcapacity.

Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection

The OECD’s priorities in the area of labour and social affairs were mainly defined by the analysis of the impact megatrends had on the development of technology and society in these areas and the formulation of appropriate policy responses. A new OECD Jobs Strategy (MCM 2018) was adopted, and initial conclusions were formulated at a social policy forum and ministerial meeting (Montreal, 14-15 May) on the future of social systems in connection with the effects of globalisation and the increase in non-standard employment relationships. Further studies on the topic of social mobility and equal opportunities placed a special focus on the development of the middle class (jobs, skills, wages and mobility). The work on migration showed that the member countries
have in principle succeeded in coping with the refugee flows of the years 2015/2016, but that the integration of refugees still gives rise to huge challenges. In the field of health, the projects PaRIS (indicators, standards and benchmarks for patient-driven healthcare systems based on the model of PISA/PIAAC), sustainability and social protection in long-term care were further promoted. In the field of consumer protection, guidelines for online advertising and non-monetary transactions are being prepared.

**Education and Skills**

Work in the field of education and skills constitutes one of the core elements of OECD activity. Based on OECD data, international benchmarks on the impact on education and skills are prepared for students and adults (PISA, PIAAC) and national skills strategies are developed. The new PISA assessments were conducted in more than 80 countries and their results will be presented in December 2019. In addition, the OECD Skills Strategy, which is to be formally adopted at the MCM in May 2019, was completed. The most important publications in the field of education and skills were “Education at a Glance” and “Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems”.

**Energy – International Energy Agency (IEA)**

The IEA increasingly focused on approaches towards deepening relations with associated countries and the question of membership payments from new participating countries. At a workshop in September, the issue of member countries’ obligation to hold emergency stocks of oil and a possible revision of the system was discussed in greater detail for the first time in 40 years. Another important topic was energy efficiency, including the establishment of an International Energy Efficiency Hub to be incorporated into the IEA. The hub is based on a G20 initiative and is to replace the International Partnership for Energy Efficiency in 2019, whose mandate is expiring. The World Energy Outlook 2018 was presented in Vienna in November and mainly focused on the future of energy systems in times of growing uncertainty, increasing electrification, the development of renewable energies, upheavals on the oil markets and the globalization of natural gas markets.

**Digitalisation – Going Digital**

All OECD activities related to the topic of digitalisation (including trade, transport, energy, labour market, education, health and taxation) are currently bundled in the horizontal project “Going Digital: Making the Transformation Work for Growth and Well-being”, launched in January 2017. The goal pursued by the project’s horizontal approach is to overcome the prevailing silo thinking and address current issues related to ongoing digitalisation (digital transformation). In total, 14 OECD committees and nine OECD directorates are involved in the project. Furthermore, a number of OECD sub-organisations (Part II Programmes), such as the IEA, also contribute to the project. A first interim report was presented at the MCM. At the Going Digital Summit on 11 and 12 March 2019, a final report and a progress report will be presented. Currently, the
OECD plans to also include the topic of “digitalisation” in the MCM 2019 agenda and to continue the Going Digital project in a phase 2. Potential priority topics in this context are blockchain and artificial intelligence.

Agriculture and Environment

For the first time, environmental and climate protection featured as a separate thematic block on the agenda of an MCM. The adoption of a joint ministerial statement, however, failed due to a lack of consensus on climate issues. A major OECD report on ‘Financing Climate Futures: Rethinking Infrastructure’, prepared jointly with the World Bank and UNEP, was finalised in September, presented at the UNGA in New York and discussed at the OECD Forum on Green Finance and Investment in November. The central message was that it was urgently necessary to align infrastructure investments with long-term climate goals and that climate-friendly investments have a positive impact on overall economic development. In the field of agriculture, the OECD published the annual Agricultural Outlook for 2018-2027 in July, which was prepared jointly with the FAO and included a separate chapter on the Middle East and North Africa. A special global forum held in May dealt with opportunities and challenges of digital technologies in agriculture.

Global Relations

Cooperation with the OECD’s key partners Brazil, China, Indonesia, India and South Africa was further intensified. A new Joint Work Programme was, for instance, agreed with Indonesia for the period 2019-2021. Brazil has evolved into the most active key partner and now seeks to join the organisation. The OECD country programmes with Morocco and Kazakhstan expired in July and at the end of the year respectively, with Morocco requesting an extension of its programme. In addition, a new country programme was launched with Thailand in May. Furthermore, much of the OECD’s work with non-members takes place in the context of regional programmes for South East Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, Eurasia, South-East Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. In order to be able to properly represent its interests at UN level, the OECD opened an office in New York.

Development Policy

In the first half of the year, the work programme of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) for 2019/20 was finalised, the motto being: “Leave no one behind”. In the course of the DAC reforms, the mandates of the sub-bodies were also renewed and agreement was reached on a compromise proposal regarding the eligibility of private sector instruments in the OECD-DAC Statistics System. In autumn, Susanne Moorehead (UK) was elected new Chair of the DAC as the previous Chair, Charlotte Gornitzka, had moved to UNICEF. Austria, together with Slovakia, was responsible for the peer review of Greece. Reviews were also performed on the EU, Canada and France. The DAC-CSO Dialogue Framework with civil society was adopted in July with the aim of ensuring a
more systematic involvement of civil society in OECD decision-making processes, not least in the light of the globally shrinking sphere of influence. The second quarter saw the revision of the Peer Review Guide with a focus on the Sustainable Development Goals and the nexus between humanitarian, development and security aspects, which will already be applied to the Austrian Peer Review 2019.

2.4.5. Department for Business Services (“Unternehmensservice”)

Austrian diplomacy has always sought to support and promote Austrian business and economy. Since its establishment in 2015, the Department for Business Services (“Unternehmensservice”) at the MFA has been a **central contact point for Austrian companies active in the international sector**.

The Department for Business Services’ primary task is to handle matters that require official or diplomatic support. Such issues may include disputes related to the European internal market regulations, foreign government actions giving rise to commercial disagreements, discriminatory and other tax claims or situations in which Austrian investors are put at a disadvantage. These topics can also be raised at or in the context of high-level visits, including the handing over of company memoranda. The wide range of activities aimed at promoting Austrian business interests also include the forwarding of tenders for UN and other public international procurement, together with the organisation of information events on current topics such as Brexit and Iran. In all these activities, the Department for Business Services cooperates with relevant stakeholders, including other federal ministries, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the Federation of Austrian Industries, and the Austrian Business Agency (ABA).

In 2018, the **MFA’s representations** have again initiated more than 2,000 business promotion activities abroad. These include interventions by the heads of mission, arranging contacts with government institutions and political decision makers, preparing economic policy analyses, advising Austrian companies and promoting as well as marketing Austria as a business location.

An excellent example of cooperation among various actors with a view to strengthening the resilience of Austrian export companies is the role the Department for Business Services has assumed since June as **Focal Point** with respect to **Iran**. Particularly noteworthy is the **Open Austria** initiative, where experts from the MFA, the Austrian Economic Chambers and the ABA who are based in San Francisco, ensure exchange between one of the world’s centres of innovation, Silicon Valley, and Austria. The **ALPS (Austrian Leadership Programs)**, a visiting programme that offers Austrian companies the opportunity to present themselves to international high potentials, is appreciated by companies and stakeholders alike. This year, two ALPS rounds were implemented involving a total of 54 participants representing 29 countries from all five continents.
3. Consular Affairs

3.1. Introduction: The Consular Department’s Activities

The Citizens’ Service and the Austrian representations abroad provide a wide range of consular services to Austrians who travel abroad and to those who live abroad either permanently or for an extended period of time. These services include the provision of detailed and constantly updated travel information and advice on the MFA’s website, information provided around the clock by telephone or in writing, as well as concrete consular support especially in emergencies or crisis situations.

The mandate of promoting digitalisation, set out in the government programme, is being pursued with particular vigour by the MFA, especially in the consular field. In connection with the digitalisation activities planned by the respective federal ministries, the MFA attaches particular importance to ensuring that the more than 550,000 Austrians who live abroad permanently or for an extended period of time also have the opportunity to use and benefit from the continuously expanded range of electronic services.

In total, some 335,000 visa applications were processed and around 12,000 applications for residence titles under the Settlement and Residence Act (Niederlassungs- und Aufenthaltsgesetz, NAG) as well as an additional 2,000 applications for family reunification under the Asylum Act (Asylgesetz, AsylG) were handled by the Austrian representation authorities over the course of the year.

Of the approximately 12,000 procedures under the Settlement and Residence Act the vast majority were submitted for the purpose of family reunification (just under 4,600) and in order to take up studies in Austria (more than 3,100).

3.2. Citizens’ Desk and Operational Crisis Management Abroad

In view of the increasing risk of terrorist attacks and the numerous natural disasters that have occurred in recent years, crisis prevention has come to play an increasingly important role. Against this background, consular crisis management was one of the priorities defined by Austria in the Council Working Party on Consular Affairs during its Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Under the Austrian Presidency, 18 of the EU Member States’ Preventive Action and Emergency Plans for crisis situations in third countries were reviewed and updated. Furthermore, and on behalf of all EU Member States, Austria held consular dialogues with Australia, Canada and the USA. Crisis management at European level was furthermore supplemented by bilateral and pluri-lateral consular consultations with various partner countries, including Germany and Switzerland.

Work at the consular level was strongly influenced by a large number of natural disasters. Tropical storms Manghkut, Florence and Michael caused major damage in Southeast Asia and in the USA respectively, necessitating large-scale evacuations. Although Austrians were also in the affected regions at the time, no casualties were reported among them. Indonesia was hit by numerous earthquakes and the resulting tsunamis,
which claimed many victims, including an Austrian couple who were injured and subsequently evacuated.

In August, the collapse of a large motorway bridge in Genoa caused 43 fatalities. Likewise, during the summer months many popular holiday destinations from Greece to the USA were hit by forest fires, in which many people were killed. Storms raging in Japan, India and Spain not only caused major damage but also claimed numerous lives.

Austrians took a total of 11.88 million trips abroad, of which 10.39 million were holiday trips (source: Statistics Austria). The Citizens' Service and the Austrian representation authorities provide a wide range of consular services to Austrian travellers, including the provision of detailed and constantly updated travel information on the MFA's website as well as travel information and advice provided by telephone or in writing.

3.3. General Consular and Legal Matters

At the end of the year, a total of 156 Austrian nationals were being detained in prisons abroad, most of them in Germany (31 cases), followed by Turkey (13 cases), Italy (ten cases), Spain (eight cases) and Hungary as well as Switzerland (six cases each). The most common offences committed by Austrians imprisoned abroad were offences against life and limb (87 cases), drug offences (also 87 cases) and property offences (72 cases).

Representation authorities made a total of 215 prison visits. The purpose of these visits is mainly to ascertain regularly that Austrian prison inmates are being treated in line with the respective country’s national regulations, and also to ensure that such regulations comply with the international minimum standards and that Austrian inmates enjoy any relief they may be entitled to under the existing regulations. Another important part of the services provided in this context is the acceptance and forwarding of parcels and small sums of money being sent to Austrian prison inmates abroad.

In cases of child abduction, the Hague Convention on Child Abduction of 1980 (Hague Convention, HCCA) foresees direct cooperation between the respective national judicial authorities. In all cases, and especially in countries that are not party to the HCCA, the MFA and the Austrian representation authorities support the affected parent with consular assistance in asserting his/her rights abroad. In total, Austrian authorities dealt with 22 cases of child abduction.

The MFA handled a total of 18,705 requests for mutual legal (judicial) assistance and administrative cooperation from both Austrian and foreign authorities. A joint project launched by INTERPOL, the French Ministry of Justice and the MFA seeks to significantly accelerate mutual legal assistance in criminal matters. To this end, guidelines for filing requests for mutual legal assistance electronically between EU Member States and third countries have been prepared. With respect to legal protection in consular matters, the consular section at the MFA and the Austrian representation authorities provided assistance in a total of 603 cases worldwide.

The MFA's scope of responsibility also includes the national coordination of Austrian positions and chairing of negotiations of treaties in the fields of legal assistance, extra-
dition and transfer of prisoners as well as police cooperation. In this context, the MFA cooperates very closely with competent ministries and the Austrian representation authorities in the countries concerned.

In total, nine agreements were in the process of ratification, 13 agreements were being negotiated, and one agreement was concluded. National coordination processes were arranged for a further 27 agreements.

3.4. Austrians Abroad

The provision of consular support to Austrian citizens abroad constitutes one of the core tasks of the Austrian representation authorities (i.e. embassies, consulates and consulates-general).

This also includes making the increasingly large number of electronic services provided by the Federal Government also accessible to Austrians residing abroad. In the context of the digitalisation activities planned by the respective federal ministries, the MFA attaches particular importance to ensuring that Austrians abroad may also use and benefit from the constantly expanded range of digital applications, such as the electronic identity card (e-ID) or the electronic delivery and service of documents.

Just like the MFA’s dedicated website for “Austrians abroad” (www.auslandsoesterreicherInnen.at), the Austrian representation authorities are an important link between Austrians abroad and their (former) home country. They constitute the first point of contact with regard to passport, citizenship and voting matters, for further contact with authorities and consular protection, for obtaining information about Austria, effective crisis preparedness and coordination, or with respect to organising and facilitating events related to Austria.

Since there is no obligation to officially register one’s permanent residence abroad, the figures relating to Austrians living abroad are largely based on estimates. Verifiable figures do not reflect the actual number of Austrians residing abroad. It is, however, to be assumed that some 584,000 Austrians currently live abroad.

By far the largest number of Austrians residing abroad live in Germany (261,000), followed by Switzerland (65,000). A major share of Austrians abroad reside in the USA, Australia, Great Britain, Argentina and South Africa. Thus, more than three quarters of Austrians living abroad are concentrated in just a few countries. Some 383,000 Austrians living abroad are registered with the representation authorities and of these around 316,000 are of voting age.

A total of 38,427 passports (35,523 ordinary passports, 2,904 emergency passports) and 10,996 identity cards were issued at the Austrian representations abroad. Currently, Austrian nationals may apply for passports and identity cards at 125 representation authorities, including the authorised honorary consulates / consulates-general.

Since the entry into force of the amendment to the Central Civil Status Register (Zentrales Personenstandsregister, ZPR) and to the Central Citizenship Register (Zentrales Staatsbürgerschaftsregister, ZSR) in 2014, Austrians abroad have had the opportunity
Consular Affairs

to have civil status documents and citizenship certificates issued by the official Austrian representation abroad. Embassies and Austrian consular offices abroad issued a total of 2,842 civil status documents and 7,634 citizenship certificates and confirmations. The Office for Consular Authentications at the MFA registered a total of 20,585 authentications and apostilles that may be issued to enable international recognition of Austrian documents abroad. In total, Austrian representation authorities abroad processed some 47,108 authentications and issued 627 apostilles.

In order to facilitate registration with Austrian representation authorities, Austrians abroad may also register online. A modern standardised registration system established at Austrian representations worldwide serves to increase the number of Austrians registered abroad and enhance data quality, thus ensuring quick and efficient contact by e-mail or text message.

Organisation of Austrians Abroad

Ties between Austrians living abroad and their home country are maintained particularly through associations of Austrians abroad, other societies that have links with Austria and increasingly also via social media. There are 400 such associations and societies in 61 countries. The Vienna-based Auslandsösterreicher-Weltbund (AÖWB), the World Federation of Austrians Abroad, is the umbrella organisation concerned with the representation of interests and providing a service platform for associations of Austrians abroad. Since 1 July 2014, Gustav Chlestit has been the President of the AÖWB and Irmgard Helperstorfer has served as Secretary-General. The AÖWB maintains its website www.weltbund.at and publishes the magazine “ROTFEISSROT”. The launch of its online platform www.austrians.org directed specifically at Austrians living abroad was established in 2012 and has contributed to further strengthening the federation’s social media presence.

The AÖWB organises an annual meeting of Austrians abroad, the most recent of which was held in Innsbruck from 6 to 9 September. At this meeting, a new board of directors was elected and from 1 January 2019 onwards Jürgen Em will hold the office of President. Funding provided by the MFA to the AÖWB amounts to 130,000 euros.

The Burgenländische Gemeinschaft is the umbrella organisation of the Burgenlanders abroad. Its aim is to maintain and deepen the ties between Burgenlanders all over the world and their native province. This goal is further pursued by the dedicated magazine “Die Burgenländische Gemeinschaft” and the social network “Burgenland Bunch”, founded in 1996. Walter Dujmovits holds the office of President of the Burgenländische Gemeinschaft.

The provinces of Upper Austria (through the network “Oberösterreich International”), Lower Austria (“Blau Gelb in der Welt”/Blue Yellow in the World) and Styria (“Büro für Auslandssteirer”/Office for Styrians Abroad) also pursue initiatives to improve the networking among and between Austrians abroad and their home country as well as their native province.
Matters of Interest to Austrian Nationals Living Abroad

The Fund for the Support of Austrians Abroad (Auslandsösterreicher-Fonds) was established in 1967 with a view to assisting Austrians who live abroad and find themselves in serious difficulties. The Federal Act on the Fund for the Support of Austrians Abroad (Bundesgesetz über den Auslandsösterreicher-Fonds, AÖF-G) Federal Law Gazette I No. 67/2006, which came into force on 1 January 2007, extended the group of potential recipients of support and assistance.

The fund, which is financed with a total of 600,000 euros by Austria’s nine federal provinces and the MFA, which each contribute 50%, provided financial assistance totalling 584,600 euros to 1,131 Austrians in need in 64 countries. The Board of Trustees appointed by the Federal Government is chaired by Ambassador (ret.) Markus Lutterotti. Until 31 October, the office of Managing Director was held by Josef Knapp, who was succeeded by Sabine Müstecaplıoğlu, whom the Board of Trustees appointed on 1 November as the Fund’s new Managing Director.

The Christmas campaign, organised by the MFA every year in support of Austrians abroad in need, raised donations in cash and in kind totalling 45,750 euros, which were made available to 416 Austrian nationals in need living in 41 countries worldwide.

For Austrians living abroad who are elderly, in need of permanent help or seriously ill and no longer able to care for themselves, the MFA may arrange for repatriation including accommodation in a suitable institution in Austria. Prerequisites for such repatriation are inter alia that help cannot be provided by relatives or local relief organisations, that the individual’s state of health allows them to travel and that they agree to repatriation. In the course of the year, five such individuals were brought back to Austria from Spain, France, Hungary, China and Afghanistan and accommodated in Austrian social welfare and/or care institutions.

At the explicit request of Austrians abroad, individuals who apply for a passport may apply for a “BMEIA-Express” passport at a number of representations – where such an express delivery is possible both from a legal and an organisational point of view. In contrast to the normal passport application, this “BMEIA-Express” passport is produced and sent abroad by DHL – at the latest – on the working day following the day the application was filed. The passport may be delivered directly to the representation authority, but also to honorary consulates or directly to an individual abroad.

In the spirit of the government programme and providing the greatest possible support, the MFA and the Austrian Embassy in London have sought to address concerns by Austrians in the United Kingdom with respect to Brexit.

Participation by Austrians Abroad in Political Decision-making in Austria and the European Union

Since 1990, Austrians who are on the (European) electoral register and are either residing in other countries or temporarily abroad on election days, have had the right to vote in Austrian parliamentary and presidential elections and to participate in nationwide plebiscites, public consultations and referendums and, since 1 January, also in
popular petitions. Austrians abroad – as well as non-Austrian citizens of the European Union who have their main residence in Austria – may vote in elections for Austrian Members of the European Parliament (EP).

Voting rights of Austrians abroad – that were simplified considerably as of 2007 – enable participation in elections from the age of 16. Postal voting is possible in Austria and abroad for anyone who is unable to cast their vote in a polling station on election day. A signed affidavit is now sufficient for casting a postal vote. The postage costs for returning the voting cards by normal mail from all parts of the world are borne by Austria.

Furthermore, Austrians abroad can order absentee ballots in advance for a period of ten years (“absentee ballot subscription”). Thus, they automatically receive their absentee ballots for all nationwide elections, plebiscites and referenda during this period. The municipality they are registered in as voters informs them ex officio about forthcoming elections, plebiscites and referenda as well as when they are about to be deleted from the electoral register. Under Austrian Federal Constitutional Law, the Austrian federal provinces also have the right to give Austrians living abroad the opportunity to vote in regional parliamentary elections in their former province of residence. So far, the provinces of Lower Austria, Tyrol and Vorarlberg have implemented this type of voting right.

The range of services provided to Austrians abroad continues to be expanded. The latest improvements and adaptations to current needs related to election law, online registration and information provided online. This mainly facilitated participation in elections from abroad in the form of simplifications introduced in the area of postal voting by the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2009, which was extended in 2010. This means that, for instance, witnesses are no longer required nor is it necessary to indicate the place and the time of the affidavit on the voting card. Together with the introduction of the new Central Voter Register, it has now become possible for Austrians, whose main registered residence is abroad, to make declarations of support and have their names entered for referenda.

They can do so by either personally submitting the relevant written document on paper to municipalities in Austria or online by means of a qualified digital signature (“Bürgerkarte”/Citizens’ Card, “Handy-Signatur”/mobile phone signature). By presenting their passport or identity card as well as the mobile phone number of an Austrian or foreign mobile phone operator, Austrians abroad may have their mobile phone signature activated at the Austrian embassies/consulates-general in Berlin, Bern, Brussels, London, Madrid, Milan, Munich and Stockholm. A mobile phone thus becomes a digital identity card that enables unique identification when dealing with authorities online.

The amendment of the e-government law in summer 2017 laid the groundwork for the new electronic proof of identity (E-ID). The implementation of the E-ID registration process in the electronic passport register, planned by the Federal Ministry of the Interior for the beginning of 2020, will enable the registration of Austrians abroad for the electronic proof of identity at all passport application facilities, including those abroad.
Visa and Residence Matters

As announced by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the E-ID will enable establishing a link between the analogue and the digital world and a new type of sovereign registration, which is voluntary for every citizen, with an innovative digital ID system and secure login, making it the leading system in Europe.

Working Holiday Programmes

Working Holiday Programmes (WHP) are agreements with other countries that enable young people between 18 and 30 to stay in the respective other country for a period of six to twelve months and to work without a work permit. It is thus possible for these young people to enter into a short, fixed-term employment relationship spontaneously while on holiday.

These programmes also seek to enable young people to gain practical work experience abroad and to use training and educational opportunities, particularly in the field of languages and culture.

So far, Austria has concluded a total of nine WHPs, namely with New Zealand (2012), the Republic of Korea (2012), Hong Kong (2015), Taiwan (2015), Japan (2016), Israel (2017), Canada (2017), Chile (2017) and Australia (2018).

3.5. Visa and Residence Matters

As of 31 December, Austrian nationals holding a regular passport were free to enter 119 states without a visa. Austrians may even enter 42 of these states with an ID card only and 15 states with a passport that has expired within the last five years. Three states required electronic registration before entry. Nationals of 95 states needed a visa to travel to Austria.

Visas for entry to Austria can be applied for not only at Austrian representations but also at embassies of other Schengen states as well as in visa centres operated by the MFA’s external service provider. In total, it was possible to file visa applications for entry into Austria in 314 locations worldwide.

The Austrian representation authorities processed nearly 335,000 visa applications, which represented an increase of 1.6% compared to the previous year. Of these, almost 93% were granted and issued subsequently. Of the visas granted, 92% were Schengen visas and 8% were national visas for stays in excess of 90 days. In the context of the representation of other Schengen states, staff at Austrian representations processed some 11,600 visas, making up a share of 3.5% of the overall total.

Cooperation with the Federal Ministry of the Interior on the analysis of the development in numbers of visas, ongoing joint training activities in the consular sector as well as evaluation of visa administration at the representation authorities was also continued this year.

The opportunity to turn to the Federal Administrative Court in order to appeal against decisions taken by Austrian representations in visa matters was used 566 times. This represents a significant decline in the number of procedures compared to the previous
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year. A total of 74% of the appeal cases are complaints against the refusal of an entry permit pursuant to § 35 Asylum Act 2005 (family reunification). In the past year, a total of 610 decisions were issued, with the Federal Administrative Court upholding the legal opinion of the representation authorities in 80% of the cases.

Residence Applications

In the settlement and residence procedure, the representation authorities abroad are responsible for accepting applications, ensuring that they are complete and correct and for forwarding them to the competent authorities in Austria for a decision. The representation authorities abroad have received and handled 11,697 applications for residence under the Settlement and Residence Act. Most of the applications for residence filed under the Settlement and Residence Act were submitted for the purpose of family reunification (4,587) and for taking up studies in Austria (3,150).

3.6. Asylum-related Issues; External Aspects of Migration

Irregular Migration

The management of mixed migratory movements (refugees, irregular migrants, victims of human trafficking) to Europe remained one of the most pressing challenges for the EU. The aim pursued in this context is effective migration management based on close partnership between the EU and relevant countries of origin and transit. During the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the High-Level Working Group on Migration and Asylum (responsibilities shared between the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the MFA) worked on the initiative of “disembarkation arrangements” for migrants and refugees rescued from distress at sea. Under this approach, the Mediterranean states’ search & rescue capacities were to be strengthened in order to prevent deaths in the Mediterranean while at the same time seeking to dismantle the people smugglers’ business model.

Austria led the discussions on the traditional update on the EU’s Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) within the framework of the High-Level Working Group on Migration and Asylum and placed the focus on Mali, Tunisia, Iraq and India.

In the context of the EU Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) on migration, two high-level round tables were convened involving the most affected Member States, UNHCR, IOM and relevant agencies to identify immediately necessary support measures along the Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean routes.

The MFA and the Federal Ministry of the Interior also participated in the Migration Cooperation Fora with Africa (Valletta, Rabat and Khartoum Processes) and with the Silk Road countries (Budapest Process).

At the UN level, the discussions on migration and refugees focused on the Global Compact for Migration (Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration) and the Global Compact on Refugees. The Austrian Federal Government does not consider the UN Global Compact for Migration to be suitable for solving migration issues and there-
Asylum-related Issues; External Aspects of Migration

Austria did not send a representative to the conference in Marrakech on 10 and 11 December and abstained from voting in the UN General Assembly on 19 December. The Austrian Council of Ministers decided to give its approval to the UN Global Compact on Refugees, despite some reservations, on 5 December.

Readmission Cooperation

Austria currently holds specific readmission agreements with 39 states. In addition to these agreements, there are also readmission clauses contained in a range of other agreements. At the end of the year, there were contractual readmission obligations concluded with 178 states worldwide (bilateral agreements, clauses in EU agreements with third countries, soft law in the UN context).

It was also possible to further improve readmission cooperation with a number of states.

Based on the example of the 2016 agreement with Afghanistan, the European Commission concluded non-legally binding agreements with Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Guinea, Gambia and Cote d’Ivoire on the improvement of readmission practices. In this context, the EU is pursuing a comprehensive approach in order to achieve progress in the field of readmission building on intensified comprehensive cooperation across all policy areas with the main countries of transit and of origin of irregular migration and flight movements. Even for states with which no contractual arrangements have been made, there is an obligation under customary international law to readmit their own nationals. Returns were thus also made to countries with which there was no such contractual framework.

With a view to determining the nationality of individuals to be returned, a number of identification missions from major countries of origin were organised by the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum and coordinated by the MFA.

A total of 12,611 individuals who were obliged to leave Austria were transferred out of the country by the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum. This figure consists of 5,665 voluntary returns and 6,946 forced returns, and also includes 2,285 Dublin transfers to the EU Member State responsible for the respective asylum procedure. There is close cooperation with the EU agency FRONTEX in the field of forced returns.

Asylum

In total, the number of applications for asylum filed in the EU Member States has returned to pre-2015/16 levels. All in all, 628,536 asylum applications were submitted across Europe, which marks a decrease of 11.75% compared to 2017 (712,235). In 2016, the number of applications still stood at some 1.2 million.

Ranging at 13,400, the number of asylum applications in Austria was lower than in 2017 (24,296) and below the average number of 25,561 for the years 1999-2016. This means 152 applications for asylum per 100,000 inhabitants.
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In absolute figures, Austria ranked 10th in the EU from the 1st to the 3rd quarter. With 118 asylum applications per 100,000 inhabitants, Austria occupied the 9th place in the same period compared with other Member States.

The majority of asylum seekers were Syrian nationals (25 %), followed by 15 % Afghan nationals, 8 % Iranian, 7 % Russian and 6 % Iraqi asylum seekers. Austria recorded the highest number of positive asylum decisions per one million inhabitants (source: Eurostat), which was mainly due to decisions on asylum applications filed in previous years. A total of 1,866 applications for family reunification under §35 of the Asylum Act were submitted to the Austrian professional representation authorities.

In Austria, 55,769 final decisions on asylum, subsidiary protection and humanitarian residence were issued. Of these, asylum was granted in 20,326 cases, while in 32,221 a legally binding negative asylum decision was issued. The largest number of positive asylum decisions were issued to Syrian nationals (asylum was granted in 4,863 cases), followed by Afghan nationals (4,853 positive final decisions) and Iranian nationals (asylum granted in 1,355 cases).

Subsidiary protection was granted to 4,099 individuals and rejected in 6,671 cases. Applications for a humanitarian residence permit were granted in 1,848 cases and rejected in 13,031 cases. In addition, there were 6,946 other decisions (source: Federal Ministry of the Interior). Austria thus fulfilled its international obligations, inter alia under the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees.
4. International Cultural Policy

4.1. Introduction

The understanding of a country is largely facilitated through the perspectives and insights provided by artists and those active in the fields of culture and science. This is true especially for Austria, which is associated with its cultural, artistic and scientific achievements in many countries around the world. Art and culture are a central component of Austria’s self-image. Austrian foreign policy makes use of this considerable interest in art and culture from Austria in order to engage in dialogue with the world via Austrian art and artists. The same holds true for the achievements of Austrian science, universities, universities of applied sciences and research institutes. Art and science are thus direct and important allies of Austria’s foreign policy in building sustainable and viable relations with other countries and in supporting a wide range of Austrian interests. In practical work associated with international cultural policy it is therefore essential that the works and achievements of Austrian artists be shared with the world at large and that lasting networks are established with partners abroad in order to facilitate a credible and multi-faceted contemporary image of Austria.

4.2. Objectives and Priorities

In addition to presenting Austria as an innovative and creative country, the International Cultural Policy Concept developed in 2015 continues to focus on Austria’s contribution to further promoting European integration and on the dialogue between cultures and religions. This goal is implemented by Austria’s international cultural policy network and the seven International Cultural Policy funding and priority programmes. The current concept was valid until the end of the year and will be updated in 2019.

The network currently consists of 30 Austrian Cultural Fora and a Cooperation Office in Lviv in Ukraine, 89 embassies and consulates general, 65 Austria Libraries (Österreich-Bibliotheken), 10 Austria Institutes (Österreich Institute) and two Offices of Science and Technology (OSTAs). The network was strengthened only recently through the establishment of the tenth Austria Institute in Moscow and the 30th Cultural Forum in Sarajevo.

Expressed in figures, the achievements of international cultural policy become somewhat quantifiable: this year a total of 6,883 events took place at 2,501 locations abroad, involving 6,165 partners and the participation of 9,383 artists and scientists.

International cultural relations were a particular focus of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Since Austria is perceived as a country that is strongly linked with culture, high expectations were also placed in the Austrian Presidency in this respect. Therefore, Austrian International Cultural Policy also promoted the use of culture to share a positive and innovative image of Austria with the world at large. In total, more than 250 cultural and scientific projects related to the EU and the Austrian Presidency took place worldwide. In Brussels alone, 70 events were organised or co-organised, often in cooperation with the Federal Chancellery. Examples include
Austrian music in public spaces and in the Brussels underground or the exhibition “Women in Art Brut” in the museum “Art et Marges”. Many Austrian embassies organised concerts or exhibitions when holding opening or closing events in the context of the Presidency.

Furthermore, a meeting of high-level representatives of the Member States’ foreign and culture ministries was held in Linz at the beginning of September. One of the topics discussed at this meeting was the EU’s cultural strategy as part of the EU’s international relations with the world. Owing to this large number of events and initiatives, the topic of Europe moved up the agenda and came to play an unparalleled role in the context of Austrian international cultural activities.

The commemorative year 2018 also featured very prominently on the Austrian international cultural policy agenda and a highly diverse, cross-disciplinary and varied programme was put together to commemorate the historic events in a wide range of ways. Organising more than 250 projects in 54 countries, the cultural fora, embassies and consulates/consulates-general made a significant contribution to the celebrations. Naturally, the main focus of events was placed on commemorating the events and anniversaries of 1918 and 1938, but other dates, such as the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), were likewise commemorated in many locations, and numerous projects also dealt with the years 1848 and 1968. In cooperation with the “House of Austrian History”, and in collaboration with Austrian historians, a White Paper on the topic “1918–2018: Die Anfänge der Republik Österreich im internationalen Kontext” (1918-2018: the beginnings of the Republic of Austria in an international context), was produced and presented worldwide.

The geographical focus remained on Austria’s neighbouring countries and the countries of South East Europe. After the bilateral cultural years with Serbia (2015), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2016) and Croatia (2017), Albania followed in 2018. In Austria, the Cultural Year Austria-Albania, which took place under the motto of “Gemeinsames Neuentdecken” (rediscovering commonalities), was celebrated in the context of a total of 33 events in eight different cities, which were mainly organised by the Albanian embassy in Vienna. In Albania, 70 events took place in ten different cities and were mainly organised by the Austrian embassy in Tirana. In both countries, the thematic focus was on music, literature and film. The publication “Gemeinsames Neuentdecken – Ein Kaleidoskop zur Geschichte und Gegenwart der österreichisch-albanischen Beziehungen” was prepared jointly by the Department for International Cultural Relations at the MFA, the Albanian embassy in Vienna and a large number of Austrian and Albanian artists. On 4 October, the book, published in German and Albanian, was presented at the Albanian Foreign Ministry in the presence of Federal Minister Karin Kneissl. On 30 October, it was presented in Vienna and during this event the PaN Prize 2018, presented by the MFA in association with the umbrella organisation of all Austrian International Societies – PaN (Partners of all Nations), was awarded to the Austrian-Albanian Society for its dedicated work aimed at promoting international understanding and cultural exchange.

Under the Schreibatelier (writers residency) and the Westbalkanstudio (Western Balkans residency) scholarships were made available to artists and writers from Albania,
Objectives and Priorities

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia who were all invited to live and work as artists-in-residence for a period of one to two months at Q21 in the MuseumsQuartier Vienna. Also with a view to further expanding cultural cooperation with neighbouring countries and Eastern Europe, the exchange project **Central & Eastern Europe Calling** was launched in cooperation with <rotor>, the association for contemporary art based in Graz, Austria: artists from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine and Belarus were selected and invited to Austria as artists-in-residence in 2019. In turn, artists from Austria were invited as artists-in-residence to these countries.

Launched in 2008, the translation programme **Traduki** seeks to promote literary exchange and already covers 14 countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Germany, Kosovo, Croatia, Liechtenstein, Macedonia, Montenegro, Austria, Romania, Switzerland, Serbia and Slovenia).

Set up in 2001 on Austria’s initiative, the **Platform Culture – Central Europe** has constantly kept developing over the past 17 years. Chaired by Poland, a Game Jam was organised in Tbilisi (Georgia) from 13 to 16 May in cooperation with the Tbilisi Digital Expo, which dealt with digital culture as part of the creative industry. Chaired by the Hungarian presidency, a performance on “Dance and Folk – Music Traditions in Central Europe” was organised on 7 November in cooperation with the Cultural Information Center “Budo Tomovic” in Podgorica (Montenegro).

The programme **“Creative Austrians – Vordenker_innen für die Gesellschaft von morgen”** (Creative Austrians – pioneering thinkers for the society of tomorrow) is a new information tool that deals with the question of how art, science and socio-politically relevant creative work changes the world. In order to explore this question, a number of interesting discussions and events were held in cooperation with the international trade office and local players in Warsaw, Zurich, Istanbul, Singapore, Los Angeles and Tunisia.

In terms of activities launched worldwide in connection with **visual arts and exhibitions**, the trend towards enhanced quality and quantity has continued. From the substantive point of view, account was also taken of the commemorative year 2018. A number of increasingly comprehensive traditional travelling exhibitions have been replaced by solo exhibitions, group exhibitions and thematic exhibitions, each of which was tailored and specially developed for individual countries, cities or partner institutions. The newly introduced travelling digital exhibitions are very well-received and have become particularly popular. Under this new concept, the Austrian representation authorities may put together a customized exhibition. They may choose from a range of topics, for instance “Kalliope AUSTRIA – Frauen in Gesellschaft, Kultur und Wissenschaft” (Calliope AUSTRIA – Women in Society, Culture and the Sciences), the 200th anniversary of “Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht” (Silent Night! Holy Night), Klimt, contemporary architecture or historical themes, download online print data of modular exhibitions and create a version that is tailored to their local needs. This approach cuts transport costs and ensures simultaneous availability worldwide.
The successful cooperation between the MFA and the MuseumsQuartier Wien, launched in 2009 in the form of the project “freiraum quartier21 International” was continued and the international exhibitions “shaping democracy – the republic in 24 frames per century” (21 March – 3 June), “Productive Work” (26 August – 2 September) and “Under Pressure – Über Formen des Autoritären und die Macht der Entscheidung” (28 September – 25 November) were presented. All exhibitions were international group exhibitions of contemporary art, which in terms of content and theme correspond to the priorities defined by Austria’s international cultural policy.

In the fields of new media and/or digital media, Austria has succeeded in attracting attention in cooperation with both major Austrian actors, such as Ars Electronica, and with individual artists – who have performed at festivals, solo or in groups.

The objective pursued by Austrian International Cultural Policy in the field of music is to present Austria, the country of music, in all its facets in an innovative and dynamic manner. In this regard, the network of Austrian representations abroad supports musical performances that cover a very wide range, from classical music to jazz, world music and pop to new music and experimental approaches (electronic music, sound installations). Support was provided in particular to those musicians who had been selected for participation in the highly successful programme for young Austrian soloists and ensembles “The New Austrian Sound of Music” (NASOM). Initiated in 2002, NASOM celebrated its 15th anniversary in 2017. For the current 2018/2019 biennium edition of NASOM, a total of 25 young acts were selected by a jury of experts last year.

In the field of literature, a large number of readings were held involving renowned as well as emerging Austrian writers. The second edition of the literature promotion programme “schreibART AUSTRIA”, launched in 2016, has become well established worldwide. The authors selected for the “schreibART” programme I and II took part in readings and were also invited to events at universities and other venues as well as to selected book fairs. First translations of some of the works were made and discussed in literary symposia, and workshops for literary translations were organised to promote linguistic understanding. Some Cultural Fora were able to establish important media partnerships for literature projects. In cooperation with the Institute for Literature and Intercultural Translation at the University of Roma Tre, the Cultural Forum Rome succeeded in translating all texts from the second edition of “schreibART AUSTRIA” and having them published by the Artemide publishing house.

In cooperation with Gerhard Gonsa and the Austrian State Archives, the “Handbuch des k.k./k.u.k. Konsulardienstes” (the vade mecum of the royal and imperial consular service) from the estate of Rudolf Agstner was published. This compendium is the first book ever to provide a detailed description of the history of the approximately 725 consulates maintained worldwide between 1718 and 1918 by the Habsburg Hereditary Lands, from 1804 onwards as the Austrian Empire and from 1867 as the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Rudolf Agstner was a historian and diplomat and published a large number of books on Austrian diplomatic history, which are invaluable reference works on Austrian foreign policy.
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In the field of **theatre**, the year saw numerous performances by Austrian playwrights, with scenic readings by Austrian writers, which were also very well-received. Austrian theatre companies took part in international theatre festivals. As part of the Cultural Year Austria-Albania, the play “Die Präsidentinnen” (The First Ladies) by Werner Schwab, directed by Sabine Mitterecker, was performed in cooperation with the experimental theatre “Kujtim Spahivogli” in Tirana.

In recent years, the contemporary Austrian **dance scene** has been able to gain a strong foothold at European level, building on a network set up with the Federal Chancellery and the Tanzquartier Wien (TQW). In cooperation with TQW, support is provided under the programme “Dance On Tour Austria” to ensembles in neighbouring countries as well as in Eastern and South East Europe.

In the context of **academic lectures** delivered abroad, the approximately 250 events held to commemorate the years 1848-1918-1938-1948-1958-1968-2018 were of particular note. At the Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań, a scientific conference was organised in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Chair of Austrian Literature and Culture. The German Studies Association in the USA, which met in Pittsburgh this year, dealt with the commemorative years 1918-38-45, inter alia in a panel discussion. In Tehran, an interdisciplinary symposium was organised to commemorate the first ascent of Damavand 175 years ago. In East Asia, a series of ambitious events were organised on the topics of law and religion. Numerous events were organised at universities to celebrate 100 years of women’s suffrage, a topic prompting enthusiastic debate.

In the **film** sector, support was provided to facilitate the participation of Austrian films in European and international film festivals as well as to enable the participation of a large number of films in festivals dealing with human rights-related topics. Furthermore, a series of Austrian film weeks or film days were initiated by Austrian embassies, consulates-general and cultural fora. As interest has remained high since it was launched in 2011, cooperation with Ars Electronica Linz was continued in the field of animation film. So far, events have been held in 30 countries. Under the cooperation set up in 2013 with the Academy of Austrian Film, selected short films have been presented abroad as “Österreichische Kurzfilmschau” (Austrian short film series) by the MFA’s international cultural network. To date, the Österreichische Kurzfilmschau has been shown in 32 countries. This enabled placing a focus on Austria at numerous events and providing a platform especially for young filmmakers. The involvement of Austrian lecturers abroad in the Österreichische Kurzfilmschau programme meant that the short films were shown to a wider audience in the school and university sectors where they met with an excellent response. Furthermore, a cooperation was set up in 2014 with the international film festival “TRICKY WOMEN” in Vienna – the only film festival worldwide dedicated exclusively to animation films produced by women. Under this collaboration, selected animation films by female Austrian filmmakers were presented in 22 countries. The programme offers the opportunity to contribute to an improved gender balance and/or to taking dedicated steps into this direction also in the area of film.
4.3. Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue

Set up in 2007, the Task Force “Dialogue of Cultures” at the MFA acts as a catalyst and contact point for the implementation of dialogue initiatives. The Task Force can rely on an international network of contacts and – as necessary – serves as an interface between Austrian government institutions, churches and religious communities, NGOs, institutions as well as representatives from the fields of science, culture, media and business. The Task Force’s constantly growing network offers a wide range of opportunities for knowledge building and exchange of views.

The Task Force furthermore supports the Austrian representation authorities in designing and implementing dialogue projects. The hallmark of these dialogue initiatives is the promotion of intercultural understanding at national and international level. At the multilateral level, the Task Force contributes pro-actively to relevant dialogue within the framework of the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the EU and in cooperation with the Vienna-based International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID).

The dialogue of cultures and worldviews is not an EU competence. The EU Global Strategy, which calls for the development of an integrated approach to crises and conflicts, for making use of all policy areas in order to manage the security challenges and for ensuring greater attention to the relationship between EU internal policies and external relations, creates the need for coordination and cooperation in this thematic area. The Task Force on Dialogue of Cultures therefore established the “Vienna Group” to initiate an exchange of information within the EU on national structures, priorities and activities. The informal coordination was complemented by briefings from the European Commission, the European Parliament, FRA, ODIHR and KAICIID.

With a view to also strengthening transatlantic coordination, Austria participated in the “Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Diplomacy” (TPNRD), which addresses the religious dimension in external relations. TPNRD is a joint initiative launched by the EEAS and the US State Department.

The Intercultural Achievement Award (IAA), initiated by the MFA and presented for the fifth time on 6 September, has developed into a key project that highlights the successful use of dialogue in civil society initiatives in the context of development work, the media and integration. Austria’s expertise in the field of dialogue, also in the context of its position as official seat and headquarters of international organisations and as a conference location, was summarised in a publication on dialogue that will be available in 2019.

4.4. International Cultural Policy Activities in the Context of the European Union

Since the Joint Communication from the EEAS and the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council “Towards an EU Strategy for international cultural relations” was launched in summer 2016, consultations have taken place on both
the political and the technical level in order to examine this strategy and to take the first steps towards its implementation in third countries.

At the institutional level, a first draft for Council conclusions was prepared during the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union under which the EU Member States provide the EU institutions (European Commission and EEAS) with a framework for developing joint cultural projects with third countries. In the context of its implementation, the network of European National Institutes of Culture (EUNIC) is to play a key role. With a view to preparing the related negotiations, a meeting of high-level representatives from the Member States’ foreign and culture ministries was convened in Linz in September in cooperation with Ars Electronica.

Regardless of this future policy orientation, the European Commission and the EEAS, together with EUNIC, have already implemented pilot projects in 14 third countries in order to gain initial experience with joint cultural initiatives, which are to be incorporated into future joint strategies as best practice examples. A detailed report including recommendations was presented in the summer and endorsed by the EUNIC General Assembly and the EU institutions.

As a co-founder of EUNIC in 2006 and as a member of the Executive Board since 2017, which pursues an international cultural policy oriented towards strengthening the European project, Austria is committed to ensuring close cooperation between EU delegations, EUNIC and its own cultural fora or embassies in third countries. Reflecting this European dimension, a documentary film about EUNIC was produced as an Austrian Presidency project. Under the heading of “UNIQUE EUNIC: EU Cultural Relations – Trust & Creativity across continents”, this film will be made available as of 2019 to the entire EUNIC network as a two-minute trailer, as a ten- and as a thirty-minute version.

EUNIC currently comprises 36 European organisations responsible for cultural relations. Worldwide, more than 100 EUNIC clusters have already been formed in over 80 countries as cooperation networks of local EU cultural institutions, in which Austria – if it has a local diplomatic presence – is represented by the Cultural Forum or the embassy and often assumes a leadership function.

Of the 30 Austrian Cultural Fora, 14 are active in the EU, this also holds true for 38 of the 65 Austria Libraries and seven of the ten Austria Institutes worldwide. Within the European Union, they work pro-actively towards promoting cultural exchange, European multilingualism, and especially the German language as it is spoken and written in Austria. They also foster career opportunities of Austrian artists on the European arts and culture market, which is of particular importance to them.

4.5. Bilateral Agreements in the Fields of Culture and Science

Austria has concluded cultural agreements with 32 states, which generally cover not only the field of culture but also education and science, and in some cases also include the fields of sports, youth and women. These agreements regulate cooperation in areas such as language teaching and educational activities, the granting of scholarships, the exchange of lecturers, the promotion of networking among researchers as well as
exchange in the fields of art and culture, and generally serve to promote cooperation on all topics covered by the respective agreement. The most recent cultural agreement was signed with Ukraine, and those with Brazil, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and India are in the planning stage.

Cultural agreements generally provide for the establishment of a joint commission formed by members of both countries in order to promote cooperation. To this end, cultural work programmes are drawn up and adopted. The latest such programmes were concluded with China and Tunisia.

Austria has concluded 19 agreements on scientific-technical cooperation (S&T cooperation agreements), which seek to facilitate the exchange of information on structures and priorities in the scientific field and to promote the mobility of scientists in the context of joint research projects with partners in the respective contracting state. Negotiations on the conclusion of an S&T cooperation agreement due to be signed in 2019 were concluded with Brazil. In 2017, new work programmes based on these agreements were adopted with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, India, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

4.6. Science, Education and Language

Alongside art and dialogue, science has also evolved into an essential element of international cultural relations. At the interface between science and foreign policy, the focus is first of all placed on scientific cooperation, i.e. to promote Austrian innovative scientific achievements and to facilitate international networking, to support partnerships of scientists and scientific institutions and thus to make Austrian scientific achievements and the international character of universities and research institutions visible and to promote them. Regardless of the respective political situation, scientific cooperation creates a positive agenda for cooperation, keeps communication channels open, deepens mutual understanding and builds trust. Examples of Austrian Science Diplomacy include Austria’s long-standing involvement in the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), as well as the bilateral dialogues with Iran, Indonesia and China, the work of the Austro-Russian Commission of Historians and the Permanent Conference of Austrian and Czech Historians.

In order to cope with the great challenges of our time such as climate change, energy issues and digitalisation – and in particular the implementation of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – science/technology and diplomacy are in high demand. Austria attaches major importance to the strategic further development of Science Diplomacy in promoting the integration of science into political decision-making processes and translating scientific results into policies. In this spirit, Austria became a member of the growing international network of Foreign Ministry Science and Technology Advisers (FMSTAN), established in 2016 to strengthen this dialogue between science and politics within the framework of INGSA, the International Network for Government Science Advice.
Against this background, the Offices of Science and Technology Austria (OSTA) in Washington D.C. and Beijing promote Austria as a technology location and are the prime contact for maintaining and expanding relations between Austria and the USA, Canada and China in the field of research and technology development. The OSTAs were designed as strategic interfaces and hubs for the exchange of information in the fields of science, research, tertiary education and technology policy. They cooperate closely with Austrian ministries and research institutions as well as with their associated research, science and technology organisations, such as the Austrian Institute of Technology (AIT), the Österreichische Forschungsförderungsgesellschaft (FFG, Austrian Research Promotion Agency), the Österreichischer Wissenschaftsfonds, (FWF, Austrian Science Fund), the Österreichischer Austauschdienst, (OeAD, Austrian Agency for International Mobility and Cooperation in Education, Science and Research) and the international trade offices (AußenwirtschaftsCentres) of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber.

The Österreich Institut GmbH (Austria Institute Ltd.) was founded in 1997 to offer and organise German language courses, to support and promote German language instruction abroad and to cooperate with national and international organisations. Their mandate covers the cultivation of international cultural relations via the German language. It thus promotes the study and cultivation of the German language as it is written and spoken in Austria and as a means to share a modern, contemporary image of Austria. Based in Vienna, the organisation maintains Austria Institutes in Belgrade, Wroclaw, Brno, Budapest, Cracow, Bratislava, Rome, Warsaw, Sarajevo and Moscow.

Austria Professorships and Centres of Austrian Studies have been established at universities in the USA, Canada, Europe and Israel. These facilities strive to initiate, deepen and coordinate the study of topics specifically related to Austria and Europe in the respective host country’s academic life and to stimulate academic research in this subject area as well as encourage publication of the relevant findings. Regular collaboration with embassies, consulates-general and Cultural Fora contributes significantly towards enabling university chairs and centres for Austrian studies to fulfil their tasks.

The OeAD GmbH (Austrian Agency for International Mobility and Cooperation in Education, Science and Research) provides services to scholarship and grant holders and administers the various mobility programmes such as Erasmus+, bilateral scholarship programmes, Austrian Development Cooperation programmes as well as scientific and technical cooperation programmes. In implementing these tasks, OeAD GmbH acts as partner of the MFA and is responsible for coordinating and providing information on study and research opportunities and programmes in Austria on behalf of the Austrian representation authorities and international representations in Austria. Important cooperation partners for the representation authorities are the OeAD cooperation offices in Lviv (Ukraine), Shanghai (China) and Baku (Azerbaijan), which collaborate with local institutions in the fields of science, education and culture. They take care of mobility, educational exchange and university marketing, provide scholarship advisory services, promote participation in summer schools and initiate exchange programmes. These offices furthermore seek to facilitate and promote cooperation with Austrian and local scientists. In addition, the OeAD cooperation offices in Shanghai and Baku are
also licensed examination centres for the Austrian German Language Diploma (Österreichisches Sprachdiplom Deutsch, ÖSD).

Currently, there are eight Austrian Schools abroad (Österreichische Auslandsschulen): two in Budapest (Hungary) and one each in Prague (Czech Republic), Istanbul (Turkey), Guatemala City (Guatemala), Shkodra (Albania), Querétaro (Mexico) and Liechtenstein. Lessons at these schools are based on the Austrian curriculum in combination with relevant curricular adaptations to the respective host country.

The project-related work by the “Beauftragte für Bildungskooperation des BMBWF” (educational coordination officers at the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research) contributes to supporting relevant reforms in Eastern and South East Europe.

4.7. Austria Libraries

Over the past 30 years, the Austria Libraries (Österreich-Bibliotheken) abroad have evolved into well-established platforms of inter-cultural dialogue. They are primarily located in Central, Eastern and South East Europe, but also in the Black Sea region, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Set up since 1989, they have made a very special contribution to overcoming the intellectual and mentality-related division of Europe into East and West.

Institutionally linked to universities and national libraries, the Austria Libraries are popular among students and teaching staff with a scientific focus and are also used by interested members of the public. Alongside their role as Austria’s science satellites abroad, they have developed into active information and cultural centres that organise cultural and scientific events in cooperation with the Austrian Cultural Fora and embassies. Being an indispensable and integral element of Austria’s international cultural policy, they provide important and sustainable impetus to fostering and sharing Austrian culture and philosophy in all its diversity abroad, also reaching beyond the Central European scope.

The network of Austria Libraries abroad currently comprises 65 libraries in 28 countries. Besides providing traditional classical library services, the Austria libraries organise some 800 events that attract more than 85,000 visitors every year. Around 100,000 individuals use the Austria Libraries, whose holdings have grown to some 445,000 books and about 16,800 audio and video media. Almost all Austria Libraries are equipped with WLAN.

Accessible via the Austria Libraries’ web portal (www.oesterreich-bibliotheken.at), the database of Austrian literature already lists more than 23,116 foreign language translations of Austrian literature (international austriaca), not including the external databases in Japan, Russia and Italy. The translations produced in the context of Austria Libraries frequently win translation awards sponsored by the Federal Chancellery as well as prizes in their respective host countries.

The Austria Libraries at the Departments of German Studies abroad are often managed by lecturers from the Österreichischer Austauschdienst (OeAD Austrian Agency for International Mobility and Cooperation in Education, Science and Research), who are
highly valued by the heads of Austria Libraries as competent networkers in matters relating to Austrian cultural, educational and scientific activities. Some facilities that house Austria Libraries also award the Austrian German Language Diploma (ÖSD) and conduct the relevant preparation courses and exams.

In long-standing cooperation with the “Culture and Language” programme launched by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, Austria Days are organised at selected locations abroad. These events, which are held in close cooperation with local institutions, focus on topics specifically related to Austria. The “Culture and Language” Department and the local cooperation partners are jointly responsible for programme design and organisation. These short seminars also serve to provide in-service training opportunities for German teachers abroad.

Austria Libraries organise cultural events, teach languages and contribute towards facilitating the diverse cultural, academic and scientific relations in both the bilateral and the multilateral context. The MFA attaches great importance to promoting networking among Austria Libraries, which is fostered by regular meetings.

The publication series “Transkulturelle Forschungen an den Österreich-Bibliotheken im Ausland” (transcultural research at the Austria Libraries abroad) provides an important publication platform for academic staff at the Austrian Libraries who work on common thematic research projects. Initial research work launched and published in this context include “Medielle Selbstreferenzen. Das Netzwerk der Presse in der Habsburgermonarchie und ihren Nachfolgestaaten 1855-1925” (media self-references. the network of the press in the Habsburg Monarchy and its successor states 1855-1925), “Geschlecht und Gedächtnis. Österreichische Autorinnen prüfen Geschichtsmythen” (gender and memory. female Austrian authors examine historical myths) and “Das Jahr 1918 in der deutschsprachigen Presse des Habsburgerreichs” (the year 1918 in the German-language press of the Habsburg Empire).

4.8. Multilateral Scientific and Technical Cooperation

Austria has continued to place a special focus on multilateral scientific and technological cooperation both inside and outside of Europe in order to strengthen its position and consolidate its role as a location for high-tech industry and research. Austria thus also takes part in programmes launched by the European Space Agency (ESA) in Paris, the European Organisation for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites (EUMETSAT) in Darmstadt and, above all, the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva. Currently, more than 100 Austrian scientists work in association with the CERN programme. Led by the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research and the Austrian Mission in Geneva, Austria participates in the meetings of the CERN Council, the CERN Finance Committee and the Tripartite Employment Conditions Forum (TREF), which acts as a consultative forum for personnel matters related to management, staff and member states. Current topics include the question of enlargement and broader-based funding.
New cooperation possibilities were explored with the **International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in Laxenburg**. Furthermore, Austria’s foreign policy interests are also represented through its involvement in the European Molecular Biology Conference (**EMBC**) in Heidelberg, the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (**ECMWF**) in Reading (United Kingdom) as well as the European Space Policy Institute (**ESPI**) in Vienna.

### 4.9. International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and Issues related to the National Socialist Past

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), an intergovernmental institution with a Permanent Secretariat in Berlin, was set up in 1998 on Sweden’s initiative as the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF). It was established with the purpose of becoming an international network promoting Holocaust education, research and remembrance at both national and international level. In accomplishing its tasks, it is able to draw on the support of renowned international experts from science and academia. This year’s Italian Chair focused on combating the growing number of anti-Semitic manifestations in Europe and also launched the implementation of the new IHRA strategy, adopted in 2017. By adopting an interdisciplinary focus, the expertise available within the IHRA is to be bundled to strengthen, advance and promote the Alliance’s central concern, “A world that remembers the Holocaust. A world without genocide” on a broad basis.

The IHRA regularly responds to current developments and challenges, as is reflected in the establishment of its committee on Roma, which is chaired by Austria. Influential diplomacy used by the 31 Member States is playing an increasingly important role in countering revisionism. Admitted in 2001, Austria held the ITF Chair in the commemorative year 2008 and has since been one of the central players within the Alliance. The Austrian delegation is co-led by the MFA and the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism. Austrian government representatives as well as experts from the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance and the organisation “erinnern.at” participate in the permanent working groups. Projects launched by Austria in the fields of Holocaust education, awareness-raising and research are highly regarded within the IHRA. In this context, Austria was commended on the Council declaration on the fight against antisemitism and the development of a common security approach to better protect Jewish communities and institutions in Europe, adopted during its Presidency of the Council of the European Union by the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 6 December. This declaration inter alia endorses the working definition of antisemitism, which was adopted by the IHRA plenary in Bucharest in 2016 and has since then been widely used and applied.
4.10. The Future Fund of the Republic of Austria

The Future Fund of the Republic of Austria was set up at the end of 2005 as a diminishing fund assuming the residual funds of the Fund for Reconciliation, Peace and Cooperation (Reconciliation Fund) that had been established in 2000 and was closed on 31 December 2005. The Fund’s mandate covers the promotion of projects, academic work and initiatives, which serve remembrance of the victims of the Nazi regime, are a reminder of the threat posed by totalitarian systems, dictatorships and tyranny, serve international cooperation and contribute towards the promotion of respect of human rights and mutual tolerance as well as towards strengthening European awareness.

Since its establishment, the Future Fund has supported around 2,300 projects, almost exhausting its original endowment. An amendment to the Future Fund Act (Federal Law Gazette I No. 141/2017), adopted unanimously by the parliament and the Federal Council on 20 September and on 5 October 2017 respectively, ensured the continuation of the Fund’s activities for another five years.

The MFA provides technical and administrative support to the Future Fund. Furthermore, the MFA and its respective representation authorities cooperate closely on a number of international projects supported by the Fund. Such projects include, for instance the redesign of the exhibition at the Austrian memorial site in the former concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau and the Intercultural Achievement Award (IAA). In addition, the Zukunftsfonds published “The Art of Encounter. Practices of Dialogue in Austrian International Relations”, in both German and English. In connection with Austria’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union, support was provided to the 14th Conference of European Regions and Cities “Europe 1918-2018-2118” The Force of the Regions – Subsidiarity & Europe. Furthermore, support was provided to exhibitions and events, organised at a number of representation authorities (including in London).

Cooperation also included the education and training courses for master’s degree students from Israel, Jordan and Palestine, organised by the Diplomatic Academy. The “Werkstattgespräche” (workshop talks), organised in cooperation with the Diplomatic Academy to present selected projects supported by the Future Fund were continued. On April 11, for instance, two projects on the painter Robert Lettner (born in 1943 in the Gurs deportation camp) and on the “Austrian Boy”, footballer and contemporary witness Hans Menasse were presented in the presence of the French ambassador. The thematic field of “National Socialism”, was addressed in the context of dedicated events on 3 May on “Österreichs Staatsanwälte und die unbestraften NS-Verbrecher” (Austria’s public prosecutors and the unpunished Nazi criminals) as well as on 23 October, which marked the presentation of the publication “Gestapo-Leitstelle Wien 1938-1945” (Gestapo Headquarters Vienna 1938-1945). In the latest of the “workshop talks”, held on 15 November, the English translation of the publication “From St. Germain to Lisbon. Austria’s long Road to United Europe 1919-2009” by Michael Gehler was presented.
5. Integration

5.1. Introduction

The integration of people with a migration background is a long-term process that takes time and should facilitate and promote participation in a way that is as equitable as possible in the central areas of social life, such as pre-school facilities, school education, vocational training, employment and housing, in voluntary work, in politics and in the various protection and welfare systems in Austria, recognising and embracing Austria’s fundamental values.

Despite the decline in the number of asylum applications over the last two years, Austrian integration work continues to be confronted with major tasks due to the disproportionate levels of admission and recognition of persons entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection. In order to prevent overburdening domestic systems and to enable sustainable integration, effective integration structures have been established under the Integration Act. As an essential basis for a swift and successful integration process, necessary initial integration measures, i.e. German language courses as well as value and orientation courses were enshrined in the law and provided nationwide by the Austrian Integration Fund (Österreichischer Integrationsfonds, ÖIF).

Alongside these measures aimed at promoting integration launched by the government, it is necessary that all those who have immigrated also contribute, participate and assume co-responsibility in accordance with the principle of “promote and demand”, by actively working towards integrating themselves into Austrian society and progressing in society.

Thus, integration is a reciprocal process, under which there can be no doubt that the adaptive performance of those individuals who are allowed to stay, certainly has to be greater. It is clear that the basic values governing Austrian society are not negotiable and must in all events be respected, observed and upheld. This contributes towards dismantling prejudices among the majority population. Rarely before have so many refugees come to Austria from regions that can neither geographically nor historically be considered neighbouring regions. Austria continues to offer the whole range of opportunities for integration while at the same time calling on those who have come here to make active use of the opportunities offered.

5.2. Objectives and Thematic Priorities

With the entry into force of the Integration Act in mid-2017, effective integration structures were for the first time ever legally enshrined in Austria. The law created a consistent and binding system for German language and values courses by means of a mandatory integration declaration, a standardised nationwide integration test, higher quality standards, sanctions and better controls. Likewise, increased transparency and improved data exchange through the introduction of integration monitoring and a research coordination office also contribute to gaining better insight and enabling comprehensive scientific findings.
Nationwide integration monitoring enables the compilation of a multitude of different data relating to asylum and residence, school education and adult education, apprenticeship training, social benefits, labour market, German courses, value and orientation courses and science. This compilation of integration-relevant governmental data and statistics in Austria was published in the Integration Report 2018.

As one of the most important keys to successful integration, the acquisition of German language skills is an essential prerequisite for participation in society and the labour market. With the introduction of an integrated language support programme for persons entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection under the Integration Act, 20,000 places in German language courses up to language level A1 were made available within the MFA’s scope of responsibility. In all German language courses, fundamental knowledge of Austrian values and social standards as well as norms governing co-existence in Austria are a mandatory component to enable early sharing and communication of values.

However, integration means more than just learning the German language. Successful integration also includes emotional affinity with the host country, an understanding of life in Austria as well as acceptance of and identification with Austrian and European values, which apply equally to all people living in Austria. Those individuals who reside legally and permanently in Austria are required to undertake an active effort towards integrating into society, towards progressing and advancing as well as to upholding Austrian values as enshrined in the Austrian constitution. Mandatory participation in the value and orientation courses as required under the Integration Act has enabled the sharing of central basic values for a harmonious coexistence as well as useful knowledge about important areas of everyday life with over 19,000 participants.

Sharing Austrian and European fundamental values contributes towards promoting equal opportunities and especially towards strengthening gender equality and equal rights for women. Women play a key role in all integration processes; they are considered multipliers, usually act as driving forces for the entire family when it comes to education and assume a very important role as mediators in sharing and passing on values. However, certain cultural values and patriarchal structures of countries of origin additionally impede the participation of women in the host society and are responsible for women’s increased vulnerability towards violence from male family members.

Since the legal obligation to participate in courses came into force, the share of female participants in value and orientation courses has doubled. Today, women make up about 45 percent of course participants, compared to 22 percent before the law came into force. In order to further support the integration of women in Austria, integration work has placed a special emphasis on measures aimed at promoting women. To this end, special in-depth courses as well as customised counselling formats directed especially at women and men were established. In these courses and counselling formats, topics such as equal rights, self-determination and the rule of law are dealt with, information on educational and career opportunities is provided, and participants are informed of contact points for victims of violence or female genital mutilation (FGM).
Information campaigns and expert discussions on the topic of violence in the context of migration were organised and contributed towards increased awareness-raising, prevention and education. The MFA remains committed to the fight against culturally motivated violence against women, which continues to be a central area of action. In this spirit, an additional special call for funding projects aimed at establishing measures against violence against women in the context of integration and against female genital mutilation (FGM), was launched in December.

The MFA also provides funding to a wide range of sustainable and innovative integration projects in the context of national promotion of integration and also allocates EU funding from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. In terms of content and substance, the main focus of the 140 integration projects funded from both national and EU sources was on “language/acquisition of German language skills” and “education/employment”.

5.3. Integration Bodies

Advisory Board on Integration

The Advisory Board on Integration, which is enshrined in Articles 19 and 20 of the Integration Act, is composed of representatives of the Federal Government, the federal provinces, social partners, stakeholders and NGOs. It aims to foster interdisciplinary exchange and coordination across the respective areas, thus taking account of the fact that integration is a cross-cutting theme that affects many different public actors. As set out in the law, the advisory board met twice this year – on 24 May and 29 November. The top items on the agenda were women and integration in schools, integration of persons entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection in the labour market, and political Islam in Austria.

The integration measures and projects that the members of the Integration Advisory Board are responsible for are included in the annual Integration Report and saved in the online database “Integration Projects in Austria” and can be accessed at: www.bmeia.gv.at/integration/datenbank-integrationsprojekte/.

Expert Council for Integration

The independent Expert Council for Integration is composed of experts from academia and practice. The Expert Council is legally enshrined in the Integration Act, Articles 17 and 18. The Council is the competence centre for integration issues and advises on questions and challenges related to the integration process. One of the Expert Council’s main tasks is the preparation of the annual integration report. The current issue places a special focus on women in the integration process and on the thematic area related to a sense of belonging and positive social coexistence.
6. The Austrian Foreign Service

6.1. Introduction


The principles of mobility (alternating domestic and foreign postings) and rotation (no protection against transfer) apply to staff working in the Foreign Service. The MFA’s staff of all-rounders, characterised by these two hallmarks, as well as state-of-the-art information and communication technologies (IT) ensure that the Foreign Service’s comprehensive foreign policy mandate is fulfilled and enable the provision of a wide range of services to Austrian citizens worldwide.

An efficient network of embassies and consulates is a sine qua non for safeguarding and promoting Austrian interests around the world. With a view to achieving the highest possible level of effectiveness and synergies or to defining new foreign policy priorities, the network of representations is continuously adapted. Thus, the Permanent Representation of Austria to the OECD in Paris was, for instance, transferred to the MFA’s scope. In April, the consulate-general in Chengdu was reopened. The planned closure of the representation in Tallinn was cancelled.

6.2. Working at the MFA

For staff working at the MFA, the system of rotation means regular transfers between headquarters in Vienna and the representations abroad. Being an essential part of professional life, this system not only requires a high level of flexibility on the part of the individual employees and their families but also comprehensive organisational and logistical planning. Every year, several hundred MFA staff are transferred between headquarters and abroad and/or to new positions. At the end of 2018, the MFA employed a total of 1,125 staff, of whom 588 (52.3 %) worked at headquarters and 537 (47.7 %) abroad.
Staffing levels at the MFA as of 31 Dec. 2018 by career scheme and gender
(excl. maternity leave, leave of absence and assignments)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career scheme</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Share of women in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Abroad</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomatic staff</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consular and administrative staff</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical, clerical and support staff</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT specialists</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>276</strong></td>
<td><strong>293</strong></td>
<td><strong>312</strong></td>
<td><strong>244</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>569</strong></td>
<td><strong>556</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As of 31 December 2018, Austrian representation authorities employed a further total of 844 local employees who were employed in accordance with the labour laws of the respective host country. Of the 844 local employees, 541 (64.1 %) were female and 303 (35.9 %) male.

As of 31 December 2018, the MFA employed 45 persons with disabilities.

In the diplomatic service, from which the largest number of senior functions are recruited, the share of female staff reached 41.5 %.

The total number of staff in the Foreign Service has been declining for many years. Furthermore, MFA staff also work in the European External Action Service (EEAS), in international organisations or in international functions in other ministries.

Following a reform of the statutory selection procedure for the Foreign Service ("Préalable") in 2016, this procedure is now being conducted in cooperation with the HR department of the Austrian Federal Armed Forces and other experts, based on a
Working at the MFA

comprehensive set of updated new methods that also enable assessment of the candidate’s personal suitability. This rigorous selection of candidates is to ensure that Austrian diplomacy will continue to live up to the highest quality standards in the future. Students and recent university graduates are offered internships of up to 12 months to support MFA staff. In 2018, a total of 251 young people made use of this opportunity and completed internships in Austria and abroad.

Furthermore, 31 students, high school graduates and university graduates completed a one-month internship (trial internship) to gain insights and some first-hand experience of the MFA’s tasks and working methods. In order to support the MFA’s team during the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, a total of 39 “EU Poolists” were taken on under a special contract for a limited period of time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internships</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abroad</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;EU Poolist&quot;</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term internships</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since 2009, the MFA has trained apprentices as administrative assistants. At the end of 2018, a total of 18 young people were participating in such an apprenticeship programme. Two further apprentices were undergoing training as IT specialists. All in all, a total of 20 apprentices were thus undergoing training at the MFA. Those apprentices who successfully complete their final apprenticeship examination will be invited to an internal admissions procedure at the BMEIA.

In 2018, the actual average retirement age of public officials at the MFA was 64.22 years, which is significantly above the Austrian average.
6.3. The Foreign Ministry’s Budget

The budget estimate for the MFA was set at 502.6 million euros, with some 75.4 million euros budgeted for head office expenses, 164.2 million euros for operating the Austrian representation authorities, 5.5 million euros for cultural projects, 2.3 million euros for international conferences, 96.6 million euros for contributions to international organisations, 107.5 million euros for the Austrian Development Agency GmbH and the Foreign Disaster Relief Fund, as well as 51.1 million euros for funding integration activities.

Budget 2008–2018 in million euros

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>MFA budget</th>
<th>Share of MFA budget in federal budget in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>388.087</td>
<td>0.56 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>435.675</td>
<td>0.56 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>440.902</td>
<td>0.62 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>427.100</td>
<td>0.61 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>409.361</td>
<td>0.56 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>402.654</td>
<td>0.54 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>418.777</td>
<td>0.55 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>409.141</td>
<td>0.55 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>427.993</td>
<td>0.56 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>551.914</td>
<td>0.71 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>502.628</td>
<td>0.64 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the budget, a total of EUR 7.6 million was earmarked for activities in the context of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2018.

To cover the higher payments to international organisations due to the US dollar exchange rate, 15 million euros were made available from the Federal Ministry of Finance.

6.4. Global Infrastructure and Information Technology

Infrastructure: The MFA’s real estate portfolio includes some 220 properties and more than 300 premises, used as offices for embassies, consulates-general, Cultural Fora and representations at international organisations as well as for residential purposes. Just over half of these objects are owned by the Republic of Austria and the rest is either rented or leased. Real estate management covers all related management aspects, including questions of principle of housing and accommodation, real estate acquisition and sale, adaptations and rehabilitations as well as individual new construction projects.

The MFA’s facility management strategy focuses on the principles of functionality, safety and economic efficiency. Great importance is attached to energy efficiency, the use of renewable energy and ecological aspects, which holds particularly true for rehabilitation and construction projects as well as for new buildings. These principles were applied, for instance, to the construction of the new embassy building in Bangkok, which was completed in 2017 and for which the MFA was presented with the Austrian Green Planet Building Award 2018. The MFA strives to constantly optimise its real estate portfolio and to reduce costs. This means that properties that are no longer needed, are unprofitable or do not meet the requirements are disposed of. Real estate controlling and ongoing cost monitoring build on a digital database covering all the MFA’s properties.

With a view to tapping into synergy effects and to realising better utilisation rates for the existing space, the MFA undertakes ongoing efforts towards implementing joint accommodation and sharing premises both with other Austrian entities and with rep-
The Austrian Foreign Service

representations of other European states and the EEAS. In this spirit, there are currently five active co-locations with other states. In 58 locations worldwide a total of 107 co-users – such as other ministries, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and the Austria Institutes – are being accommodated.

**Information technology (IT):** As the main topic on the IT Department’s agenda, the NORA project (re-equipment and reorganisation of the computer centre at the Foreign Ministry), was launched at the beginning of the year and completed in autumn. The project was set up with a view to replacing the entire server and storage hardware from 2011 with the new innovative enterprise cloud and to also contribute to reducing costs. All data, virtual servers and workstations are now stored on a platform operated by the MFA. In connection with the implementation of the NORA project, a number of other improvements were also implemented, including the updating of office applications, single sign-on or a substantially improved video performance.

Every day some **50,000 emails** are processed in this data centre and a total **data volume of four terabytes (TB)** is generated. Added to this, bi-directional communication with the representation authorities generates **90 gigabytes (GB)** of data on a daily basis in the form of intranet queries, emails, remote logins and IP telephone.

The tailor-made CRM solution for the **worldwide contact data management** (CDM, Kontaktadatenverwaltung KDV) of **Austrians living abroad and Austrians travelling abroad** was further developed in cooperation with the consular section to also be used for additional applications. On the one hand, this application can be used for daily contact data management at the representation authorities, on the other hand it provides a professional **tool for structured, efficient use in the event of a crisis or disaster**, i.e. **the crisis database – KDV-Z1**. This tool enables quick input of information received via a call centre, assessment of the case data and assignment to single case management. Furthermore, it is now possible to continuously document the course of a crisis, analyse it and provide strategic monitoring.

In order to enable the digital handling of work processes related to citizens’ concerns and visa applications, a **digitalisation offensive** was launched. The following concrete steps have already been implemented: online application form for visas (excl. biometric data) and link to the appointment reservation system, consistent digital process support using application tracking, digital supporting documents and feedback function. However, as the general conditions are based on the current legal framework, full and exclusively electronic processing is not yet feasible.

**Digital workplaces**, making information and services available at any time, are already in use. Since mobility has become an increasingly essential factor, users may work independently of the accessing platform and regardless of their location. Working **anywhere, anytime, any device** has thus already been implemented at the MFA. The Unified Communication Tool used by the MFA enables, for instance, direct informal communication within the MFA and with external parties via chat, telephony, video and document sharing.
A chatbot (communication with a computer-based system) used to handle specific inquiries enables a **7 × 24-hour service**, enabling further improvement in the consular service.

### 6.5. Austrian Missions Abroad and Honorary Consulates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diplomatic and Other Missions of the MFA</th>
<th>As of 31 Dec. 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilateral embassies</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Representations at International Organisations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulates-General</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Cultural Fora</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other representations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>99</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Boasting a global presence of 99 representation authorities, the MFA may also draw on the 12 foreign offices of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), the Austrian Development Cooperation Agency (ADC).

In addition, the Austrian Foreign Service receives valuable support from some 340 honorary consulates worldwide. The honorary functionaries are eminent figures with close ties to Austria who work on an honorary basis for Austria, making available the necessary infrastructure for the provision of consular services from their own resources. Thanks to their commitment and dedication, they extend the network of Austria’s international consular presence and contribute to the promotion of economic and cultural relations between Austria and the respective host country.
The Austrian Foreign Service

In 2018, eight new honorary consulates were opened and five honorary consulates that had been temporarily closed were reopened:

a) Newly opened honorary consular offices:
   − Antwerp, Belgium
   − Brazzaville, Congo
   − Cagliari, Italy/Sardinia
   − Muscat, Oman
   − Mbabane, Eswatini
   − Tampa, USA
   − Vlora, Albania
   − Yaoundé, Cameroon

(b) Reopenings
   − Edinburgh, Scotland (UK)
   − Accra, Ghana
   − Honolulu, Hawaii (USA)
   − La Paz, Bolivia
   − Rotterdam, Netherlands

Three honorary consulates (Skelleftea, Barranquilla, Oslo) were permanently closed.
Excursus: The Diplomatic Academy of Vienna

Established in 1754 during the reign of Empress Maria Theresa as the Oriental Academy, the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna (DA) is the oldest school of its kind. After having been shut down during the Second World War, it was re-established in 1964 under its current name as a postgraduate training institution. Having until then been run and funded by the Austrian federal administration, it was granted the status of independent public postgraduate training institution in 1996.

In the academic year 2018/19, a total of 206 students from 44 countries and all continents studied at the DA and were enrolled in the following courses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>thereof Austrians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>54th Diploma programme</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55th Diploma programme</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st Master of Advanced International Studies (MAIS) programme; joint degree of the DA and the University of Vienna</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22nd MAIS programme</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23rd MAIS programme (1st year)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th ETIA study programme - Master of Science in Environmental Technology and International Affairs; conducted in cooperation with Vienna University of Technology</td>
<td>20 (15 graduates, 5 eligibility period extensions)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th ETIA study programme</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th ETIA study programme (1st year)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st PhD programme (2015–2019)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd PhD programme (2017–2021)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd PhD programme (2018–2022)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alongside cooperation agreements with Johns Hopkins University, SAIS Europe and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, the MAIS programme offers exchange programmes that extend over several months with Stanford University, MGIMO University (Moscow), Korea University’s Graduate School of International Studies, China Foreign Affairs University and Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Study trips were arranged for students to the European institutions in Brussels. Furthermore, a 3,000 km bus trip took students through the Western Balkans (with stops for meetings inter alia in Sarajevo, Belgrade, Skopje and Tirana). Visits were also made to Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and – organised by the representation authority in Vienna – a trip to the Autonomous Region Kurdistan-Iraq.
In the context of diplomatic training and further training programmes, the DA offered special courses (Executive Training Programmes) and training modules tailored to the needs of diplomats and other civil service officials from the following country groups: Danube area/Western Balkans, Black Sea region/South Caucasus, Africa and Middle East (M.A. students). The DA conducted training modules for the MFA. Furthermore, the DA also supported the MFA in organising and implementing the Austrian Leadership Programme (ALPS). In cooperation with the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), two regional seminars lasting several days were organised and in cooperation with the Association of Austrian Adult Education Centres (Verband der Österreichischen Volkshochschulen, VÖV), two visiting programmes for apprentices were implemented in Brussels. The Summer Course in German Language and Austrian Studies was attended by 44 participants from 27 countries worldwide. Furthermore, Summer Schools were organised for the Free University of Brussels, the MGIMO University (Moscow), for Rong Chang Scholars of the Fudan University/Shanghai and seminars were held for the School of Youth Diplomacy at the MGIMO. In the lead-up to the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the DA – as requested by the Council of Ministers – offered and conducted a wide range of tailored training and education seminars directed at civil servants from all departments. Likewise in connection with the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and within the framework of the European Diplomatic Programme, a specialist conference was organised directed at young diplomats, heads of training programmes and heads of HR departments at EU Member States’ foreign ministries, the EEAS, the European Commission and training institutions.

The DA is also a very popular conference venue. In 2018, it hosted some 115 public events involving inter alia the President of Kosovo, the former Afghan President, the former Austrian President, the former Czech President, the Albanian Prime Minister, the former Slovenian Prime Minister, the Macedonian Deputy Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister of Andorra, the Foreign Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Foreign Minister of Kurdistan-Iraq, the Austrian Foreign Minister, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia, numerous ambassadors and representatives of the EU and international organisations. The DA also hosted a number of high-level conferences, including: We need to talk about Europe! The European Union’s challenges & opportunities ahead, 1938 – The “Anschluss” in an international context, Vienna Cyber Security Week 2018, The EU as a leading actor for stability, security and defence in Europe, and 1918-2018: Why History Matters – Lessons of the Habsburg Monarchy for the EU and Lessons of 1918 for World Order. The Milton Wolf Seminar dealt with the topic of Public Diplomacy in Moments of Geopolitical Transformation. The series of Werkstattgespräche (“workshop talks”, public debates and presentations on selected topics) with the Future Fund of the Republic of Austria was also continued.

Celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy (ISD), the International Forum on Diplomatic Training (IFDT; annual meeting of the Deans and Directors of Diplomatic Academies and Institutes of International Relations chaired by the DA and the ISD at Georgetown University) was held in Washington from 19 to 22
Excursus: The Diplomatic Academy of Vienna

September. The meeting was attended by some 60 representatives from more than 40 institutions and 35 countries.

In addition to the 53rd Yearbook of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, the DA also published the Favorita Paper – the last in its current form – entitled Implementing the 2030 Agenda: A new vision for development. The contribution of the UN Vienna-based organizations, dealing with the annual ACUNS (Academic Council of the United Nations System) conference.

With a view to strengthening the DA’s international competitiveness, initial planning activities for the extension to the DA’s building were launched.
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