Foreign and European Policy Report

2015

Report by the Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs
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Assistance services available to Austrian citizens abroad are detailed on the website of the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs at www.bmeia.gv.at.
With the entry into force of the amendment to the Federal Ministries Act 2014 on 1 March 2014, the Foreign Ministry was renamed Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs as its scope of responsibilities within the Federal Government was expanded to include integration matters. For reasons of enhanced readability, however, either Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) or Foreign Ministry are used in the English language edition of the Foreign Policy Report.
From the Austrian perspective, the year 2015 was both a special and an intensive one. After years of controversy, the nuclear negotiations with Iran were eventually brought to a successful conclusion in Vienna, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of our membership of the European Union (EU) and at the same time, the refugee and migration crisis confronted us with one of the most substantial challenges the EU has experienced since its inception.

These and many of the other topics we were faced with last year, made it very clear that reacting to topical events requires a high level of flexibility. At the same time, however, we must not lose sight of our long-term foreign and European policy goals.

1. Refugee and migration crisis

Since last spring, the refugee and migration crisis has confronted us with a new and enormous challenge whose impact continues to remain on our agenda. Last year, Austria took in some 90,000 asylum seekers. This is the second highest number of asylum seekers per capita of all European countries. From the very outset, I have cautioned against a policy of uncontrolled admittance, stressing that this cannot be a sustainable option – neither for Austria nor for Europe. Particularly the policy of “waving through” towards Central Europe along the Western Balkans route has put an excessive strain not only on the transit countries but also, and in particular, on the target countries, such as Austria.

Right at the beginning of the migration crisis in August 2015, I had called for dealing with this topic at EU level among the Foreign Affairs Ministers. In this context, my focus was on developing a holistic approach covering the following five aspects:

1.) Countering the root causes, inter alia in Syria and Libya, 2.) Safety, security and support for refugees on the ground, 3.) Enhanced protection of the EU’s external border, 4.) Close cooperation along the Western Balkans transit route, 5.) Uniform EU regulation governing asylum matters.

Austria has advocated these five action points at the European level – but also in contacts and together with its neighbouring states. Eventually, the closing of the Western Balkans route led to a significant reduction of the illegal inflow into Europe.
2. Integration based on performance

Austria is a country that is characterised by diversity. Every fifth Austrian has a migration background, so either they themselves or their family are originally from another country. Austria is a country of opportunities – and offers migrants, irrespective of their background, country of origin, skin colour or religion, a wide range of opportunities. What ultimately counts, is the positive contribution each individual person is prepared to make to Austria and to Austrian society. It is a fact that with commitment and the will to succeed one can indeed achieve everything in Austria.

The prerequisite for such achievements and positive contributions is successful integration in Austria. Alongside the acquisition of German language skills, education, training, promotion of skills and joining the labour market, successful integration is also based on the sharing of the fundamental values governing life in Austria. In this context, the «50 Action Points Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria», presented in November 2015, marked a very important step. The 50 measures are recommendations prepared in collaboration with the members of the independent Expert Council for Integration, chaired by Professor Heinz Faßmann. The objective pursued by these measures is to integrate persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection as quickly as possible and enable them to quickly lead a financially independent life. In this context, the Wiener Zukunftsgespräche (Vienna Future Talks), held for the first time on 9 November 2015, also provided some important impetus. This integration conference provided a platform for exchange between staff from our Ministry and a number of European integration ministers and experts from 21 countries. A key contribution in this respect is also made by the project Zusammen:Österreich (Together: Austria), which demonstrates and highlights approaches towards successful coexistence. Prejudice is addressed in open discussions and students as well as young people with and without a migration background are motivated to make active use of the training and career opportunities available to them.

3. Twenty years of membership of the European Union (EU)

Austria’s accession to the EU in 1995 marks an important historic milestone. For this reason, we celebrated the 20th anniversary with a large number of discussion events and activities, such as the competition #OE20EU or the first-ever presentation of the Europe State Award in the categories civil society, EU-related journalism and youth. Irrespective of the many challenges to be faced within the EU, European Union membership has created enormous benefits for Austria. As an export-oriented country we have benefitted substantially from the EU internal market. The substantial EU enlargement round in 2004 created additional momentum and further boosted growth. Since 1995, Austria’s exports have seen an almost three-fold increase and
Austrian direct investments abroad have increased from just under 9 billion euros to some 170 billion euros. Accession to the EU not only opened up new opportunities to business and industry, but also to citizens. Young people in particular benefit from mobility within the EU and for many living, working or studying in the various EU Member States has come to be regarded as nothing extraordinary.

Membership of the EU has not only changed Austrian foreign and European policy, but has also opened up new opportunities for us to make our voice heard and to influence developments. As equal partner, Austria may thus contribute towards further designing common European Union policies and towards shaping Europe’s relations with the world. Of key importance in this context is the commensurate sharing of tasks:

Europe must be “big” on “big” issues – such as a Common Security and Defence Policy – yet, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, should not seek to regulate on smaller issues on which countries and regions are better placed to make their own decisions.

4. Strengthening relations with our neighbouring region, the Western Balkans, and its rapprochement with the EU

The Western Balkan states are important partners in ensuring safety, security, stability and prosperity in Europe and enjoy a wide range of diverse inter-personal, cultural and economic relations with Austria. Some 500,000 people living in Austria have their origins in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro or Serbia and make an important contribution to Austrian society and to the Austrian economy. Without the Western Balkans, the EU would in our view be incomplete.

By hosting the Western Balkans Summit under the “Berlin Process” in Vienna in August, we were able to contribute again this year towards the EU integration of the Western Balkan countries. Our close ties with the Western Balkans and the ongoing support we provide in the efforts launched by these countries on their path towards the EU also resulted in further success: On 14 December 2015, it was possible to open the first two chapters in the EU accession negotiations with Serbia.

5. Austria as a venue for dialogue

Also with respect to other foreign policy topics, 2015 was a record year in terms of Austria’s role as a hub for discussion on global developments. As a result of intensive negotiations held in Vienna with Iran under the E3/EU+3 format, it was, for instance, possible on 14 July 2015 to successfully settle the nuclear dispute with Iran that had been ongoing for thirteen years. Since February 2014, the foreign ministers of Iran, the USA, the United Kingdom, France, China, Russia and Germany as well as the High Representative of the
Foreword

European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy had met regularly for talks in Vienna. By hosting these nuclear talks, we were able to successfully build on Austria’s longstanding tradition as a “bridge builder” and venue for sensitive international negotiations. In autumn, the series of international negotiations continued in Vienna with several rounds of Syria talks in the context of which the International Syria Support Group was established.

From international negotiations to international cultural policy projects – by engaging in dialogue we promote trust between states, cultures and religions. This approach and the basis thus created, enable us to advocate more effectively a global order that respects international law and human rights and a world free of weapons of mass destruction. We continue to actively encourage the hosting of negotiations of a global policy dimension in Vienna. A key element in this respect is strengthening Vienna’s position as a seat and headquarters of international organisations – a total of 40 international organisations are currently represented in Vienna. Of particular relevance in this context is the city’s role as one of the headquarters of the United Nations. The year 2015, for instance, also marked the 70th anniversary of the UN’s establishment and the 60th anniversary of Austria’s membership of the United Nations.

6. The MFA as a service centre for citizens and companies

We seek to open the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs to the interested public in a range of areas. We are also keen to provide insights into our work and to constantly update and improve the services we provide to citizens as well as to business and industry.

The provision of services to Austrian companies is of special concern to the MFA, especially as Austria’s industry and business earns six out of ten euros in the export sector. By having set up business partnerships in the field of development cooperation and by establishing the “Unternehmensservice” (the Business Service Unit), we support and assist Austrian companies worldwide, pro-actively promoting Austria as an export country at foreign policy level. These efforts are also directed at promoting Austria as a tourism destination. With respect to visa-related services, Austria is already “European champion”, boasting the largest number of visa application centres among the Schengen states.

With our approximately 100 representations around the world we facilitate Austrian companies’ access to new markets, support them in managing challenges on the ground and negotiate international framework conditions for fair trade. In future, the Foreign Ministry’s representations and those operated by the Austrian Economic Chamber will cooperate even more closely in order to further foster international interlinking and networking. We are also in the process of re-focussing our network of embassies in order to increase our presence in international centres of growth and innovation outside the EU.
Foreword

But it is not only business and industry that benefit from these activities. A total of some 1,200 MFA staff act as service centre for all Austrians abroad, irrespective of whether they live abroad, are travelling or doing business abroad, whether they are studying in another country or are active at the cultural level. The number of trips taken abroad by Austrians and the number of Austrians residing abroad continue to increase. At the same time, however, the number of crisis regions around the globe is also on the rise. Our representations are the first point of contact for Austrians facing an emergency situation abroad. In 2015, we were able to further develop and expand our dense service network, also thanks to our honorary consulates. In 2015, MFA staff thus provided advice and services to a total of 15,841 Austrians who called the consular emergency services hotline, and the travel information section on our website was visited more that 3.2 million times.

The political and organisational challenges to be addressed by Austria’s European, Foreign and Integration policy will definitely continue to increase over the next few years. The fact that the excellent quality of the work remains unchanged despite budgetary constraints, is attributable to our staff’s dedication and commitment – together with their willingness to go the extra mile. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank the entire team in Austria and abroad most warmly for all their efforts and hard work.

I hope you enjoy reading this year’s report.

Sebastian Kurz
Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs
# Table of Contents

Foreword .................................................................................................................. III

1. **Worldwide at Your Service – Services provided by the MFA to Austrians Abroad** .................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1. Worldwide at Your Service: Services the MFA provided Worldwide to Austrians Abroad in 2015 ................................................................. 1
       1.1.1. Crisis Prevention and Crisis Management .................................. 1
   1.2. General Consular and Legal Issues ......................................................... 2
       1.2.1. Citizens’ Desk ............................................................................ 2
       1.2.2. Assistance in Criminal and Civil Matters ...................................... 3
   1.3. Tourist and Cross-border Traffic ............................................................... 4
       1.3.1. Visas ....................................................................................... 4
   1.4. Austrians Abroad .................................................................................. 5
       1.4.1. Organisation of Austrians Abroad ........................................... 6
       1.4.2. Support for Austrian Nationals Abroad ..................................... 6
       1.4.3. Participation by Austrians Abroad in Political Decision-making in Austria and the European Union ............................................................. 7
   1.5. Services provided to Business and Industry .......................................... 8

2. **Austria in the European Union** ....................................................................... 10
   2.1. Twenty Years Austria in the EU .............................................................. 10
   2.2. Important Developments at European Level ........................................ 11
   2.3. Austria in the Institutions of the European Union ................................... 15
       2.3.1. The Permanent Representation of Austria to the European Union ................................................................. 15
       2.3.2. Austrians in the EU Institutions ................................................ 16
       2.3.3. The European Parliament ......................................................... 16
       2.3.4. The European Council .............................................................. 17
       2.3.5. The Council ............................................................................ 17
       2.3.6. The European Commission .................................................... 18
       2.3.7. The European External Action Service .................................... 18
       2.3.8. The Court of Justice of the European Union .............................. 18
       2.3.9. The Committee of the Regions .................................................. 19
       2.3.10. The European Economic and Social Committee ..................... 20
   2.4. Participation of the Austrian Parliament at European Level and National Cooperation between Parliament and the Federal Provinces ................................................................. 21
   2.5. Austria’s Contribution to the Policy Areas of the European Union .......... 23
Table of Contents

2.5.1. The European Union’s External Relations .................. 23
2.5.2. The Enlargement of the European Union ..................... 29
2.5.3. Macro-Regional Strategies ...................................... 32
2.5.4. Policy Areas of the European Union .......................... 34
2.5.5. Economic and Monetary Union .................................. 69
2.5.6. EU Budget ................................................................. 72
2.6. Information on Europe ...................................................... 73

3. Challenges and Developments on all Five Continents .......... 74
   3.1. Europe and its Neighbouring States ............................. 74
   3.1.1. Austria’s Neighbours .............................................. 74
   3.1.2. South East Europe / Western Balkan Countries ......... 88
   3.1.3. Cyprus ................................................................. 93
   3.1.4. Turkey ................................................................. 94
   3.1.5. The EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood ........................... 96
   3.1.6. The EU’s Southern Neighbourhood ...................... 110
   3.2. Africa and the African Union ...................................... 117
   3.2.1. EU-Africa ............................................................ 117
   3.2.2. Developments in the Regions .................................. 118
   3.2.3. Regional Integration Issues ................................... 130
   3.3. America .................................................................. 131
   3.3.1. USA .................................................................... 131
   3.3.2. Canada ................................................................. 134
   3.3.3. Latin America and the Caribbean ............................ 135
   3.4. Asia ........................................................................ 141
   3.4.1. EU-Asia .............................................................. 141
   3.4.2. General Developments ......................................... 142
   3.5. Australia and Oceania ................................................... 149

4. Security Policy Dimension ................................................ 151
   4.1. Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) ............. 151
   4.1.1. Ongoing CSDP Operations and Missions and Austria’s Involvement ........................................ 152
   4.1.2. Development of Civilian and Military Capabilities for Crisis Management .............................. 152
   4.2. North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) ................. 155
   4.2.1. Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and Partnership for Peace (PfP) ......................... 155
   4.3. Fighting International Terrorism ..................................... 156

5. The United Nations and its Specialised Agencies ............... 159
   5.1. Introduction ................................................................. 159
# Table of Contents

5.2. The General Assembly ............................................................  160
  5.2.1. Procedural Matters ..........................................................  160
  5.2.2. Political Affairs ..............................................................  161
  5.2.3. Economic, Development and Environmental Affairs .....................................................  162
  5.2.4. Human Rights .................................................................  163
  5.2.5. International Drug Control .............................................  163
  5.2.6. International Crime Prevention and the Fight against Corruption .............................................  164
  5.2.7. Social Policy ........................................................................  164
  5.2.8. International Women's Affairs .........................................  165
  5.2.9. Humanitarian Affairs .......................................................  165
  5.2.10. Peaceful Use of Outer Space ...........................................  165
  5.2.11. Administrative Use of Outer Space ..................................  166
  5.2.12. UN Procurement ..............................................................  166
  5.2.13. International Law ............................................................  167

5.3. The United Nations Security Council .....................................  169
  5.3.1. Cross-sectional Issues .....................................................  169
  5.3.2. Peacekeeping Operations .................................................  172
  5.3.3. Country-specific and Regional Issues ....................................  173

5.4. The UN Peacebuilding Commission ......................................  173

5.5. The Economic and Social Council ...........................................  174
  5.5.1. General Part ........................................................................  174
  5.5.2. Austria's Presidency of the Economic and Social Council in 2015 .................................................  174
  5.5.3. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe .....................................................  175

5.6. The International Court of Justice ...........................................  175

5.7. The United Nations Specialised Agencies ................................  176

6. Austria as the Seat of International Organisations and Institutions .....................................................  181
  6.1. Headquartered in Austria – an Overview ...........................................  181
  6.2. OSCE ......................................................................................  182
    6.2.1. The OSCE Security Community in the Context of the Crisis in and around Ukraine .............................................  182
    6.2.2. Regional Issues and Field Activities ....................................  183
    6.2.3. Election Observation .........................................................  185
    6.2.4. The Human Dimension of the OSCE ...................................  185
    6.2.5. The OSCE's Security Policy Dimension ................................  186

XI
# Table of Contents

6.2.6. The OSCE’s Economic and Environmental Dimension ................................................................. 186  
6.2.7. The OSCE’s Regional Policy Dimension .......... 187  
6.3. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)................................. 187  
6.4. Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) .......................................................... 188  
6.5. United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).......................................................................................... 188  
6.6. Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All).................................................................................................................. 188  
6.7. The International Organization for Migration (IOM)............. 189  
6.8. Alpine Convention and Carpathian Convention .................. 190  

7. Austria in European Regional Organisations.................................. 192  
7.1. Council of Europe ................................................................... 192  
7.1.1. Key Political Issues ................................................... 192  
7.1.2. Relations with Other International Organisations... 193  
7.1.3. Human Rights................................................................. 194  
7.1.4. Monitoring Respect of Commitments by Member States........................................................................... 195  
7.1.5. Assistance Programmes ............................................ 196  
7.1.6. Organs of the Council of Europe ................................. 197  
7.1.7. The Council of Europe and Austria .......................... 199  
7.2. Central European Initiative (CEI) ........................................... 200  
7.3. Danube Commission .................................................................. 200  

8. The International Protection of Human Rights ............................... 202  
8.1. Introduction............................................................................. 202  
8.2. Human Rights in the United Nations ..................................... 202  
8.2.1. Human Rights Council............................................... 202  
8.2.2. General Assembly ..................................................... 205  
8.2.3. Commission on the Status of Women ...................... 206  
8.3. Human Rights in the European Union ................................ 207  
8.3.1. The European Union Human Rights Policy ............. 207  
8.3.2. Structured Human Rights Dialogues ....................... 209  
8.4. Human Rights in the Council of Europe .............................. 210  
8.5. Human Rights in the OSCE..................................................... 211  
8.6. Austrian Priorities in the Field of Human Rights ............ 212  
8.6.1. Freedom of Religion and Protection of Religious Minorities .......................................................... 212
### Table of Contents

8.6.2. Human Rights of Children ........................................ 212  
8.6.3. Human Rights of Women .......................................... 213  
8.6.4. Freedom of the Media and Protection of Journalists 215  
8.6.5. Protection of Minorities ............................................ 216  
8.6.6. Human Rights Education  ......................................... 218  
8.6.7. Combating the Death Penalty ................................... 218  
8.6.8. International Humanitarian Law .............................. 219  
8.6.9. Combating Human Trafficking.................................. 219  
8.7. The International Criminal Court ........................................... 220  

9. **Austrian Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief** ......................... 223  
9.1. Austrian Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief .................... 223  
9.1.1. Bilateral Humanitarian Aid ...................................... 223  
9.1.2. Multilateral Humanitarian Aid ................................. 225  
9.2.1. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) .......................................................... 226  
9.2.2. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) .......................................................... 226  
9.2.3. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) .............................................................................. 226  
9.2.4. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA) ... 227  
9.3. Humanitarian Aid in the European Union Context.............. 227  
9.4. International Humanitarian Law (IHL) .............................. 227  
9.5. Global Environmental Protection Agreements .......................... 228  

10. **Global Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Means of Delivery** ........... 229  
10.1. Introduction............................................................................. 229  
10.2. Arms Control and Disarmament in the Field of Weapons of Mass Destruction............................................................................. 230  
10.2.1. Initiatives for the Worldwide Elimination of Nuclear Weapons ............................................................................. 230  
10.2.2. Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons ............................................................................. 230  
10.2.3. Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty ................. 231  
10.2.4. Geneva Conference on Disarmament .......................... 231  
10.2.5. Chemical Weapons Convention................................. 232  
10.2.6. Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention................. 232  
10.2.7. Ballistic Missiles .............................................................. 232
Table of Contents

10.3. Arms Control and Disarmament in the Field of Conventional Weapons ........................................................... 233
   10.3.1. Latest Developments in Arms Technology ............... 234
10.4. Export Control Regimes .......................................................... 234
   10.4.1. Multilateral Export Control ...................................... 234
   10.4.2. Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) .......................................... 235
   10.4.3. National Export Control ............................................ 236

11. Foreign Trade ..................................................................................... 237
   11.1. Bilateral Foreign Trade Policy ................................................ 237
       11.1.1. Austrian Investment .................................................. 237
       11.1.2. Investment Protection ............................................... 237
       11.1.3. Bilateral Air Transport Agreements .......................... 239
   11.2. Multilateral Foreign Economic Policy ............................... 239
       11.2.1. World Trade Organization (WTO) ............................ 239
       11.2.2. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ................................................ 240
       11.2.3. International Energy Agency (IEA) ......................... 244
       11.2.4. International Financial Institutions ............................ 244

12. Austrian Development Cooperation ................................................. 247
   12.1. Introduction............................................................................. 247
       12.1.1. Thematic Priorities .................................................... 248
       12.1.2. Policy Coherence ...................................................... 251
       12.1.3. Budget for Development Cooperation ..................... 252
       12.1.4. Evaluation ................................................................. 252
   12.2. Bilateral Development Cooperation ...................................... 252
       12.2.1. Geographic Priorities .................................................. 252
       12.2.2. Promotion of Civil Society Commitment ................. 260
   12.3. Multilateral Development Cooperation ............................ 261
       12.3.1. The European Union ................................................. 261
       12.3.2. The United Nations ................................................... 263
       12.3.3. The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) ............................................................. 264
       12.3.4. Assignments of Young Austrians.............................. 265

13. Global Environmental and Climate Policy ...................................... 266
   13.1. Climate Change and Climate Policy ....................................... 266
   13.2. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) ............ 267
   13.3. Global Environmental Protection Agreements and Initiatives ................................................................. 267
13.4. Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) ............................................. 269
13.5. Nuclear Safety ........................................................................ 269

   14.1. Objectives and Priorities ....................................................... 271
   14.2. Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue ................................ 276
   14.3. International Cultural Policy Activities in the Context of
         the European Union .............................................................. 278
   14.4. Bilateral Agreements in the Fields of Culture and Science .. 278
   14.5. Science, Education and Language ......................................... 279
   14.6. Austria Libraries ................................................................ 281
   14.7. Multilateral Scientific and Technical Cooperation ................ 283
   14.8. International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)
         and Issues related to the National Socialist Past ................... 284

15. Integration ................................................................. 286
   15.1. Introduction ................................................................. 286
   15.2. Targets and the Key to Successful Integration ....................... 286
      15.2.1. Work Programme of the Federal Government
              2013–2018 ................................................................. 287
   15.3. Integration Bodies ............................................................ 287
      15.3.1. Advisory Board on Integration .................................. 287
      15.3.2. Expert Council for Integration ................................. 287
   15.4. Review of the Thematic Priorities 2015 ................................. 287
      15.4.1. Integration Plan ....................................................... 287
      15.4.2. Islam Law of 2015 .................................................. 288
      15.4.3. Recognition Act ..................................................... 288
      15.4.4. Promoting Integration ............................................ 289
      15.4.5. Early Language Tuition .......................................... 290
      15.4.6. International Bodies ................................................ 292

16. Media and Information .......................................................... 293
   16.1. Press Work .................................................................... 293
   16.2. PR, New Media, Web Presence .......................................... 293
   16.3. Information about Europe .................................................. 294
   16.4. The Initiative “Europa fängt in der Gemeinde an” (Europe
        starts at local level) ............................................................. 294
   16.5. Publications .................................................................... 295
   16.6. Press Officers’ Meeting ...................................................... 295

17. The Austrian Foreign Service ................................................ 296
   17.1. Introduction .................................................................... 296
# Table of Contents

17.2. Working at the MFA ................................................................. 296
17.3. The Foreign Ministry’s Budget ............................................... 298
17.4. Worldwide Infrastructure ...................................................... 299

17.4.1. Real Estate Management and Construction Projects 299
17.4.2. Information Technology ............................................ 300
17.4.3. Information and Knowledge Management .............. 300

17.5. Austrian Missions Abroad and Honorary Consulates .......... 300
17.6. Organisational Chart ............................................................... 302
17.7. Excursus: The Diplomatic Academy of Vienna ..................... 304

18. Selected Documents ........................................................................... 306


18.3. Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz: Speech at the Public Segment of the MFA’s Ambassadors’ Conference, Vienna, 3 September 2015 ...................................................... 310

18.4. Federal President Heinz Fischer: Address at the High Level Side Event “Strengthening Cooperation on Migration and Refugee Movements in the Perspective of the New Development Agenda”, 70th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 1 October 2015 ...................................................... 316


18.7. United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution A/RES/70/47 adopted by the General Assembly on 7 December 2015 ...................................................... 323
Table of Contents


Index ........................................................................................................... 329
1. **Worldwide at Your Service – Services provided by the MFA to Austrians Abroad**

1.1. **Worldwide at Your Service: Services the MFA provided Worldwide to Austrians Abroad in 2015**

1.1.1. **Crisis Prevention and Crisis Management**

The year 2015 was marked by crises and disasters in nearly all regions of the world. In addition, it saw a rising number of terrorist attacks and acts of terrorism, many of which specifically targeted tourist destinations. A number of Austrians were affected by these acts and one Austrian was seriously injured in a terrorist attack in Paris.

On 26 June, an attack was launched on hotels in Port El-Kantaoui near Sousse (Tunisia) killing 38 people. Among the guests staying at these hotels were 14 Austrians who were assisted by the Austrian honorary consul in Sousse and two staff from the Austrian embassy in Tunis. In a series of seven simultaneous terrorist attacks committed in Paris on 13 November that claimed 132 lives and left more than 350 persons injured, Austrians were affected and one man suffered serious injuries. Reacting to the crash of German Wings flight 9525 of 24 March, the attacks on the Brado Museum in Tunis on 18 May and on the Erewan Shrine in the centre of Bangkok’s tourist quarters on 17 August, which did not affect and/or result in injuries to any Austrians, the MFA and the local representation authorities also took precautions in order to be able to assist and support Austrian citizens as required. Measures were thus taken to ensure that help could be provided both quickly and in an unbureaucratic manner – as was the case in other instances as well, such as in Saudi Arabia, Mali or Burkina Faso.

During the main holiday season in summer, the situation in Greece with temporary restriction of payment transactions led many citizens to contact the MFA enquiring about alternative opportunities for withdrawing cash using Austrian ATM or credit cards and asking Ministry staff about their assessment of tourists’ security and the supply situation. The Ministry also received many calls and written enquiries from worried Austrian tourists and their relatives in the aftermath of the attacks in Egypt and Turkey.

Austrian citizens were also affected by natural disasters abroad. On 1 April, several individuals including nine Austrians were caught in an avalanche in the Hautes-Alpes region in France. One staff member from the Austrian embassy in Paris thus travelled to the site of the disaster to assist and support both survivors and the accident victims’ relatives and family members.

The earthquakes that hit Nepal on 25 April and 12 May also had a direct impact on Austrians. In close coordination with the EU Member States, other western states, the USA and the EAS, the local honorary consul and one staff
member each from the Austrian embassy in New Delhi and from the Citizens’ Desk sought to support the Austrians affected by this emergency situation. Prevention also continues to play an increasingly important role in the context of consular crisis management. Under the leadership of the MFA, crisis support teams involving representatives from the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports were dispatched on joint exploratory missions to Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia and the Philippines.

1.2. General Consular and Legal Issues

1.2.1. Citizens’ Desk

In 2015, Austrians made 10.61 million trips abroad, of which 8.69 million were holiday trips (source: Statistics Austria). Apart from this group, about half a million Austrians live abroad either permanently or for extended periods of time. The Citizens’ Desk and the Austrian representation authorities provide a range of services to these individuals, both before they leave and especially in cases of emergency. These services, for instance, include detailed and constantly updated travel information and advice, information provided around the clock by telephone and in writing, as well as concrete support especially in emergencies or crisis situations.

In the course of the year, the travel information section on the Foreign Ministry’s website was accessed more than 3.2 million times. In total, 16,400 callers dialled 0501150–3775 for general consular information provided by MFA staff. A total of 15,841 Austrians called 01–901150–4411, the number set up for consular emergency cases, and received support and assistance from MFA staff. In addition, a total of 2,681 general requests were answered by MFA staff in writing.

In line with the provisions governing the Central Civil Status Register (Zentrales Personenstandsregister, ZPR) and the Central Citizenship Register (Zentrales Staatsbürgerschaftsregister, ZSR) that entered into force on 1 November 2014, Austrians abroad may thus now have their civil status and citizenship documents issued by the official professional Austrian representations abroad. In 2015, the Austrian embassies and professional consular offices abroad issued a total of 1,142 civil status documents and 10,061 citizenship certificates and confirmations. The Office for Consular Authentications at the MFA registered a total of approximately 20,000 authentications and apostilles that may be issued to enable international recognition of Austrian documents abroad. In total, the Austrian representation authorities abroad processed some 50,700 authentications.
1.2.2. Assistance in Criminal and Civil Matters

The Austrian representation authorities offered consular assistance in a total of 510 cases. They are, however, not authorised to legally represent Austrian nationals. In addition to these 510 cases, the representation authorities handled a further 8,535 requests for mutual administrative and judicial assistance from Austrian authorities.

At the end of the year, a total of 165 Austrian nationals were being detained in prisons abroad\(^1\), most of them in Europe. Representation authorities paid 253 visits to prisons. In this context, authorities ascertain at regular intervals that Austrian prison inmates are being treated in line with the relevant national regulations, that such regulations comply with the international minimum standards and that Austrian inmates also enjoy any relief they may be entitled to under the existing provisions. Another important element of the services provided is the acceptance and forwarding of packages and small sums of money (inmate deposits) to Austrian prison inmates abroad.

The MFA’s scope of responsibility also includes national coordination of Austrian positions and chairing of negotiations on readmission, police cooperation, extradition and servicing of process agreements. In the year 2015, work was carried out on 14 such agreements.

In cases of child abduction, direct cooperation between national central judicial authorities (i.e. ministries of justice) is provided for under the Hague Convention on Child Abduction (HCCA). In all cases, especially in countries that are not party to the HCCA, the MFA and the Austrian representation authorities support the affected parent in asserting his/her rights abroad.

The Hague Adoption Convention (HAC) regulates the adoption processes between countries that are parties to the convention. In Austria, each federal province has a central authority operating in line with HAC provisions, which cooperates closely with the MFA and the Federal Ministry of Justice.

Adoptions from countries that are not party to the HAC are in principle possible for Austrians wishing to adopt a child, but do involve substantial administrative efforts. In the context of child adoptions, the fight against human trafficking and child trafficking enjoys top priority.

The year 2015 saw a massive increase in assistance and support provided to individuals at risk of forced marriage abroad.

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\(^1\) Statistics include only individuals who are reported to and/or have contacted Austrian representations.
1.3. **Tourist and Cross-border Traffic**

1.3.1. **Visas**

As of 31 December, Austrian nationals holding a regular passport were free to enter 114 states without a visa, including all neighbouring states, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, the USA, many states in Africa and almost all states in South America. Austrians may enter 41 states with an identification card and 18 with a passport that has expired within the last five years. Nationals of 125 states need a visa to travel to Austria.

Visas for Austria were issued at 83 Austrian embassies and consulates. Schengen visas for entering Austria were issued at a further 97 locations by representation authorities of states that Austria holds Schengen Representation Agreements with. In turn, Austria – having 84 Schengen representations for 14 states – issued visas at 42 service locations. In addition, visas for Austria may be applied for via an external partner at a further 71 locations in line with Art. 43 of the EU Visa Code. This enables applications for visas for Austria to be filed in more than 250 locations worldwide. An expansion of this network is planned for 2016. This enables customer- and service-oriented as well as cost-effective processing of visa-related matters.

Visa liberalisation agreements between the EU and Dominica, Grenada, Kiribati, Colombia, Palau, Samoa, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Vanuatu as well as the United Arab Emirates, enabling mutual visa-free entry into the respective states’ territory were signed and entered into force in the course of the year.

This year also saw the completion of the EU-wide roll-out of the EU Visa Information System (VIS) for all Austrian representation authorities. It is now possible to issue biometric visas around the world. The Austrian representation authorities processed some 291,000 visa applications, which represents a slight increase of 0.1 % over the previous year. Visas were subsequently granted for 96.3 % of these applications. Of the visas granted, 88.5 % were Schengen visas and 11.5 % 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 9,500 visas, making up a share of 3.3 % of the overall total.

At the Consular and Administration Conference, the MFA and the Ministry of the Interior jointly organised an information desk on 2 July. The MFA also conducted regular in-house training events on visa and residence issues as well as on-line seminars for consular staff.

Activities carried out by the joint training and inspection team, composed of members of the MFA and the Ministry of Justice, were further intensified at Austrian representations abroad and at headquarters. Inspections included joint checks performed in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of the Interior in states with particularly high migration rates.
Close cooperation with the Federal Ministry of the Interior on the analysis of developments in numbers of visas, ongoing joint training activities in the consular sector and evaluation of visa administration at the representation authorities, including the implementation of relevant measures, was also continued and intensified.

Likewise, successful cooperation was continued with the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, inter alia in the context of further round table meetings with representatives from the tourism and external trade industries.

The opportunity to turn to the Federal Administrative Court in order to appeal against decisions taken by Austrian representations in visa matters was used 255 times. Since the introduction of the ordinary appeal procedure in 2014, the Federal Administrative Court upheld the legal opinion of the representation authorities in 95 % of the cases.

1.4. Austrians Abroad

The provision of support and services to Austrian citizens abroad constitutes one of the core tasks of Austrian embassies, consulates and consulates-general.

Just like the MFA’s website dedicated to “Austrians abroad” (www.auslands-soesterreicherInnen.at), the Austrian representations are an important link between Austrians abroad and their (former) home country. They are the first points of contact and service with regard to passport, citizenship and voting matters, further contact with authorities and consular protection, information about Austria, effective crisis preparedness and coordination, or with respect to facilitating and organising Austria-related events.

Some 390,000 Austrians abroad are registered with the Austrian representation authorities. As there is no obligation to officially register one’s permanent residence abroad, the figures on Austrians living abroad are largely based on estimates. Verifiable figures do not reflect the actual number of Austrians residing abroad. It is to be assumed that approximately 530,000 Austrians live abroad.

By far the largest number of Austrians living abroad reside in Germany (252,000), followed by Switzerland (64,000). A major share of Austrians abroad resides in the USA, Australia, the United Kingdom, Argentina and South Africa. More than three quarters of Austrians living abroad are thus concentrated in just a few countries.

Some 315,000 Austrians abroad are of voting age. However, in connection with the elections to the European Parliament in 2014, the number of Austrians abroad registered in the municipalities’ electoral registers – which is a prerequisite for participating in elections – totalled only 34,773; a total of 16,368 voting cards were used by Austrians abroad to cast votes in this election.
Austrians abroad may also register online with Austrian representation authorities. A modern standardised registration system established at Austrian representations worldwide serves to increase the number of registered Austrians abroad and enhance data quality, ensuring quick and efficient contact (by email or text message).

The number of Austrians at heart – who do not or no longer hold Austrian citizenship but feel a particular attachment to Austria due to their former citizenship, family or business connections, extended stays in Austria or for other reasons – can only be estimated and probably comprises several hundred thousand individuals.

1.4.1. **Organisation of Austrians Abroad**

Ties between Austrians living abroad and their home country are maintained particularly through associations of Austrians abroad and other societies abroad that have links with Austria, and increasingly also via social media. There are 413 such associations and societies in 61 countries. The Vienna-based Auslandsösterreicher-Weltbund (AÖWB), the World Federation of Austrians Abroad, is the umbrella organisation, interest group and service platform for associations of Austrians abroad. Since 1 July 2004, Gustav Chlestil has been the President of the AÖWB and Irmgard Helperstorfer has served as Secretary-General. The AÖWB maintains the website www.weltbund.at and publishes the magazine “ROTWEISSROT”. In 2012, the Federation launched its internet platform at www.austrians.org.

The AÖWB organises annual meetings of Austrians abroad, the most recent of such meetings, which are always held in Austria, took place in Klagenfurt from 3 to 6 September. Funding provided by the MFA to the AÖWB amounted to 200,000 euros.

1.4.2. **Support for Austrian Nationals Abroad**

The Fund for Austrians Abroad 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 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.

The fund is financed with a total of 600,000 euros by Austria’s nine federal provinces and the MFA, which each contribute 50 per cent. Drawing on existing financial reserves, the fund provided financial assistance totalling 603,100 euros to 1,320 Austrians in need in 61 countries. The Board of Trustees appointed by the Federal Government is chaired by Ambassador (ret.)
Markus Lutterotti, the office of Managing Director is held by Josef Knapp. The Christmas Campaign, organised by the MFA every year in support of Austrians abroad in need, raised donations in cash and in kind totalling 53,240 euros, which went to 473 Austrian nationals in need in 44 countries worldwide.

For Austrians living abroad who are elderly or severely ill and no longer able to care for themselves, the MFA can 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 individuals’ state of health allows them to travel and that they agree to repatriation. In the course of the year, six Austrians were repatriated from France, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, Poland and Switzerland, and placed with Austrian social welfare and/or care institutions.

1.4.3. 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 staying abroad on election days, have had the right to vote in Austrian parliamentary and presidential elections and to participate in nationwide plebiscites and referenda. Austrians abroad – as well as non-Austrian citizens of the European Union with their main residence in Austria – can also vote in elections for Austrian Members of the European Parliament (EP). Voting rights of Austrians abroad – that were simplified substantially as of 2007 – enable participation in elections from the age of 16. Postal voting is possible in Austria and abroad for anyone unable to cast their vote in a polling station on election day. A signed affidavit is now sufficient for casting a postal vote. Furthermore, Austrians abroad can order absentee ballots in advance for a period of ten years (“absentee ballot subscription”) and will automatically receive their absentee ballots for all nationwide elections, plebiscites and referenda during this period. The municipality in which they are registered as voters informs them ex officio about forthcoming elections, plebiscites and referenda and also 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 federal 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 extended. The latest improvements and adaptations to current needs related to election law, online registration and information provided on the internet.

Acting in collaboration with Austrian authorities, ministries, competence centres and experts, the MFA promotes development and use of informa-
tion and communication technology (ICT) applications for Austrians abroad, especially with regard to eGovernment and broader citizen participation. Increased use is also being made of new forms of communication (social media).

1.5. Services provided to Business and Industry

The range of services the MFA and the network of Austrian representations provide to Austrian companies was further expanded on 1 September, thus giving greater visibility to the important contribution made by the MFA to the Austrian economy.

Austrian companies active in the export sector, which generate approximately 60% of the Austrian gross domestic product (GDP), now have the possibility of addressing their questions and concerns directly to a central point of contact within the MFA – the Business Service unit (“Unternehmensservice”). Placing its focus of activities on supporting export companies as well as promoting cooperation and networking, this point of contact provides export companies with access to sound political analyses and forecasts and enables them to benefit from the existing network the Austrian representations have established with institutions, authorities, governmental bodies, and policymakers in the target country. In the field of external trade promotion, the specific knowledge and expertise of the MFA may thus contribute to putting processes and events that are relevant to both the economy as well as individual companies into a real political and social context.

The MFA and its representations are constantly enhancing their expert knowledge and ensure a systematic documentation and analysis of political, economic and social developments, as well as of tangible processes and events in the target state with a view to providing better services for Austrian companies. Focusing on this goal, the network of missions abroad is also being adapted. The MFA facilitates access to decision-makers in growth markets by focusing on locations that are of special economic interest, such as Qatar, Singapore or Colombia, as well as through the opening of a dedicated office in the innovation area Silicon Valley/Bay Area.

Furthermore, international cultural policy activities including cultural fora are being increasingly opened for cooperation with Austrian companies. In the context of its business services, the MFA also provides relevant platforms in Vienna by hosting events such as “Business meets Diplomacy“, thus facilitating networking between Austrian business leaders and ambassadors accredited to Vienna. Other such events include the Round Table on Foreign Trade, where MFA staff present current foreign policy events to invited company representatives, or “Meet the Ambassadors”, an event organised during the public segment of the Ambassadors’ Conference enabling company representatives to establish contacts and meet face-to-face with Austrian ambassadors.
Services provided to Business and Industry

The MFA’s Business Service unit regards itself and its services as complementing the activities launched by the Austrian Economic Chamber and its AußenwirtschaftsCenters (foreign trade centres) and seeks to continue the good and close cooperation with these bodies.
2. **Austria in the European Union**

2.1. **Twenty Years Austria in the EU**

The twentieth anniversary of Austria’s accession to the European Union (EU) was a key topic of many activities and events held in 2015. Its membership of the EU has played a major role in shaping Austria’s foreign and European policy over the last twenty years. At the same time, involvement in EU decision-making structures enabled Austrian concerns to be successfully supported at European level, relating for instance to environmental and consumer protection, coordination of social minimum standards, limitation of transit traffic or promotion of rural development and nuclear safety.

Looking back on these twenty years, Austria, as an export-oriented country located in the heart of Europe, has benefitted substantially from the economic opportunities and advantages offered by the EU internal market. A recent study commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy and conducted by the ifo (Institute for Economic Research) confirms—as illustrated by earlier surveys and analyses—that Austria’s accession to the EU in 1995 and the opening of the East in 2004 have significantly boosted growth. Austria’s exports to other EU Member States have increased almost threefold since 1995 and cumulative direct foreign investment has risen from a little less than 9 billion euros to some 170 billion euros.

EU membership has not only opened up enormous opportunities to Austria’s business and industry but also brought many benefits and facilitations for citizens. Surveys confirm that 72% of Austrians consider the Single Market with its huge choice of products for consumers to be a major added value of the EU, while 69% regard mobility of the workforce and of students as an important benefit. Currently, a quarter of a million Austrians make active use of the opportunity to settle and work in another EU Member State and students in particular benefit from mobility within the EU. The way Austrians see themselves has also changed—while one year after joining the EU only 11 per cent of Austrians considered themselves to be (also) EU citizens, this share had risen to 87 per cent in 2014.

Since Austria’s accession, the EU has also undergone decisive further development, including for instance the introduction of the euro, the Schengen Agreement, the enlargement resulting in the inclusion of a total of 13 new Member States and the implementation of the Treaties of Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon. Austria contributes to this further development of a common Europe in a pro-active and responsible manner.

The wide range of activities launched by Austria to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of EU membership included information events, festive acts, symposia, discussions and school events, the publication of information brochures and contributions on the information web portals operated by federal ministries, cities and municipalities. Studies, surveys and publications also


Important Developments at European Level

Dealt with the importance of EU membership for the various areas of politics and spheres of (everyday) life.

For the MFA, this 20th anniversary was also a priority topic of EU communication and the focus of many events in the context of the Municipal Councillors for European Affairs initiative, in schools, at the European Forum Alpbach and the European Forum Wachau, which celebrated their 70th and 20th anniversaries respectively in 2015. The MFA promoted the various activities on its social media channels using its hashtag #OE20EU, and the logo “20 Jahre Österreich in der EU” (20 years Austria in the EU) was used in numerous events in cooperation with projects partners across the whole of Austria.

The anniversary year 2015 also served as a pertinent occasion for presentation of the Europe State Award to citizens and organisations for extraordinary commitment and efforts in promoting European awareness and understanding of Europe. The winners were chosen by a specialised jury from some 130 submissions from all federal provinces. On 13 June, the Europe State Award was presented by Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz in the context of the European Forum Wachau. The winner in the category “Civil Society” was the social project “Rückenwind” (tail wind) by the Chamber of Labour of Tyrol, which enables socially and educationally disadvantaged young people to take part in projects abroad. In the category “Reporting on Europe”, the EU department of the national daily newspaper “Die Presse” won the award and in the category “Youth”, the award went to the youth campaign “eu2014.at”, which had been launched by the Young European Federalists together with Europe Direct Austria and the European Movement in the lead-up to the elections to the European Parliament.

2.2. Important Developments at European Level

The biggest challenge facing the EU and its Member States was managing the refugee crisis and the migration pressure at the Union’s external borders. In the aftermath of the tragic capsizing of a boat carrying refugees which claimed more than 800 lives in April, the European Council convened for an extraordinary summit on 23 April. The meeting focused on adopting measures towards managing the acute crisis and saving human lives at sea, while at the same time deciding on medium- and long term EU-wide steps to be taken in the fields of migration and asylum. Since then this topic has been dealt with intensively by the Council, the European Commission and at the Heads of State or Government level (also see Chapter 2.5.4.1.). The crisis has made it very clear that – beyond emergency measures – it is necessary to subject the European framework for asylum policy and the EU Member States’ approach towards protecting their external borders to a fundamental review. The Communication on a European Agenda on Migration, submitted by the EC on 13 May, provides for both immediate action and longer-term solution approaches.
Another key topic at European level were the negotiations on the third financial assistance programme for Greece, as the second such programme had expired on 30 June. As a result of the snap election and taking of office of the new government, the disbursement of the last tranche under the second assistance programme and the negotiations on potential new assistance were, however, delayed. In view of the urgent need for funding, the Eurozone Member States’ Heads of State or Government reached an agreement after lengthy negotiations on 12 and 13 July, which provided for a general compromise on a further assistance programme for Greece to which the Board of Governors of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) agreed on 19 August.

Another priority goal the new Commission, in office since November 2014, continues to pursue is the promotion of growth and jobs. In the context of the efforts aimed at stimulating investment in Europe, the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) was launched. The goal is to trigger investments of 315 billion euros by 2017 in Europe. By the end of the year, 50 billion euros had already been mobilised in 22 Member States, from which some 81,000 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have benefitted.

Furthermore, numerous measures aimed at improving the internal market have been launched with a view to enhancing the investment environment, removing barriers and promoting SME and start-up growth. The Digital Single Market Strategy, presented in May, seeks to dismantle hurdles to cross-border online activities in the EU. Trade agreements were signed with more strongly growing regions around the globe with a view to tapping into new export opportunities and thus enabling the creation of jobs, while at the same time seeking to ensure the highest possible level of transparency with respect to trade negotiations and observation of high social, data protection law and ecological minimum standards. The establishment of an European Energy Union not only seeks to ensure secure, affordable and climate-friendly energy for citizens and companies in Europe, but also to create new jobs and promote growth through investment directed at energy efficiency and countering climate change.

Another central issue at European level was fighting cross-border threats to domestic security. In response to the attacks in Paris on 13 November, ways and means to ensure even closer cooperation between Member States in the common fight against terrorism, enhanced efforts towards protecting citizens and measures against radicalisation thus topped the agenda.

In its work programme, the new EC set itself the goal of regaining citizens’ trust in the functioning of the EU institutions through better regulation. Existing legislation is thus to be overhauled to a much larger extent than before, in order to make sure it is fit for purpose, and will also be adapted to better meet ‘citizens’ and companies’ needs. In May, the Commission adopted the Better Regulation Agenda that sets out a comprehensive reform package aimed at making the EU law-making process more transparent, open for input from
stakeholders and easier to understand. The agenda also seeks to enable better assessment of the impact EU legislation has on SMEs, industry and citizens. The agenda consists of two main elements, the Proposal for an Interinstitutional Agreement (IIA) on Better Law-Making and the Commission’s Communication on “Better Regulation for Better Results – An EU Agenda”. The latter defines internal measures to be taken by the Commission, including the development of the REFIT platform, the establishment of a Regulatory Scrutiny Board to check the quality of all impact assessments by the Commission, and new online tools for public consultation processes.

The IIA negotiated between the Commission, the EP and the Council on 15 December will, as a result of the applicable primary legislation, lead to adaptations in the entire policy-making cycle, ranging from consultations and impact assessments to adoption, implementation and assessment of EU legislation. The steps towards preparation of the Commission’s work programme were formalised and the three bodies will issue joint statements on policy priorities. The Council will be put on a level with the EP. As far as possible, legislators will include review clauses in EU legislation to enable better preparation of future evaluations and improved assessment of results. The three bodies reiterated their approval of conducting impact assessments, and also committed to considering work by the Commission in connection with impact assessments during law-making procedures. The Commission committed to using delegated acts more moderately and implementing acts only when justified and in an efficient and transparent manner.

The year 2015 also saw the first evaluation of the European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI). Three years after the entry into force of the EU Regulation on the ECI, the Commission presented an impact assessment report on its application on 31 March, which is also based on the experience gained thus far by organisers of ECIs. Building on this report, the Council and the EP examined measures for improvement, including a revision of the ECI Regulation. On 28 October, the EP adopted a report on potential improvements to the ECI, enhanced user-friendliness for ECI organisers and a potential revision of the ECI Regulation. After an initial stock-taking of the proposals for amending the ECI Regulation received thus far, a summarising note of the Presidency was adopted by the GAC on 22 June. Austria contributed pro-actively to the discussion and together with Germany and Luxembourg made proposals for improvements which are currently being examined.

Austria also contributed pro-actively to Council activities aimed at improving control of respect for the rule of law principles and protection of the fundamental values in the Member States, especially in the field of justice, by the EU (the “rule of law initiative”). After the Commission had presented its Communication on “A New EU Framework to Strengthen the Rule of Law” on 18 March 2014, which sets out a three stage early warning mechanism to be launched by the Commission prior to activating sanctions mechanisms under Article 7 of the TEU, the Council and the Member States adopted Con-
Austria in the European Union

cclusions at the end of 2014, which focus on the definition of programmatic principles (objectivity, non-discrimination and equal treatment of all Member States, as well as using non-partisan and evidence-based approaches (Doc. No 17014/14). A dialogue among Member States, also included in the adopted Conclusions, is to take place once a year in the context of the Council. By the end of 2016, the experience acquired on the basis of this dialogue is to be evaluated. The first political dialogue on fundamental rights and preventing hatred in the Internet was held in the General Affairs Council only a few days after the Paris attacks of 13 November. Account will continue to be taken of current developments. Both the Commission (by launching infringement proceedings) and the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission (by issuing expert opinions) have already reacted to worrying developments in the field of human rights, democracy and rule of law.

The central topic of the European policy debate was the referendum on the United Kingdom’s continued membership of the European Union announced by the British Prime Minister David Cameron in 2013. At the European Council meetings in June, October and December, PM Cameron outlined his plans for holding the referendum in the United Kingdom and his proposals for EU reform. He also summarised these ideas for reform in a letter sent to the President of the European Council Donald Tusk on 10 November. At the invitation of the Council Secretariat and the Commission, consultations were held with Austria on 20 November on its assessment of the British proposals for reform. Following completion of bilateral consultations with all Member States, Council President Tusk informed the Member States’ Heads of State or Government in a letter of 7 December of his assessment of the negotiation process. The United Kingdom also presented its proposals for reform in the context of official visits by Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond on 11 June and Prime Minister David Cameron on 26 November to Vienna and a visit Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz paid to London on 3 November. Together with the negotiation texts to be prepared by the beginning of 2016, these steps formed the basis for the planned final discussion of the British proposals in spring 2016.

Based on a number of calls for change made in the four main areas of governance of the Eurozone, competitiveness of the EU, sovereignty and subsidiarity, immigration and free movement of labour, Prime Minister Cameron sought to gain attention for central British concerns. These key concerns included in particular strengthening the voice of the non-Eurozone Member States in shaping the Monetary Union and safeguarding the integrity of the Single Market. The United Kingdom furthermore pushed for a faster and more focused implementation of measures aimed at strengthening the Union’s competitiveness, developing trade relations with growing markets and strengthening the role of national parliaments. The British proposals also sought to counter immigration of EU citizens by restricting access to UK social security benefits.
2.3. Austria in the Institutions of the European Union

2.3.1. The Permanent Representation of Austria to the European Union

Austria’s direct point of contact to the institutions of the Union, the Council Presidency and other Member States is the Permanent Representation of Austria to the European Union, in which all federal ministries, the Liaison Office of the Federal Provinces as well as social partners and interest groups (the Austrian 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 and thus informed about ongoing negotiations.

The Permanent Representation’s central task is representing Austria in preparing the political and legislative decisions taken by the EU. The relevant negotiations are held in the competent Council working groups and committees in some 4,500 meetings per year in which staff from the Permanent Representation or from the Federal Ministries participate. Before being formally adopted at 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 Committee).

By making specific use of their networks, the Permanent Representation’s staff also seek to represent Austria’s interests outside of Council meetings and in all phases of decision-making and legislative processes. The Permanent Representation also provides reports and analyses that serve as a basis for the formulation of Austria’s positions in EU bodies.

As decisions taken at European level often have immediate political and legal implications for Austria, special focus is placed on informing the public about important developments and work on legislation initiatives in a timely manner. The Representation’s press office thus also supports the EU correspondents of Austrian and international media active in Brussels and updates them on current developments and activities.

The Permanent Representation’s tasks also include providing interested citizens with first-hand insights into its activities and the work of the European institutions. In 2015, the Permanent Representation’s Visitor and Information Service thus looked after 150 groups of visitors (a total of 4,410 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 every month by the Commission for delegated national experts and internship opportunities in ministries, Member States, country offices, universities, etc. to the provision of individual assistance to applicants in handling requests of all kinds and providing them with support in selection procedures.
2.3.2. Austrians in the EU Institutions

In office since 10 February 2010, Commissioner and former Federal Minister Johannes Hahn was responsible for regional policy in the Commission Barroso II. Since 1 November 2014, he has held the office of Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations in the Juncker Commission and represents the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (EU HR) Federica Mogherini in this field. Since October 2009, former Federal Minister Maria Berger has been active as a judge at the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in Luxembourg and was reappointed for the period from 7 October 2012 to 6 October 2018. Since September 2013, Viktor Kreuschitz has been judge at the General Court (EGC). His term was extended for the period from 1 September 2016 to 31 August 2022. From July 2011 to the end of August 2015, former Austrian Vice-Chancellor Wilhelm Molterer held the office of Vice-President and Member of the Management Committee of the European Investment Bank (EIB). Following expiration of this mandate on 31 August, he was appointed Managing Director of the newly established European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) in November.

At the European Court of Auditors, Oskar Herics is the Austrian member of the Audit Group I “Preservation and Management of Natural Resources”.

In 2015, a total of 476 Austrians (222 women and 254 men) worked at the Commission, making up a share of 1.59% of its total headcount. A total of 18 Austrians (8 women and 10 men) were employed at the ECJ, representing 0.85% of the Court’s total staff. A total of 73 Austrians (44 women and 29 men) worked in the EP, making up 0.94% of the Parliament’s headcount. The 28 Austrians (13 women and 15 men) working in the Council’s Secretariat-General account for 0.99% of its total staff; 40 Austrians (18 women and 22 men) work at the European Bank of Investment (EBI) and 15 Austrians (7 female and 8 male) are employed at the European Court of Auditors (ECA).

2.3.3. The European Parliament

A total of 18 seats are held by Austrian MPs in the European Parliament (EP). Since July 2014, the Austrian Parliamentarian Ulrike Lunacek has held the office of Vice President of the EP.

The 18 Austrian seats in the EP are 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. Following the establishment of the new group in the EP “Europe of Nations and Freedom” on 16 June, whose membership also includes the FPÖ, all Austrian MEPs now belong to a political group in the EP.

During his visit to Vienna on 19 and 20 February, the President of the EP, Martin Schulz, met Federal President Heinz Fischer, Federal Chancellor Wer-
ner Faymann, President of the National Council Doris Bures and members of the National Council for working discussions, also visited Burgenland at the invitation of Province Governor Hans Niessl. President Schulz visited Vienna again from 18 to 19 September and from 4 to 5 December.

On 11 November, the EP adopted a resolution on the reform of the electoral law of the European Union, which seeks to increase turnout in European elections and is to be implemented in time before the elections to the European Parliament in 2019. This requires a unanimous Council decision following approval by the EP, and ratification by all Member States. After subjecting the resolution to an initial review, the Council welcomed the efforts undertaken by the EP towards promoting electoral turnout while at the same time voicing numerous concerns inter alia against the proposal to institutionalise the top candidate model introduced at the European elections 2014.

2.3.4. The European Council

In 2015, the European Council held four ordinary meetings, one extraordinary European Council meeting, three informal meetings of the Heads of State or Government, one euro summit as well as two informal meetings of the Heads of State or Government of the euro area. In the context of the efforts towards managing the migration and refugee crisis, three meetings of EU Heads of State or Government were held with third countries, on 25 October the Heads of State or Government of the countries along the Western Balkans route met, from 11 to 12 November the EU Heads of State or Government met with African partner countries and on 29 November with Turkey.

2.3.5. The Council

In the Council of the EU, Austria is represented by the relevant members of the Federal Government. In contrast to the European Council, the principle of the semi-annually rotating presidency between the Member States has been retained. In the first six months the rotating presidency was thus held by Latvia and in the second half of the year by Luxembourg. In 2015, a total of 90 Council meetings were convened in Brussels and in Luxembourg involving participation by members of the Austrian government.

The General Affairs Council, which is composed of the Member States’ foreign and/or European affairs ministers, coordinates the other Council formations’ activities, prepares European Council meetings and takes decisions of horizontal importance (for instance on enlargement and on the multiannual financial framework).

The presidency of the Foreign Affairs Council is held by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (EU HR), who is elected for a term of five years.
2.3.6. The European Commission

In 2015, numerous EU Commissioners visited Austria. They participated in and contributed to EU events and panel discussions on topical European policy issues held across the country and also took part in working discussions and debates in Parliament. In the course of the year, EU Commissioners paid a total of 47 visits to Austria, 22 of which by Commissioner Johannes Hahn.

2.3.7. The European External Action Service

Established on 1 January 2011 by merging the Commission’s and the Council’s foreign policy services and by involving diplomats of the national diplomatic services, the European External Action Service (EEAS) was reorganised under EU HR Federica Mogherini with a view to increasing consistency and effectiveness of the departments responsible for security policy, crisis management and CSDP. A new leadership structure involving an additional Deputy Secretary General in charge of Economic and Global Affairs as well as an EEAS Gender Advisor was introduced. The review of the EEAS, announced for 2015, is to be conducted in 2016.

By the end of the year, 307 members of the EU Member States’ national diplomatic services worked with the EEAS (this is equivalent to 32.9% of all EEAS positions). Of this staff, about 141 (45.9%) worked at headquarters and 166 (54.1%) in the delegations. At the end of the year, the EEAS headcount totalled 3,302 individuals of which 36.5 % worked at headquarters in Brussels and 63.5 % in the Union’s worldwide network of 139 delegations and offices. Taking account of all employment groups – including officials from the Commission, the Council Secretariat, members of the contract staff and staff employed as national delegates – 59 Austrians worked in the EEAS, including the heads of the EU delegations in Beijing, Pretoria, Lima and Asmara, the Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia, the Director General of the EU Military Staff, and the EU Managing Director for North Africa, the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq and Iran.

2.3.8. The Court of Justice of the European Union

The Republic of Austria is represented before the Court of Justice of the European Union (consisting of the Court and the General Court) by legal counsels from the Constitutional Service of the Federal Chancellery. In 2015, Austrian courts initiated 21 new preliminary ruling proceedings (i.e. proceedings where a national court refers a question relating to the interpretation or validity of Community law to the Court).

At the end of 2015, there were three proceedings for alleged infringements of Union law pending against the Republic of Austria. These infringement proceedings concerned the incorrect implementation of the Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC when approving the construction of a hydro power
plant on the “Schwarze Sulm”, an infringement of Art. 13 of Decision No 1/80 and Art. 41 par. 1 of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement with Turkey (freedom of settlement and free movement of workers of Turkish nationality) as well as an infringement of Art. 6 par. 3 of Directive 2012/34/EU and Art. 6 par. 1 in combination with No 5 of the Annex to the Regulation (EC) No. 1370/2007, insofar as ÖBB Personenverkehr (passenger transport section of the Austrian Federal Railways) was not obliged to publish the public compensation payments as well as the costs and income for each public service contract. The infringement proceedings relating to the implementation of Directive 2009/28/EC on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources, and to the implementation of the Railway Safety Directive 2004/49/EC were withdrawn by the Commission.

The preliminary agreement reached in the Council in 2014 on increasing the number of judges proposed by the Court in order to resolve the problems of increased work load, the resulting backlog and lengthy duration of proceedings at the Court of the EU provides for a doubling of the number of judges to 56 in three stages, starting in 2016 with the addition of twelve judges. Subsequently, the European Union Civil Service Tribunal is to be dissolved in 2015 and its responsibilities are to be transferred back to the Court of Justice of the European Union. Finally, in 2019 the process will be completed by a third partial filling of positions. In parallel, the efficiency of the Court is to be increased by procedural changes and shall be ensured by reviews conducted after each phase.

Deliberations at EU level also dealt with the opinion issued by the ECJ in 2014 on the issue of a potential accession of the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Under the EU Treaty, the EU is obliged to accede to the ECHR. This accession would create an additional opportunity for filing an individual complaint directly against the EU in areas of Union competences and/or would enable a review of Union legislation before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) for compatibility with the ECHR. After negotiations on an ECHR accession agreement between the EU and the Council of Europe (CoE) were completed at officials’ level in April 2013, the Commission commissioned the ECJ with preparing an opinion on the draft’s compatibility with primary legislation. In its Opinion 2/13 of 18 December, the ECJ concludes that the draft accession agreement is not in all aspects compatible with primary law requirements. In 2015, the Commission and the Member States consulted on necessary and appropriate measures for implementing the requirements outlined in the opinion and confirmed their resolve to continue to pursue the accession.

2.3.9. The Committee of the Regions

The Committee of the Regions (CoR) is a consultative body and as such provides a forum for the representation of regional and local interests in con-
Austria in the European Union

nection with European integration. Austria is represented by twelve members. Each of the nine federal provinces has a seat and the towns, cities and municipalities together have a total of three seats.

In February, the CoR held the constitutive meeting marking the beginning of its 6th term of office. The members of all of the CoR bodies (bureau, plenary assembly, thematic and other commissions as well as working groups) were thus newly appointed. The President of the Tyrolean Diet Herwig van Staa was confirmed in his function as head of the delegation by the Austrian delegation. Austria continues to be represented in the Bureau by two members (Diet President Herwig van Staa and Mayor Heinz Schaden). The Austrian delegation was also able to assume the chairs of ECON (the CoR Commission for Economic Policy, Province Councillor Christian Buchmann) and of the Western Balkans Working Group (Diet President ret. Franz Schausberger).

In the first six months, debates in the plenary focused on the topics of TTIP, multilevel governance and the conflict in the Ukraine, while debates in the second half of the year dealt with migration and the environment. The Austrian delegation was able to contribute to and shape the work of the CoR through its chairs, its contributions to debates and numerous proposals for amendments to opinions.

2.3.10. 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 an organisational level, the EESC’s members are subdivided into the Workers’ Group, the Employers’ Group and the Various Interests’ Group. Topics are dealt with in six thematic sections. Austria is represented by twelve members composed of representatives from the social partners and the Austrian Consumer Protection Association.

Since Croatia’s accession to the EU, the EESC has had 353 members based on the transitional regulation in the accession treaty. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), however, provides for a maximum of 350 members for the EESC. Based on a proposal submitted by the Commission on 12 June 2014, the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) decided on the EESC’s composition on 14 July 2015. Taking account of the maximum number of members provided for in the TFEU, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Estonia will thus lose one seat each. For the term 2015–2020, Austria will not lose any of its twelve seats.
2.4. Participation of the Austrian Parliament at European Level and National Cooperation between Parliament and the Federal Provinces

The National Council and the Federal Council have a wide range of participation rights. Apart from the opportunity to deliver opinions to members of the Federal Government in effect since 1995 under Art. 23e of the Federal Constitutional Act, the Treaty of Lisbon established new participation rights for the National Council and the Federal Council in matters relating to the EU. These new rights include in particular the opportunity to submit “reasoned opinions” in the context of subsidiarity checks, to present “communications” in the context of political dialogue with EU institutions and to bring an action before the European Court of Justice on the grounds of infringement of the subsidiarity principle. Cooperation between the Austrian and the European Parliament (EP) is to be further intensified by the right of Austrian MPs to address the EP, introduced in 2015, and the right granted to outstanding figures of European and international politics to address both chambers of the Austrian Parliament.

In 2015, the Austrian Parliament made intensive use of many of these tools. The EU Committee of the Austrian Federal Council played a particularly active role by submitting reasoned opinions on legislative proposals from the Commission, thus ranking among the most active parliamentary chambers in the EU.

The Main Committee on Matters of the European Union of the Austrian National Council convened for six preparatory sessions in the lead-up to EU Council meetings. The Main Committee’s Standing Sub-Committee on Matters of the European Union held eight sessions to deliberate on 17 EU submissions.

An opinion under Art. 23e par. 3 of the Federal Constitutional Act was adopted on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (30 June).

The EU Committee of the Austrian Federal Council convened for 11 sessions to deliberate on 35 EU submissions and adopted eight communications under Art. 23f par. 4 of the Federal Constitutional Act. In addition, the Federal Council issued a communication on the recommendation of the Committee and a resolution at the request of the Committee.

The following communications under Art. 23f par. 4 of the Federal Constitutional Act were adopted:

- on the friends of the Presidency Group: improving the functioning of the EU system (4 February)
- on harmonised consumer price indexes (4 February)
Austria in the European Union

- on the European Fund for Strategic Investments and on amending Regulations (EU) No 1291/2013 and (EU) No 1316/2013 (8 April)
- on delegated acts (11 June)
- on the possibility for the Member States to restrict or prohibit the use of genetically modified food or feed on their territory (1 July)
- on the Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe (22 July)
- on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (15 September)
- on the establishment of national competitiveness boards within the euro area (16 December)

In its session of 4 February, the EU Committee of the Federal Council adopted an independent motion for a resolution (5/AEA-BR/2015). In view of the problem areas listed in the reasoning for the motion for the resolution, the Federal Government was requested to sound out possibilities for further developing the national parliaments’ contribution to EU legislative processes within the framework of the participation of national parliaments at European level and to contribute pro-actively towards this end – within the available means – in the context of the relevant discussion process with the newly elected Commission. On 5 February, the Federal Council unanimously adopted this resolution (243/E-BR/2015) in its 838th session.

In its session of 6 May, the EU Committee of the Federal Council adopted a recommendation to the plenary on issuing a communication on the Energy Union Package – A Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank). In its 842nd session on 3 June, the Federal Council decided unanimously to issue this communication (1/MTPL-BR/2015).

The participation rights of the provinces and municipalities laid down in Article 23d of the Federal Constitutional Act include the right to be notified of and comment on issues falling within their sphere of responsibility, analogous to the rights of the National and Federal Councils. Under the system governing participation of the federal provinces in the internal decision-making process on EU proposals (EU-Länderbeteiligungsverfahren), a total of 18 joint statements were submitted and five common statements were adopted in line with Article 23d par. 2 of the Federal Constitutional Act.

Chaired by the MFA, Austria’s positions in the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) are coordinated on a weekly basis. This process ensures the continuous involvement of the federal ministries, the social partners, the National Bank, the Federation of Austrian Industries, and the provinces and municipalities in the opinion-forming process in Austria. Since November 2004, the individual ministries have submitted reports to Parlia-
Austria’s Contribution to the Policy Areas of the European Union

2.5. Austria’s Contribution to the Policy Areas of the European Union

2.5.1. The European Union’s External Relations

2.5.1.1. Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) / Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

Under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), current foreign policy issues – including the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP; see Chapter 4) – that are of relevance for all EU Member States are dealt with at EU level. On matters relating to the CFSP, decisions are generally taken unanimously (constructive abstention is possible) by the Foreign Affairs Council; in addition, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (EU HR) issues statements on current events on behalf of the EU Member States.
The Political and Security Committee (PSC) is composed of representatives from the Member States and regularly monitors international foreign and security policy developments, supervises the implementation of agreed policies and exercises strategic direction in CFSP missions and operations.

At the suggestion of the EU HR, Federica Mogherini, the Council may appoint EU Special Representatives (EUSR). The EUSR mandates in effect in 2015 related to Afghanistan, the African Union (AU), the Sahel region, the Horn of Africa, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the South Caucasus and the conflict in Georgia, the Middle East Peace Process and Human Rights. In 2015, the CFSP budget amounted to 320.5 million euros. The majority of these funds was used for civilian crisis management operations, the EUSRs’ activities, as well as the promotion of disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Central CFSP topics included the conflicts in Europe’s neighbourhood, especially in Syria, in Iraq and in Libya, and the migration and refugee crisis that hit Europe very hard in 2015. In the conflict in Ukraine, agreement was reached on the Minsk II Agreement. It was, however, not fully implemented and the conflict thus remained unresolved. Led by EU HR Federica Mogherini, the nuclear negotiations between the E3/EU+3 and Iran, held in Vienna, were successfully completed and the “Vienna Agreement” was adopted on 14 July. Vienna also hosted the negotiations of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) on Syria (Vienna Process). With the naval anti-people smuggling operation EUNAVFOR MED Sophia in the Mediterranean, the number of CSDP operations increased to 18.

2.5.1.2. The European Neighbourhood Policy

The European Neighbourhood policy (ENP) applies to the six Eastern neighbouring countries, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine as well as the ten neighbouring countries of the EU in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean regions, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine/PNA, Syria and Tunisia. Belarus, Libya and Syria are included in the ENP but do not fully participate in it.

Cooperation under the ENP is based on the existing bilateral association, partnership and cooperation agreements which are to be supplemented by bilateral Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) including non-tariff measures, services, intellectual property rights, competition and public procurement, and by mobility partnerships.

In November, the Commission presented proposals for a review of the ENP, which had been prepared based on a broad consultation process involving all stakeholders from business, industry, civil society, think tanks and academia. Against the background of the rapid changes in the immediate neighbourhood and the interdependence between the EU and its neighbourhood, which has become increasingly apparent in the context of the migration and
refugee crisis, the review sought to outline ways for building up more effective partnerships between the EU and its partners and for enabling the EU to react more rapidly to changes in its neighbourhood. Essential hallmarks of the revised ENP are greater differentiation and more sharing of responsibilities. Thus the Union has recognised the fact that not all partners aspire to adopt EU rules and standards, and has taken account of the individual countries’ wishes regarding the nature and scope of their partnership with the EU.

A stronger focus is placed on economic, political and security policy stabilisation of the EU’s neighbourhood. Sustainable economic development, prevention of radicalisation and reforms in the fields of security and border management are to be supported in order to open up perspectives for the local population. The refocused ENP also seeks to involve its neighbours’ neighbours to a greater extent in addressing challenges. The EU will uphold and continue to promote good governance, democracy, rule of law and human rights.

The review was welcomed by the EU Foreign Affairs Ministers in December and from 2016 onwards the new ENP will be implemented, starting with contacts with the partner countries, in close coordination with the EU Member States. The question on shaping relations with those states that reject deep and comprehensive integration with the EU will come to play a key role in this context.

The EU supports realisation of the ENP goals through financial contributions and political as well as technical cooperation. Financial assistance is mainly provided through the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) that is funded with 15.4 billion euros for the period 2014 to 2020. Reform processes and institution building in the partner countries are supported by twinning programmes (administrative partnerships) and TAIEX (short-term expert assistance). The aim is to assist these countries in their approximation to EU standards and policies by sharing relevant expert knowledge.

As a successful twinning partner in South East Europe, Austria is also interested in becoming more closely involved in the European Neighbourhood. Following successful completion of a twinning project with the local energy control authority in Georgia, E-Control was entrusted with a follow-up project. In the context of TAIEX, Austrian authorities in 2015 seconded experts to Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Israel, Moldova and Ukraine to share relevant specialised know-how in the fields of justice and home affairs, finances, health care, labour law and digitalisation.

In response to the challenges in the Southern Neighbourhood, the new ENP seeks to also address the root causes of the current migration and refugee crisis and the threat posed by terrorism. Special attention is being paid to promoting economic development, fighting unemployment and improving prospects for the future especially for young people. A stabilising effect is to be achieved through the support of good governance and the rule of law as well as effective
justice and law enforcement systems. These plans for reform lay the groundwork for a more flexible ENP, which takes better account of the widely varying range of ambitions of the respective countries and of the EU itself.


In addition to the bilateral cooperation approach pursued under the ENP, the EU has also held the co-chair of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) since March 2012. Composed of 43 members in total, the UfM includes the Southern Mediterranean states, Jordan and Mauritania, and all EU Member States. The goal is to reinforce the complementary character of the UfM and the ENP, and to strengthen the effectiveness of EU financial assistance for the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean countries. The EU provided continued support in the project-related work of the Barcelona-based UfM Secretariat. Meeting in November, the UfM Foreign Affairs Ministers decided that in future meetings will be held on an annual basis.

Implementing the Eastern Partnership concept developed in 2009, relations with the six countries in the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood have been further developed. In 2015, the ratification process for the association agreements with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, which are aimed at political association and gradual integration into the EU economic area as well as establishment of a comprehensive and deepened free trade zone, was completed in almost all EU Member States. In April 2016, the Netherlands will hold a popular referendum on the Association Agreement with Ukraine. The referendum is based on the first application of a new law on citizens’ participation, which provides for a non-binding popular referendum on planned legislation subject to the collection of a sufficient number of declarations of support.

As regards the further deepening of relations with Armenia, the EC and the EEAS were authorised in October by the Council to launch negotiations on a new framework agreement. The first round of talks, in which Austria supports quick completion of negotiations, was held in December.

Other important aspects fostered by the Eastern Partnership Policy include the promotion of citizens’ mobility and visa liberalisation in a secure environment. The EU is taking gradual steps towards the goal of full visa liberalisation for individual partner countries provided that the necessary requirements for well-managed and safe mobility are fulfilled. In December, the EC stated that Ukraine and Georgia had made progress in implementing the Visa Liberalisation Action Plans and announced that a proposal on the relevant visa liberalisation regulation would be made in spring 2016. Visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Armenia and Azerbaijan entered into force in 2014. Likewise in 2014, visa requirements were lifted for Moldovan citizens.
2.5.1.3. **Foreign Trade**

The ten most important export markets for the EU in 2015 were: the USA, China, Switzerland, Turkey, the Russian Federation, Japan, Norway, the Republic of Korea, the United Arab Emirates and Brazil.

The ten most important export markets for Austria outside the EU in 2015 were the USA, Switzerland, China, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Japan, Canada, the Republic of Korea, the United Arab Emirates and Mexico.

In line with its objective of promoting economic growth and job creation, the EU is conducting negotiations on bilateral Free Trade Agreements with a number of states. Negotiations with Canada, for instance, were opened in 2009 and concluded in 2014 at European Commission level. The agreement is to be signed at the EU-Canada Summit in October 2016. Negotiations with Vietnam were completed in December.

In autumn, the Commission presented its new Trade Strategy based on which the European presence in Asia is to be strengthened. After having been given the relevant mandate, the Commission will launch negotiations on a free trade agreement with Australia and New Zealand, new negotiations with the Philippines and Indonesia will be launched in due course. Another objective is the modernisation of the agreements with Chile and Mexico and the trade union with Turkey. The trade strategy also provides for extending the transparency initiative launched in the context of TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) to all the EU’s trade negotiations. Reacting to the increasing importance of markets outside of the EU – such as the BRICS or the Next 11 countries – Austria also launched an internationalisation initiative. Austria seeks to strengthen its exports to these markets of the future, as growth rates in Asia and Latin America significantly exceed those in Europe. Likewise, better access to attractive markets was one of the aspects considered in the geographic adaptation of the MFA’s network of foreign representations.

2.5.1.4. **Human Rights and Democracy**

See Chapter 8.3.

2.5.1.5. **Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid**

See Chapter 9.3. and 12.3.1.

2.5.1.6. **EFTA/EEA and Relations to Western European Non-EU Member Countries**

Founded in 1960, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) was originally conceived as a counterweight to the European Communities. Today, it consists of the Western European non-EU Member States Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. The association primarily aims to promote
economic relations through free movement of goods and services; the EFTA Agreement also sets out rules in the fields of competition, investment, dismantling of technical trade barriers and free movement of persons.

With a view to fully involving the EFTA states in the Single Market, the European Economic Area (EEA) was set up by the EU Member States and Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. The core elements of the EEA Agreement are the “four freedoms” – free movement of goods, services, capital and people. The EEA Agreement also includes provisions on trade in agricultural and fisheries products and stipulates rules for the fields of competition and state aid; it also provides for deepening cooperation in the areas of research and development, environment, education and social policy. The areas of Common Foreign and Security Policy, agricultural and fisheries policies, trade policies, customs union, justice and home affairs (although all EFTA states are members of the Schengen Area) and the Economic and Monetary Union. In exchange for their participation in the Single Market, the EEA/EFTA states contribute towards combating social and economic disparities in the entire EEA area. In this respect, negotiations on the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism (2014–2021) were launched in spring 2014 and completed in December.

Switzerland does not belong to the EEA. Its relationship with the EU is regulated by a dense network of some 120 agreements, which enable far-reaching participation in the Single Market. Alongside the Free Trade Agreement of 1972, the relations between the EU and Switzerland are mainly governed by two packages of treaties, known as Bilateral Agreements I and II, and adopted in 1999 and 2004 respectively. The Bilateral Agreements I include a package of seven sectoral agreements that relate to freedom of movement and mutual opening of markets; under the Bilateral Agreements II cooperation with the EU is extended to areas such as Schengen/Dublin, interest taxation, processed agricultural products, the environment and education.

In a referendum held on 9 February 2014, a majority of 50.3% of the Swiss population voted in favour of state controlled immigration. The outcome of this referendum has to be implemented by the Swiss government by 2017. Rejecting a re-negotiation of the EU-Swiss Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons, the EU now focuses on upholding the principles set out in this agreement. Another important element in the context of the further development of bilateral relations with Switzerland is the completion of negotiations on an institutional framework agreement on the coherent application of the agreements and the introduction of effective dispute settlement mechanisms. Despite numerous rounds of consultations on the implementation of the free movement agreement and the resumption of negotiations on the institutional framework agreement on 9 December, it has, however, not been possible to resolve the open issues.
### 2.5.1.7. Relations between the EU and (further) Third Countries

See Chapter 3.

### 2.5.2. The Enlargement of the European Union

The “renewed consensus on enlargement” agreed on in December 2006 again continued to guide the EU’s enlargement policy in 2015. Adopted by the European Council, the strategy is based on the premise of the Union’s capacity to integrate new members and stresses – along with the consolidation of commitments made – the observance of a fair and at the same time rigorous conditionality. This means that progress in the 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 rule of law, fundamental rights, improvement of economic policy governance and reform of public administration.

On 10 November, the Commission presented the annual Enlargement Package, which contains the EU’s Enlargement Strategy and – for each candidate country – Country Progress Reports whose format had been revised. This comprehensive strategy underlines the contribution the Union’s enlargement policy makes towards peace, security, stability and economic development in Europe. It also highlights the progress made by the Western Balkan states in the context of the Berlin Process, including the Vienna Western Balkans Summit of 27 August, inter alia in the field of connectivity.

Austria – being aware of the key role the EU perspective plays in the peaceful and stable development of this region it enjoys close historic, cultural, economic and inter-personal ties with – is one of the major advocates and political supporters of the Western Balkan states in the Enlargement Process. Austria’s pro-active role in the context of the Berlin Process, also as mediator in seeking to resolve open issues, and its commitment towards strengthening civil society thus reflects this foreign policy priority.

Austria also provided very tangible support to the pre-accession process by establishing EU-funded twinning partnerships as well as providing short-term expert assistance (TAIEX), thus supporting candidate countries in strengthening their public administrations. In 2015, Austria contributed pro-actively to projects in the environmental and tax sectors in Croatia, which as a new EU Member State continues to benefit from twinning projects. Other projects Austria contributed to related to anti-corruption (in Albania) and the penal system (in Serbia).

The EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) is the funding mechanism for the pre-accession process. The beneficiaries are candidate countries under the accession process (Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, Albania and Turkey) and potential candidates (Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as
Austria in the European Union

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 Commission’s evaluations and annual strategy papers, in which context account is taken, for instance, of the migration and refugee crisis. The IPA II Regulation currently in force entered into effect on 1 January. Total IPA funding for the 2014–2020 period amounts to 11.699 billion euros. The objectives outlined in IPA II include a more targeted and efficient use of funds, more results-oriented project monitoring and a simplification of procedures.

2.5.2.1. Serbia, Montenegro, Turkey and Iceland

The EU formally launched accession negotiations with Serbia on 21 January 2014, after a First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations between Belgrade and Pristina had been reached on 19 April 2013. As a result of important progress made under the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue on 25 August, the political requirements for opening the first two negotiation chapters were fulfilled and chapters 32 (financial control) and 35 (other issues) were opened. According to the Commission’s Progress Report, the further pace of negotiations will be highly dependent on progress made in the fields of rule of law and normalisation of relations with Kosovo. Economic reform, especially in the field of publicly owned companies, is to be continued and Serbia is to maintain its constructive role in the region.

Accession negotiations with Montenegro were opened on 29 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 2015, a total of 22 negotiation chapters had been opened, the most recent ones being chapters 14 and 15 (transport policy and energy) on 21 December. Two chapters have already been provisionally closed. According to the Commission, progress in the field of rule of law will influence the pace of further negotiations.

Following its official application for accession in 1987, accession negotiations with Turkey were opened in October 2005. Out of a total of 35 negotiation chapters, only Chapter 25 (Science and Research) has been provisionally closed so far. Another 14 chapters have been opened since 2005. In return for an agreement with Turkey on the migration and refugee crisis, the European Council on 15 October inter alia held out the prospect of adding new impetus to the accession negotiations. In this spirit, Chapter 17 (Economic and Monetary Policy) was opened in December, and the Commission announced the presentation of revised screening documents on chapters 15 (Energy), 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights), 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security), and 26 (Education and Culture) by spring 2016. Progress in opening further chapters is, however, hampered by political hurdles: Turkey has been in a customs union with the EU since 1995. The enlargements 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 Ankara Agreement, was signed in July 2005. Turkey, however, issued a declaration in which it stated that it continued not to recognise the Republic of Cyprus and that the customs union did not include Cyprus. The EU Council has upheld its criticism of this breach of contract and in December 2006 decided to partially suspend accession negotiations. Until full implementation of the Ankara Protocol by Turkey, eight related chapters will thus remain unopened and it will not be possible to close any of the negotiation chapters that had already been opened.

In its 2015 progress report, the Commission criticised negative trends in important areas such as the respect of the rule of law, freedom of expression and freedom of the media. The economic area was generally assessed in positive terms. The adoption of the Joint Action Plan on managing the migration and refugee crisis, prepared together with the EU, was welcomed.

Accession negotiations with **Iceland** have been suspended since May 2013 following a decision to this end taken by the Icelandic government. In March, the Icelandic Foreign Minister informed the Presidency of the Council of the EU that Iceland no longer wished to be considered a candidate country. This step was massively criticised by the country’s opposition party. The Presidency of the Council took note of the relevant letter.

### 2.5.2.2. The European Perspective of Further Countries in the Western Balkans

In its Progress Report of 10 November, the Commission noted progress made by Albania, Kosovo and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Macedonia lacked headway in the process of EU integration.

**Albania**, which was granted candidate status by the Council on 24 June 2014, has made ongoing progress – especially by reforming its public administration and preparing a comprehensive reform of the judicial system – on its way towards its next goal, i.e. the opening of accession negotiations. Alongside highlighting tangible results in the field of rule of law, particularly in the fight against corruption and organised crime, the Commission calls for establishing a constructive dialogue between the political parties, efforts in the field of budget consolidation and improvement in the business environment.

The pace at which **Kosovo** moves closer to the EU depends to a great extent on the progress made by the country in the fields of rule of law, the judiciary, public administration and establishment of a functioning market economy. Another key factor is progress in the process of normalisation of relations with Serbia. After the “First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations” had been reached between Kosovo and Serbia on 19 April 2013, the EU launched negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) which was initialled on 25 July 2014. Following further progress, including in particular the establishment of a special war crimes
tribunal and the positive outcome of the dialogue with Serbia in August, the agreement was signed on 27 October. However, as Kosovo is not recognised by five EU Member States this SAA is purely an EU agreement.

A visa dialogue was started with Kosovo on 19 January 2012. The prerequisite for visa liberalisation is fulfilment of technical requirements in the fields of document security, illegal migration and readmission, public order and security as well as external relations and fundamental rights. The majority of these prerequisites have already been fulfilled.

The EU’s strategy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina is based on the political leadership’s commitment to a comprehensive reform agenda and has already generated positive results: the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, which had already been signed in 2008, entered into force on 1 June. It is however necessary to adapt the agreement to Croatia’s EU accession. Mid-September saw the adoption of an Action Plan for the implementation of comprehensive reform in key areas. According to the Commission, the country is thus back on track with regard to reforms. Bosnia and Herzegovina does not yet enjoy candidate status and its application for EU accession was announced for the beginning of 2016.

Every year since 2009, the EC has been recommending the start of accession negotiations with Macedonia. The necessary consensus in the Council had, however, always been thwarted by the name dispute with Greece. The beginning of 2013 saw the onset of an ongoing political crisis in the country, which has largely paralysed the accession process. The Commission identified deficits in the respect of fundamental rights, negative trends as regards the judiciary and media independence, the politicisation of public institutions, democratic deficits in elections and a polarisation of political culture. At the same time, alignment with the EU acquis has advanced well. Thus the Commission recommends the opening of accession negotiations, however, on condition that the Prizno Agreement of June/July, aimed at resolving the domestic policy crisis and mediated by EU representatives, has been implemented following the elections scheduled for April 2016, and that substantial progress has been made on urgent reform priorities.

2.5.3. Macro-Regional Strategies

As mandated by the European Council, in 2015 the European Commission submitted strategy documents and action plans on EU Strategies for the Baltic Sea Region (2009), the Danube Region (2011), the Adriatic-Ionic Region (2014) and for the Alpine Region.

The Communication on an EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), adopted by the Commission on 28 July, was endorsed on 27 November by the General Affairs Council. In the Conclusions that were endorsed, the GAC approved of the strategy and called for its swift and immediate implementa-
Austria’s Contribution to the Policy Areas of the European Union

tion in policy areas such as economic growth and innovation, mobility and connectivity, and environment and energy.

The primary goal of the EU Alpine macro-regional strategy, prepared by the Commission since 2013, involving a broad-based consultation process, is close cooperation among the Alpine countries as they face the same or similar challenges due to their topography. The goal of this strategy is not to make available new EU funding but to make targeted, specific and coordinated use of the existing EU funding instruments in conjunction with the respective national funding by the EU Member States in the overall regional context of the wider Alpine region, especially in the fields of environment, education, civil society, economy and natural hazards. The wider Alpine region covers both the Alpine region and its urban peripheral area (such as Milan and Vienna). It thus stretches across the territories of seven countries (Austria, Germany, France, Italy and Slovenia as well as Switzerland and Liechtenstein) comprising a total of 48 regions and a population of 70 million people. Implementation of the EUSALP is to start in January 2016 chaired by Slovenia, which is the first country to assume the annually rotating chairmanship.

Established in 2011, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) consists of four pillars (connecting the region, protecting the environment, building prosperity and strengthening the region) based on which eleven priorities were developed. Austrian institutions are actively involved in all areas and have assumed a coordinating role in three of them (inland navigation, developing human resources and stepping up institutional capacity). In order to ensure the appropriate national involvement and to accompany the inner-Austrian implementation of the EUSDR in an ongoing manner, the Federal Chancellery in agreement with the MFA set up a cooperation platform composed of representatives from the federal ministries, the federal provinces and the social partners. With a view to involving further civil society players and multipliers in the Strategy for the Danube Region, exchanging experiences and sharing proposals with National Coordinators, the Federal Chancellery and the MFA jointly organised the First EUSDR Dialogue Forum held in Vienna on 13 May.

In the ministerial meeting chaired by Baden-Wuerttemberg in Brussels on 13 May, the introduction of a Trio Presidency was adopted. Until autumn 2015, Austria together with the Presidency countries of 2015 (Baden-Wuerttemberg) and 2016 (Slovakia) was responsible for promoting the EUSDR agendas at overall strategy level. The first political meeting at the level of the newly established Trio Presidency was held in Bratislava on 24 June involving representatives from Baden-Wuerttemberg, Austria and Slovakia. At this meeting, participants deliberated on the longer-term course of the EUSDR. On 29 and 30 October, the Fourth Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Danube region was held in Ulm (Germany) and brought together more than 1,000 representatives from the countries bordering the Danube. In line with the motto “Smart, social, sustainable – Innovation for the Danube Region”, discussions
between participants and high-level political representatives focused on topics such as innovation, vocational training, dual education, entrepreneurship and civil society as engines of sustainable and inclusive growth. At a concurrent meeting of ministers responsible for the coordination of funds, a joint declaration on aligning the EU Strategy for the Danube Region with various programmes and funds was adopted. On 15 July, the Danube Strategy Point (DSP) was opened at the Representation of the State of Baden-Wuerttemberg in Brussels. The Danube Strategy Point is a EUSDR support structure for the coordination of strategy implementation, dissemination of information and aligning the EUSDR with the EU Programme for transnational cooperation in the Danube region. Approved by the Commission in August, this Danube Transnational Programme provides for funding of 202 million euros for the period 2014–2020 from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and 19.8 million euros from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) for translational project in the Danube river basin.

2.5.4. Policy Areas of the European Union

2.5.4.1. Migration and Asylum

The largest migration and refugee crisis since the end of the Second World War faced the EU and its Member States with a major challenge in 2015. The civil war in Syria, the unstable situation in Iraq, in Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as in some African countries triggered a flow of irregular migrants and refugees heading for Europe. More than one million people crossed the Mediterranean in 2015. In the course of the year, the migration flow shifted from the central Mediterranean route to the eastern Mediterranean and the Western Balkans. Some 851,000 irregular migrants, mostly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, came from Turkey via the Aegean to Greece, crossing Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary and/or Croatia and Slovenia on their way to Austria, Germany and Scandinavia. In addition, some 153,600 irregular migrants, mainly from Eritrea, Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa headed via the central Mediterranean route to Europe. Austria was massively affected by the migration movement both as target and transit country. From the beginning of September to the end of the year, some 670,000 irregular migrants crossed the Austrian border. In 2015, some 90,000 individuals applied for asylum in Austria.

After a boat carrying irregular migrants had capsized off the island of Lampedusa claiming more than 800 lives, the European Council in a special meeting of 23 April adopted guidelines for further steps to be taken in order to address the migration and refugee crisis. An immediate strengthening of the common border control and sea rescue operations TRITON and POSEIDON, coordinated by FRONTEX, is thus to be followed by a CSDP mission in line with international law to fight criminal people smuggling in the Central Mediterranean as well as steps towards intensified cooperation with the African states and Turkey and towards strengthening internal solidarity and shared
Austria’s Contribution to the Policy Areas of the European Union

responsibility for the protection of refugees. On 18 May, the Council agreed to establish the CSDP mission EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia. Aimed at disrupting human smuggling and trafficking networks, the operation was launched on 22 June. On 27 May, the Commission presented an EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling.

The Communication from the Commission of 13 May on a European Agenda on Migration defined both immediate action and medium-term measures for improved management of migration and considerations regarding long-term solution approaches. These measures were specified in more detail by the Commission in three implementation packages of 27 May, 9 September and 15 December. By the end of the year, the following steps had been taken regarding the key elements outlined in these packages.

Both the Council of the EU and the Council (Justice and Home Affairs, and Foreign Affairs) had repeatedly dealt with the topic of migration and developed the framework and the requirements for EU action. The positions of the Austrian Federal Government on these EU projects were mainly based on the resolutions by the National Council regarding EU search and rescue operations at sea of 4 May and further measures aimed at preventing new deaths in the Mediterranean, and of 1 September on refugee movements in Europe and in Austria, calling on the Federal Government to support a comprehensive European asylum strategy, a mandatory quota-based distribution of asylum seekers, the fight against people smuggling and safe immigration opportunities for refugees.

Proposals by the Commission to introduce an initially temporary and subsequently permanent mechanism under which asylum seekers from countries of origin with particularly high recognition rates are to be distributed and relocated from hotspots – to be established in countries of first entry with particularly high numbers of arrivals at the EU’s external borders – based on a fixed key to the other Member States (“relocation”) proved highly controversial. By the end of the year, the emergency regulations – initially based on a voluntary scheme and then adopted by qualified majority – on the relocation of a limited number of asylum seekers from the frontline countries Greece and Italy were only poorly implemented.

In its decisions of 14 and 22 September the Council agreed to resettle (within two years) a total of 160,000 asylum seekers in need of international protection, 66,400 from Greece and 39,600 from Italy. The decision on a further 54,000 such asylum seekers – envisaged originally from Hungary – will be taken in 2016. By the end of the year, 17 Member States had made available a total of 4,207 relocation places; in total 272 individuals were actually relocated (190 from Italy and 82 from Greece) by the end of the year. By the end of the year, Austria, as a result of the extraordinarily high influx of asylum seekers to its territory and the strain on its capacities to process asylum applications, did not provide any of the 1,953 relocation places allocated to it and notified the Council and the Commission on 16 December that it was
“confronted with an emergency situation characterised by a sudden inflow of nationals of third countries”. Provided that there was no comprehensive and permanent reduction in inflow of refugees and migrants coming to Austria by the end of June 2016, Austria reserved the right to suspend its contribution to the implementation and apply for adaptation of the relocation regulation in favour of Austria as a beneficiary Member State.

At the Justice and Home Affairs Council of 20 July, Member States committed themselves on a voluntary basis and independently of the relocation of asylum seekers within the EU, to take in 20,000 persons in clear need of international protection from third countries (primarily from North Africa, the Middle East and the Horn of Africa) within two years (resettlement). Including the involvement of associated states, the EU held out the prospect of some 22,500 such resettlement places. Austria agreed to take in 1,900 persons under this scheme and by the end of the year some 1,300 individuals had already arrived in the context of a humanitarian reception programme for Syrian refugees, in place since the end of 2013.

Of the six hotspots that are to be established in Italy and the five hotspots to be established in Greece for the initial registration of arriving refugees, only two (on Lampedusa and Lesbos) had somewhat sufficient reception and operational capacities by the end of the year. Of the 1,149 border control officers and/or experts requested towards this end by the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the EU Member States (FRONTEX) and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), Member States had only made available 648 by the end of the year. Having made available 71 border control officers and/or experts, Austria ranked among the top contributors.

In its efforts to address the migration and refugee crisis, the EU adopted financial measures and decided to increase funding for the migration-related budget items for 2015: funding for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) was thus increased by 80 million euros and an additional amount of 20 million euros was made available for the Internal Security Fund (ISF); additional funding of 1.3 million euros was made available for FRONTEX, EASO and the European Police Office (EUROPOL); a funding increase for the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) was provided, totalling 300 million euros, in favour of the Madad Trust Fund.

In addition to the immediate measures, the Commission in the second half of the year presented an Action Plan on the return of irregular migrants to their home countries and proposals for a regulation on a common list of safe countries of origin, a permanent relocation mechanism, the establishment of a European Border and Coast Guard Agency and an amendment to the Schengen Border Code.

After lengthy negotiations, the Council and the European Parliament reached a political agreement on a directive on legal migration on 4 December. The
Directive 'on the conditions of entry and residence of third country nationals for the purposes of research, study, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or education project and au pairing' thus aims to improve the conditions for third country nationals who come to the EU as students, researchers, pupils, volunteers, interns and trainees.

The migration and refugee crisis also dominated the EU’s external action. As early as 24 August, Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz issued an urgent appeal to EU HR Federica Mogherini requesting her to put the topic on the agenda of the Foreign Affairs Council. At the same time, the Federal Minister advocated a comprehensive approach that is to comprise five elements: addressing the root causes inter alia in Syria and Libya, safety and humanitarian support for refugees on the ground, stepping up the protection of the EU’s external borders, close cooperation along the Western Balkans route and an EU-wide asylum regulation. In the subsequent months, the EU, alongside launching measures aimed at strengthening the diplomatic initiatives for a political solution to the conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Libya, and towards fighting organised crime responsible for people smuggling, established a Trust Fund for Africa and also took steps towards ensuring effective action in managing the inflow of refugees and migrants building on enhanced political dialogue, intensified cooperation and exchange of information and experience with strategic partner countries, civil society organisations and local authorities.

In support of the countries on the Western Balkans, a conference bringing together EU interior and foreign ministers and their counterparts from Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and the Western Balkan countries was organised on 8 October to discuss the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Balkans routes. At this meeting, a common action plan was adopted with the goal of ensuring management of migratory flows in an organised manner.

The EU-Africa Summit on Migration on 11 and 12 November in Valletta brought together the EU Heads of State or Government and representatives from 30 African states. A joint political statement and an action plan were adopted with a view to tackling the root causes of poverty, unemployment and armed conflict, enabling legal migration and mobility, ensuring protection and asylum, fighting the crimes of people smuggling and human trafficking as well as ensuring return, readmission and reintegration.

As a further measure aimed at curbing the inflow of refugees and migrants heading for Europe, the EU Heads of State or Government adopted a Joint Action Plan with Turkey on 29 November. Under this plan, the EU inter alia makes available a total of three billion euros to assist Turkey in supporting Syrian refugees. In return, the readmission agreement is to be fully applicable by June 2016, measures aimed at improving the socio-economic situation of Syrian refugees are to be initiated by Turkey and criminal networks of people smugglers are to be fought more intensively.
Joint Declarations for a Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility were signed by the EU on 12 March with Nigeria and on 12 November with Ethiopia. On 1 June, the EU reached political agreement with Belarus on establishing a Mobility Partnership that is to be signed in 2016 as soon as the negotiations on a visa facilitation and readmission agreement have been completed. Towards the end of the year, the EU furthermore submitted a draft for a Joint Declaration on a Mobility Partnership with the Lebanon that is to be fully negotiated in 2016. At the EU-China Summit on 29 June, a package on cooperation in the fields of visa, mobility and readmission was endorsed.

2.5.4.1.1. Other Issues relating to the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice

Under the Treaty on European Union, the EU is to ensure that its citizens live in an Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ) without internal frontiers. In June, the Justice and Home Affairs Council adopted a renewed Internal Security Strategy (ISS) for the period 2015–2020, which is based on the European Agenda on Security presented by the EC in April. The ISS sets out three priorities in the field of internal security: tackling and preventing terrorism and radicalisation, preventing and fighting serious and organised crime as well as preventing and fighting cybercrime. The strategy defines five goals for the further development of the AFSJ: 1) improving information exchange; 2) strengthening operational cooperation; 3) enhancing prevention and investigation of criminal acts and of terrorist attacks; 4) enhancing training, funding, research and innovation possibilities, and 5) developing as well as promoting availability and use of safe and secure information and communication technologies in order to enhance cyber security. As a first step towards implementing the ISS, a list of 40 concrete priority measures for the second half of the year was presented, including the adoption of the Data Protection Package, the adoption of the Passenger Name Record (PNR) Directive, the fight against illicit trafficking of firearms (please also see Chapter 4.3.) and the implementation of the European Migration Agenda, with a special focus on the fight against people smuggling (see Chapter 2.5.4.1.).

In December, agreement was reached in the Council and in the EP on a comprehensive reform of the Union Data Protection Rules (Data Protection Package). The relevant proposals had been presented by the Commission at the beginning of 2012. The package includes the regulation on the protection of individuals with regard to processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (General Data Protection Regulation) as well as the Directive on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by competent authorities for the purposes of the prevention, detection, investigation or prosecution of criminal offences or the execution of criminal penalties, and on the free movement of such data (Data Protection Directive). Austria advocated even stricter and more far-reaching data protection provisions.
The General Data Protection Regulation will essentially replace the Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC and for the first time create a standardised legal framework in the field of general data protection that is directly applicable in every Member State, which is to lead to far-reaching harmonisation in this area. The new Data Protection Directive will in principle repeal Council Framework Decision 2008/977/JHA for the field of police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters.

Since the Commission was given the mandate to open negotiations on a framework agreement between the EU and the USA on the protection of personal data transferred and processed for the purposes of prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of criminal offences, including terrorist acts in the context of police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters (Umbrella-Agreement), several rounds of negotiations have been held with the USA. The EU seeks to conclude a sustainable agreement with the USA that provides for the necessary guarantees, including the protection of natural persons’ rights to legal protection by the courts. The agreement was initialled on 8 September. By the end of 2015, however, an amendment to the law in the USA aimed at ensuring natural persons’ right to legal protection by the courts in the USA and the final review by the Council and the European Parliament were still lacking.

The Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC and consequently also the Member States’ national data protection rules allow data transfers to third countries without appropriate data protection levels only under very strict conditions (for instance approval by the supervisory authority). The Safe Harbor “Certification Programme” (Commission decision based on Art. 26 par. 6 of the Data Protection Directive) enabled the transfer of personal data from EU to US companies without prior approval, provided these companies (for instance Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Facebook, Apple) had registered with the U.S. Department of Commerce by entering their names in the relevant list and thus committed themselves to adhere to specific data protection principles. This was, however, not subject to any independent verification by third bodies (“self certification”). The Safe Harbor Decision was declared invalid by the judgement passed by the European Court of Justice of 6 October in the case Schrems (C–362/14). The Commission now seeks to conclude a new agreement (Safe Harbor 2.0) with the USA on the transfer of personal data which ensures the required guarantees in the light of the recent court ruling.

In 2011, the Commission presented a proposal for a directive on the use of Passenger Name Record data for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime (Passenger Name Record Directive/PNR Directive), which inter alia due to the ECJ judgement on data retention (C–293/12), could not reach a majority in the EP for the time being. In view of the increased terrorist threat, the legislative process was continued in the EP and in the EU Council from February onwards. The compromise text, negotiated in a trilogue, was confirmed on 4 December in
the Council (Justice and Home Affairs) and on 10 December in the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs of the European Parliament thus enabling political agreement to be reached. Under the new directive, air carriers will be obliged to provide Member States’ authorities with the PNR for international flights. The inclusion of intra-European flights within the scope of national implementing legislation is optional. Under this directive, the collected data may be stored for a period of five years (after an initial period of six months, data elements will be masked out and de-personalised) and processed for the prevention, detection, investigation and criminal prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crimes.

In its judgement of 8 April 2014 (Joined Cases Digital Rights), the ECJ annulled the Data Retention Directive (Directive 2006/24/EC of 15 March 2006 on the retention of data generated or processed in connection with the provision of publicly available electronic communication services or public communications networks and amending Directive 2002/58/EC) based on two preliminary decision procedures initiated inter alia by the Austrian Constitutional Court. Subsequently, the Austrian Constitutional Court in a finding of 27 June 2014, also rescinded the national legal provisions relating to data retention. Similar judgements were also passed in numerous other EU Member States. Following internal consultations, the Commission announced at the beginning of the year not to propose a new legal instrument on data retention. At the Justice and Home Affairs Council in December, the majority of the EU Member States advocated a European solution, which is, however, to be based on the outcome of further developments regarding the two cases still pending with the ECJ (case Tele 2 Sverige (C–203/15).

In December, the Justice and Home Affairs Council also reached political agreement on the proposal for a regulation on promoting the free movement of citizens and businesses by simplifying the acceptance of certain public documents in the European Union and amending Regulation (EU) No. 1024/2012.

In the field of police cooperation, the political agreement reached with the EP on the draft regulation on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation and Training (Europol) was confirmed by the EU Council on 4 December. This regulation aligns the legal framework of Europol to the requirements of the Treaty of Lisbon, by inter alia setting up supervisory and control mechanisms, and making the Agency a supra-national body. The regulation on the establishment of a European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL), adopted in October by the EP and in November by the Council, forms the new legal basis for the European Police College (CEPOL), an EU Agency entrusted with education and training of high-level law enforcement officials.

In the field of criminal law, diverging views on the issue of including valued added tax continued to thwart agreement in the trilogue negotiations on the proposal for a Directive on the fight against fraud to the Union’s financial
Austria's Contribution to the Policy Areas of the European Union

interests by means of criminal law, presented in July 2012. Concerning the proposal for a Regulation on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office, submitted in July 2013, the Justice and Home Affairs Council of December was able to agree on a partial general approach, especially with respect to scope and responsibilities, and on cooperation with national authorities. In March, the Council adopted a general approach on the amendment of the EUROJUST Regulation, which aims to streamline the functioning and structure of EUROJUST, an EU agency mandated with coordinating cooperation between the EU Member States' judicial authorities involved in the investigation and prosecution of cross-border criminal cases, in line with the Lisbon Treaty and to add to the agency's democratic legitimacy. Regarding the proposal for a Directive on provisional legal aid to suspects or accused persons deprived of liberty and legal aid in European arrest warrant proceedings, presented in November 2013, which provides for a minimum harmonisation in this field, the Justice and Home Affairs Council adopted a general approach in March and trilogue negotiations with the EP were launched. Negotiations on the proposals on illegal drug trafficking, presented in September 2013, for a Directive laying down minimum provisions on the constituent elements of criminal acts and penalties in the field of drug trafficking and for a Regulation on new psychoactive substances were continued. Political agreement between the EP and the Council was reached in November on the proposal for a Directive on the strengthening of certain aspects of the presumption of innocence and of the right to be present at trial in criminal proceedings, and in December on a proposal for a Directive on procedural safeguards for children suspected or accused in criminal proceedings. With a view to sounding out legislative requirements on the topic of ensuring effective criminal justice in the digital age, initial talks were held in December between the Commission and the Council.

In the field of judicial cooperation in civil matters, it was not possible to reach political agreement in the Justice and Home Affairs Council on proposals for regulations on jurisdiction, applicable law and the recognition and enforcement of decisions in matters of matrimonial property regimes and regarding the property consequences of registered partnerships. These legislative projects are to be implemented by way of enhanced cooperation.

After political agreement had been reached in December 2014 on the proposal for a Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 1346/2000 on insolvency proceedings, the latter was adopted by the Council in March and by the EP in May. The proposal for a Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 861/2007 establishing a European Small Claims Procedure, and Regulation (EC) No 1896/2006 creating a European order for payment procedure was adopted by the EP in November and by the Council in December.
2.5.4.2. Internal Market, Free Movement of Goods, Industry and Tourism

2.5.4.2.1. Internal Market and Free Movement of Goods

The Single Market is a central policy area of the EU. Its primary goal is the creation of an economic area without internal frontiers within which goods, capital, persons and services may move freely. Despite long-standing efforts towards completing the Single Market, numerous cross-border obstacles have not yet been dismantled. In October, the European Commission presented a new Single Market Strategy in which it outlines that the full implementation of the Single Market, i.e. removal of the last remaining hurdles, would lead to an annual increase of the EU’s gross domestic product (GDP) of 615 billion euros (or 4.4 %). This would also have a positive impact on employment and the EU’s competitiveness as compared with other economic areas such as the USA, Japan or the BRICS.

The past few years have seen a range of efforts within the EU aimed at adding momentum to the completion of the Single Market. The goal was primarily to identify and dismantle remaining obstacles. In 2011, the Barroso Commission presented the Single Market Act I (SMA I), which includes twelve key actions/proposals for legislative actions; in 2012 the Single Market Act II (SMAII) was published, which provides for a further twelve key actions and proposals for legislative actions aimed at further deepening the Single Market. All legislative actions covered by the SMA I were adopted by the Council, all those covered by the SMA II were submitted by the Commission and some have already been adopted by the Council. Negotiations on some major legislative acts such as the Fourth Railway Package, for instance, are still ongoing; on the Product Safety and Market Surveillance Package the Council has not yet been able to reach agreement.

For Austrian business and industry, the new public procurement rules, the revised Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications, the facilitated access to funding for small and medium-sized companies, measures aimed at promoting rapid start-up growth, and the new European Unitary Patent including the Unified Patent Court are of particular importance in this context, especially with a view to making full use of the potential offered by the Single Market.

On 6 May, the EC presented its Strategy for a Digital Single Market for Europe. The EC has made the development of a Digital Single Market (DSM) a priority of its work. The strategy is based on three pillars: better online access to digital goods and services across Europe; creating the right conditions for digital networks and services to flourish; maximising the growth potential of the European digital economy.

This strategy sets out 16 key actions to be delivered by the EC (such as legislative proposals) by the end of 2016. Under this new strategic approach, the EC seeks to make the Single Market and Union legislation “fit for the digital age”. The implementation of the DSM is to substantially increase effi-
Austria’s Contribution to the Policy Areas of the European Union

ciency and add new momentum to the EU’s global competitiveness. During the Latvian and Luxembourg EU Council Presidencies, this strategy was the topic of intensive debate within almost every Council formation. The most important findings of these consultations and the Council Conclusions were summarised by the Latvian Presidency in a letter on the strategy that was submitted to the President of the European Council in the lead-up to the European Council meeting in June. Conclusions on the DSM strategy were adopted by the European Council meetings of 25 and 26 June as well as of 17 and 18 December. The subsequent Council Presidencies (the Netherlands, Slovakia, Malta) plan to place their focus on initiatives such as creating a legal framework for electronic communication, copyright (EC proposals on the modernisation of EU copyright rules of 9 December) and portability, geo-blocking, digital contracts, audio-visual media and e-commerce, the Cable and Satellite Directive, and cooperation in the field of consumer protection. One action derived from the Digital Single Market strategy is the preparation of a new eGovernment Action Plan 2016–2020, covering the topics of interoperability and key enablers, the “Once Only” principle, the Single Digital Gateway, eProcurement and eSignature and interlinking of business registers. In light of repeated statements made by EC Vice-President Andrus Ansip, it can be assumed that the principle of “digital by default” may also be included. The new Action Plan is to be presented by the Dutch Council Presidency in June 2016.

The new Single Market Strategy for Goods and Services presented by the EC on 28 October covers the balanced development of the “collaborative” (shared) economy, growth assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises and start-ups, the realization of a market without borders for services, preventing discrimination against consumers and entrepreneurs, a modernised standardisation system, more transparent and efficient public procurement and a strengthening of the Single Market for goods. It also includes a road map for the presentation of future legislative proposals and other measures, such as guidelines, voluntary initiatives involving the contribution of stakeholders, or the sharing of best practices. All proposals are to be presented between 2016 and 2018.

Just like the digital sector, the service sector is identified as a sector with huge growth potential. Particularly so as services, as highlighted by the Commission, make up a share of approximately 70 per cent of the European economic output and 90 per cent of all new jobs are created in this sector. Furthermore, services make up some 40% of the added value of export goods, while in EU trade they only account for 20%. The increasing interlinking of services and goods creates new business models and challenges. A central digital portal at EU level, which interconnects national information and service portals and presents business-relevant (national and EU) legislation and requirements in a clear and transparent manner, is to provide citizens and enterprises with better information and enhanced opportunities for par-
Austria in the European Union

ticipation. The introduction of a ‘services passport’ is to facilitate the cross-border exchange of documents and documentation. Other objectives pursued under this strategy are improvements with respect to the mutual recognition of products and services and preventing discrimination against consumers and companies based on their citizenship or place of residence.

The field of public procurement plays a key role in the Europe 2020 Strategy aimed at improving economic framework conditions mainly for SMEs and enhancing the efficiency of public administrations. The package of directives overhauling the public procurement framework in the EU has been in force since 18 April 2014 and includes Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement; Directive 2014/25/EU on procurement by entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors; and Directive 2014/23/EU on the award of concession contracts. Repealing the previous body of procurement rules, these three new directives seek to provide for greater flexibility and to simplify existing public procurement rules. They provide public authorities with the opportunity to promote common social goals and ensure inclusion of social, ecological and innovative aspects in all the various stages of public procurement procedures. A noteworthy element included in this package of directives is the obligation to handle procurement procedures electronically. Other important objectives pursued by the new directives are improved access of SMEs to procurement procedures and promotion of their participation in tender procedures. Member States are in principle required to transpose this package by 18 April 2018, but have the opportunity to postpone the application of regulations in the field of electronic public procurement. In Austria, this process is led by the Constitutional Service of the Federal Chancellery in close coordination with the Federal Government and the federal provinces and by involving all other relevant stakeholders. In addition, practical and technical issues are being discussed in expert groups at EU level in order to ensure proper, full and correct transposition of the directives. In this context, Austria places a special focus on timely transposition.

With a view to simplifying the verification procedures under which companies are required to provide evidence of their suitability to bid for public contracts, Art. 59 of the new Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement provides for a European Single Procurement Document. To this end, the Commission presented a new draft implementing regulation establishing the European Single Procurement Document to Member States in August. Austria stated that it can only agree to the draft provided that the substantive comments regarding clarity and structure of the implementing regulation developed in the course of the review are taken into account.

In its meeting on 28 May, the EU Competitiveness Council adopted a general approach on the Commission proposal for a Directive on single member private limited liability companies. The countries voting against this general approach included Austria, Belgium, Germany, Spain and Sweden. After the
Council had reached agreement on the proposed text under Latvian Presidency, a negotiation mandate for the trilogue on the proposal for a Directive amending Directive 2007/36/EG as regards the encouragement of long-term shareholder engagement and Directive 2013/34/EU as regards certain elements of the corporate governance statement was granted.

With the Council Decision (EU) 2015/1293 of 20 July on the conclusion on behalf of the European Union, of the European Convention on the legal protection of services based on, or consisting of, conditional access, the European Convention on the legal protection of services based on, or consisting of, conditional access was approved on behalf of the EU. The wording of the Convention is almost identical to that of Directive 98/84/EC of 20 November 1998 on the legal protection of services based on, or consisting of, conditional access and could help to extend the application of similar provisions beyond the borders of the Union and establish a law on services based on conditional access which would be applicable throughout the European continent.

In its plenary session of 15 December, the EP adopted the texts of the EU Trade Mark Package without amendments. The trade mark package, which consists of a recast of the Regulation approximating the laws of the Member States relating to national trademarks, and a revision of the Community Trademark Regulation, had previously been adopted in the first reading by the Council. In line with Art. 294 par. 7 lit. a TFEU, the relevant texts are thus considered formally adopted. The directive will enter into force on 15 January 2016 (20th day after publication in the Official Journal of the EU) and from that date on, the provisions set out in the regulation have to be transposed by Member States within 36 months (i.e. by 14 January 2019 at the latest). The regulation on the new “Union Trade Mark” will enter into effect 90 days after its publication, however, a number of new provisions will only be applicable after a further 18 months. The objective pursued by this legislative initiative, which has been under discussion since 2013, is modernisation of the entire European trademark system including its complementary protection opportunities at Union, national and regional level, thus adapting it to the challenges of the internet age. In this context, special attention had to be paid to improved substantive coordination and approximation of the two legal texts as well as to promoting convergence of essential procedural provisions (for instance with respect to renewal). Issues relating to detainment or seizure of counterfeit goods in transit by customs authorities were also regulated.

Regarding the implementation of a Unitary European Patent and a Unified Patent Court, the related issues were largely resolved and practical implementation in 2016 seems probable. The package consists of the regulations on the European patent with unitary effect (EU patent) including a cost-efficient language regime and an international agreement on a Unified Patent Court. The prerequisite for its entry into force is ratification by a minimum of 13 Member States, including Germany, the United Kingdom and France.
Following the entry into effect of the reform package, it should thus be possible to register the first patents with unitary effect by the beginning of 2017. SMEs in particular are to benefit from the cost-efficient Unitary Patent and the Unified Patent Court which aims to contribute to dismantling a competitive disadvantage compared with other major economic areas. Since agreement has been reached on the distribution of income from patent fees among Member States, it should now also be possible to reach agreement on other open issues and overcome the remaining hurdles. Regarding the Unified Patent Court, Austria decided to set up a national chamber to facilitate court proceedings in Austria.

2.5.4.2.2. European Industrial Policy

Since the onset of the economic crisis there have been ongoing efforts at European level towards developing an integrated European industrial policy. In 2010, the EC thus published a Communication on “An integrated industrial policy for the globalisation era – putting competitiveness and sustainability at centre stage”, which is at the same time one of the flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

In 2012, the Commission adopted an update of the Industrial Policy flagship initiative “A stronger European Industry for Growth and Economic Recovery” – with a view to improving Europe’s industrial competitiveness and facilitating the transition to a sustainable, low-carbon and resource-efficient economy.

Key activities relate to the promotion of investment in innovative and new technologies, the creation of an enterprise-friendly environment, improved access to funding, increased investment in education, training and skills. In a first step, six priority action lines (markets for advanced manufacturing technologies for clean production, sustainable industrial and construction policy and sustainable use of raw materials, clean vehicles, markets for bio-based products, markets for key enabling technologies, smart grids) were identified as areas requiring immediate action.

Based on the Industrial Policy Flagship Initiative and in order to assess their competitiveness, the EC has paid annual information visits to Member States since the beginning of 2011. The findings are then included in the annual competitiveness report. Following up on a debate on the European Semester held in the context of the European Council meeting of June 2013, the Heads of State or Government called for a broad-based horizontal and coherent approach for a modern industrial policy in Europe that accompanies structural change and economic renewal. At the beginning of 2014, the EC presented the Communication “For a European Industrial Renaissance”, which provides for horizontal focus and addresses topics such as financing, regulatory framework, research and innovation as well as climate and energy policy. The European Council in March 2014 confirmed that issues relating
to industrial competitiveness are to be integrated systematically into all EU policy areas and should also form part of impact assessment (mainstreaming and competitiveness proofing). The EU Member States are requested to approximate the measures taken at the European level in order to strengthen industrial competitiveness at the national level. The EC was asked to present a roadmap outlining further steps to be taken in the field of industrial policy. As a result of internal changes under the new Commission led by Jean-Claude Juncker, the roadmap has not yet been presented. The DG Internal Market and the DG Industry were merged and now form the DG Growth (led by Commissioner Elżbieta Bienkowska). In line with a Council decision of October 2014, improved coordination of industrial policy measures is sought at Council level by upgrading the High-Level Group on Competitiveness and Growth (HLG COMPCRO) as the strategic body of the Competitiveness Council with elected chair. The Juncker Commission takes a holistic approach covering all policy areas in order to continue to pursue an integrated industrial policy. The increasing intertwining of the production and the service sectors represents a major challenge for the future. The future sustainability of Europe’s industry also depends on its ability to adapt to the age of digital networking. The Juncker Commission also seeks to continue successful sectoral EU initiatives (including the relaunch of the CARS2020 initiative by the planned High Level Group on Automotive Industry GEAR 2030, the innovation partnership for raw material, and initiatives in the field of the defence industry). Succeeding the HLG Steel Industry, the High-Level Group on Energy Intensive Industries (EII) held its first meeting in 2015. Led by outstanding Austrian representatives of industry, a flagship location strategy including 130 proposed measures was developed at national level. Subject to consensus, the actions included in this initiative will be implemented in an ongoing manner.

2.5.4.2.3. Tourism

The tourism sector is of enormous national economic importance. Based on a communication on the topic of tourism presented by the Commission in 2010, measures aimed at promoting the tourism sector have been launched. These priorities relate inter alia to stimulating competitiveness in the European tourism sector, promoting the development of sustainable, responsible and high-quality tourism, the consolidation of the image and profile of Europe as a collection of sustainable and high-quality destinations, and maximising the potential of EU financial instruments for developing tourism. In the context of implementing these priorities, activities aimed at promoting data quality, the level of information and knowledge, framework conditions and networking were launched in 2015. This included inter alia studies on tourism development, Europeans’ demand behaviour, on the potential of accessible tourism, on the requirements of the labour market in the tourism industry, and the further development of the new Virtual Tourism Monitoring Centre.
Measures aimed at enhanced cross-border cooperation were also launched (such as European Routes of Culture, macro areas, the EDEN project aimed at promoting sustainable tourism development models, accessibility in tourism, senior citizens’ and youth tourism, the tourism indicator system ETIS for the sustainable management of tourism destinations, advertising Europe as a destination).


### 2.5.4.3. Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion

The EU’s structural and cohesion policy is an important tool for stimulating investment, growth and the creation of jobs as well for supporting structural reform. For the period 2014–2020, an indicative amount of some 5.18 billion euros is made available for Austria from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI), which has to be supplemented by national funding. The ESI Funds are made up of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD, approx. 3.9 billion euros), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF, approx. 536 million euros), the European Social Fund (ESF, approx. 442 million euros) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF, approx. seven million euros). In addition, ERDF funds of 257 million euros are made available for European Territorial Cooperation (ETC).

The strategic orientation of the use made of these ESI Funds in Austria is defined in the partnership agreement “Strat.at 2020”. Implementation of the programmes commenced in 2015.

On 18 November, the General Affairs Council (Cohesion) adopted Conclusions on simplification of the ESI Funds. The goal is to reduce the legal provisions’ level of complexity while at the same time making better use of the funds.

On 10 June, the EU Ministers responsible for cohesion policy, territorial development and urban planning adopted the Declaration of Riga. Under the heading “Towards the EU Urban Agenda”, it triggers a process of improved coordination of activities launched by Member States and European institutions in the fields of urban development and urban policy.

### 2.5.4.4. Free Movement of People, Services and Capital

The Services Directive 2006/123/EC (SD) liberalises the cross-border provision of services and the freedom of establishment and had to be transposed into national law by the end of 2009.

In Austria, the SD’s horizontal elements (such as Points of Single Contact and Mutual Administrative Assistance) were transposed at federal level by the Services Act (Dienstleistungsgesetz, DLG, Federal law Gazette I No 100/2011) and at province level by nine province laws. In addition, the fed-
eral provinces also amended numerous specific relevant laws in order to implement the SD's non-horizontal provisions (such as Art. 9 to 15). The transposition process is supervised by a national advisory board. As providers of Points of Single Contact (PSC), the provinces upgrade the relevant portals and procedures in an ongoing manner (including translation of information and process descriptions into English, development of PSC manuals to ensure user-friendliness, or consideration of the requirements set out in the amended Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications at the PSC). A network of advisory service centres was established under SOLVIT that aims to solve problems encountered by citizens and businesses in the internal market as quickly and effectively as possible without the need for legal action. The Austrian SOLVIT centre is based at the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy.

In its Communication on the “Small Business Act” (SBA), adopted in 2008, the European Commission for the first time defined a comprehensive framework for an EU policy directed at small and medium-sized companies (SMEs). The objective pursued by this act is to facilitate SMEs’ access to funding and markets and promote entrepreneurial action. The Commission, however, decided not to further develop the SBA. On the one hand, this could lead to shifting the focus away from SMEs and the related comprehensive political framework. On the other hand, the new Single Market Strategy 2015 places a strong emphasis on SMEs and start-up companies. The measures outlined under the Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME) including better legislation, promotion of a second chance and access to finance, are generally deemed to be positive. The COSME work programme for 2016 was adopted at the end of November, thus some 116 million euros in terms of loan guarantee facilities and equity facilities of some 50 million euros are made available across the EU. This also enables mobilising loans and equity investments for SMEs in Austria and generally facilitates SME’s access to funding. Furthermore, COSME also promotes the internationalisation of European SMEs through the Enterprise Europe Network and SME helpdesks. By launching programmes such as Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE), it also contributes to reducing the administrative burden on companies and stimulating entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial spirit across Europe.

The objective pursued by the Smart Regulation Agenda is to create a regulatory framework that is as simple as possible – clear, stable and predictable. Member States are invited to design new legislative proposals in a manner that enables guaranteeing low-cost, efficient and transparent implementation and application. Existing legislation is screened for potential inefficiencies and obsolete regulations are to be deleted. The strategy’s core elements include impact assessment, stakeholder consultations and ex-post evaluations of legislative measures. All legislative proposals made by the European Commission are to be subjected to impact assessments whose quality shall
be scrutinised by the Impact Assessment Board (IAB) based at the Commission’s Secretariat-General. The impact assessments are also to be updated in the event of significant changes resulting from negotiations in the Council. A dedicated unit was already set up some time ago at the European Parliament (EP). In the context of the re-orientation of industrial policy, some Member States advocated screening legislation with respect to impact on competitiveness (competitiveness proofing).

The REFIT programme (Regulatory Fitness and Performance Programme) launched by the Commission at the end of 2012, is part of the already established horizontal smart regulation policy. Based on REFIT, the European Commission has examined the entire acquis for administrative burdens, inconsistencies, gaps or inefficient measures and has determined potential corrective actions. Under this programme, not only individual legal acts but entire areas of law and all associated legal acts were subjected to comprehensive evaluation and assessment (also with regard to relations between regulatory areas). In this context, a particular focus was being placed on simplification of administrative processes and on lighter and leaner administrative requirements. Furthermore, under the ABR Plus programme, the Commission cooperates closely with the Member States in order to confirm estimates for cost reductions, identify best practices for implementation and improve the quality of data on regulatory cost required for the assessment of the impact of EU regulations. In June 2014, the Commission submitted a report on the implementation status of REFIT and started consultations on updating its impact assessment guidelines. Former Bavarian Prime Minister Edmund Stoiber, Chairman of the High Level Group on Administrative Burdens from 2007 to October 2014, was appointed Special Adviser on Better Regulation by President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker. In this function, Stoiber will advise in particular on ways to cut red tape, and reduce administrative burdens for SMEs, in order to boost jobs, growth and investments in the EU.

The Professional Qualifications Directive 2005/36/EC was modernised and amended by Directive 2013/55/EU, which is to be transposed by 18 January 2016. This project is part of Single Market Act I and seeks to further promote mobility in the internal market. In Austria, the EU body of law on the recognition of professional qualifications was transposed in a decentralised manner in the individual vocational laws. In the course of the year, the recognition procedures set out in the individual vocational laws were adapted accordingly, for instance by the amendment of the Trade Regulations Code or the EU Professional Qualifications Recognition Act for the Health Professions. A key amendment relates to the introduction of the European Professional Card for physiotherapists, nursing staff, mountain guides and real estate brokers. This professional card is an alternative recognition procedure which can only be handled electronically and on-line. In addition, the recognition procedures were optimised by simplifying requirements, facilitating automatic recognition and increased provision of on-line information.
2.5.4.5. Competition, Tax Issues and Harmonisation of National Laws

As part of its agenda to tackle corporate tax avoidance and harmful tax competition in the EU, the Commission presented a package of tax transparency measures on 18 March. The central component of this Transparency Package is a legislative proposal to improve cooperation between Member States with respect to their cross-border tax rulings that may have an impact on other Member States. On this topic, the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) of 6 October reached an agreement that provides for binding cooperation among EU tax administrations. On 12 February, the EP set up a Special Committee on Tax Rulings and Other Measures Similar in Nature or Effect (TAXE). On 17 June, the EC presented an Action Plan for Fair and Efficient Corporate Taxation in which it announced a strategy to re-launch the Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base. At the ECOFIN on 8 December, ministers supported the efficient, prompt and coordinated implementation of the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) Action Plan, developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and endorsed by the G20.

On 27 May, the EU and Switzerland signed an agreement on the automatic exchange of financial account information, which is to become operational by 2018. Similar agreements were signed between the EU and Liechtenstein on 28 October, and San Marino on 8 December. Negotiations on such an agreement were concluded with Andorra on 4 November.

The deliberations on the planned Financial Transaction Tax (FTT) were continued. The goal of the FTT is on the one hand to make the financial sector pay a fair share in the cost of crisis management and on the other hand to increase the stability of the financial markets through higher taxation of highly speculative transactions. As agreement on the FTT at the level of all EU Member States based on the Commission proposal of September 2011 had not been possible, 11 EU Member States (Austria, Germany, France, Belgium, Greece, Portugal, Slovenia, Estonia, Spain, Italy, Slovakia) declared that they were ready to support the introduction of FTT by way of enhanced cooperation. At the end of January, Federal Minister Hans Jörg Schelling assumed political coordination of this group. At the ECOFIN Council of 8 December, ten of the eleven countries informed the other Member States of their agreement on the basic elements and of their intention to reach overall agreement by the end of June 2016. Estonia declared its withdrawal from the enhanced cooperation for the time being.

2.5.4.6. Employment and Social Policy

Work in the context of the European Semester was continued, and a stronger focus was placed on social and employment policy aspects. In this context, the role played by the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) Council with respect to the social dimension was particu-
larly highlighted. Alongside fighting long-term and youth unemployment, the EU needs to tackle new challenges, including the refugee and migration crisis. A special focus is to be placed on improved integration of the areas of employment and social affairs into economic policy governance. The Council adopted Conclusions on the Special Report on the implementation of the EU Youth Guarantee, prepared by the European Court of Auditors, and the Commission presented the status of implementation of EU measures and action in the field of youth employment. With respect to the youth employment initiative, reference was made to the increase in pre-financing.

In the field of EU labour law, negotiations on a Regulation on a European network of Employment Services (EURES) and on a Decision on establishing a European Platform to enhance cooperation in the prevention and deterrence of undeclared work were completed. Work on the Anti-Discrimination Directive and a proposal for a Directive on improving the gender balance among directors of companies listed on stock exchanges was continued and progress reports were presented to the Council. A recommendation on re-integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market and a Directive amending Directive 2008/94/EC, 2009/38/EC and 2002/14/EC of the European Parliament and the Council and the Directives 98/59/EC and 2001/23/EC of the Council as regards seafarers were adopted. This directive thus extends the scope of application of six working directives to seafarers. A Directive of the Council implementing the European Agreement concerning certain aspects of the organisation of working time in inland waterway transport, concluded by the European Barge Union (EBU), the European Skippers Organisation (ESO) and the European Transport Workers’ Federation (ETF) was likewise adopted.

2.5.4.7. Agriculture and Fisheries

Topics of major importance in the field of agriculture included in particular the crisis-ridden market situation and measures aimed at stimulating the markets, the new Organic Regulation, school schemes and the simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Further priorities included the areas plant health, official inspections and controls, genetically modified food and feed, zootechnical and genealogical conditions for trade in and imports into the Union of breeding animals and their germinal products. Among the important international meetings relating to forestry were the 11th United Nations Forum on Forests, the FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference and the Asia-Europe Meeting on Forests.

The year 2015 was characterised by an unsatisfactory market situation, which was particularly noticeable in the dairy and pork markets and occasionally also in the sugar market. Against the background of the ban imposed by the Russian Federation on the import of agricultural commodities, foodstuffs and raw material from all EU Member States effective as of 7 August 2014,
the declining demand in skimmed milk powder in China and with a view to the expiry of the milk quota system in the EU, the Agriculture Council has regularly dealt with measures aimed at stabilising individual market sectors. Given the problematic market situation, an Extraordinary Agriculture and Fisheries Council was convened on 7 September. At the Informal Meeting of EU Ministers of Agriculture on 15 September, the EC presented a package of measures totalling 500 million euros aimed both at financing market management instruments (private storage of products and public intervention) and provided extraordinary market support to producers in the dairy and livestock sectors. The EC furthermore pledged to promote the opening of new markets and to continue talks with the Russian Federation in order to remove non-tariff trade barriers and to resume trade in products that are not included in the political embargo list.

Another priority were the negotiations on amending the **Regulation on organic production and labelling of organic products.** Alongside consolidating the existing regulations into one single legal framework, the goal is also to introduce amendments that are to result in expanding organic production in the EU, strengthening trade with third countries as well as increasing consumer confidence. In the Agriculture and Fisheries Council of 16 June, a compromise was reached on controversial issues – i.e. controls, substances not allowed in organic production and imports – and thus enabling a general approach to be achieved. Coordination with the Agriculture Committee of the EP was agreed on 13 October, and in November and December two interinstitutional negotiations (trilogues) were held. The relevant work will be continued in 2016.

At the end of January 2014, the EC had presented a proposal for bringing together the two **school schemes** in order to simplify administrative procedures. The school schemes cover the milk and selected dairy products group on the one hand and the fruit and vegetable product group on the other hand. During the Luxembourg EU Council Presidency, five trilogue rounds of negotiations were held which translated into a compromise on the school schemes reached at the extraordinary meeting of the Agriculture Committee on 16 December. After the new regulation has entered into force on 1 August 2017, a total of 100 million euros annually will made available to Member States for school programmes on milk and a total of 150 million euros for schooling on fruit, vegetables and bananas. The objective is to exercise a positive influence on European students’ and pupils’ dietary habits.

A main priority pursued by the Commission in 2015 was **simplification of the CAP** in order to reduce both red tape and costs for farmers and other economic operators. Building on a screening of the entire body of law by the Commission and on proposals by the Member States, 28 different thematic fields were identified and specified in Council Conclusions which were adopted on 11 May. The Commission presented simplification packages in the fields of direct payments and the Integrated Administration and
Control System (IACS). It also announced future measures, including preliminary screening of aid applications, a reduction of on-the-spot controls or the opportunity of filing collective applications for agricultural and climate-related measures.

In the phytosanitary field, the focus was placed on official controls. The Regulation on official controls and other official activities (food chain) forms part of the EU food safety regime that covers five elements. The goal of the amendment is to update and consolidate the individual regulations into one single proposal. At technical level, the proposal was regularly reviewed by veterinary experts and phytosanitary specialists and in a final step dealt with in joint attaché groups. After the EP had already issued its statement in the first reading, the general approach of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council was adopted without debate on 22 October. Subsequently, three trilogues were held during the Luxembourg EU Council Presidency.

Work on a regulation on a novel uniform animal health law and on a regulation on novel foods was completed. On the topic of novel foods, the Commission had presented a proposal to the Council and the EP for discussion and decision taking in 2008. Due to diverging views held by legislators, especially with regard to the issue of cloning of animals for food production, legislative consultations – including in the context of a conciliation procedure – could not be brought to a positive conclusion. Separately from the regulation on novel foods, the Commission then presented a proposal for a Directive on the cloning of animals kept and reproduced for farming purposes, and a Directive on the placing in the market of food from clones. By the end of 2015, discussions on both proposals were still ongoing.

Another important item on this year’s agenda related to genetically modified organisms. On 27 April, the Commission presented a proposal for a regulation according to which Member States would have the right to restrict or prohibit the use of genetically modified food or feed on their territory. At the Agriculture and Fisheries Council, Member States requested the Commission on 13 July to present an impact assessment. Although envisaged by the end of 2015, it was eventually not submitted. Likewise, the Council’s Legal Service (LS) should have issued an opinion on the proposal. The proposal was rejected on 12 October in the Environmental Committee and on 28 October in the EP’s plenary session. For the time being, further progress on this issue remained open.

In the fisheries sector, work was marked by the continuation of the works on ensuring sustainable fisheries based on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) that has been in force since 1 January 2014. In this connection, the review of the technical measures (“omnibus regulation”) aimed at implementing the landing obligation, to be introduced gradually from 1 January as a result of the reform of the CFP, marked a milestone. The goal is to put an end to the practice of throwing marketable fish back into the sea.
Deliberations continued on the proposals presented by the Commission for a regulation banning **drift net fishing** and a regulation on **deep sea fishing in the North East Atlantic**. Cross-cutting **multiannual fisheries management plans** are a key element of the CFP. The first of these plans is the Baltic Sea Management Plan covering cod, herring and sprat stocks. Considered a role model for other such plans it was the subject of intensive negotiations in 2015. Work was also resumed on a recovery plan for Bluefin tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and in the Mediterranean.

Another priority was the start of negotiations on **Fisheries Partnership Agreements** between the EU and third countries and/or the adoption of agreements that have already been negotiated inter alia with Guinea-Bissau, Cabo Verde, Madagascar, Greenland, Liberia, Tanzania and Mauretania. Another topic related to EU-third country relations was a regulation on the implementation into Union law of the recommendations on sustainable fisheries submitted by the **General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)**, an international fisheries organisation. The relevant works were completed in 2015. Furthermore, **autonomous tariff quotas** for EU imports of certain fisheries products were defined for the years 2016 to 2018, thus ensuring supply of EU processors during this period.

In the context of the EU’s **Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP)**, a public consultation was held on **Ocean Governance**. This topic is one of the priorities defined by Commissioner Karmenu Vella, who seeks to improve international cooperation in order to achieve a sustainable **blue economy**. The ministerial conference of the Mediterranean Union on Blue Economy in November also dealt with the topic of eliminating poverty.

Works on implementing the **EU Maritime Security Strategy** including the related **action plan** were continued.

### 2.5.4.8. Transport and Telecommunications

In order to address the topic of cyber security, the **Cyber Security Strategy for Europe**, which is based on a communication and a proposal for a Directive concerning measures to ensure a high level of common network and information security across the Union (NIS Directive), was presented in February 2013. This initiative was launched in reaction to the alarming increase of cyber security incidents and their potential for jeopardising prosperity, safety and security in Europe. The objective pursued by the European Cyber Security Strategy is thus ensuring high quality cyber security in Europe based on a coordinated approach. The strategy builds on three pillars: ensuring network and information security (led by DG CONNECT), combating cybercrime (DG HOME), and External Dimension (Cyber Policy and Cyber Defence – EEAS).

After intensive discussions on the role and form of cooperation between Member States and on the Directive’s scope had been completed, it was pos-
Austria in the European Union

It is possible to finalise a compromise text at COREPER level in December, which is expected to be adopted in 2016.

A European Commission proposal for a Directive on the accessibility of public sector bodies’ websites is currently being negotiated. This new Directive aims at the approximation of national laws, regulations and administrative provisions on the accessibility of websites of public sector bodies. The goal is to support Member States in achieving their national commitments regarding web-accessibility and to support them in implementing their commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The original proposal presented by the Commission referred to twelve types of websites, including websites on car registration, declaration and notification of assessment of income taxes, and applying for passports or driving licences. In the course of negotiations at Council level, the scope was significantly expanded while substantive restrictions were also included regarding areas such as live/video and/or audio material, online ticketing services, office file formats and archived documents. The first trilogue is envisaged for January 2016.

The Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council met twice during the Latvian Presidency (13 March as well as 11 and 12 June) and during the Luxembourg Presidency (8 October as well as 10 and 11 December).

In the field of rail transport, the Fourth Railway Package was discussed at the Council meeting in March. It was however, not possible to reach agreement, as Member States held diverging views on technical dossiers and on the impact railway market opening might have on working conditions. At the June Council, discussions on the market-relevant pillar were continued but, however, not completed. At the Council meeting in October, a compromise was eventually reached. Participants agreed that competitive tendering should be the main rule for awarding public service contracts, but included a number of exceptions allowing for public service contracts to be awarded directly. Although it had concerns with respect to the principle of subsidiarity, Austria eventually supported the proposal. Following the unanimous adoption of a general approach, negotiations with the EP were immediately launched. In March, the Presidency provided information on the Asia-Europe Ministers of Transport Meeting that dealt with the development of an efficient multi-modal transport system. Regarding “Shift2Rail” (S2R), a public-private partnership that aims to support the development of better rail transport services in Europe, the Commission informed the Council of delays regarding the appointment of an executive director. Highlighting the programme’s importance for the railway sector, it also called for rapid progress in the ongoing tender procedure.

In the field of infrastructure financing, the role played by the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) and the European Fund for Strategic Investments was discussed at the Council meeting in March. In the context of these talks, Austria stated that for railway projects on the EU core network corridors direct support through EU grants was still necessary, as opportunities for including
private funding are somewhat limited in this area. At the Council meeting in October, the EC pointed out that regional investment platforms will come to play a major role in future. Furthermore, the Presidency highlighted the fact that following a political debate the objectives of the 2011 White Paper remained valid and that the Commission would present a stock-taking report on the steps taken so far.

On the topic of aviation, the Presidency submitted a progress report in June on the negotiations on the Air Passenger Rights Regulation. Due to lack of agreement among Member States regarding thresholds, it has not yet been possible to adopt a common position. Austria advocates a high level of passenger rights in which context the relevant judgements by the European Court of Justice should serve as a yardstick.

In the field of navigation, the Council agreed in June on a general approach on the Directive laying down technical requirements for inland waterway vessels. Previously, on 3 June, the committee for the future development of uniform technical standards for European inland waterway navigation had been established at the Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine.

In the field of road transport, the Commission presented an interim evaluation of the EU road safety policy framework 2011–2020, which aims to halve the number of road deaths by 2020. In October, the EC provided information on test procedures for real driving emissions from passenger cars and light duty vehicles. A new test procedure is to be adopted as soon as possible, which, like the adoption of a second package of measures setting out conformity factors and transitional periods, was explicitly welcomed by Austria. On the initiative of the Luxembourg Presidency of the EU Council, a debate on social legislation relating to road transport was held in December. In this context, Austria supported ensuring high level labour and social legislation in order to guarantee fair competition. This discussion will also be reflected in the Road Package announced by the Commission for 2016.

In September 2013, the Commission had submitted a proposal for a Regulation on a Single Market in Telecommunications. Following an orientation debate at the Telecommunications Ministers’ Council in December 2013 and further discussions at technical level, the package was reduced to the two thematic areas of roaming and network neutrality, and it was decided that all other aspects included in the proposal will be dealt with in the course of the overall Review of the Electronics Communications Regulatory Framework scheduled for 2016. The EP completed its first reading in April 2014. In the context of the fourth informal trilogue with the EP on 29 June, the Presidency of the EU Council was able to achieve early agreement in the second reading, which was then also formally adopted by both co-legislators. The regulation was formally published on 25 November.

The principle of safeguarding equal and non-discriminatory treatment of all data traffic in the provision of internet access services was enshrined and
with a view to admissible traffic control it was clarified that such measures must not be discriminatory and not be applied based on economic considerations. Regarding the admissibility of the provision of specialised services, the document defines a large number of requirements aimed at ensuring that general Internet access is not impaired. In the context of these negotiations, major importance had always been attached to implementing the abolition of roaming surcharges in such a way that any market distortions that may possibly be of disadvantage for both the end users and companies (such as imbalances in the key account customers market and in the field of mobile termination charges, risk of waterbed effect) be avoided. The roadmap provides for a further reduction in roaming fees as of 30 April 2016 and for the final abolition of roaming surcharges by 15 June 2017 at the latest.

2.5.4.9. Environment

Environmental policy is one of the EU’s major policy areas which – as a cross-cutting issue – also influences other EU policies. Due to the ongoing expansion of environmental policy activities at EU level, there is a dense network of European environmental legislation in place that covers all aspects of environmental protection (including climate, air and atmosphere, water, waste, biodiversity and chemicals). The central EU environment policy body is the Environment Council composed of the Member States’ environment ministers, which deals both with current and long-term EU environmental and climate issues (on international climate matters, please see Chapter 13.1.).

At the first meeting of the Environment Council under Latvian EU Council Presidency on 6 March there was an exchange of views on the Energy Union package and on climate policy aspects. Topics addressed in the discussions included the comprehensive approach and the need to integrate the five pillars of the Energy Union. Special emphasis was placed on the role played by energy efficiency and the promotion of renewable energies and their contribution towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions. On the topic of energy efficiency, the plans presented by the Commission with respect to buildings and especially transport were welcomed. Regarding renewable energies, discussions mainly focused on the questions of infrastructure, grid and interconnected network development. Some Member States stressed the need to respect Member States’ freedom in determining their energy mix, thus also including nuclear energy. In this context Austria and Luxembourg explicitly opposed support for nuclear energy by the Energy Union.

An exchange of views on the global Post–2015 Agenda – ‘taking stock of negotiations and perspectives for the future’, highlighted the importance of the year 2015 as the target year for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the year in which the Agenda for a Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda, see Chapter 12.3.2.) was adopted. As a contribution towards reaching this goal, the Commission had presented the Commu-
Austria’s Contribution to the Policy Areas of the European Union

In an orientation debate on 15 June, the Environment Council dealt with the proposal for amending the Directive on the reduction in national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants. The original directive from 2003 had set caps on total annual national emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds other than methane and ammonia. The revision of this directive is intended to translate into further cost-efficient emission reductions and to cover fine particulate matter and methane. The proposal sets out binding reduction targets for the individual Member States for the years 2020 and 2030 based on calculations modelling the measures to be taken towards concrete environment targets while minimising costs. The Commission also presented information on the Investment Plan for Europe, which also opens up opportunities for environmental and climate protection projects. On this item, Austria emphasised that it assumed that nuclear energy was not to be granted special status in this respect.

In the first orientation debate the Environment Council of 26 October dealt with the proposal for a Directive implementing the objective of reducing the EU’s emissions domestically by 40%, presented by the Commission on 15 July (to enhance cost-effectiveness of emission reductions and low carbon investments) as well as the European Council Conclusions of October 2014. The proposal applies to the sectors covered by the EU emissions trading system and defines rules for auctioning certificates and free allocations based on carbon leakage risks, i.e. the risk of shifting production abroad due to higher costs in the EU resulting from carbon minimisation measures. The proposal also includes financial compensation mechanisms: an innovation fund, a modernisation fund and the continuation of allocations to the electricity sector. The Council held yet another exchange of views on Greening the European Semester, focusing on phasing-out environmentally harmful subsidies and the implementation of environmental policies and legislation. In the Annual Growth Survey 2015, the Commission had presented the key items on its new agenda for growth and employment and explained which additional efforts could be taken at the EU level to boost growth in Member States. It had also outlined steps Member States needed to take as part of their national reform programmes to make progress towards sustainable development. Member States stated their views on the repeal of environmentally harmful subsidies and on improving the implementation of both existing and future environmental legislation and policies – taking special account of the circular economy package and the Agenda 2030.
Another exchange of views was held on the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development – transforming our world and its environmental policy perspectives. In contrast to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which expire in 2015, this agenda has a global character, i.e. it also covers industrialized states. Discussions in the Environment Council focused on appropriate instruments to best facilitate the best possible implementation in the EU of the environmental dimension enshrined in the Agenda 2030.

Under “Any other Business”, the topic of real driving emissions and manipulation of emission control systems in cars was discussed at the request of Austria and Denmark. A large number of Member States voiced their concerns over the impact on air quality and supported timely completion of the negotiations on the globally harmonised type testing cycle and the conformity factor in real driving emissions.

In its meeting on 16 December, the Environment Council adopted Council Conclusions on the mid-term review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy by 2020. The Commission had presented this mid-term review on 2 October. The Conclusions took note of this review and called for enhanced efforts towards implementing the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020 and for its goals to be reached. Special emphasis was placed on enhanced mainstreaming of biodiversity topics into sector policies, the implementation of existing legal instruments and programmes as well as further work on assessing biodiversity and eco-system services. The proposal for amending the Directive on the reduction in national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants was once again placed on the agenda, this time with the objective of reaching a general approach. At the meeting, many Member States deplored the ambitiousness of the targets but in the light of the necessary health protection (reduction of premature deaths by at least 48%) supported the proposed objectives. The reduction targets 2030 outlined in Annex II to the draft directive will require additional measures in all relevant sectors. The general approach was adopted by qualified majority, not supported by Austria.

The Presidency provided information on the “REACH-UP” Initiative on challenges and options for improving legislation on chemicals, which a number of Member States support, including Austria. The Commission and the other Member States are called upon to intensify efforts to strengthen and speed up implementation of the REACH chemicals regulation. The Commission presented the Circular Economy Package of 2 December. This new package consists of the review of six directives in the waste sector and an action plan. It contains proposals for the entire life cycle of materials and products from manufacturing to product design, usage phase and recycling, including a market for secondary raw materials, and eventually disposal.

2.5.4.10. Energy and Trans-European Networks

The Energy Union is to provide a cross-cutting, strategic framework for the re-orientation of energy policy at EU and at national level. It forms part of the

On 18 November, the Commission presented its first annual progress report on the Energy Union, the State of the Energy Report. The most important achievement of the second half year 2015 was the establishment of a governance mechanism for the Energy Union. In line with the Council Conclusions of 26 November, integrated national energy and climate plans are to be prepared for the period 2021 to 2030. To this end, guidance was published together with the progress report. Other related documents published included an updated roadmap outlining further implementation steps and planned initiatives, and a concept for monitoring the delivery of the Energy Union based on key indicators. The report was also accompanied by national factsheets providing an assessment on the delivery of the Energy Union by each Member State, based inter alia on qualitative and quantitative indicators reflecting the five dimensions. The Country Factsheet on the State of the Energy Union presents a largely positive picture for Austria. The strengths identified in the fact sheet included good infrastructure connections with neighbouring countries and a high share of renewables in the energy mix compared with other states.

One of the priorities defined for the Energy Union for 2016 is, alongside governance design, the implementation of the 2030 Climate and Energy Package adopted by the European Council on 23 and 24 October 2014. The latter provides for a binding EU target for domestic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of at least 40 % by the year 2030, a binding EU target for increasing the share of renewables in the overall EU energy consumption to at least 27 %, as well as an indicative target at EU level for reducing energy consumption by 27 %. With respect to climate, the Commission presented a proposal for amending the Emissions Trading Directive. In 2016, the Commission is to present legislative proposals for burden sharing in the efforts towards greenhouse gas reduction for sectors outside of the emissions trading system and for integrating the fields of land-use, land-use change and forestry into climate and energy policy by 2030. The Commission also plans to launch a review on coherence and administrative efforts in the context of reporting duties in the energy and climate field.

Austria is committed to the Energy Union targets in all dimensions and will pro-actively contribute to implementing the Energy Union including its individual tools. Likewise, it will contribute towards reaching the 2030 climate and energy targets. In terms of delivering on the 2030 targets, especially those
Austria in the European Union

at EU level, Austria supports an approach under which all EU Member States make an appropriate contribution taking account of early action. In addition, the post 2020 Emissions Trading System needs to be designed in a manner that counters the risk of industry relocation due to higher climate protection costs in the EU (carbon leakage).

Austria furthermore advocates a better balancing of the three cornerstones the new Energy Union is based on, i.e. supply security, sustainability and competitiveness under the new Energy Union. Austria also holds the view that the main objective is to promote renewable energies, as far as necessary, to bring them closer to the market and to reduce energy demand through intelligent, economical energy efficiency measures. Furthermore, Austria continues to reject any promotion of nuclear energy. In the context of an experts group, Austria also contributes to shaping the energy and climate plans with a view to governance and progress monitoring.

On 15 November 2012, the Commission presented the Communication “Making the Internal Energy Market Work” and at the Energy Council on 3 December 2012, the functioning and implementation status – completion upon final extension by 2014 – of the internal energy market was discussed. Since September 2011, the Commission has launched treaty infringement procedures against defaulting Member States in order not to jeopardise the success of the internal market. Austria has already transposed the Third Internal Energy Market Package of 2011 by amending the Electricity Management and Organisation Act (Elektrizitätswirtschafts- und -organisationsgesetz, ElWOG) and the Energy Control Act (Energie-Control-Gesetz, E-ControlG). Thus no further adaptations or amendments to the ElWOG are necessary. In the field of natural gas, the relevant provisions were transposed in the context of the Gas Management Act, adopted in 2011, and the Energy Control Austria ordinances which are based on this Act – especially the Gas Market Model Ordinance of 2012, which entered into force in 2013.

At European level, a major focus of activities was the development of network codes in the electricity and gas sector that are required for the full implementation of the Internal Energy Market. The codes relating to bottleneck/congestion management, capacity allocation, balancing energy management and interoperability have already been adopted. Work on the network codes relating to rates and tariffs has already progressed quite far, and especially in the electricity sector considerable progress was made in this field. According to plans, those network codes that are still under discussion are to be adopted by the end of 2016 at the latest. Alongside Austria’s proactive contribution in the EU bodies developing the network codes, there has also been ongoing contact and exchange with neighbouring countries with a view to further promoting regional cooperation and bringing together the market regions, including the introduction of Flow Based Market Coupling.

The Austrian economy also benefits from the common electricity price zone with Germany. Maintaining the common German-Austrian electricity price
Austria’s Contribution to the Policy Areas of the European Union

zone enjoys top priority, as it is an example of a functioning Internal Energy Market in Europe.

On the basis of its Communication of 15 November 2012, the Commission proposes an Action Plan for Europe (under Annex 1) to ensure the success of the Internal Energy Market. Progress made in implementing this Action Plan was reviewed for the first time in 2014. It contains 22 measures/actions to be implemented by Member States, national regulators, national competition authorities, consumer protection associations ACER, ENTSO-E/G, the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission. In this context, special importance is being attached to regional cooperation and initiatives, primarily with respect to developing the infrastructures necessary for integrating the EU’s energy markets, fostering market coupling in order to bridge the differences between Member States and developing the relationship between EU Member States and third countries (by creating a level playing field between market participants in terms of competition). A large number of action items addressed in the Communication (including price comparison tools for consumers, free pricing, unbundling) have already been fulfilled by Austria ahead of schedule. Discussions on other sub-items, such as network codes (see above) or the realisation of smart grids were still ongoing by the end of the year.

On 15 May 2013, Regulation (EU) No 347/2013 of 17 April 2013 on the guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure and repealing Decision No 1364/2006/EC and amending Regulations (EC) No 713/2009, (EC) No 714/2009 and (EC) No 715/2009, came into effect (TEN-E Regulation). Based on this regulation, preferential treatment is to be granted to projects of common interest (PCIs) within the scope of national legal opportunities, while at the same time strengthening citizens’ participation and environmental protection, in which context permit granting procedures shall not exceed a defined maximum period of time.

On 12 November 2013, the Federal Minister for Economy, Family and Youth (now Federal Minister of Science, Research and Economy) was designated the national competent authority within the meaning of Art. 8 par. 1 of the TEN-E Regulation, and entrusted with facilitating and co-ordinating the PCI permitting process and thus plays a substantial role in further developing important energy infrastructure. A central scope of this TEN-E Regulation governs the selection process for projects of common interests with the relevant criteria defined in Art. 4 of the TEN-E Regulation. The first Union list of projects of common interest was adopted by the EC on 14 October 2013 (adoption of the Union list); a revision of the Union list is envisaged every second year. Project funding will be made available from the Connecting Europe Facility.

In line with the schedule, the second PCI list was published on 18 November and covers a total of 195 projects. Of these, 108 are in the electricity sector, 77 in the gas and seven in the oil sector while three are smart grid projects.
Under the second PCI list, Austria is involved in ten electricity, three gas and two oil projects. These projects contribute to market integration and supply security. Furthermore, the PCI status enables project applicants to increase their projects’ acceptance levels and also helps to attract investors. An important aspect in the context of the national transposition of the TEN-E Regulation is the authority model chosen for the competent authority (Federal Minister of Science, Research and Economy). The regulation provides for three approaches to conducting the permit procedures involving differing degrees of process concentration (from a comprehensive concentration of procedures to a mere coordinating role played by the competent authority). Depending on the authority model selected, a range of far-reaching legal amendments will become necessary.

The Connecting Europe Facility (Regulation No 1316/2013) published on 20 December 2013 in the Official Journal of the EU provides for support in the fields of transport, energy and telecommunications. Of its overall funding volume of 33.2 billion euros, 5.81 billion euros are allocated to the energy sector, which are made available in several annual tranches. The annual tranche for 2015 amounted to 48.518 million euros (compared with 40.771 million euros in 2014).

Two calls for proposals for PCI projects were issued in 2015. Regarding the first call (March to April), the evaluation committee formed by the Commission and the agency INEA entrusted with handling the calls, awarded a total of 149 million euros to the 20 eligible study and work projects. Of these projects, eleven related to the gas and nine to the electricity sector. Under the second call for proposals, submissions were possible from June to October. A total of 15 study or work projects were assessed as being eligible for support and a total of 217 million euros was made available. Grant agreements are due to be signed from February 2016 onwards. Austrian PCIs are not directly affected.

CEF funding together with the easier access to further funding opportunities enables energy infrastructure projects, which would not be marketable without support measures, to be realised faster. The Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy is represented in the relevant groups at EU level (especially Regional Groups and the CEF Committee) and was in constant liaison with the Austrian project operators.

In its Communication from 2011 “The EU Energy Policy: Engaging with Partners beyond Our Borders”, the Commission for the first time presented a comprehensive external energy policy. Building on that, the EEAS prepared an EU Energy Diplomacy Action Plan, which was adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council in July together with conclusions. In this connection, the Energy Union (as outlined by the relevant Communication from the Commission of 25 February) inter alia focuses on increasing supply security, which requires close coordination between the EU’s energy, climate and foreign policy agendas.
The Action Plan sets out the following objectives: further develop energy cooperation and dialogue on global and regional security policy developments in the energy sector, including with important producing and transit states. In this context, the focus should be placed on diversification of energy sources, supply states and routes. Another important aspect is the provision of particular support to global and multilateral initiatives, such as the reform of the Energy Community, the modernisation of the Energy Charter, the association agreement of the International Energy Agency, as well as relevant initiatives within the G7/G20 and the UN (including, for instance, SE4All).

In future, instruments such as the Energy Community, the Eastern Partnership and the successor programme to INOGATE, are to be used to promote the energy dialogue between the EU and its neighbours. Dialogue with states such as Iran, Algeria, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Iraq and Turkmenistan is to be expanded. Generally, the EU is to speak with one voice on energy issues, both in bilateral relations and in multilateral frameworks.

2.5.4.11. Consumer Protection


No progress was made in the negotiations on the new product safety package, as Member States were not able to reach agreement on the planned country of origin labelling.

2.5.4.12. Healthcare

Legislative work in the healthcare sector focused on the review of the regulatory framework for medicinal products and in-vitro diagnostic medical devices. After almost three years of discussions, the Council was able to agree on a general approach in October and thus finally open negotiations with the EP. The objective is to reach early agreement in the second reading.

The focus of non-legislative activities was placed mainly on the topics of alcohol, dementia and innovation in the healthcare sector in the interests of patients.

2.5.4.13. Education, Youth and Sports

On 17 March, the EU Ministers of Education convened for an informal meeting in Paris. Held against the background of the terror attacks in Paris and Copenhagen, the meeting focussed on promoting political education and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination. Minis-
ters adopted a joint European Declaration, which reiterates the objective of pro-actively promoting citizenship and the common fundamental EU values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education in schools and universities. Agreement was reached on seeking to launch follow-up activities both at the European and at national levels.

In May, discussions in the Education Ministers Council dealt with the mid-term evaluation of the **Strategic Framework for European Cooperation on Education and Training (“ET 2020“)**. Building on national reports, a common report is being prepared which sets out the new priorities up to 2020 and is to be completed by summer. In May, the Council also adopted **Conclusions on the role of early childhood education in fostering creativity, innovation and digital competence**.

In November, the Education Ministers Council adopted the **2015 Joint Report by the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation on Education and Training (“ET 2020“) – New priorities for European cooperation in education and training**. The objective pursued by this framework, originally adopted in 2009, is to enshrine education in the second cycle of the Lisbon Strategy by 2020 and to create a framework for flexible cooperation which enables a flexible reaction to current and future challenges. The interim report defines the priorities of education policy cooperation at EU level up to 2020.

The Education Council furthermore adopted **Conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school**, taking stock of progress made four years after a recommendation on political strategies for reducing early school leaving had been adopted. Since the adoption of the Council recommendation in 2011, numerous earlier findings have been deepened and supplemented through peer learning, best practice sharing and a thorough analysis of strategies pursued at national level.

Against the background of the major migration movements during the year, the Council’s orientation debate in November dealt with education and training **strategies for integrating recently arrived migrants and persons with a migration background**.

During the Latvian Presidency of the EU Council, the priority topic dealt with in the youth area was “enhancing cross-sectoral policy cooperation to effectively address socioeconomic challenges facing young people”. The ongoing economic crisis particularly affects young people in the EU; the social consequences of unemployment and poverty risk among young people thus require effective cross-sectoral policy action.

During the Luxembourg Presidency of the EU Council, the focal topic of European youth policy was encouraging “political participation of young people in democratic life”. The thematic focus was placed on stressing the fundamental values governing the EU, such as democracy, pluralism and active citizenship. In this context, strengthening participation of young people on
all levels of representative democracy and supporting alternative forms of political participation were among the priorities pursued. By reducing the electoral age to 16 years, Austria has defined a challenging target for the other EU Member States.

The **EU programme “Youth in Action” (2007–2013)** was integrated as one of four thematic pillars in the new EU programme **Erasmus+** (2014–2020 programme for education, training, youth and sport). The Youth in Action element of the Erasmus+ programme has a budget of its own (some 10 % of overall funding). In 2015, total funding available for projects submitted by Austrian applicants amounted to 3.6 million euros, which was fully utilised. Across Europe, a total of almost one million individuals and 70,000 organisations participated in the 18,000 projects under the EU programme Erasmus+ in 2014. Some 21 % of all mobility activities were based on the ERASMUS+: Youth in Action segment.

Alongside youth and education initiatives, the EU funding programme Erasmus+ also supports cross-country sports-related EU projects. A major focus in this context is mass sports activities and special attention is being paid to promoting dual careers of athletes as well as health-enhancing physical activity.

September saw the **first “European Week of Sport”**. The objective of this week, which is to be organised on an annual basis, is promoting sports activities and participation at all levels and among all age groups. The EU Member States were invited to launch activities aimed at advertising sports and exercising at national level between September 7 and 30. The Day of Sport organised by Austria was thus linked with the European Week of Sport.

**2.5.4.14. Research, Technological Development and Outer Space**

At the beginning of the year, the **investment programme for Europe** (the European Fund for Strategic Investments, EFSI) topped the agenda in many institutions and Council configurations. In the Competitiveness Council, numerous Member States stressed that research and innovation should play a key role, as funding was provided under Horizon 2020. After moving very quickly through the legislative process, the EFSI Regulation, which had been presented only in January, was adopted in June. In the course of the trilogue negotiations it was possible to agree on a reduction in the amount to be provided under Horizon 2020 from the originally envisaged total of 2.7 billion euros to 2.2 billion euros.

In May, the Council dealt with two documents relating to the **European Research Area**, namely the Conclusions on the European Research Area Roadmap 2015–2020 (**ERA Roadmap**) and the review of the European Research Area **advisory structure**. The Commission proposed that Member States prepare **national plans by June 2016** end present them at a joint final conference. In the **orientation debate** on the topic of “Economy 2.0“,
the proposal presented by the Commission on developing an **Open Science Agenda** was discussed. The central requirements identified for Open Science included sound framework conditions and financial support ensuring open access. In this context, Austria stressed that Open Science had to generate clear European added value and that implementation had to be in keeping with the principles governing the ERA and other European strategies such as the Digital Agenda.

The informal meeting of Research Ministers in July was dominated by two declared priorities of the Luxembourg EU Council Presidency, the **integrity of research** and **gender equality** in research.

In December, the Presidency placed the focus of the meeting on an exchange of views on the **EFSI** aimed at stimulating research and innovation in Europe. Apart from Research Commissioner Carlos Moedas, the meeting was also attended by the Vice-President of the Commission Jyrki Katainen who highlighted the contribution the fund was making towards supporting research-related investment. In this respect, a number of Member States, including Austria, stressed the need for regular reporting to the Council and the EP, and referred to the communication tools provided by the EFSI.

Discussions on the status of relations between the EU and the European Space Agency (ESA) were resumed at the **informal meeting of EU Ministers responsible for space policy and the ESA** held in Brussels on 30 November (Informal Space Council). The topics addressed included the evolution of the Space Council, the institutional launcher market, promotion of the use of space-based systems and data in public policies. The large majority of Member States supported a strong European space policy and enhanced cooperation among stakeholders in a common forum. They also stressed the need for ensuring Europe’s access to outer space and called for making increasing use of space-based systems and services to the benefit of all stakeholders. The latter aspect could be facilitated by developing pilot initiatives that relate to the areas of climate change and migration. Austria advocated better cooperation among all players.

### 2.5.4.15. Culture

The **Culture and Audiovisual Council** met in Brussels on 19 May and 24 November and adopted three Conclusions that referred to the implementation of the EU Work Plan for Culture 2015 to 2018.

The **Latvian EU Council Presidency** placed the focus on the topic of **creativity and innovation**. The socio-political and economic role played by culture was analysed in a number of thematic conferences and also in the Council meeting. Conclusions were adopted on cultural and creative crossovers to foster innovation, economic sustainability and social inclusion with a view to stimulating a cross-sectoral strategy and tailored financial instruments for promoting the culture-based economy.
During the **Luxembourg Presidency of the EU Council** an important step towards upgrading the role played by **culture in the external relations of the EU** and towards highlighting the contribution culture makes to promoting mutual understanding, dialogue on an equal footing and solidarity. In its Conclusions, the Council invited the EEAS and the Commission to present a strategy that defines thematic and geographic priorities, objectives, measures, funding and stakeholders. A working group on culture in development cooperation is also to be established. This topic was also addressed in a thematic conference and in a meeting of Directors-General at Ministries of Culture and Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

Reacting to current events, the Council discussed the **important role played by culture in the context of refugee integration**. In 2016, an EU experts group on the exchange of good practice in Member States will be set up and a special call for proposals under the EU programme “Creative Europe” involving a total of 1.6 million euros will be launched. The EU Ministers of Culture condemned the **targeted destruction of cultural heritage sites in Syria and Iraq** and discussed a number of measures aimed at countering illicit trafficking in cultural goods. In this connection, ministers called for a pro-active role to be played by the EU and closer cooperation with UNESCO. In connection with the terrorist attacks in Paris, a joint declaration of solidarity was published.

The **European Capitals of Culture 2015** were Mons (Belgium) and Pilsen (Czech Republic).

The Commission announced the award of the **European Heritage Label** to nine sites, including inter alia the Wiener Hofburg (the Imperial Palace in Vienna) and the European District of Strasbourg.

Under the **Creative Europe** programme, 140 European cultural cooperation projects were awarded a total of 40 million euros, including two Austrian projects which were awarded 200,000 euros each and nine further projects to which Austria contributed. Under the **Europe for Citizens** programme, a total of 20 million euros was made available for 380 town twinning and civil society projects, in which context five projects submitted by Austria were awarded total funding of some 440,000 euros.

### 2.5.5. Economic and Monetary Union

The European Council of 19 and 20 March confirmed the key role played by investment, structural reform and growth-friendly fiscal consolidation in Europe’s economy. These three pillars constitute the groundwork for the economic and fiscal policy measures taken in the Eurozone and define the further development of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU).

#### 2.5.5.1. Economic Policy Coordination and Governance

The European Fund for Strategic Investments (**EFSI**) is the central element of the Investment Plan for Europe, launched by the Commission in November
Austria in the European Union

2014. Based on guarantees from the EU budget (16 billion euros) and funding from the European Investment Bank (5 billion euros), investments amounting to at least 315 billion euros are to be generated in the period from 2015 to 2017. After the relevant proposal for a regulation had been presented by the Commission in January, agreement on Regulation (EU) 2015/1017 was reached as early as June within both the Council and the EP. Established within the structures of the European Investment Bank (EIB), the EFSI became fully operational in the second half of the year and former Austrian Vice Chancellor Wilhelm Molterer was appointed Managing Director. Implementation of another element set out in the Investment Plan for Europe, i.e. the establishment of a European Investment Project Portal, was envisaged for the end of the year. The portal aims to bring together potential investors and private as well as governmental project operators seeking funding for their investment projects.

Ongoing economic policy coordination and governance mainly takes place under the European Semester and based on the Stability and Growth Pack (SGP) and its reform packages (“six-pack” and “two-pack”) that were adopted in 2011 and 2013, respectively. At the end of November, the Commission recommended conducting in-depth reviews under the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure for 18 EU Member States, including – for the first time ever – Austria.

2.5.5.2. Banking and Capital Markets Union

The Banking Union is a central element of the Economic and Monetary Union. It seeks to break the close connection between banking crises and sovereign debt crises, frequently observed in the past, and to prevent nations from acting unilaterally. Banking Union membership is mandatory for all euro countries. EU countries that do not belong to the Eurozone may participate through voluntary cooperation with the European Central Bank (ECB). Under the Single Supervisory Mechanism, the ECB has exercised direct supervision over large banks based in the Eurozone since November 2014. After the Agreement on the Transfer and Mutualisation of Contributions to the Single Resolution Fund had been ratified on 30 November by the required number of participating states, including Austria, the requirements for the entry into force of the Single Resolution Mechanism as the second pillar of the Banking Union on 1 January 2016 were fulfilled. In November, the Commission presented a proposal for the establishment of a European Deposit Insurance Scheme, which – as outlined by the Commission – is to be introduced in three steps by 2024 and will form the third pillar of the Banking Union.

In February, the Commission launched consultations on building a Capital Markets Union which seeks to counter the fragmentation of the financial markets in Europe, diversify sources of finance and improve access to funding for small and medium-sized companies and start-ups. The goal is to counter the strong dependence on financing via bank loans in the EU and
Austria’s Contribution to the Policy Areas of the European Union

strengthen the opportunities for business funding on the capital markets. The Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) of 19 June welcomed the development of a Capital Markets Union. In September, the Commission presented an Action Plan involving 20 measures, including proposals to restart the securitisation markets, and a review of the Prospectus Directive.

2.5.5.3. Strengthening the Economic and Monetary Union

The Strategic Agenda adopted by the European Council on 26 and 27 June 2014 defines the further development of the EMU as one of the EU’s key priorities for the next five years. On 22 June, the President of the European Commission in cooperation with the Presidents of the Euro Summit, the Euro Group, the ECB and the EP presented the report on “Completing Europe’s Economic and Monetary Union” (the Five Presidents' Report). The goal pursued by the proposals outlined in the report is to complete the EMU based on three stages by the year 2025. The first stage relates to concrete economic, financial and fiscal policy measures, which do not require changes in EU primary law and are to be completed in the course of the year 2017. The second stage provides for a shift from the existing set of rules and guidelines for national economic policies to a system of large-scale sharing of sovereignty in the context of joint institutions. The third and final stage is to be completed by 2025.

The European Council of 17 and 18 December asked the Council to rapidly advance work especially as regards more effective economic and fiscal governance to boost competitiveness, convergence and sustainability, the euro area’s external representation as well as the Banking Union and to continue the relevant discussions.

2.5.5.4. Single Currency and Eurozone

In line with the priority goal of ensuring price stability, the Governing Council of the European Central Bank (ECB) pursues the objective of keeping the inflation rate below but close to 2% in the medium-term. Against the background of very low inflation rates in the euro area, the ECB Council continued its policy of quantitative easing. The key interest rate remained unchanged at 0.05%. In December, the interest rate on the deposit facility was reduced from –0.2 to –0.3%.

In January, the ECB Council decided that purchases are to involve public as well as private sector securities of a combined monthly amount of 60 billion euros until at least September 2016. In December, this programme was extended until at least the end of March 2017.

2.5.5.5. Financial Assistance to Euro Area Countries

On 30 June, the second financial assistance programme for Greece ended. A total of 130.9 billion euros in loans had been disbursed by the European
Financial Stability Facility (EFSF). On 12 and 13 July, the Heads of State or Government reached a general compromise on a third assistance package for Greece totalling up to 86 billion euros in the form of loans from the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) for the period of three years. After two reform packages had been adopted by the Greek parliament, the Euro Group on 14 August approved of providing financial assistance to Greece. The Memorandum of Understanding outlining the planned reforms and the loan agreement were approved by the ESM Board of Governors on 19 August. As had been the case with previous programmes, the loan tranches will only be disbursed after a number of specified reforms have been carried out in Greece. The implementation of the programme is regularly reviewed by the Commission, the ECB, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the ESM. By the end of the year, loan tranches totalling 21.4 billion euros had been disbursed from the ESM to Greece under the third financial assistance programme.

Since April 2013, Cyprus has been subject to a macro-economic adjustment programme with a programme volume of up to 10 billion euros from ESM and IMF funds that covers the period until March 2016. After review missions had been conducted, the ESM disbursed two loan tranches totalling 600 million euros in 2015. The overall volume of ESM loans amounted to 6.3 billion euros by the end of 2015.

Ireland was able to complete its financial assistance programme at the end of 2013. Spain in January 2014 and Portugal in June 2014. The Commission, the ECB and the IMF monitor progress made by these countries in the context of post-programme surveillance.

2.5.6. EU Budget

Negotiations on the EU budget 2016 and on the total of eight amendments to the 2015 budget were based on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2014–2020. On 14 November, the Council and the EP reached agreement in the conciliation committee on the EU budget 2016, which provides for 155,004 billion euros in commitment appropriations (CA) and 143.885 billion euros in payment appropriations (PA). The compromise thus agreed on remains below the original demands made by the EP, while at the same time reflecting the Council’s calls for budgetary margins to respond to unforeseeable events in the year 2016. This agreement was adopted by the Council on 24 and by the EP on 25 November.

In order to support EU Member States and third countries in managing the refugee situation, the EU budget 2016 provides for a total of 4 billion euros in CA for the priority area of migration. Of this total, 1.5 billion euros are earmarked for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Internal Security Fund (ISF), 120 million euros for FRONTEX and 300 million euros for humanitarian aid.
2.6. Information on Europe

See Chapters 16.3 and 16.4.
3. Challenges and Developments on all Five Continents

3.1. Europe and its Neighbouring States

3.1.1. Austria’s Neighbours

3.1.1.1. South Tyrol

South Tyrol continues to enjoy special status within Austrian foreign policy. The protective role assumed by Austria with regard to South Tyrol and enshrined in the Treaty of Paris of 5 September 1946 is exercised in an attentive manner by the Austrian Federal Government. Austria’s protective function is expressed in an intensive interest in the autonomy policy and general developments in South Tyrol, in regular talks held between those responsible at political level in Vienna, Innsbruck and Bolzano/Bozen, and – if required – contacts with the relevant authorities in Rome. At European level, the autonomy of South Tyrol serves as a model for the resolution of minority conflicts. It has become a common good 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 very close, amicable and good neighbourly relations with Italy. Austria’s and Italy’s common membership of the European Union has given rise to 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”, established in 2011, serves as a good example of the practical application of European instruments in the interest of regional co-operation. In 2015, a number of projects were implemented to mark the joint commemoration of the First World War that had broken out between Austria and Italy a hundred years previously.

On 10 May, municipal elections were held in South Tyrol. With an overall share of 53.6% of votes, the Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP) succeeded in winning the elections in the predominant majority of 101 of the 116 South Tyrolean municipalities. Seven went to citizens’ parties or independent candidates. In the run-off ballots held in several municipalities in June, Paul Rösch who succeeded in the city of Meran/Merano was the first green politician to win an election. In largely Italian-speaking Bolzano/Bozen, the incumbent Luigi Spagnolli from the centre-left Partei Partito Democratico (PD) was confirmed in the second ballot. For the first time ever, an Italian centre-right candidate won the majority of votes in Leifers. Against the background of major controversies over urban development in Bolzano/Bozen, uncertain majorities in the municipal council and a motion of no confidence sponsored by the opposition, mayor Spagnolli resigned on 24 September which resulted in
the dissolution of both the city and the municipal council. As required by the relevant legislation, a provisional administrator was appointed who will take care of official business until new elections are held in May 2016.

The year was marked by discussions about the new, generally centralist-oriented Italian constitution and its impacts on South Tyrol. Following lengthy negotiations in both chambers of the Italian Parliament, the ‘protective clause’ – according to which the new constitution will not be applied in South Tyrol until such time as the South Tyrolean Autonomy Statute has been revised in consultation with all parties – and the ‘dynamisation clause’ – which provides for the transfer of further state competences to the autonomous regions and provinces – were included in the text of the Constitution.

The visit by Prime Minister Matteo Renzi to Bolzano/Bozen on 5 May was important from an autonomy policy perspective. In the context of this visit, the Province Governors Arno Kompatscher and Ugo Rossi (Trentino) handed over a memorandum stipulating policy fields under which the adoption of detailed provisions should gradually lead to the realisation of the competences enshrined in the Autonomy Statute. In a first step, the transfer of competences regarding the National Park Stilfser Joch to South Tyrol, the Trentino and the Lombardia region in December marked the completion of a thematic area that had long remained unresolved.

In the field of critical infrastructures, South Tyrol was able to develop synergies and improve public supply security. In February, the two largest South Tyrolean utility companies Südtiroler Elektrizitätsaktiengesellschaft (SEL) and Etschwerke were merged and amalgamated into a new corporation named Alperia on 21 December. Following controversies between the Province of South Tyrol and private co-owners, the telecommunications company Brennercom was split and the company’s fibre-optic network was taken over by the Province in November. In keeping with a decision taken by the shareholders’ meeting, the shareholdings of some 15% that were privately held in the Brennerautobahngesellschaft (the Brenner motorway company) were transferred to the Province of South Tyrol in December.

The year saw a very active exchange of visits on all levels between Austria and South Tyrol. On 19 February, the Province Governor of South Tyrol Arno Kompatscher met Federal President Heinz Fischer, Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz and representatives of the South Tyrol Sub-Committee of the Austrian National Council in Vienna. Vice Chancellor Reinhold Mitterlehner attended the SVP party congress in Meran/Merano on 11 April. On 15 May, Province Governor Arno Kompatscher attended the celebratory event marking the 60th anniversary of the Austrian State Treaty in Vienna and met Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz. Federal Minister Andrä Rupprechter visited Province Governor Arno Kompatscher in Bolzano/Bozen on 5 June. On 22 June, the South Tyrolean Province Councillor for German Education and Culture and for Integration, Philipp Achammer, visited Vice Chancellor Reinhold Mitterlehner, Federal Minister Josef Ostermayer, and Federal Min-
ister Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek. Together with the Province Governor of Tyrol Günter Platter, Province Governor Arno Kompatscher took part in Tyrol Day at the European Forum Alpbach on 23 August. A delegation involving representatives from the South Tyrolean Province Parliament headed by its President Thomas Widmann, paid a visit to the South Tyrol Sub-Committee of the Austrian National Council, convened with the Secretary-General at the Foreign Ministry Michael Linhart for a working meeting, and also held talks in the Federal Chancellery. On 23 November, Province Governor Arno Kompatscher and Province Councillor Philipp Acharmer met Federal President Heinz Fischer, Vice Chancellor Reinhold Mitterlehner and Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz. In the course of the year, Province Governor Kompatscher visited his counterparts from Tyrol, Upper Austria and Carinthia and welcomed the Province Governor of Vorarlberg Markus Wallner to Bolzano/Bozen. There was also an active exchange of visits among representatives from province parliaments and province governments, delegations from Styria and Burgenland, for instance, visited South Tyrol. Furthermore, province governors and presidents of province governments, as well as province government officials paid a large number of visits to their respective counterparts in the context of cooperation within the European region Tyrol – South Tyrol – Trentino.

The budget of the Province of South Tyrol amounts to 5.4 billion euros for the year 2016. With a growth of 1.1 %, the South Tyrolean economy again registered a slight increase, while inflation saw a decrease down to 0.5 %. Tyrol’s exports have once more picked up substantially, rising by 9.8 % and imports increased by 1.2 %. Unemployment rates dropped to 3.8 % in 2015.

3.1.1.2. Austria’s Neighbours

3.1.1.2.1. Germany

Austria and Germany enjoy very close relations at all levels – politically, economically and between their societies. Germany remains Austria’s most important trading partner. In terms of arrivals and overnight stays in Austria, travellers from Germany make up the largest group by far (with a total of 12.13 million arrivals and 50.16 million overnight stays).

25 years after Germany’s reunification, the country’s economy grew by 1.7 %. The number of unemployed dropped to the lowest level in 24 years (6.4 %). Due to high income from taxes, Germany was able to generate a budget surplus of 12.1 billion euros and to continue on its consolidation course.

Having reached its “mid-term” in 2015, the grand coalition can look back on the successful implementation of most of the central projects defined in the coalition agreement, including a pension package (expansion of the scope of mothers’ pensions and entitlement to pension payments from the age of 63 years for long-time contributors), the introduction of a statutory minimum wage (8.5 %), a climate protection agreement (reduction of the CO₂ emissions
by 40% by 2020) and further steps towards transformation of its energy system towards sustainability.

Since summer, both the political debate within Germany and the bilateral relations with Austria have been dominated by the influx of refugees and migrants.

In light of the ongoing increase in arrivals (in 2015 the figure determined by the System for the Initial Distribution of Asylum Seekers, “EASY”, stood at around 1.1 million individuals), the German Federal Government adopted a number of measures at national, European and international level aimed at reducing these numbers.

At the national level, the German Federal Government introduced preliminary controls at the borders with Austria in mid-September. An asylum package resulted in a tightening of the applicable rules including the extension of the list of safe countries of origin. The discussion about introducing upper limits, improved measures towards return and removal of irregular migrants without prospects of being granted a residence permit and integration efforts dominated the domestic policy debate.

At European level, Germany called for solutions to the refugee issue based on solidarity, especially with respect to the joint responsibility to protect the EU’s external borders, the establishment of hotspots and a relocation mechanism to be applied among Member States. Germany considers the Action Plan concluded between the EU and Turkey at the end of November to be an important contribution towards reducing the influx of refugees to Europe.

At international level, Germany stepped up humanitarian assistance aimed at improving the situation in the countries of origin. As a member of the international Syria conference, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier contributed towards developing a political solution. In December, the Bundestag (German Federal Parliament) dealt with Germany’s military involvement in the fight against the terrorist militia “Islamic State” and agreed to contribute up to 1,200 troops.

With respect to bilateral issues, the general settlement between Austria and the State of Bavaria helped in clarifying a number of open questions related to Hypo Alpe Adria (HETA). Due to a draft bill on the introduction of a toll for passenger vehicles, the European Commission initiated infringement proceedings against Germany. Subsequently, Federal Minister of Transport Alexander Dobrindt announced that the introduction of the passenger vehicle toll was to be postponed until the European Court of Justice has passed its judgement. Regarding the issue of the landing rights for Salzburg airport, an advisory council was set up to negotiate a mutually acceptable solution.

At European level, Germany focused on stronger economic policy coordination within the Eurozone and on deepening of the monetary union. After agreement had been reached that Greece, supported by a further loan programme, would remain in the Eurozone, the Bundestag, by a large majority,
authorised the Federal Minister of Finance on 17 July to negotiate an assistance programme.

**Germany’s foreign policy** attached particular importance to relations with the Middle East (Iran and Syria talks) and with Eastern Europe. Germany played a leading role in the “Normandy format” (Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine) and pushed for the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. The extensions of the sanctions against Russia were supported by Germany. In the field of energy, Russia remains an important partner (Nord Stream). From 1 January 2016, Germany assumes Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

The USA remains Germany’s most important partner outside of Europe and has become the country’s second most important trading partner. The parliamentary committee of inquiry set up by the Bundestag to investigate the spying by foreign intelligence services continued its work.

### 3.1.1.2.2. Italy

Following the resignation of President of State Giorgio Napolitano, Sergio Mattarella, judge at the Constitutional Court, was elected his successor and sworn in on 3 February.

The government headed by Prime Minister Matteo Renzi continued to consist of a coalition formed by the Partito Democratico (PD) and the Nuovo Centrodestra (NCD) party, a breakaway party emanating from Berlusconi’s Forza Italia and led by Interior Minister Angelino Alfano. The opposition was formed by Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia, the Lega Nord under its new chairman Matteo Salvini, the protest party Movimento 5 Stelle led by Beppe Grillo, the right-wing party Fratelli d’Italia and the left-wing party Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà. On 20 March, Infrastructure Minister Maurizio Lupi (NCD) resigned because of a corruption scandal involving some major construction projects; his successor Graziano Delrio, was sworn in on 2 April. Since the incumbent Maria Carmela Lanzetta had resigned at the end of January, the position of Minister for Regional Affairs remained vacant. The South Tyrolean People’s Party (Südtiroler Volkspartei, SVP) succeeded, particularly in the Senate, in positioning itself with the autonomy group as the party that frequently tipped the scales in favour of the government.

At the regional elections held at the end of May, the PD in coalition with other centre left parties was indeed able to win five regions, but the overall result of 24% on average remained nevertheless rather disappointing for the party in general. Strengthened by their electoral results in Veneto and Liguria, the right-wing parties subsequently formed a new right-wing coalition led by Matteo Salvini.

Prime Minister Matteo Renzi continued to pursue an intensive programme of reforms, consisting of electoral law reform (adopted on 4 May by the Parliament), liberalisation and reform of the labour market (adoption of the first
two implementing decrees on the “Jobs Act” in February), reduction of the tax burden, reform of public administration, simplification and acceleration of judicial processes, reform of the school system (adopted by Parliament in July), constitutional reform (including the transformation of the Senate into a “Senate of the Regions”).

With more than 21 million visitors and more than 145 participating states and organisations, the world exposition EXPO 2015 in Milan “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life“ was a major success. A delegation headed by Federal President Heinz Fischer and involving Vice Chancellor Reinhold Mitterlehner, the Federal Ministers Andrä Rupprechter and Josef Ostermayer, Province Governor Markus Wallner and the President of the Austrian Economic Chamber Christoph Leitl participated in Austria Day on 26 June. The Austrian pavilion, which won several distinctions, was visited by more than two million people.

At foreign policy level, Italy supports the European integration of the Western Balkan states and focuses special attention on Libya and the Middle East. Italy also considers it a special task to focus the EU’s attention and activities on the Mediterranean region as well as on the migration and refugee crisis. Despite the Ukraine crisis, Russia is still seen as important dialogue partner. Due to its geopolitical location Italy is, furthermore, an important NATO alliance partner. The country is a member of the Central European Initiative (CEI) and supports macro-regional EU strategies for the Adriatic-Ionian region and the Alpine region.

The excellent and intensive bilateral relations are characterised by a very active exchange of visits between Austria and Italy, intense economic relations and mutual tourism. Italy remains Austria’s second largest trading partner; trade relations with the Northern Italian regions are particularly close. The majority of the approximately 300 subsidiaries of Austrian companies in Italy are also located in the north of the country. For Austrian holidaymakers, Italy remains the unrivalled number one holiday destination and arrival numbers of Italian guests in Austria also saw an increase over the previous year.

3.1.1.2.3. Liechtenstein

The year was marked by several anniversaries and commemorative events in the Principality of Liechtenstein. 200 years ago at the Congress of Vienna the country’s sovereignty was recognised for the first time, 25 years ago Liechtenstein became a member of the United Nations and 20 years ago it joined the European Economic Area. The year also saw important cultural highlights: the Treasure Chamber was opened in March, and the new exhibition building of the Hilti Art Foundation was inaugurated in May.

The decision taken, without prior notice, by the Swiss National Bank to abandon the Swiss Franc’s fixed minimum exchange rate with the euro, pre-
sent the Liechtenstein with major economic, budgetary and employment policy challenges. In spite of these difficult general conditions, Liechtenstein succeeded in reducing its budget deficit and even in generating a small surplus. There was consensus in the coalition government of the Fortschrittliche Bürgerpartei (FBP, Progressive Citizens’ Party) and the Vaterländische Union (VU, Patriotic Union), led by Prime Minister Adrian Hasler (FBP) on the continuation of this consolidation course. In total, some 36,700 persons are employed in Liechtenstein of whom 50% come from abroad, mostly as daily cross-border commuters.

Liechtenstein’s foreign policy priorities include safeguarding its sovereignty, free access to global markets and deepening relations with its neighbouring states. Both in the bilateral and in the multilateral context, as a member of the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, EFTA, EEA and the WTO, Liechtenstein proves itself a reliable and committed partner.

Bilateral relations between Austria and Liechtenstein are characterised by close cooperation in all fields, based on mutual trust. Regional cooperation is highly dynamic. Close to 2,200 Austrian citizens live in the Principality and close to 8,400 Austrians commute daily to their workplace in Liechtenstein. Austrian export rates have also seen a marked increase. Only the question concerning the funding of the cross-border regional express railway project FL.A.CH (regional connection to the international long-distance network) remained open. Efforts aimed at developing a solution that is acceptable for all sides are still ongoing. With respect to European policy issues (EU, EEA), bilateral expert talks were initiated and will be continued in 2016.

3.1.1.2.4. Switzerland

Elected by the Federal Assembly on 9 December, the new government (Federal Council) consists of two members each from the Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP, the Swiss People’s Party), the Social Democratic Party (SP) and the FDP. Die Liberalen (FDP. The Liberals), and one member from the Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei (CVP, Christian Democratic People’s Party). The election of Guy Parmelin (SVP) as new Minister of Defence marked the return to the “magic formula” of the Swiss system of concordance, whereby two seats each in the government are held by the three strongest parties and one seat by a representative from the fourth strongest party. The rotating office of President of the Swiss Confederation was held by Minister of Justice and Police Simonetta Sommaruga (SP).

At the Parliamentary elections on 18 October, the right-wing conservative SVP won 29.4% of the votes. Despite slight losses, the Social Democratic SP remained the second strongest power, winning 18.8%. The liberal FDP was able to gain votes and reached 16.4%, the Christian-social CVP won 11.6%, the Greens 7.1%, the Green-liberal Party (GLP) 4.6%, and the Bürgerlich-Demokratische Partei (BDP, Conservative-Democratic Party) secured 4.1%
of the vote. In the Ständerat (Council of States), which is elected at canton level and has 46 seats, the FDP won two seats and now stands at 13, the CVP kept its 13 seats, the SP now has twelve seats, the SVP remained at five seats, while the Greens, the BDP and independent candidates won one seat each.

In the relations between Switzerland and the EU, the implementation of the popular initiative, accepted in 2014 by the Swiss electorate on “Stopping Mass Migration”, which is not compatible with the agreement on the free movement of persons between the European Union and Switzerland, remained the dominant theme. The Bilateral I Agreements risk to be suspended (“Guillotine Clause”). The new constitutional provision is to be implemented by February 2017, although a number of issues (especially with respect to levels and modalities of contingents, the impact on cross-border commuters, family reunification, and preference to be granted to Swiss nationals on the labour market) remain open. In December, the government decided to prepare a law which provides for the introduction of safeguard clauses that would become effective, if a threshold for immigration – which is yet to be defined – is exceeded. In parallel, talks with the EU on this subject as well as on an arrangement for the institutional relations between the EU and Switzerland continued. Switzerland seeks to implement the popular initiative while at the same time maintain the Bilateral Agreements with the EU. The EU, however, only sees an option for talks on the implementation of the agreement on the free movement of persons, but not on renegotiating the agreement, as the free movement of persons is one of the fundamental principles of the Single Market.

The renewal of the research and education programme with the EU (Horizon 2020, Erasmus+) for the period 2014–2020 was not possible – inter alia because Switzerland was not able to ratify the initialled agreement on extending free movement of persons to Croatia.

On 8 March, the initiative launched by the GLP on the introduction of a tax on non-renewable sources of energy in exchange for the abolition of value added tax was rejected with 92 % of the votes. The initiative for a tax exemption for child and educational allowances, supported by the CVP, was likewise rejected by a clear majority. On 14 June, an amendment to the radio and television act was adopted by a narrow margin and a law on the regulation on pre-implantation diagnostics by a clear majority. By contrast, an inheritance tax reform and the scholarship initiative were, however, rejected.

Swiss foreign policy continued to attach priority to relations with its neighbouring states, the EU, its wider neighbourhood, such as the Western Balkan states, other important third countries (USA, Brazil, Russia, India and China) as well as to global issues. Special emphasis is traditionally being placed on international trade policy, neutrality and strengthening the UN headquarters in Geneva. After the conclusion of its OSCE Chairmanship (2014), Switzerland continued to make available considerable funds for strengthening the OSCE mediation capabilities, particularly in Ukraine.
On the margins of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Belgrade, Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz and his counterpart Didier Burkhalter signed a new agreement on consular cooperation on 3 December; thus Austria will become Switzerland’s most important partner for consular issues within the EU.

Bilateral relations with Austria are characterised by a comprehensive set of treaties and a frequent exchange of visits. Some 65,000 Austrians (of whom 23,000 hold dual citizenship) reside permanently in Switzerland, about 8,500 of whom commute daily across the Austro-Swiss border. Switzerland is Austria’s third largest trading partner, the fourth most important buyer of Austrian goods, and the second most important consumer of services. Swiss nationals make up the third largest group of tourists in Austria. The positive trend in the field of trade continued. Growth in Austrian exports continued as did growth in imports from Switzerland – despite the suspension of the minimum euro/franc exchange rate in January.

3.1.1.2.5. Slovakia

Austria and Slovakia enjoy very close and friendly relations. Throughout the year there was a particularly intensive exchange of visits, which culminated in an official working visit by Federal President Heinz Fischer to President Andrej Kiska on 13 July. On 10 August, the Federal President met Prime Minister Robert Fico in Eckartsau Castle. Exchange at government level, included visits by Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann (7 September), Federal Minister Gerald Klug (11 March), Vice Chancellor Reinhold Mitterlehner (16 April), Federal Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner (Gabčíkovo, 19 October), Federal Minister Hans Jörg Schelling (5 November) and Federal Minister Wolfgang Brandstetter (6 November) to their respective counterparts.

Bilateral economic relations kept developing dynamically. With an overall investment volume of some 6 billion euros, Austria is currently the second largest foreign investor. The bilateral trade volume has increased more than tenfold since 1993. Some 2,500 Austrian companies are active in Slovakia and employ more than 40,000 local staff. Austrian banks, construction and construction supply companies as well as metal processing firms are particularly well represented in Slovakia. In turn, about 43,000 Slovaks work in Austria, many of whom are employed in the healthcare sector. Since autumn 2014, the Austrian Economic Chambers and the Slovak Ministry of Education have successfully implemented a common pilot project in the field of dual education which is listed as a best practice example by the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. The experience gained in this project formed the basis for a new law on vocational training which entered into force in Slovakia on 1 April.

Transport and infrastructure projects remain a key priority of bilateral relations. The Austrian-Slovak working group of transport experts, set up in 2014 in this respect, continued its activity. Work towards implementing
various projects, such as the Marchfeld expressway and the development of railway and bridge infrastructure proceeded. With a view to the development and expansion of the bilateral transport infrastructure along the border section of the River March, the Governor of Lower Austria Erwin Pröll and the Chairman of the Bratislava Self-Governing Region Pavol Frešo agreed on modernising the local ferry connection. The construction of cycle and pedestrian bridges across the River March, similar to the “bridge of freedom” near Schloßhof castle, has been taken into consideration.

Slovakia is a close partner of Austria in the European Union and, with the exception of questions pertaining to nuclear energy and migration shares similar views on many European policy issues and regarding the Eurozone. In the energy sector, cooperation on issues related to the security of gas and oil supply is of strategic relevance. In view of the imminent completion of the Mochovce nuclear power plant’s reactor units 3 and 4 and the planned construction of a new nuclear power plant in Jaslovske Bohunice, Austria reiterated its legitimate safety concerns. With respect to renewable energies, potential for sharing Austrian know-how has been identified.

Cross-border and regional cooperation between Slovakia and Austria remains highly diverse and wide-ranging. In October, the provinces of Lower Austria and Burgenland signed cooperation agreements for the years 2015 to 2019 with the respective neighbouring regions. At EU level, the new Interreg V-A programme was launched for the programme period 2014–2020. It will include joint projects in the field of dual education and training, tourism (with a special focus on agro-tourism) and the promotion of start-ups. This cooperation also featured high on the agenda of the visit by Governor paid to the Chairman of the Region Pavol Frešo in Bratislava on 2 March and the talks the Mayor of Bratislava Ivo Nesrovnal held in Vienna with Mayor Michael Häupl on 21 April. There were also frequent meetings under the new Trilateral Cooperation between Austria, Slovakia and the Czech Republic (“Austerlitz format”). Austria also took part in events and conferences organised by Slovakia during its Presidency of the Visegrád Group 2014/2015.

3.1.1.2.6. Slovenia

Apart from some cabinet reshuffles, Slovenian domestic politics remained relatively uneventful in the first half of the year. In summer, however, a wiretapping affair in connection with the arbitration proceedings concerning the dispute over the sea border in the Piran Bay and certain land borders put a strain on the relationship with neighbouring Croatia (“Pirangate”). As a consequence, Croatia announced that it would withdraw from the arbitration proceedings.

From September on, the migration and refugee crisis topped the political agenda. The shift of refugee and migration routes to Croatia and Slovenia from mid-October onwards had a negative impact on the already tense politi-
Challenges and Developments on all Five Continents

cal climate between the two countries. In the course of the refugee crisis, coordination with Austria became closer, which was generally very well received and was also the topic of a meeting between Foreign Minister Karl Erjavec and Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz held in Vienna on 11 November.

The economically and politically very close and intensive bilateral relations between Austria and Slovenia were further developed. Together with representatives from the Federal Provinces of Carinthia and Styria, Slovenia again participated in Joint Committee meetings held in Klagenfurt (Carinthia-Slovenia) on 26 May and in Maribor (Styria-Slovenia) on 25 November.

**Cooperation between the two foreign ministries** was further deepened. The Informal Working Group Austria-Slovenia, set up in 2014, met in Vienna on 18 September. On 4 and 5 November, the Parliamentary Friendship Group **Austria-Slovenia** held talks with members of the Slovenian Parliament and the Speaker of the Slovenian Parliament Milan Brglez.

**Trilateral Cooperation** between Austria, Slovenia and Croatia continued at top political level. On 17 April, President Borut Pahor invited his counterparts, Federal President Heinz Fischer and the President of of Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, to attend a meeting in Logarska Dolina. On 28 March, the three countries’ heads of government met Vice President of the European Commission Maroš Šefčovič in Schladming for talks that mainly focused on energy issues.

A compromise was found with regard to the funding of the Slovenian music school in Klagenfurt, an important concern of the **Slovenian ethnic group in Carinthia**. On 22 October, the government of the province of Carinthia agreed on an amendment to the province constitution, which inter alia includes explicit reference to the Slovenian ethnic group. The necessary decision by the province parliament, required for amendments to the constitution, is to be taken in 2016.

The official recognition of the **German-speaking ethnic group as a minority in Slovenia** remains an important concern for Austria and is regularly addressed in bilateral contacts. Austria consistently pursues the unchanged goal of achieving rapid and final processing by Slovenian authorities and courts of the still pending **denationalisation cases** involving Austrian nationals, on which, however, no progress was made.

**Economic relations** between Slovenia and Austria are particularly intensive. Many Austrian companies have subsidiaries or representations in Slovenia. With a share of 48% of all foreign direct investments, Austria has for many years now been the largest foreign investor in Slovenia. Slovenian citizens also remain the most important per capita consumers of Austrian products. The Slovenian economy started to recover and stabilise. Notwithstanding the ongoing challenges, economic growth has again picked up.
3.1.1.2.7. Czech Republic

At their party conventions, the three partners in the coalition government, the Social Democrats (ČSSD), “ANO”, and the Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL), confirmed their respective party leadership. The chairman of the opposition party TOP 09, Karel Schwarzenberg, did not stand for another term as chair. Domestic policy debates were increasingly dominated by the question of how to deal with the migration and refugee crisis as well as with Muslims and Islam.

The new dynamic in bilateral relations was maintained. A further meeting between Foreign Minister Lubomir Zaorálek, Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz and the Governors of Lower Austria and Upper Austria as well as the Governors of the South Moravian Region, the Vysočina Region and the South Bohemian Region, was held in the Upper Austrian capital Linz on 21 August. At this meeting, a new format at public officials’ level, the “2plus6 Group”, was established. This group, which also includes Vienna, seeks to contribute towards deepening cross-border cooperation – both at national and regional levels. A first meeting of the 2plus6 Group was held in Třeboň (Wittingau) on 11 November.

The intensification of bilateral relations is also reflected in a large number of meetings at ministerial and parliamentary level, and between Austrian province governors and Czech regional governors. One of the key issues addressed on these occasions was again the improvement of transport connections. Progress was made in this field: the construction and development of the S 10 express road as far as Freistadt Nord was completed, and construction started on new sections of the A 5 motorway in the direction of Drasenhofen and on the Czech side of the D 3 between Prague and České Budějovice. In keeping with a political agreement on the swift development of train connections between Vienna and Prague, concluded in Vienna between Federal Minister Alois Stöger and his Czech counterpart Dan Ťok on 12 February, the travel time for the section Vienna-Prague was reduced in December (beginning of the winter train schedule) to less than four hours.

In the context of a visit Minister of the Environment Richard Brabec paid to Federal Minister Andrä Rupprechter, it was agreed to establish a structured dialogue on environmental issues that has already been launched.

In the field of nuclear energy, Austria continued to represent its legitimate and legally founded security interests. On 18 May, the Czech government adopted a new national energy concept that focuses on stepping up the use of nuclear energy. The action plan for nuclear energy development, adopted on 3 June, provides for an expansion of the Temelín and the Dukovany nuclear power plants. The question of funding of these development plans has, however, as yet not been solved.

The Czech Republic remained Austria’s most important trading and economic partner in Central and Eastern Europe. In support of efforts towards
countering the shortage of skilled labour, Austrian investors together with Czech companies and specialised vocational schools launched a pilot project promoting dual education and training in South Bohemia.

The successful academic and scientific exchange was continued. With a view to implementing the bilateral cultural agreement, a work programme for cooperation in the years 2015 to 2019 was adopted in Prague on 30 June.

On 9 October, Federal Minister Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek attended the opening ceremony for the new building of the Österreichisches Gymnasiums Prag (Austrian grammar school Prague). In the context of this event, she also met her Czech counterpart Kateřina Valachová for a working discussion.

The Permanent Conference of Austrian and Czech Historians continued its work on a common history book, inter alia by holding public discussion events on individual chapters in Vienna, Linz, St. Pölten and Raabs an der Thaya in October and November.

On 27 January, the Second President of the National Council Karlheinz Kopf travelled to Prague and Terezín (Theresienstadt) to attend events commemorating the end of the Second World War 70 years ago. On 10 May, Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka, accompanied by several ministers, travelled to Mauthausen. For the first time ever, several Czech cities officially commemorated the victims of expulsions after the end of the war; statements were issued expressing regret about the events of that time. The city of Brno, for instance, proclaimed a year of reconciliation and organised a symbolic walk back from the Czech-Austrian border to Brno, led by the mayor of Brno Petr Vokřal, in commemoration of the “Brno death march” of May 1945 when half of the German-speaking population of the city had been expelled.

At a first meeting between the Heads of Government, Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka, Prime Minister Robert Fico and Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann, trilateral cooperation with Austria and Slovakia was officially agreed in Slavkov u Brna (Austerlitz) on 29 January, and a work programme was adopted whose implementation was launched at public officials’ level in Prague on 17 June. The next meeting at the Heads of Government level is planned for 2016 and will be coordinated by Slovakia.

3.1.1.2.8. Hungary

Following the by-elections in the constituencies Veszprém (22 February) and Tapolca (12 April), the governing coalition formed by the Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz) and Christian Democrats (KDNP) lost their two thirds majority, required to amend the constitution, and now holds 131 of the 199 seats in parliament. On 22 June, the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission published an opinion on Hungarian media legislation, in which inter alia the regulations on media content-based restrictions and on the appointment of the members of the media regulation authority as well as the role of the national news agency were deemed to be in need of revision. The domestic
policy agenda was mainly dominated by the **refugee situation**. From September onwards, the asylum law was tightened and by mid-October the construction of a more than 200 kilometre-long fence erected along the border with Serbia and Croatia was completed. On 10 December, the European Commission opened infringement proceedings against Hungary in connection with amendments to the asylum law. Likewise in December, Hungary decided to take legal steps against the decision (EU) 2015/1601 by the Council on a quota-based distribution of refugees.

The **relations between Austria and Hungary** are **intensive** and characterised by **broad-based exchange**. At an informal meeting of the Heads of State of Austria, Slovenia and Hungary, Federal President Heinz Fischer met his counterparts in the border village of Felsőszölnök in Vas County on 26 May. On 6 November, Federal President Heinz Fischer attended the funeral of former Hungarian President Arpad Göncz in Budapest. Parliamentarian contacts were strengthened through meetings of the Bilateral Friendship Group in Budapest on 29 April and in Vienna on 19 November. Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó was guest of honour at the opening of the European Forum Wachau on 13 June. On 25 September, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Head of the Prime Minister’s Office Janos Lázár and Foreign Minister Peter Szijjártó held working meetings with Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann and Vice Chancellor Reinhold Mitterlehner in Vienna. Regular consultations in the context of the Bilateral Working Group involving representatives from both foreign ministries, as well as bilateral nuclear talks were continued.

**Economic relations** play a key role in the bilateral relationship. Austria is Hungary’s second most important trading partner and fourth-largest investor. According to a Hungarian statistical survey, Austrian companies employ some 70,000 people in Hungary. Four Austrian companies that are active in Hungary have formed “strategic partnerships” with the government.

The important role that a predictable and secure investment climate plays for Austria’s economic presence in Hungary is therefore a recurring topic in bilateral discussions. On 10 February, a **round table on economic issues**, led by the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy as well as the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, was held in Vienna. It was agreed to hold further annual meetings in this format to discuss bilateral concerns and issues in the economic area.

On 9 February, the Hungarian government signed a tri-lateral agreement with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the Erste Bank. Among other measures, the agreement provides for a reduction in the special bank tax between 2016 and 2018 to a level that is in line with the EU average. By the end of the year, it had, however, not been possible to find a solution regarding the amendment to the Hungarian Land Act, which entered into force on 1 May 2014 and against which the European Commission had launched infringement proceedings on 26 March.
Cooperation at regional level was further intensified. Austria and Hungary jointly and pro-actively contribute to regional cooperation programmes, for instance within the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) or the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI). Cross-border cooperation between Burgenland and Hungary, especially on expanding cross-border transport continued to develop positively. On 30 June, the European Commission approved the cooperation programme Interreg V-A Austria-Hungary, which covers the funding period until 2020. A total of 95 million euros will be made available for this programme from Union and national funds.

3.1.2. South East Europe / Western Balkan Countries

The Western Balkans is a key priority of Austrian foreign policy. In the framework of the Berlin Process, launched in 2014 by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, Austria thus organised a Western Balkans summit in Vienna on 27 August. Held at the invitation of Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann, the conference was attended by the Heads of Government, ministers of foreign affairs and the ministers of economy of the six Western Balkan states, of Germany, France and Italy, as well as by representatives of the European Commission and from various international finance institutions.

The process seeks to strengthen the Western Balkans’ European perspective and support the countries in implementing necessary reform. In total, five annual summits are planned between 2014 and 2018. The process has already added tangible momentum to regional cooperation in important areas for the future and led to a more focused approach in the efforts undertaken by the six Western Balkan countries in important areas of reform. The very concrete results achieved during the Vienna summit include in particular agreements relating to transport and energy infrastructure in the region, the establishment of a regional youth exchange office, the signing of two border treaties and the active involvement of civil society. The follow-up summit will be held in Paris in 2016.

3.1.2.1. Albania

The local elections held on 21 June were won by the governing alliance of the left. In summer, a large-scale territorial reform was implemented by which the number of municipalities was reduced from 380 to 61. In December, the Albanian parliament adopted another comprehensive law on de-criminalisation under which individuals with a criminal past are to be excluded from assuming political offices. Bilateral relations with Serbia saw a clear improvement, which became particularly clear reflected during a visit paid by the Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić to Tirana in May and in the context of a joint initiative towards establishing a regional youth exchange office based on the German-French model. A major challenge for the govern-
ment to be faced in the coming year is the reform of the judiciary, which plays a key role particularly in the EU accession process and has been the subject of intensive work with the support of the international community. Albania is a priority country of Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC).

3.1.2.2. Bosnia and Herzegovina

After the elections held in October 2014, the government formation process was completed in March. At national level, the country is governed by a six party coalition led by the Chairman of the Ministerial Council Denis Zvizdić. In the Federation, agreement was reached under the new Prime Minister Fadil Novalić. In the Republika Srpska, the government formation process under the leadership of Prime Minister Željka Cvijanović was already completed in 2014.

At the beginning of the year, all parties and levels of government agreed on a comprehensive reform agenda which enabled the entry into force of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU on 1 June. The adaptation of the SAA as a consequence of Croatia’s accession to the EU and the creation of an EU coordination mechanism were, however, still not completed. Comprehensive action plans aimed at implementing reforms were adopted and their implementation was started, irrespective of complicated coordination and allocation of competences at domestic level. EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Johannes Hahn paid several visits to the country and announced further support from the EU, provided the necessary reforms are implemented as planned. Bosnia and Herzegovina is generally back on track towards EU integration.

The increasingly overt secessionist tendencies displayed by the Republika Srpska, however, remain problematic. Its President Milorad Dodik time and again openly questions the legitimacy of the national institutions – established in the Dayton Peace Agreement and in the course of the further development of the country in line with the provisions set out in this agreement – and thus also the integrity of the nation state. During the Vienna Western Balkans Summit a border treaty was signed with Montenegro on 27 August. During the months of November and December events and celebrations were organised to mark the 20th anniversary of the signing of the peace agreement. During a visit of high symbolic importance in the context of which he attended the commemorative event in Srebrenica in July, some members of the audience, however, threw stones at the Serbian Prime Minister. Further challenges faced by the country remain the ongoing ethnic homogenisation in the individual parts of the country, which is promoted by the current constitutional structure, and at national level the coming to terms with the war crimes which will still take a long time, and also radicalisation as well as Islamisation. In November, for instance, there was an attack which killed two soldiers near Sarajevo and a bomb exploded at a police station.
Since 2009, Austria has contributed to the military CSDP operation for the stabilisation of the region, EUFOR Althea, and with about 200 personnel has also been the second largest provider of troops to the mission. Since December 2014, Major General Johann Luif has held the position of Commander of EUFOR Althea. The latest extension of the mission’s mandate was adopted by the UN Security Council in November.

The economic situation has seen some slight improvement, although the level of new investment remains low and unemployment is high. Cumulatively speaking, Austria has remained the largest foreign investor in Bosnia and Herzegovina since its independence. Visits by Federal Minister Josef Ostermayer, Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz, Federal Minister Gerald Klug and Federal Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner highlight the Austrian commitment. Since 2009, the Austrian Valentin Inzko has held the position of High Representative of the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

3.1.2.3. Kosovo

The beginning of the year was marked by violent demonstrations by the opposition against the coalition government that had been formed by the two main parties, the PDK and the LDK, in December 2014. In the first few months of the year, Austria also registered a sharp increase in numbers of asylum seekers from Kosovo which was, however, markedly reduced by March due to targeted measures launched by Austria and the Kosovar government. In February, Federal Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner, the local authorities and the Austrian Embassy launched an information campaign on the ground towards this end. The most frequently cited reasons for such an immigration wave are often high unemployment rates, low economic growth as well as a certain lack of prospects among the population.

Kosovo can, however, also report some progress, including for instance the development of a national infrastructure investment plan and the adoption of important measures towards fighting extremism. Furthermore, the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU was signed in October. Kosovo also made clear progress in achieving the criteria for visa liberalisation with the EU. During a visit by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in November, the partial lifting of the upper airspace and aviation restrictions over Kosovo in force since 1999 was announced. On 3 August, approval was given to setting up a special war crimes tribunal in The Hague to review the war crimes attributed to the Kosovar underground army UÇK (Kosovo Liberation Army) during the Kosovo conflict. Of central importance were also four agreements negotiated under the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue for normalisation of relations with Serbia and signed on 25 August. These agreements relate to measures in the fields of telecommunications, energy, the establishment of an Association/Community of Serb Majority Municipalities in Kosovo and the opening of the hitherto closed bridge connecting North
and South Mitrovica. Another agreement signed during the Vienna Western Balkans Summit on 27 August related to the drawing of the border between Kosovo and Montenegro.

As a reaction to the signing of the agreement on the establishment of an Association/Community of Serb Majority Municipalities and the border agreement with Montenegro, the opposition sought to block all parliamentary work – sometimes even by resorting to violence – for the rest of the year. Members of the opposition, for instance, let off tear gas in Parliament to disturb sessions. Several opposition MPs were thus arrested, including the former head of the Vetevendosje party, Albin Kurti. A number of demonstrations that often turned violent were organised in the inner city of Pristina. Although President Atifete Jahjaga had submitted an expert opinion by the constitutional court, which basically conceded that the agreement with Belgrade on the establishment of an Association/Community of Serb Majority Municipalities was not inconsistent with the constitution, the opposition continued to put up resistance for the rest of the year.

Austria contributes more than 500 personnel to the NATO-led Operation Kosovo Force (KFOR), set up in 1999, which makes it the largest non-NATO troop contributor. Until 1 October, Brigadier General Anton Waldner held the position of Deputy Commander. The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) assists the Kosovar institutions in building up a functioning legal, police, customs and judicial system – and is the EU’s largest civilian CSDP mission to date.

High-level bilateral visits emphasise the importance Austrian foreign policy attributes to Kosovo. Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz, for instance, paid a working visit to the country in January, followed by Interior Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner in February. The visit by Federal President Heinz Fischer in October was the first by an Austrian Head of State since the country’s foundation. Concurrent to the Federal President’s visit, Federal Minister Gerald Klug also travelled to Kosovo to visit the Austrian KFOR contingent.

By the end of the year, Kosovo has been recognised as an independent state by 111 states. The fact that its application for UNESCO membership was rejected by a narrow margin in October, however, cast a shadow over the rapprochement between Belgrade and Pristina. Kosovo is a priority country of Austrian Development Cooperation.

3.1.2.4. Macedonia

On 9 and 10 May, the domestic policy crisis that had been ongoing since the beginning of 2013 came to a head in the north Macedonian city of Kumanovo during a large-scale police operation against an armed group suspected of planning a terrorist attack on state institutions. A massive gunfight that lasted a whole day claimed 22 lives. Further escalation and destabilisation was, however, prevented by the country’s two main ethnic groups moving
closer together, and a substantial increase in commitment and engagement by the international community.

Thanks to committed support provided by EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn, the representatives of the four most important political parties reached an agreement on containing and overcoming the crisis (Przino Agreement) on 15 July. After the opposition had returned to Parliament, it was possible to meet, sometimes with a slight delay, the various deadlines for the other items defined in the agreement. Following the resignation of the current Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, elections, to be prepared by a technocrat government led by a new interim Prime Minister, are scheduled for April next year. The full implementation of the Przino Agreement also represents a central element for a potential new recommendation by the European Commission to open membership negotiations.

It had still not been possible to find a solution to the name dispute with Greece. However, following an agreement reached in June between the Macedonian and the Greek foreign ministers, confidence-building measures were launched with a view to improving bilateral relations and resolving the name dispute. Relations with Bulgaria, on the other hand, remained tense.

The drastic increase in refugee and migration movements through the country, registered since spring, faced local authorities with substantial difficulties. During a visit Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz paid to Macedonia at the height of the crisis at the end of August, steps towards better cooperation were agreed. Since mid-November, Macedonia has rejected migrants who do not come from Afghanistan, Syria or Iraq in order to prevent potential economic migration.

3.1.2.5. Montenegro

Despite difficulties, Montenegro continued on its course towards Euro-Atlantic integration. Accession negotiations with the EU were opened in June 2012 and at the beginning of December, the official invitation to join NATO – which is still considered controversial by some members of the opposition – was extended. Against this background, there have been ongoing protest activities launched by the opposition which occasionally also turned violent. The goal pursued by the opposition party Democratic Front (DF) is to bring down the coalition government between the DPS and the SPD. The coalition itself was not spared internal tensions either, which could not be fully resolved by a government reshuffle in March and a split of the SPD in summer. The next parliamentary elections are scheduled to take place in 2016. In December, Svetozar Marović, former President of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro was arrested for corruption allegations. As regards good neighbourly relations, Montenegro was able to sign border treaties with Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as with Kosovo in August.

Federal Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner visited Montenegro in February, in June Federal President Heinz Fischer participated as guest of honour in the
Heads of State summit of the Brdo-Brioni Process and likewise in June, Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz also visited the country.

3.1.2.6. Serbia

Governing with a vast majority since April 2014, the cabinet led by Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić continued its reform course. The government attached top priority to large-scale economic reform, combating corruption, fighting organised crime and making further progress in the EU accession process. On the latter, Serbia was able to reach a major milestone, as the first two negotiation chapters were opened in December. In this context, Serbia’s continued commitment in the normalisation process between Belgrade and Pristina, in which an important breakthrough was achieved on 25 August, is of central importance.

As a transit country, the dramatic increase in refugee and migration movements witnessed since the beginning of the year also faced Serbia with major challenges. Although the country’s asylum system is quite poorly developed compared to the rest of Europe, the Serbian government undertook committed efforts – on which it was widely commended – to cope with and manage the influx of refugees and migrants. Since mid-November, Serbia has also been rejecting migrants who are not from Afghanistan, Syria or Iraq at the border in order to prevent potential migration for economic reasons. In the course of closings of the mutual border by both Croatia and Serbia, the situation was on the verge of escalating at the end of September. Thanks to inter alia mediation efforts undertaken by the EU, it was largely possible to somewhat normalise it again.

In 2015, Serbia held the Chairmanship of the OSCE and was a priority country of Austrian international cultural policy.

3.1.3. Cyprus

By adopting resolution 2197 (2015) on 29 January and resolution 2234 (2015) on 29 July, the UNSC 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 states, including Austria. Compared with previous years, the situation in the buffer zone was generally calmer.

After the temporary end of natural gas drilling off the south coast, the withdrawal of Turkish ships from this area and the election of Mustafa Akıncı as leader of the entity in the North that is not recognised internationally, Cyprus talks were resumed on 15 May. By the end of the year, intensive talks had been held at the level of head negotiators and both sides began implementing some initial confidence-building measures. A number of substantive meetings were also held between President Anastasiades and ethnic group leader Akinci. Although some topics, including the ownership issues are very dif-
Challenges and Developments on all Five Continents

It is difficult to solve, it is to be assumed that progress has been made and positions have somewhat been converging. Most recently the process gave rise to visits by high-level foreign government representatives.

3.1.4. Turkey

The year was dominated by two parliamentary elections. On 7 June, the governing Islamic-conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) lost the absolute majority (41% of votes and 258 of 550 seats). Standing for the first time as a party, the pro-Kurdish HDP (Peoples’ Democratic Party) won 13% of the votes. It thus clearly exceeded the 10% threshold and won 80 seats in parliament. As coalition agreements failed, new elections were called on 1 November in which the AKP won 49.5% of the votes (317 seats) and was thus able to once again govern alone. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu remained Head of Government, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu Foreign Minister and Volkan Bozkır Minister of European Affairs.

Besides the Kurdish issues, domestic policy was dominated by the dispute between the AKP and the “Hizmet” movement led by Fethullah Gülen, the President’s pushing for the introduction of a presidential system, and efforts towards managing the refugee crisis. The year was also marked by the restriction of fundamental rights, particularly freedom of the press and freedom of opinion. In the second half of the year, numerous journalists were arrested for insulting the president or engaging in terrorist propaganda; among those arrested was also the editor in chief of the leading daily newspaper Cumhuriyet. In the lead-up to the parliamentary elections on 1 November, state authorities launched a large-scale offensive against formerly government-friendly media that are supportive of the Gülen movement and now critical of the government.

The year 2015, was at the same time overshadowed by a series of terrorist attacks. The most serious attacks included the suicide attack in July during a political rally of pro-Kurdish activists in Suruç close to the Syrian border, which killed 34 people and injured 76, some of whom very seriously; and the attack in front of the train station in Ankara in the lead-up to a trade union event, which claimed 102 lives and left more than 500 people injured in October.

Since June, the conflict between the government and the Kurdish underground organisation PKK (Kurdistan’s Workers Party) has escalated. This resurgence of violence has claimed hundreds of lives on both sides. As a result of the conflicts and ongoing curfews, thousands of people had to flee to neighbouring provinces or large cities.

Regarding the civil war in Syria, Turkey called for a military intervention by the international community to establish safe zones. Since July, the İncirlik air force base has been opened for US fighter aircrafts. Since then, Turkey has
also participated in the Global Coalition against ISIL/Da’esh. A considerable share of Turkish operations was, however, directed at PKK positions in the south-east of Turkey and northern Iraq.

At an extraordinary summit held in Brussels on 29 November, the EU and Turkey agreed on a Joint Action Plan in order to curb the ongoing influx of refugees and migrants via Turkey to Europe. Under this plan, the EU supports Turkey in providing care for the approximately three million refugees in the country. The summit declaration contains a financial pledge of three billion euros for this purpose, the intention to revive the EU accession negotiations which had been deadlocked for years (Chapter 17 economy and currency was opened on 14 December) and the resumption of the – likewise stagnating – visa dialogue. The latter is to lead to visa liberalisation for Turkish citizens by the end of 2016 when travelling to the EU, provided Turkey fulfils all necessary requirements by that date. This dialogue had already been opened with the re-admission agreement between the EU and Turkey, whose application is now to be advanced also for third country nationals.

Also due to its geo-strategic position at the interface between the Middle East, Central Asia and Europe, Turkey for a long time pursued a multipolar foreign policy. Not least because of the President’s uncompromising attitude on many controversial issues, relations with the neighbouring states have, however, seen a sometimes dramatic deterioration. The downing of a Russian fighter jet in the context of an operation in Syria in December, marked a low also in the relations with the Russian Federation. Russia thus introduced a number of mainly economic sanctions against Turkey.

While the UNSG avoided the term genocide when referring to the massacre against Armenians committed one hundred years before, and spoke of “atrocities”, Pope Francis commemorated the “Armenian genocide”, which triggered a diplomatic crisis between Turkey and the Holy See as well as some other states, whose governments and parliaments had also used this term.

Although the expectations for 2015 were modest, the economic growth rate reached around 3%. The Turkish lira declined again against the US dollar and the euro in 2015. The trade volume between Turkey and the EU increased from 129.159 billion euros to 140.732 billion euros in 2015. This increase made Turkey the fifth largest trading partner of the EU, while the EU became Turkey’s most important trade partner. With a view to further developing their mutual economic relations, the EU and Turkey announced that the customs union set up 20 years ago is to be expanded to the areas of public procurements, services and most agricultural products.
3.1.5. The EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood

3.1.5.1. Russia

At foreign policy level, the year was marked for Russia inter alia by the ongoing crisis in the Donbass region and the Crimean Peninsula and the resulting strain on relations with the EU, its Member States, the USA and their allies, as well as the military intervention in Syria and, most recently, increasing tensions with Turkey. At the economic level, Russia has come under pressure mainly as a result of the low oil price, the weak rouble and the sanctions and counter-sanctions. All these developments also impacted the domestic policy situation.

In the still unresolved Donbass crisis Russia continued to play a key role, mainly due to the massive presence of Russian armed formations and Moscow’s influence on the separatists (also see Chapter 3.1.5.2.1.). This crisis has also put a strain on relations between the EU and Russia. Negotiations on a new framework agreement and the visa dialogue were still not continued. Additional issues related to Russia’s non-implementation of its WTO obligations. The sanctions imposed against Russia in 2014 in response to the annexation of Crimea that violates international law, and the crisis in eastern Ukraine remained in force and were unanimously extended by the EU. The Russian counter-sanctions have also remained in force.

Reflecting Austria’s concerns, the EU also continued its dialogue efforts with Russia. Several rounds of trilateral negotiations between the EU, Russia and Ukraine on the application of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) between the EU and Ukraine were conducted, but did not produce any results. The EU thus decided not to continue these talks. Under the measures launched by Russia against Ukrainian imports, the CIS Free Trade Agreement was suspended for Ukraine at the end of the year and numerous food imports banned due to health concerns.

In the dispute over the Iranian nuclear programme, Russia assumed a constructive role and contributed to the successful completion of the Iran negotiations in Vienna in July.

In the Syria crisis, Russia plays a central and active role and since September also used its air force in support of President Assad’s regime. The West criticised that Russia was to a large extent attacking the moderate opposition.

Russia’s greater involvement in the Syria conflict also led to tensions with Turkey, which considers itself as the protective power of the Turkmen minority in the north-west of Syria, which was repeatedly attacked by the Russian air force. Relations reached a low when the Turkish air force shot down a Russian fighter jet near the Syrian-Turkish border on 21 November. Turkey argued that Turkish airspace had been violated although several warnings had been issued. In response to that downing, Russia called for an apology.
Europe and its Neighbouring States

and responded in strong terms, inter alia by imposing economic sanctions in the field of construction, tourism, the hotel industry and wood processing.

The trend towards placing a stronger focus on the G20 and the BRICS partners by the Russian Federation, which has been observed for some time, also continued in 2015.

On 1 January, the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) entered into force, with participation of Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and since May also Kyrgyzstan. Austria supported opening talks between the EU and the EAEU.

At domestic policy level, the year 2015 was overshadowed by further restrictions on the space for the civil society and the fragmented opposition – especially from a judicial, legislative and political perspective. On 27 February, the well-known opposition politician Boris Nemtsov was killed on a street near the Kremlin.

Against the background of the conflict in and around Ukraine and Russian military operations in Syria, President Putin’s popularity saw a sharp increase with ratings sometimes ranging at 88%. This rise in popularity also helped the governing party “United Russia” to maintain its dominant position in the nationwide elections (governors, regional and city parliaments) held in September. Despite efforts at socio-economic improvements, the situation in northern Caucasus remained unstable. The return to Russia of Russian fighters who had previously left for Syria and Iraq as well as the extremists in the North Caucasus, who have pledged their loyalty towards IS, pose a risk to security.

As a result of the low oil price and the associated decline of the rouble, as well as the negative impacts of the EU sanctions and the Russian counter-sanctions, the Russian economy slipped into a recession. While the official inflation rate remained at around 13%, price increases for some basic food-stuffs reached between 20 and 30%.

In percentage terms, Russia had the highest military expenses in the whole of Europe. The draft budget for 2016 provides for some 3.36 trillion Russian roubles under the item ‘national defence’, which corresponds to an increase of approximately 0.8% compared with 2015, equalling some 20% of the Russian budget or 4% of the gross domestic product.

From 4 to 5 May, Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz visited Moscow and met Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. On the margins of the Syria negotiations in Vienna, the two foreign ministers also met twice for bilateral talks.

The inclusion of Austria in the “black list” of insufficiently cooperating countries, considered in autumn by the Russian tax authorities, could have led to unjustified tax disadvantages for companies in both countries. It was, however, possible to convince the Russian side in time that none of the criteria defined for such an inclusion applied to Austria.
3.1.5.2. Eastern Partnership States

3.1.5.2.1. Ukraine

The conflict in the east of Ukraine, which has been ongoing for almost two years now, the reform process in the country and economic as well as tax policy issues dominated relations with Ukraine in 2015.

The conflict in the Donbass region has already claimed at least 9,000 lives, more than 20,000 people have been injured, five million people require humanitarian assistance and 2.3 million people have had to flee their homes. The Ukrainian economy strongly declined inter alia due to the military clashes. At the end of the year, however, some initial indications of a recovery were discernible. In light of these developments, the EU and Austria maintained their efforts towards calming the situation and resolving the conflict. The OSCE has played a major role in these efforts.

As a result of the escalating crisis and building on the Minsk Agreements of 5 September 2014, the presidents of France, Russia and Ukraine as well as the German Federal Chancellor negotiated a package of measures towards resolving the conflict. This package included a ceasefire due to come into effect on 14 February, the withdrawal of heavy weapons, the holding of local elections in the occupied regions, a constitutional reform aimed at decentralising Ukraine and the re-introduction of border controls by the Ukrainian authorities at the Russian-Ukrainian border. The separatists, however, used the time prior to the entry into force of the ceasefire to launch another offensive at the key road and railway junction Debaltseve, as a result of which many people were killed, injured and taken prisoner. Despite this breach of confidence, the two Minsk Agreements developed into the central roadmap for resolving the conflict.

In the subsequent negotiations it was decided to conduct talks on the concrete design of the Minsk Agreement in the framework of the Trilateral Contact group. Set up in June 2014, this group includes the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine and is headed by OSCE Special Representative Heidi Tagliavini. To this end, four working groups were established for the areas of security, policy, humanitarian affairs and economy, and met at regular intervals. The provisions of the Minsk Agreements were to be implemented by 31 December. In July, former Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations in New York, Martin Sajdik took over from Heidi Tagliavini as OSCE Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine. After both ceasefire violations and the intensity of fighting had again increased dramatically in summer, and especially in the first few weeks of August, it was possible to negotiate with help of Martin Sajdik an, albeit, fragile ceasefire. This comparably calm period of time was used to start reconstructing part of the country’s infrastructure and enable thousands of Ukrainian children to go to school. In the Trilateral Contact Group meeting of 29 September, representatives furthermore agreed on a withdrawal of certain types of weapons with
a calibre of less than 120 mm, which was implemented in the subsequent weeks. After ceasefire violations had again increased from mid-November on, it was possible to agree another ceasefire on 22 December, which was, however, also not observed.

In 2015, Austria seconded 18 members to the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and made available a financial contribution totalling some 1.4 million euros, in line with the distribution key agreed across the OSCE. Austria furthermore provides introductory training courses for designated mission staff.

Little progress was, however, made regarding implementation of the political obligations under the Minsk Agreements. The legal act granting “Special Status to Certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions”, adopted already in September 2014 by the Ukrainian parliament, was supposed to be backed by a constitutional amendment – especially with regard to decentralisation. This amendment was indeed adopted in the first reading on 31 August, but triggered riots by angry nationalistic demonstrators, in the course of which four people died and more than one hundred were injured. Following these events, one of the five governing parties left the coalition. By the end of the year, the adoption of the constitutional amendment in the second reading was still outstanding.

No progress was made regarding the modalities for the uniform local elections provided for under the Minsk Agreements, which could not be held in the areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions occupied by the separatists; in response to pressure from Russia, the separatists likewise did not hold any elections.

The two other central items of the Minsk Agreements – withdrawal of foreign fighters from the Donbass and re-establishment of border control by the Ukrainian border guard in all sections along the Russian-Ukrainian border – have still not been implemented.

The resistance put up by nationalistic forces against concessions vis-à-vis Russia also manifested itself with respect to the Crimea. In November, several high voltage lines between the Ukrainian mainland and the Crimea were blown up in an attack, which led to major problems in the peninsula’s electricity supply. Repair works were subsequently blocked by nationalist groups and a number of Crimean Tartars. Towards the end of the year, power supply for the Crimea was to some extent restored and from December onwards the peninsula was partly supplied with electricity from Russia (the Rostov region). In December, however, the electricity supply of most of Ukraine was disrupted by a hacker attack on the power grid. According to Ukraine, the attack was carried out by a Russian hacker.

The Minsk Agreements constitute the central framework of reference for a peace process and thus for the measures taken by the EU and Austria vis-à-vis Russia. The developments in eastern Ukraine are evaluated continuously
on the basis of the Minsk Agreements in order to facilitate appropriate reactions to progress and deteriorations. By the end of the implementation period on 31 December, however, only a limited part of the Agreements had in fact been implemented. In order to maintain the pressure necessary for a political solution, the EU prolonged a number of restrictive measures including entry bans and financial sanctions against certain natural and legal persons. In light of the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine pursued by Russia, the EU prolonged capital market restrictions on Russian banks as well as on companies active in the energy and defence sectors, an arms embargo, an embargo on dual use items for military end use as well as an embargo on petroleum technology. In view of the lack of progress in the implementation of the Minsk Agreements, the sanctions against Russia were extended for six months until 31 July 2016. In response to the illegal annexation of the Crimea by Russia, the import ban on goods that originate from the Crimea or Sevastopol was extended as was the financing and insurance ban related to such imports and a trade and investment ban relating to Crimea and Sevastopol. As a Member State of the EU, Austria supports all sanctions decisions, at the same time, however, and in keeping with its traditional role as a mediator, it has always advocated continuing dialogue with Russia.

In parallel with the sanctions, the EU also supported measures aimed at promoting the reform efforts launched by Ukraine. The priority areas were constitutional reform, decentralisation and combating corruption. The Support Group for Ukraine (SGUA), set up towards this end in 2014, and the EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform Ukraine (EUAM) continued their work. Together with the EU delegation in Kiev they were instrumental in advising and consulting the Ukrainian government on important reform projects. Generally speaking, the Ukrainian government has launched and realised comprehensive reforms over the last few years based on recommendations from the IMF and the EU, although there have been some weaknesses in terms of implementation. Tangible progress was made inter alia in the fields of budget transparency, the effective use of public funds (public finance management) and public procurement. Further positive developments are to be noted for instance in the fields of rule of law (human rights situation, reform of public prosecution, the police and the judiciary), improvements in election legislation, legislation aimed at combating corruption and measures towards promoting decentralisation.

In view of the precarious situation in eastern Ukraine, Austria provides humanitarian assistance, which is implemented on the ground in close cooperation with local NGOs. In addition to the funds made available for humanitarian assistance, a special development cooperation programme for Ukraine was adopted, totalling one million euros per year from 2016 onwards. The existing structures available at the ADA Coordination Office in Chişinău will be used to implement the planned projects. Austria thus makes an effective and efficient contribution towards fostering the positive development of Ukraine.
The conflict in the east of the country and the ongoing economic conflict with Russia is having an impact on the Ukrainian economy.

Austria is among the five largest investors in Ukraine. With a view to further developing the already significant economic activities of Austrian companies in Ukraine and to intensifying economic relations, the Austrian Economic Chamber organised the “Forum Ukraine” in Vienna on 19 November.

The EU Association Agreement with Ukraine, which aims at political association and gradual integration into the EU economic area including the establishment of a comprehensive and deep free trade zone, is being provisionally applied since 1 November 2014. The provisional application of the central trade section was postponed until 1 January 2016, based on an agreement with Russia. In trilateral negotiations between the EU, Russia and Ukraine it was sought, as far as possible, to take account of Russia’s concerns vis-à-vis the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) and to negotiate a compromise. However, as it was not possible to reach agreement in December, Russia announced that it would terminate a number of trade facilitations for Ukraine as of 1 January 2016. In addition, the Russian import ban on food from the EU was extended to Ukraine and restrictions on the transit of Ukrainian goods through Russia were introduced. In response to these steps, Ukraine imposed the same measures against Russian products. Likewise, direct air services between the two states were discontinued.

The local elections on 25 October were held in accordance with international standards. It was, however, not possible to hold elections in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, in Sevastopol and in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. The governing parties, which except for Prime Minister Yatsenyuk’s People’s Front, had all stood for these elections, did in fact lose some of the votes but were largely able to maintain their leading role across the country. All parties represented in the Ukrainian parliament support the integration of Ukraine into European structures, which is also supported by the majority of the Ukrainian population.

The exchange of bilateral visits saw a highly dynamic development in 2015. Apart from several bilateral meetings between Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz and President Petro Poroshenko, Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin and the mayor of Kiev Vitali Klitschko, Vice Chancellor and Federal Minister Reinhold Mitterlehner as well Federal Minister Wolfgang Brandstetter also met with their Ukrainian colleagues. Ukrainian plans to include Austria in a “black list” of low wage tax countries led to an intense phase of bilateral relations. This step would have entailed substantial tax disadvantages for Austrian companies. Austria succeeded in convincing Ukraine in time that none of the three criteria defined for the inclusion in this list applied to Austria.
3.1.5.2.2. Moldova

Following the parliamentary elections of 30 November 2014, a minority government was formed on 18 February. Consisting of the Liberal Democratic Party and the Democratic Party, this government led by Prime Minister Chiril Gaburici, however, resigned as early as 10 June. On 30 July, a new coalition government formed by the three EU-oriented parties (Liberal Democratic, Democratic and Liberal) led by Prime Minister Valeriu Streleț (Liberal Democratic Party) was confirmed by a narrow majority in parliament. On 29 October, however, a motion of no confidence introduced by the pro-Russian opposition against the pro-European government was adopted by parliament with 65 out of 101 votes. Subsequently, all further attempts at government formation failed. The political crisis was triggered by a financial scandal in which one billion US dollars (which corresponds to one sixth of the country’s gross domestic product) had disappeared without a trace from the national bank. In reaction to that, protestors took to the streets and demonstrations continued over many months.

At bilateral level, relations have increased substantially as a result of Austria’s commitment in the field of development cooperation. Economic relations with Moldova are still poorly developed although Austrian business and industry are in principle interested in an intensification. Deficits in the financial sector and in the rule of law field resulted in and contributed to a lack of trust among investors.

The country’s economic situation continued to deteriorate. The Transnistria conflict with Russia in combination with the Russian economic crisis translated in a decline in remittances by Moldovans working in Russia. The trade restrictions imposed by Russia (wine, fruits, tinned food) were to some extent compensated for by measures launched by the EU. The EU, the World Bank and the USA temporarily suspended their payments to the state budget until the IMF agreement had been signed by Moldova. The latter was, however, thwarted by the above mentioned financial scandal and the sluggish formation of a new government.

As Tiraspol was blocking any efforts aimed at resolving the conflict in Transnistria, only one informal round of negotiations in the 5+2 format (the two parties to the conflict, OSCE, Russian Federation, Ukraine as mediators and the EU and the USA as observers) was held in Vienna in 2015. The Ukraine crisis posed a threat, since there was the risk of this conflict spilling over. Regarding Transnistria, however, this threat did not materialise as the border to Ukraine had been closed.

3.1.5.2.3. Belarus

In 2015, the events in its neighbouring country again meant that Belarus enjoyed a special position at international level, since it was accepted as honest broker by both parties to the conflict. On 11 February, talks aimed at
resolving the crisis in Ukraine were held in Minsk. The meeting was hosted by President Alexander Lukashenko and attended by the French President François Hollande, the German Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin, the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko and separatist leaders. The agreement reached subsequently prepared the ground for a de-escalation of the conflict. Its role as host also contributed to a more positive perception of Belarus at international level and particularly among the western partners.

In the course of the year, Belarus took a number of concrete positive measures. The three last political prisoners (including former presidential candidate Mikalaj Statkievic) were released from prison on 22 August, thus fulfilling a central requirement defined by the EU in connection with the sanctions. However, Statkievic could not stand for the presidential elections on 11 October. Apart from the incumbent, three other candidates stood for office. Of these three, at least Tatjana Korotkevich was deemed by all sides to be a truly independent candidate. In the elections, the incumbent president Alexander Lukashenko, in office since 1994, won more than 80 % of the votes. The opposition still remained largely fragmented – it was, for instance, not able to agree on a common candidate – and continued to play an insignificant domestic role. Although the election proved to be defective in many respects (including the collection of votes for registration and the counting modalities), standards were nevertheless higher than in 2010 and – most importantly – these elections were free of violence and repression. For the first time ever, international observers, mainly from the OSCE (ODIHR) were admitted, and good cooperation by the Belarusian electoral authorities was highlighted. The EU in fact prolonged the sanctions against Belarus (with a few exceptions) for four months until the end of February 2016 – but acknowledging these circumstances, it at the same time suspended them. Within the EU, Austria had strongly supported lifting sanctions against Belarus.

As a consequence, relations with the EU clearly improved in the course of the year. In April, Commissioner Johannes Hahn visited Belarus. The EU prepared a catalogue of measures aimed at improving relations between Belarus and the EU. This includes participation in the Bologna Process, progress in the field of visa facilitation and readmission, EIB/EBRD lending, support in connection with Belarus’ accession to the WTO, the Neighbourhood Investment Facility (NIF), export facilitation and the development of a new legal basis for bilateral relations.

Austria’s relations with Belarus remained problem-free. With a total direct investment volume of two billion euros, Austria is – after Russia – the second largest foreign investor in Belarus.

From 3 to 4 May, Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz visited Belarus and met President Alexander Lukashenko, Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei and top representatives from business, industry and civil society. On 7 May,
representatives from both countries’ foreign ministries held political consultations in Vienna. On 25 September, the Mixed Commission on Bilateral Trade and Economic Relations met in Vienna. On the margins of the UNGA, Federal President Heinz Fischer and President Alexander Lukashenko held talks in New York on 28 September. Federal President Heinz Fischer took this opportunity to thank his counterpart for the efforts aimed at promoting the commemoration of the victims of the extinction camp Malij Trostinec (Trostenez) near Minsk, in which some 10,000 Austrians who had been deported were killed, and highlighted the opening of the newly built Trostenez memorial by President Alexander Lukashenko on 22 June. In connection with the memorial, a Belarussian delegation visited Vienna from 10 to 11 December.

On 12 and 13 October, the Second President of the Austrian National Council Karlheinz Kopf visited Belarus together with the President of the Austrian Economic Chamber Christoph Leitl to attend a high-level trilateral economic forum (Austria, Belarus, the Russian Federation). In this context, talks were held with President Alexander Lukashenko, Deputy Foreign Minister responsible for European affairs Alena Kupchyna, Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei, and with the Chairman of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly Vladimir Andreichenko.

3.1.5.2.4. Armenia

Although Armenia has been a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) since 2 January, it also remains interested in promoting best-possible relations with the EU. On 7 December, the first round of negotiations was held on a Framework Agreement which is to replace the current Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

On 6 December, a referendum was held on an amendment to the constitution by which Armenia is to be changed from a presidential republic to a parliamentarian republic as of 2018. The amendment to the constitution was adopted by a majority of 66.2 % of votes. The role of the president, who will then no longer be elected directly by the people but by parliament for a term of seven years, will only be of a procedural nature and the major part of his current responsibilities will be transferred to the prime minister. During the constitutional referendum, the OSCE/ODIHR Monitoring Mission noted some shortcomings, such as the excessive involvement of the state apparatus in favour of the yes-campaign, and issued a number of recommendations also with respect to the necessary adoption of a new electoral law.

On 24 April, the central commemorative event marking the centenary of the Armenian genocide was held in Yerevan. This event was also attended by MP Hannes Weninger who was accompanied by the Austrian ambassador. On 22 April, the chairpersons of all six parties represented in the Austrian National Council had condemned the violence against the Armenians, and
recognised the killings and deportations of the Armenians by the Osman Empire as genocide.

In January, the killing of a family of seven by a Russian soldier, who had deserted from the garrison in Gyumry, and the subsequent refusal by the Russian side to extradite him to the Armenian authorities led to anti-Russian protests. When the Russian-owned gas utility provider sought to massively increase gas prices in June, people again took to the streets and the price increase was eventually suspended for private households.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict saw the most serious escalation since the entry into effect of the ceasefire in 1994. For the first time in many years, heavy weapons were used, which translated into a marked increase in numbers of victims on both sides. A meeting between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan held in Bern on 19 December merely resulted in mutual pledges to continue to seek a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict under the Minsk Process. Russia, whose massive arms deliveries to Azerbaijan met with increasing criticism in Armenia, held out the prospect of modern weapons systems to Armenia. With a view to its engagement in Syria and the tensions with Turkey, Russia furthermore stepped up the presence of its air forces in Armenia.

3.1.5.2.5. Azerbaijan

Although Azerbaijan takes part in the EU’s Eastern Partnership, it does not seek to conclude an Association Agreement but rather a “Strategic Modernisation Partnership” agreement that is to build on the principles of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. One of the reasons why Azerbaijan is important for the EU and Austria is its rich oil and gas resources. Critical statements made by Brussels regarding the deteriorating human rights situation and lack of democracy are rejected by Azerbaijan as interference in the country’s internal affairs. A resolution adopted by the EP on 10 September, which calls on Azerbaijan to release journalists and human rights activists, and to take action towards combating corruption, resulted in a temporary deterioration in relations. Azerbaijan furthermore expects the EU to step up its commitment towards resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, on which hardly any progress was achieved – despite international mediation efforts and the activities launched by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group. The second half of the year saw a military escalation along the contested Line of Contact between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan, after the Azerbaijani armed forces had for the first time since the entry into effect of the ceasefire in 1994 used heavy weapons (artillery). As a result of this fighting, numerous soldiers were killed and many wounded.

In June, the 2015 European Games were held in Baku. The opening ceremony was attended by the Second President of the National Council Karlheinz Kopf as official representative of Austria.
3.1.5.2.6. Georgia

Following the armed conflict around South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008, Georgia broke off diplomatic relations with Russia and has, especially since the Ukraine crisis, made increasing efforts towards joining the EU and NATO. The ratification process for the Association Agreement with the EU that was signed in the context of the Eastern Partnership on 27 June 2014, was completed. As is the case with other members of the EU’s Eastern Partnership, Russia exercises various levels of pressure on Georgia in connection with the implementation of the agreement – which the EU, in turn, seeks to mitigate by way of bilateral talks with Russia.

With respect to relations with the EU, Georgia attaches great importance to visa liberalisation. In December, the European Commission noted in its progress report that Georgia met the conditions to lift visa requirements for Georgian citizens and recommended creating the necessary legal requirements for visa liberalisation.

The conflict involving the two separatist entities Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are recognised as independent states by Russia, remains unresolved. Russia has deployed considerable military units in both entities. The Geneva talks that were established as a negotiation forum have so far failed to achieve any tangible progress. After Russia had signed an Agreement on Alliance and Strategic Partnership with Abkhazia in November 2014, it signed an Agreement on Alliance and Integration with South Ossetia on 18 March. This treaty contains far-reaching elements, which de facto provide for integrating South Ossetia into Russia.

The Georgian government was subject to repeated reshuffles: on 1 September, Former Minister of Economic Affairs Giorgi Kvirikashvili took office as Foreign Minister. After Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili had, quite surprisingly, announced his resignation on 23 December, Foreign Minister Kvirikashvili was appointed his successor, and First Deputy Foreign Minister Mikheil Janelidze was appointed new Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Georgia is a priority country of Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC). The coordination office for development activities, opened in Tbilisi in 2013, focuses on the areas of forestry, agriculture and regional development.

3.1.5.3. Central Asia

All five Central Asian states were faced with economic challenges. To some extent, these challenges were attributable to the low raw material prices, which meant very noticeable losses in revenues for the petrol and natural gas exporting countries in the region. Another major issue was the recession in Russia, which led to a considerable drop in remittances sent home from these countries’ nationals who work in Russia and thus contribute substantially to some of the Central Asian countries’ domestic economies.
The most pressing security policy issues emerging in the course of the year continued to include the impact of the volatile security situation in Afghanistan and the threat posed by the “Islamic State” (which was joined by numerous Central Asians) and other militant-Islamist groupings.

In the course of the revision of its Central Asia Strategy, the EU adopted Council Conclusions on 21 June which confirmed the strategic importance of Central Asia for the Union and increased funding for Central Asia by more than 50 % to about one billion euros for the period 2014–2020.

On 1 January, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) initiated by Russia entered into force. The EAEU seeks to follow the model of the EU as a regional integration project and includes besides Russia, Armenia and Belarus and with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan now also two Central Asian states. In its first year of existence, domestic trade in the EAEU, however, declined.

At the early presidential elections held in Kazakhstan on 26 April, the incumbent Nursultan Naşarbayev was re-elected for a sixth term winning 97 % of the vote. With a view to implementing President Naşarbayev’s election programme, a 100-step programme was adopted at the beginning of May and a modernisation committee chaired by Prime Minister Karım Massimov was entrusted with its implementation. The main goals defined by the programme include the development of a modern administration, the promotion of the rule of law, industrialisation and economic growth, a united nation and the realisation of the goal of a transparent and responsible state.

The low oil prices meant a massive deterioration in the Kazakh economy’s terms of trade. The negative impacts included a fifty per cent drop in export revenues, budget adaptations and massive currency devaluations (on 20 August the government allowed the local currency to float freely). Economic growth, which fell in 2015 to approximately 1 %, also suffered from the decline in demand from Russia and China.

On 21 December, the EU signed an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Kazakhstan, which is currently the only Central Asian state party to such an agreement. The agreement is to lead to a further intensification of economic and political cooperation. Kazakhstan makes up almost 90 % of the EU’s trade with Central Asia.

At international level, Kazakhstan continued to pursue a committed, multi-vector foreign policy and in several cases (including Iran, Syria, Ukraine) sought to mediate pro-actively and provide quality services. On 30 November, Kazakhstan became the 162th member of the WTO.

On 2 December, Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov paid a working visit to Vienna to attend a meeting of the Eurasian Council for Foreign Affairs, set up by Kazakhstan, which seeks to strengthen relations between Kazakhstan and the Central Asian states with the EU and is chaired by former EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner. On 15 October, Secretary-General at the
Foreign Ministry Michael Linhart met his counterpart Executive Secretary Anarbek Karashev for political consultations in Astana.

In Kyrgyzstan, parliamentary elections were held on 4 October from which the Social Democratic Party (SDPK) emerged as the strongest party, winning 28% of the votes. Winning some 20% of the votes, the party alliance ‘Respublika-Ata Jurt’ came in second. At the beginning of November, the new government coalition formed by SDPK and the three smaller parties ‘Kyrgyzstan’, the ‘Onuguu/Progress’ based in the south of the country and the socialist party ‘Ata-Meken’ started work. The office of Prime Minister continued to be held by Temir Sariyev. OSCE and EU observers assessed the parliamentary elections as having been largely free and fair. Kyrgyzstan thus has the broadest range of parties in Central Asia.

In terms of content, the priorities defined by the new government include macro-economic stabilisation of the country, attracting more foreign investment, development of energy infrastructure and tapping into the production opportunities resulting from the new Eurasian internal market (Kyrgyzstan joined the EAEU on 8 May). The Kyrgyz economy was particularly affected by the decline in remittances from Kyrgyz citizens working abroad that make up a share of some 30% of the country’s gross domestic product.

On 23 March, President Almazbek Atambayev paid an official working visit to Austria.

At the parliamentary elections held in Tajikistan on 1 March, the governing People’s Democratic Party succeeded by a clear majority, winning some 65% of the votes. International election observers, however, noted numerous irregularities in the elections. The opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) officially won just 2%. For the first time since the end of the civil war in 1997, it is thus no longer represented in parliament. At the beginning of September, there were some shooting incidents near a police station, a defence ministry arms depot and in front of the airport. According to the Tajik government, these incidents were an attempted coup by Deputy Minister of Defence Abdukhalim Nazarzoda who had links with the IRPT. In the course of an operation by Tajik security forces, Nazarzoda was killed when he tried to flee a few days later; on 29 September, the Supreme Court decided to ban the IRPT and classified it as a terrorist organisation. This marked the end of the involvement of an Islamic party in government- and administrative structures – which had been unique in the whole of Central Asia. In a statement of 1 October, the EU described the ban of the IRPT as a further restriction of political pluralism in Tajikistan.

As a result of the recession in Russia, the volume of remittances from Tajik foreign workers declined by 58% according to figures from the Russian Central Bank. This sharp drop faced the Tajik economy with acute problems as these remittances from Tajik nationals who work in Russia make up some 40% of the country’s gross domestic product. One of the priorities of
Tajikistan’s national development strategy is the expansion of hydro power. The plant in Rogun, which is by far the largest hydro power project, however, remains controversial. Uzbekistan in particular fears negative impacts on its water-intensive agriculture. On 12 October, Secretary-General at the Foreign Ministry Michael Linhart met Foreign Minister Sirodjidin Aslov for political consultations in Dushanbe.

As in other energy exporting countries, the economy in natural gas-rich Turkmenistan was hit by the low raw material prices. In a government meeting on 30 January, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov declared that the oil and gas boom had come to an end. As a consequence of the falling revenues from natural gas exports, petrol prices were increased in the course of the year, state subsidies reduced and the national currency depreciated.

On 13 December, the ground-breaking ceremony for the construction of the TAPI pipeline was held. The pipeline is to deliver Turkmen natural gas to Afghanistan, India and Pakistan and contribute to a diversification of Turkmen gas export routes.

In order to mark the 20th anniversary of the recognition of Turkmenistan’s neutrality by the UNGA, the Turkmen government organised an international conference on neutrality policy in Ashgabat on 12 December, which was attended by numerous Heads of State and Speakers of Parliament. Austria was represented by a delegation led by the Second President of the Austrian National Council Karlheinz Kopf. On 12 May, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov paid an official visit to Vienna. On 17 October, Secretary-General at the Foreign Ministry Michael Linhart met Deputy Foreign Minister Beryniyaz Metiyev for political consultations in Ashgabat.

On 21 December 2014 and on 6 January, parliamentary elections were held in Uzbekistan, which only resulted in minor shifts in power between the four admitted parties whose party programmes hardly differ from each other. According to the OSCE/ODIHR, the elections were well conducted from an organisational point of view, although real alternatives were lacking. Compared with earlier elections some improvements had been made but key OSCE recommendations relating to fundamental freedoms had, however, still not been heeded.

In the presidential elections, held on 29 March, the incumbent Islam Karimov was re-elected, winning more than 90% of the votes cast according to the country’s Central Election Commission. The OSCE/ODIHR stated that no genuine opposition candidates had been allowed to stand for elections.

President Islam Karimov continued his policy of not joining the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) led by Russia. Uzbekistan indeed continued to diversify its foreign policy relations by establishing closer links with the USA and China, and to distance itself a little more from Russia. Thus President Karimov, for instance, participated in the CIS summit in Moscow on 8 May but not, however, in the victory parade on 9 May. In contrast to that, he was one
of the guests of hour attending the military parade held in Beijing on 3 September to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Asia. At the EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting, held in Astana on 21 December, Uzbekistan was represented by Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov. At the beginning of November, Uzbekistan had hosted a meeting of Central Asian foreign ministers with the USA in Samarkand at which President Karimov had also held talks with Secretary of State John Kerry.

At the end of the year, the agreement with Germany on the use of Termes airport at the border with Afghanistan, which had been of central importance for the ISAF troops deployed in Afghanistan, expired. In line with its constitution, Uzbekistan thus no longer hosts a foreign military base on its territory. Uzbekistan was also affected by the Ukraine crisis and the subsequent devaluation of the Russian rouble. Remittances from Uzbek nationals who work in Russia – and with about two million individuals make up the largest group of immigrants – declined by half. Uzbekistan was repeatedly faced with energy and fuel shortages, which was mainly attributable to an increase in exports especially of natural gas.

At political level, maintaining stability remained the overarching goal towards which all policy measures were directed. A spill over of radical Islamic tendencies mainly from Afghanistan and the “Islamic State” (IS) are considered the most significant threats in this respect.

3.1.6. The EU’s Southern Neighbourhood

3.1.6.1. North Africa (Maghreb)

3.1.6.1.1. Egypt

Although Egypt’s growth rate doubled to 4% in the course of the financial year 2014/2015, progress made could not yet translate into tangible improvements for the population. Both unemployment and inflation rates remained at high levels, driving up particularly food prices. An international economic conference in Sharm-El-Sheikh in March produced important support and investment pledges, mainly from the Gulf States. The major project of expanding the Suez Canal was completed within only one year, with the opening of the second shipping lane on 6 August. Likewise in August, a large natural gas field (“Zohr“) was discovered in Egyptian territorial waters in the Mediterranean and will, according to estimates, be fully exploited in the next few years.

In 2015, terrorism and the related violence continued to face Egypt with major challenges. Clashes between the army and Islamist terrorist organisations without any prospect of imminent peaceful settlement became increasingly intense, especially in the north of Sinai. The rest of the country was also repeatedly hit by terrorist attacks against security and law enforcement forces, and for the first time also against foreign entities and tourists.
The human rights situation in Egypt remained tense, which was also analysed and criticised in a comprehensive report by the country’s National Human Rights Commission. There were also public protests against police violence, which triggered a political discussion of the topic. Against the background of the fight against terrorism, increasingly stricter legal restrictions were imposed, particularly on freedom of the media and freedom of expression, and the jurisdiction of military courts was expanded. In the bilateral context, the topic of human rights was thus addressed on all levels, including at the ministerial level during an official visit Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz paid to Egypt on 20 and 21 May. The EU also made human rights a topic of its dialogue with Egypt.

Between October and December, several rounds of previously repeatedly postponed parliamentary elections took place. Thus the final milestone of the political road map announced in summer 2013 was accomplished.

3.1.6.1.2. Algeria

At domestic policy level, work on constitutional reform as well as social and economic policy issues topped the agenda. As a result of shortfalls in income from oil and gas exports and the associated massive reduction in public revenue, efforts towards increasing the country’s economic output and diversifying Algerian exports took absolute priority. In the context of EU twinning projects, Austria was again able to contribute its expert knowledge in the field of diversification. Likewise, Austria contributed substantially towards the launch of another EU twinning project in January aimed at building up an environmental database and in November towards a project in the field of energy deregulation. The deteriorating security policy situation in the region also confronted Algeria with extraordinary challenges. In the interest of its own security, Algerian diplomacy pro-actively supported a peaceful solution in the north of Mali. The signing of an agreement in May marked the successful completion of the relevant negotiations. In cooperation with the UN, Algeria also sought to bring about a peaceful solution to the situation in Libya. In the field of human rights, recent events including violations of freedom of expression and of assembly gave rise to concern.

3.1.6.1.3. Libya

The UN sought to promote political dialogue between the parties to the dispute in Libya by facilitating the related process in the context of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) led by UN Special Representative Bernardino Leon. The goal was to develop a transitional solution towards reaching final political agreement including a ceasefire. In summer, the political agreement was fully negotiated. On 8 October, UN Special Representative Bernardino Leon announced the proposal of establishing a Presidential Council for the transitional period. Under his successor, UN Special
Representative Martin Kobler, the agreement was signed in Skhirat on 17 December by members of the parties to the dispute in their own capacity – who were, however, not equipped with a formal mandate. By adopting resolution 2259 (2015) on 23 December, the UNSC expressed its support for the planned installation of a Government of National Accord within one month and the continuation of the peace process supported by UNSMIL. Work on drafting a constitution was still ongoing.

Fighting in many parts of the country and the expansion of ISIL/Da’esh led to a further massive drop in vital oil production and oil exports. As revenues were poor, the Central Bank’s currency reserves continued to dwindle. In addition, Libya remained a transit country and starting point for many people from crisis regions and poorer areas in Africa heading for Europe.

Austria supports the efforts launched by UNSMIL towards improvement of the human rights situation, which is of key importance for the reconciliation process, and through the Austrian Embassy actively supports the protection of journalists under an UNESCO project.

3.1.6.1.4. Morocco

Preparatory legislative acts and ballots at municipal and regional level resulted in the appointment of new members to the House of Councillors, the second chamber of the Moroccan Parliament. Thus account was taken of the targets defined in the 2011 constitution, which include a regionalisation of administrative structures and stronger democratic participation of the population in political life.

Necessary reforms, including in the judiciary, with respect to gender equality, preventing domestic violence, combating corruption and relating to the status of the media and journalists only made very slow progress. Non-governmental organisations and observers criticised the Moroccan human rights practice, referring to restrictions imposed by authorities on freedom of expression, of the media and of assembly.

The asylum and migration policy pursued by the government combined regularisation of persons who live illegally in the country with preventing new immigration from sub-Saharan Africa. The migration pressure towards the north and the influx to the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla has somewhat decreased. The attacks in Paris and terrorist threats against persons and institutions in Morocco prompted the Moroccan authorities to maintain the maximum security level throughout the country. At international level, Morocco contributes pro-actively towards the fight against terrorism, for instance in the context of the Global Counter Terrorism Forum and the Global Coalition against ISIL/Da’esh.

Relations with Algeria remain tense. On the issue of Western Sahara, administered by Morocco, the latter in no uncertain terms insisted on its claim to
Europe and its Neighbouring States

sovereignty over this territory, and mediation efforts under the auspices of the UN still failed to produce any results.

Negotiations between the EU and Morocco on a Comprehensive and Deepened Free Trade Agreement and parallel talks on a readmission and a visa facilitation agreement also failed to make headway.

3.1.6.1.5. Tunisia

After the parliamentary and presidential elections had been successfully conducted at the end of 2014, President Beji Caid Essebsi entrusted Habib Essid at the beginning of 2015 with the formation of the first freely elected government that was subsequently sworn in in February.

The government set out to boost the economy and defuse social tensions. Following the terrorist attack on the Bardo Museum at the beginning of March, however, the fight against terrorism moved up the political agenda. The topic eventually determined the government’s policy throughout the year, also because the country was hit by two further serious attacks – one on a hotel in Sousse in July and the other in Tunis in November.

The attacks seriously disrupted the country’s economy and especially tourism, and social tensions were exacerbated. The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the National Dialogue Quartet in December was celebrated across the country and interpreted as a mandate calling upon all social forces to cooperate.

The enshrining of fundamental rights in the constitution and the signing of international human rights agreements reflected progress made in the field of human rights. The most important challenge in this context, however, is ensuring respect of human rights in the fight against terrorism.

3.1.6.2. Near and Middle East

Developments in the Near and Middle East were dominated by the ongoing and destructive civil war in Syria, the international community’s successes and failures in the efforts towards pushing back the terrorist organisation ISIL/Da’esh, a new wave of violence in Israel and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and most of all by a refugee movement of hitherto unprecedented dimensions from this region to Central and Northern Europe. In responding to these challenges, Austria and the EU increasingly sought to adopt a comprehensive approach that involves addressing the political root causes and contributing towards solving the political problems in the refugees’ countries of origin.

3.1.6.2.1. Israel/Palestinian Territories, Middle East Peace Process

In the decades-long struggle for a sustainable and lasting peaceful solution in the Middle East, divisions became even more entrenched among all par-
ties. Following the elections in Israel, a coalition government was formed. Building on the coalition partners’ political programmes, this new government did, however, not show any willingness to implement a two-state solution (i.e. Israel and an independent state of Palestine as peaceful neighbours within mutually recognised borders).

In the Palestinian territories, tactical party policy interests continued to pose an obstacle to reconciliation between the two major political camps. This also prevented a united political stance necessary for credible negotiations with Israel. Due to lack of other political progress, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation sought to strengthen its own starting position for potential future negotiations by submitting motions for recognition of the State of Palestine at international level. The second half of the year was marked by a wave of individual knife attacks and car driver attacks against Israeli civilians that displayed elements of a third Intifada. Among the underlying causes that contributed to these developments were the lack of political perspective, the factual undermining of a two-state solution by ongoing settlement construction on the part of Israel that conflicts with international law. Other factors were Israel’s increasingly firmer grip on East Jerusalem as well as a lack of prospects for young Palestinians in view of the political environment outlined above.

Austria, in line with the entire EU, renewed its readiness to support a negotiated solution, although concrete starting points were lacking.

3.1.6.2.2. Syria

The civil war in Syria and its consequences also led to a new definition of priorities in Europe in 2015. In the absence of any prospect whatsoever of an end to the armed clashes, a large number of Syrian refugees found themselves with no possibility of being able to return to their home country. At the same time, however, relief organisations lacked the financial means to provide comprehensive care and assistance to Syrians who had fled to neighbouring countries. From the second half of the year onwards, this situation led to an ever growing number of Syrians leaving these countries in search of a new basis for their own future in Europe, especially in Germany, Sweden and Austria.

In Syria itself, the regime was confronted with heavy military losses. In the light of the scale of these losses, the President felt forced to publicly admit that the armed forces would focus on defending only those areas that were of top strategic importance. From the end of September onwards, direct military intervention on the part of Russia actually changed developments at the military front in favour of the regime. It was, however, not possible to establish decisive strategic superiority over the various armed opposition groups, let alone the terrorist organisation ISIL/Da’esh. Once again it became very
clear that against all reason and despite all humanitarian appeals the parties to the conflict remained largely focused on a military solution.

The Vienna Agreement, which the E3/EU+3 had reached with Iran after lengthy negotiations, seemed to open up a new political alternative. Prior to that, Iran – despite its position as an important regional power and central supporter of the Syrian regime – had been excluded from all international mediation initiatives (particularly the Geneva I and the Geneva II conferences). In the context of two rounds of negotiations held in Vienna between the end of October and mid-November, the International Syria Support Group – involving not only Iran but also regional rival Saudi Arabia – was established. The jointly prepared plan for the termination of military clashes and the political reorganisation of the country, based on the Geneva Communiqués (2012), was subsequently adopted by the UNSC as resolution 2254. The goal is to launch direct negotiations between the parties to the civil war in Syria with a view to developing a new constitution and holding elections based on it within 18 months as of the beginning of 2016.

3.1.6.2.3. Iran

In the course of the E3/EU+3-Iran nuclear negotiations held in Vienna at the invitation of Austria, the Vienna Agreement was reached on 14 July. The agreement provides for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which is to ensure the exclusively peaceful character of the Iranian nuclear programme and facilitate the comprehensive lifting of all nuclear sanctions. On the day the Vienna Agreement was adopted (adoption day, 18 October), EU legal acts were adopted, which will become effective on implementation day. Beginning with adoption day, Iran thus started to prepare the implementation, while the IAEA started with the preparatory work for monitoring and verification activities, and the USA launched the necessary preparations for lifting the sanctions starting with implementation day.

Against the background of the settlement of the nuclear issue, the role played by Iran in resolving the Syria crisis and in stabilising the region was thus among the key topics dealt with during the visit Federal President Heinz Fischer, accompanied by Vice Chancellor Reinhold Mitterlehner and Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz paid to the country from 7 to 9 September. Other important items addressed were Austria’s concern about the increasing use of the death penalty witnessed since 2014, the still alarming human rights situation in the country and the development of bilateral relations in the fields of economy and science.

3.1.6.2.4. Iraq

Together with a dedicated international alliance, the Iraqi government continued the fight against the terrorist organisation ISIL/Da’esh, which was asserting its dominance across numerous regions of the country also by
Challenges and Developments on all Five Continents

launching a large number of attacks. Tensions between the Shiite and the Sunni religious groups hampered the formation of an inclusive government and administration. The agreement reached between the central government and the autonomous region Kurdistan-Iraq on oil and gas sales was not fully implemented. Added to that, the humanitarian situation with 8.2 million people in need of assistance and 3.2 million internally displaced, including members of the Christian and Yazidi minorities, was very tense. After it had been possible to push back ISIL/Da’esh, some 460,000 Iraqi were able to return to their home towns. The government led by Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi launched a reform process that was adopted by parliament on 11 August.

3.1.6.3. Arabian Peninsula

3.1.6.3.1. Saudi Arabia

Following the death of King Abdullah in January, the new King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud started to significantly increase Saudi Arabia’s involvement at regional policy level. An intensified exchange of high-level visits, military intervention in the civil war in Yemen as well as the establishment of an Islamic Alliance against Terrorism led by Saudi Arabia were among the measures taken by the country to underline its claim to leadership in the Arab world against the background of the Iranian nuclear deal. These developments were directly related to a reshuffle at the top leadership level. Following the withdrawal of the heir apparent Muqrin Bin Abdulaziz, the succession to the Saudi crown was newly regulated. Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Naif became heir apparent and King Salman’s son, Mohammed Bin Salman, was made Deputy Crown Prince. The sentence of lashing and imprisonment imposed on human rights activist Raif Badawi attracted much international attention and led to numerous efforts – also on the part of Austria – towards bringing about a humanitarian solution to the case. Progress was registered at domestic policy level as women were for the first time ever given the opportunity to participate in municipal elections, being entitled both to vote and stand as candidates. Regional issues, such as the conflict in Syria, the refugee crisis and the alarming human rights situation were the main topics addressed by Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz during his visit to Saudi Arabia in November.

3.1.6.3.2. Yemen

Allied with former president Saleh, the Houthi militia made large-scale territorial gains, took the capital Sana’a in January and temporarily forced the government led by President Hadi to flee to and seek exile in Saudi Arabia. In March, these developments triggered a military intervention by an alliance of Arab states under the leadership of Saudi Arabia, which was able to conquer Aden and some areas in the south of the country. Despite the efforts under-
3.2. Africa and the African Union

Commensurate with the continent’s heterogeneous nature, developments also differed widely in the individual countries and regions of Africa. While numerous African countries were able to report a successful year, with economic growth and stability on the rise, other countries such as Somalia, South Sudan, Mali or the Central African Republic were caught in ongoing crises, and a new crisis erupted in Burundi. Generally speaking, challenges increased in Africa at large. Regarding relations between the EU and the African Union (AU), joint meetings including the EU-Africa Migration Summit in November and the participation of high-level EU officials at the two AU summits contributed towards promoting mutual understanding. In Austria, media attention also focused increasingly on the developments in Africa. Terrorist attacks by Boko Haram, which claimed high death tolls in Nigeria, and jihadist attacks on the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali were reported in the headlines. Against this background, Austria continued its involvement in EU military training operations for security forces in Africa. Austria’s decision to participate in the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, MINUSMA) also sends out an important signal for the importance Austria attaches to peaceful development in the Sahel region.

3.2.1. EU-Africa

The EU stepped up its commitment to Africa at all levels and in all areas. Efforts towards settling crises in Africa were continued and African regional organisations were strengthened, including by promoting the assumption of ownership. The EU remained Africa’s most important trading partner and key donor of development aid and assistance. The Strategic Partnership between the EU and Africa focuses on promoting and expanding political dialogue and concrete measures in areas of common interest between equal partners. Cooperation focuses especially on promoting peace and security, democracy, good governance and human rights, human development as well as sustainable development and growth. The basis, this cooperation rests on was laid by the EU-Africa Strategy, adopted at the Second EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon in 2007.

In implementing the Action Plan adopted at the 4th EU-Africa Summit in Brussels for the period 2014–2017, approaches towards resolving the conflict were discussed in the context of a joint visit paid by the EU Political and Security Committee (EU PSC) and the African Union Peace and Security
Council (AU-PSC) to Mali in February. Measures towards further strengthening this partnership were then dealt with in a formal meeting held between the EU PSC and the AU PSC in Ethiopia. Reacting to the massive increase in migration from Africa towards Europe via the Mediterranean, an EU Africa Migration Summit was held in Malta in November. The meeting was attended by the member states of the Rabat and the Khartoum processes, including some 33 African states. Austria was represented by Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann. The measures adopted in Malta are to be implemented using existing mechanisms, such as the Action Plan adopted at the 2014 EU-Africa Summit which also covers measures on migration and mobility, such as strengthening synergies between migration and development or fighting human trafficking.

3.2.2. Developments in the Regions

3.2.2.1. The Horn of Africa and East Africa

In Ethiopia, the first six months of the year were marked by the parliametary elections of 24 May in which the governing coalition was able to secure all seats in Parliament. As there was hardly any rainfall in spring and the quantity of summer rain was likewise very poor due to an extraordinarily strong El Niño effect, the country was faced with massive crop failures and a humanitarian emergency situation. By the end of the year, some ten million people were dependent on food aid and it is to be assumed that this figure will double in the next year. As had already been the case in spring 2014, the months November and December were again marked by bloody clashes between security forces and inhabitants of the Oromia region. As the popular protests were still ongoing by the end of the year, it was not possible to ascertain the number of casualties and arrests. Generally, the human rights situation in the country has not improved and in the list of most censored countries worldwide, prepared by the Committee to Protect Journalists, Ethiopia ranked fourth in 2015.

Relations with Egypt – especially with a view to the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the River Nile which is regarded with concern by Egypt – improved in the course of the year as a result of dedicated diplomatic efforts. On 23 March, agreement was reached on a Declaration of Principle signed by Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan. Subsequently, on 29 December they agreed on the selection of two external companies that were mandated with examining the controversial technical aspects of the construction.

As regards the reception of refugees, Ethiopia continues to pursue a very constructive open door policy and with some 800,000 refugees mainly from South Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea, currently hosts the largest refugee population in the whole of Africa.

In Eritrea, the year was marked by efforts towards further rapprochement with the international community, and particularly with some neighbouring
states. Another key factor was the publication of a report by the UN Commission investigating human rights violations in the country. Since 1991, the UN Human Rights Council’s (UNHRC) Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Eritrea and the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea have submitted critical reports, which also highlight that human rights violations are among the root causes for the ongoing increase in refugee movements from Eritrea.

In the first six months of the year, Eritrea formed a new strategic-military alliance with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. Under this agreement, the Eritrean government arranged to rent the port of Assab to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for a period of 30 years, and granted both the UAE and Saudi Arabia permission to establish a military presence on the Hanish islands in the Red Sea in exchange for financial compensation and fuel deliveries. The Monitoring Group warns that it might be tantamount to a breach of the arms embargo, should the Eritrean military have benefitted from this compensation or the funds be used to finance activities that pose a threat to peace and security in the region. By adopting resolution 2244 (2015) on 23 October, the UNSC extended the arms embargo against Eritrea and the mandate of the Sanctions and Monitoring Group until 15 December 2016.

In 2015, Kenya was again shaken by a number of horrendous terrorist attacks committed by the Islamist Al-Shabaab militia. The year was thus marked by the government’s fight against terrorism, which was also being waged at the expense of fundamental rights and freedom of opinion. Following a number of attacks near the city of Mandera close to the border to Somalia and Ethiopia at the end of 2014, Al-Shabaab committed the most disastrous terrorist attack Kenya had suffered since 1998: The night-time attack launched in the eastern university town of Garissa against the university’s dormitories in May killed at least 148 students and left 79 seriously injured.

The Kenyan government reacted to the attacks with the call for the immediate closing of the refugee camp Dadaab. Located approximately 80 kilometres from the Somali border, it accommodates some 450,000 refugees making it the world’s largest camp. Following negotiations with the UNHCR, it was agreed to launch a voluntary return programme for Somali refugees to Somalia, which has as yet, however, not been particularly successful. At domestic policy level, allegations of misuse and improper conduct and the fight against corruption dominated the agenda. Reacting to these allegations, President Uhuru Kenyatta removed six members of his cabinet from office and dismissed the head of the National Anti-Corruption authority from office because of alleged corruption. Hampered by bureaucracy, corruption, infrastructure problems and ongoing insecurity, Kenya was not able to fully exploit its economic potential. The tourism sector was hit particularly hard by the security risks and the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. Despite all these issues, the country’s GDP nevertheless grew by a considerable 5.3 %.
In neighbouring **Somalia**, a new cabinet led by Prime Minister Omar Ali Sharmake was sworn in in February. The government’s main tasks consisted in revising the text of the constitution and the preparations for the elections scheduled for 2016 (presidential, parliamentary and local elections). At domestic policy level, the year was marked by ongoing power struggles between rival groups within the federal government – which is supported by the international community and the UN – and the regions. Another recurring feature were the serious attacks that attracted a lot of media attention and were launched by the Islamist Al-Shabaab militia. In the fight against Al-Shabaab, the AU mission AMISOM was able to register some important successes and also some territorial gains. A number of senior Al-Shabaab leaders were killed in attacks, including Adan Garar, who had allegedly planned the attack in the Westgate shopping centre in Nairobi (Kenya) in September 2013.

In **Sudan**, an amendment to the constitution was adopted at the beginning of January. Based on this constitutional amendment, the individual federal states’ governors are no longer to be elected in general elections but will instead be appointed directly by the President. At the parliamentary elections held in April, which was characterised by poor voter turnout ranging at some 30%, the National Congress Party led by President Al Bashir was able to secure the majority of seats (323 out of 426). The country’s second largest party, the Democratic Unionist Party, which also contributes to the government, won 25 seats. As a result of the presidential elections held at the same time, the incumbent Al Bashir was confirmed in office and sworn in on 2 June for his second term. The National Dialogue, initiated by President Al Bashir at the beginning of 2014, which by “involving all political forces” is to prepare the ground for resolving the conflicts and launching the necessary reforms, was resumed in October after it had been suspended for an extended period of time by the government. The majority of the opposition groups, however, continued to boycott this dialogue, as the framework conditions they had called for still had not been created. In **Darfur**, fighting between government troops and armed groups again increased significantly. At the same time, tribal conflicts flared up again in almost all parts of Darfur, which in turn triggered new mass refugee movements among civilians. At the invitation of the UN-AU peace mission and the Special Representative of the UNSG for Children in Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui, the leaders of the three largest rebel organisations of Darfur (Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), Sudan Liberation Movement/Abdul Wahid (SLM/AW) and Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minnawi (SLA/MM)) met for talks in Stadtschlaining in May. The three non-state armed groups committed themselves in a joint agreement to protect children’s rights in the future, which also involves refraining from recruiting child soldiers.

On 29 June, the UNSC extended the mandate of the UN-AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) by another year until 30 June 2016. A joint working
group composed of representatives from the UN, the AU and the Sudanese government was set up in February to prepare an exit strategy for the withdrawal of UNAMID called for by the government. The group visited all five federal states of Darfur in order to assess the humanitarian and security situation, but did not arrive at a conclusive result.

The UNSC extended the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) several times, most recently until 15 May 2016. On 12 February, the UNSC extended the UN sanctions against Sudan (including the arms embargo, the travel restrictions and the asset freezes) until March 2016.

In May, the new Independent Expert of the Human Rights Council on Sudan, Aristide Nononsi, paid his first visit to the country. He stated that no significant improvements in the human rights situation were identifiable and that the recommendations made by his predecessor had by and large not been implemented. With some 2.5 million internally displaced persons, the humanitarian situation in Sudan was extremely tense.

**South Sudan** continued to be affected by the civil war that broke out at the end of 2013. For a long time, the peace negotiations led by the regional organisation Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) failed to produce any results. Eventually, the talks’ format was expanded to include Algeria, Nigeria, Chad, Rwanda and South Africa as representatives of the five African regions (IGAD plus). Increased international pressure eventually translated into the signing of a peace agreement in August. This Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan inter alia provides for the establishment of a transitional government of national unity, ceasefire and security arrangements, regulates humanitarian assistance and reconstruction as well as economic and financial aspects. It furthermore sets out numerous provisions, governing measures to deal with and investigate the large number of war crimes and human rights violations committed by both parties to the conflict (inter alia a Hybrid Court for South Sudan). Of special importance in this context is the work by the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) that is to monitor the implementation of the agreement. The former president of Botswana, Festus Mogae, was appointed chair of the commission. The two parties to the conflict – the SPLM, led by the country’s President Salva Kiir and the SPLMiO led by former Vice-President Riek Machar (SPLMiO) – are, however, still at loggerheads and do not contribute at all towards resolving the conflict. The number of internally displaced persons rose to some 1.6 million, a total of some 642,000 persons have fled to neighbouring states (of these alone some 350,000 have found refuge in Ethiopia/Province Gambella, and a little under 180,000 in UN refugee camps).

3.2.2.2. Southern Africa

As was the case in other southern African countries, the economic situation in Angola deteriorated following the boom experienced in previous years.
Due to low oil prices, income from crude oil sales fell by more than 50 per cent, which hit Angola all the harder as income from the oil sector makes up 95% of exports, 56% of state revenue and 45% of the gross domestic product. In view of the increasingly scarce currency reserves, the increasing controls on capital transactions meant that companies active in the country came under growing pressure. Sluggish economic growth, a high budget deficit, high inflation and the austerity budget with low social expenditure meant that especially the poorer segments of the population were affected by the increasing social imbalances. The human rights situation repeatedly gave cause for criticism. The arrest and in some cases conviction of several human rights activists received much international attention.

Botswana, which also depends on raw material exports, was likewise affected by an economic crisis. In the case of Botswana, it was mainly the global decline in demand for diamonds and copper that caused a massive slowdown in economic growth. In order to avoid this crisis, President Khama launched an economic stimulus plan that is to be financed from the central bank’s currency reserves in order to add new momentum to the country’s economy.

After the failed coup against Prime Minister Thomas Thabane in the year before, elections were held in Lesotho in February. Immediately after the results had been announced, the winner of the elections Pakalitha Mosisili announced the formation of a coalition government involving six further parties. Army commander Tlali Kamoli, who was ousted after the attempted coup in August 2014, was reinstated and started a revenge campaign against those members of the army he accused of supporting his predecessor. Fearing attempts on their lives, three opposition leaders fled to South Africa. The assassination of a well-known businessman and supporter of Thabane, Thabiso Tsosanes, in the street in May as well as the assassination of General Maaparankoe Mohao on 25 July served to confirm the opposition politicians’ fears.

A commission of inquiry from the South African Development Community (SADC), tasked with investigating the events in connection with the reinstatement of General Kamoli and the assassination of Maaparankoe Mohao, was forced to discontinue its activities after three months as the armed forces refused to cooperate.

At the beginning of a year that was marked by political instability also in Madagascar, the entire government led by Roger Kolo resigned in January, primarily because it was not able to successfully deal with the large-scale power cuts in the country. On 14 January, Air Force General Jean Ravelonarivo was appointed new Prime Minister and his cabinet took office on 25 January.

After the national reconciliation process launched by the Council of Christian Churches (FFKM) had failed in June, the party led by President Rajaonarimarina won the local elections on 31 July with a vast majority.
In autumn, President Rajaonarimampianina sought to achieve a new majority in Parliament to rally support from members of different parties for his programme, the “Stability Pact”. The new majority then successfully dealt with several initial challenges, such as the establishment of a new election commission and the adoption of the 2016 budget act. On 29 December, the – not uncontested – elections to the senate were finally held, in which the President’s party also won by a comfortable margin.

The main tasks of the government led by President Peter Mutharika in Malawi consisted in managing the “Cashgate” corruption scandal and in restoring trust and confidence among donors and the international community. Other areas the government focused on included combating corruption and improving the economic situation. The latter, however, remained precarious after prices for tobacco – the country’s most important export product – had collapsed on the world market and the country’s only uranium mine remained closed.

In Mauritius, the Minister of Technology, Innovation and Communication, Pravind Jugnauth, son of Prime Minister Aneerod Jugnauth resigned on 1 July. The underlying reason for his resignation was a pending lawsuit under which he was charged with having granted personally motivated financial support from public funds to a private hospital during his term as minister of finance in 2010. Although he was subsequently sentenced to twelve months’ imprisonment on 3 July, Jugnauth remained chairman of his party, the Mouvement Socialiste Militant (MSM); the appeals proceedings he sought are due to be completed in 2016. On 3 December, Parliament adopted the Good Governance and Integrity Reporting Bill, which had been subject to lengthy discussions. The new act regulated the seizure of illegally acquired assets and is applicable to both the public and the private sectors.

After having won the elections in October 2014 in Mozambique, the FRELIMO party candidate, Filipe Nyusi, officially took office as Head of State on 15 January and at the end of March, he assumed party leadership of the FRELIMO winning 98.6 % of the delegates’ votes. Following several rounds of talks between the government and the opposition party RENAMO, held during the first half of the year, which, however, failed to produce any progress, the government decided to take a tougher approach against RENAMO. On 9 October, police officers gained forced entry into the house of RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama in Beira and searched it. Following this incident, Dhlakama withdrew to the outback. Subsequently, the government refrained from further security police actions against RENAMO as it had realised that a climate of violence would deter international investors and that it was hardly possible to win a guerrilla war against RENAMO.

After the new government involving the new prime minister, her deputy and 24 other ministers had taken office in Namibia on 21 March, President Hage Geingob appointed further vice ministers. With a total of, most recently, 33 deputy ministers, the Geingob administration is the
largest in the country’s history. The regional and municipal elections held on 27 November were likewise won by the governing SWAPO that was able to secure a total of 92.6% of the vote.

One of the most pressing issues to be addressed by the government is land distribution. At the end of July, the government decided to distribute 200,000 plots of land for the time being to the landless population. In November, a law was adopted that banned foreign land ownership – rental, however, is still allowed.

In view of President Robert Mugabe’s age, the power struggle that had emerged in Zimbabwe for his succession within the governing ZANU-PF became increasingly intense. The two opposing camps are the Generation 40 (G 40) headed by its Political Commissioner Saviour Kasukuwere, which openly supports the President’s wife Grace Mugabe, and the group led by Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa who enjoys the support of the liberation war veterans.

The human rights situation in Zimbabwe remained problematic. In March, journalist and human rights activist Itai Dzamara was abducted, presumably by plain clothes police officers, in a suburb of Harare with his whereabouts unknown ever since.

At the annual meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Lima in October, Zimbabwe was able to reach agreement with its international creditors on the redemption of its – unsustainable – debt burden totalling 8.4 billion US dollars, and may thus again apply for fresh loans.

In South Africa, poverty and unemployment combined with a high immigration rate of – to some extent highly skilled – labour from the adjacent neighbouring states has since 2008 been a frequent source of riots and xenophobic attacks across the country. In the aftermath of the riots in January, February, April and October, which claimed several lives and could not fully be contained by the armed forces, the government adopted a tougher stance on illegal immigration and has already deported a number of illegal immigrants.

In October, the students’ protests against an increase in tuition fees announced by the government that had started in October at the University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) quickly expanded and developed into a national protest movement (#FeesMustFall) that paralysed the entire university sector and eventually led President Jacob Zuma to announce that there would be no increase in fees. According to political observers, the intensity of the students’ protests was not so much related to the actual trigger, but rather an expression of general dissatisfaction with social imbalances which the governing ANC has not been able to resolve during the 21 years it has been in power.

On 9 December, the highly respected Minister of Finance Nhlanhla Nene was replaced by David van Rooyen. Following massive criticism within the
ANC and a drop in the South African rand, he was replaced after only four days in office by Pravin Gordhan who had already held the office from 2009 to 2014. Immediately after Gordhan had taken office, the currency somewhat recovered.

Although freedom of speech and freedom of assembly are among the rights guaranteed by the constitution of Swaziland, the government – referring to anti-terrorist legislation – clamped down mainly on members of the opposition. International observers criticized the violation of human rights and the arrest of numerous government critics. In the course of June, however, two politicians from the opposition party People United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO) that operates in the underground due to the general ban on parties in Swaziland, namely Mario Masuku and Maxwell, journalist Bheki Makhubu and human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko, who had been imprisoned for political reasons were released after having served sometimes lengthy sentences.

3.2.2.3. The Great Lakes Region

In the countries of the Great Lakes Region, the year was marked by disputes related to the third term in office of their respective presidents. In Burundi this resulted in a conflict that has already claimed several hundred lives and threatens to expand into a civil war. In the course of the parliamentary, presidential and local elections in June and July, the country was shaken by very heavy clashes and riots. These were triggered by President Pierre Nkurunziza’s announcement that he intended to stand for another term after having already served two terms in office – which is incompatible with the country’s constitution and would also violate the Arusha agreement of 2000. Nkurunziza and the governing party CNDD-FDD argued that the President’s first term could not be considered as such as he had not been elected by the people at the time but was installed by Parliament. On 4 May, the Supreme Court in Bujumbura confirmed this view, thus paving the way for another candidacy. As a consequence of these conflicts, hundreds of thousands Burundians, including some well-known government representatives, such as the Speaker of Parliament and the Second Deputy Speaker, fled the country mainly to Rwanda, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Belgium.

The AU sought to mediate in the conflict between the government and the opposition and on 17 December announced the dispatch of a total of 5,000 soldiers and police officers under the African Prevention and Protection Mission in Burundi (MAPROBU).

In the lead-up to the presidential elections scheduled for 2016 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the domestic policy situation also worsened. The attempt by President Joseph Kabila, in office since 2001, who sought to have an electoral law reform adopted that would enable him to hold on to
governing power after the end of his second term and thus violate the constitution in order to stand for another term as President in 2016, was met with public resistance and led to mass demonstrations that claimed more than 40 lives.

The ongoing operations of the numerous rebel groups continued to pose a risk to security in the northern and eastern parts of the country. Rebel groups were particularly active in East Congo and also included militia units from Uganda and Ruanda, such as the Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU), the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and the Front for Patriotic Resistance of Ituri (FRPI). There was frequent fighting including widespread assassinations, mass executions and mass rape.

In the lead-up to the 2017 presidential elections in Rwanda, the question of the political future of President Paul Kagame, in office since 1994, dominated the political agenda. The National Assembly and the Senate were in favour of an amendment to the constitution enabling the extension of the incumbent’s term in office until 2034 – which was also confirmed by the outcome of a popular referendum held on 18 December. While the country’s economic development was praised, an increasingly repressive climate and the pressure exercised on non-governmental organisations and journalists were, however, subject to sometimes fierce international criticism.

In Uganda too, the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for February 2016 indeed overshadowed the whole year, although the official campaign was only launched in December. In office since 1985, the incumbent Yoweri Museveni sought a consecutive fifth term as president. Apart from the incumbent, two other candidates announced that they would stand for office, namely Kizza Besigye, Museveni’s long-term opponent and leader of the largest opposition party, and Amama Mbabazi, former Prime Minister (and long-standing ally of the President, who had ousted him the year before). The year also saw further restrictions imposed on the freedom of assembly, especially affecting opposition groups, restrictions of freedom of the media and intimidation of journalists. In spite of these measures, the country’s media landscape is surprisingly diverse and vocal.

From 25 to 30 November, Pope Francis visited Uganda, Kenya and the Central African Republic. His programme of visits in East Africa included encounters with young people, visits to the slum of Kangemi (Nairobi), the sacred sites of the Anglican and Christian martyrs of Uganda (Namugongo near Kampala), and to the refugee camp Camp Saint Sauveur (Bangu).

### 3.2.2.4. West Africa

After the popular uprising in Burkina Faso had forced long-term president Compaoré to resign in 2014, the transition period was impacted by a military coup in September which could, however, be defeated – mainly thanks to
the population’s determination to proceed along the path towards democratisation. At the elections on 29 November, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré from the Mouvement du Peuple Pour le Progrès (MPP) was elected as the new president, winning 53.49% of the vote. These elections are indeed of historical importance as they were the first in many years in which no incumbent stood for the office, and because they are considered the freest and most open elections the country has ever seen. The election process was supported by Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC), which implemented two projects aimed at strengthening the capacities of the independent national electoral commission and at financing election monitoring.

In the peaceful presidential elections held in Côte d’Ivoire on 25 October, President Alassane Dramane Ouattara was confirmed in office winning an overwhelming majority of 83.66% in the first round. Although followers of former president Gbagbo had called for boycotting the elections, voter turnout reached what is by sub-regional standards an impressive level of 52.86%. Winning 9.29%, Pascal Affi came second and accepted the result without further protest. Against the background of the post-electoral crisis in 2010, these results illustrate that although ethnic-geographical factors still remained politically relevant, it had nevertheless been possible to make major headway towards resolving political dispute in a peaceful manner. Bilateral economic relations also intensified in 2015, the Austrian Economic Chambers, for instance, conducted a business mission to the country from 26 to 30 January.

By adopting resolution 2219 (2015), the UNSC extended the sanctions regime until 30 April 2016. By adopting resolution 2226 (2015), the mandate of the UN Operation in Côte d’Ivoire was extended until 30 June 2016.

High debt burden, increasing inflation rates and a depreciating currency in Ghana forced the government led by President John Dramani Mahama to accept support from the IMF. Government efforts aimed at fighting debt have also significantly slowed the implementation pace of Austrian economic projects.

After the end of the Ebola epidemic in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, which had not only overburdened the countries’ healthcare system but also led to a decline in economic output, all three countries were declared Ebola-free by the WHO.

Following deliberations on the future of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the UNSC adopted resolution 2239 (2015), thus extending the mandate of UNMIL until 30 September 2016 and providing for ongoing force level reductions. By adopting resolution 2237 (2015), the arms embargo under the 1521 sanctions regime was extended by another nine months, while sanctions imposed on assets and travels were terminated. In February, May and November, the UNSC adopted resolution 2203 (2015) extending the mandate of the UN Integrated Peace-Building Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) for the time being until 29 February 2016.
On 8 January and on 24 September, Mali saw the third and fourth government reshuffle within only three years. In January, 72-year-old former Prime Minister and until that time mediator for the North, Modibo Keita, was appointed new Prime Minister.

The long-standing negotiations between the government and the insurgent Tuareg groups in the north, in particular the alliance Coordination des Mouvements de l’Azawad (CMA), which cover the most important rebel groups, culminated on 15 May and on 20 June in the signing of the Algiers Peace Agreement. The agreement’s implementation process, however, started with some delays and is marked by difficulties. Despite the peace agreement, the security situation in the country still remains volatile. Spared thus far, the country’s capital Bamako has increasingly become the target of attacks. The EU is active in Mali via a military advice and training operation (EU Training Mission, EUTM Mali) to which Austria contributes eight staff. From 27 to 29 July, Federal Minister Gerald Klug paid a troop visit to the Austrian EUTM-contingent and also met President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and Defence Minister Tiéméan Hubert Coulibaly for talks.

By adopting resolution 2227 (2015) on 30 June, the UNSC decided to extend the mandate of the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and to adapt the mission’s mandate following the signing of the peace agreement. In the light of the continuing unstable situation on the ground, the UNSC dealt repeatedly with Mali. On 17 December, the Main Committee of the Austrian National Council approved of seconding ten staff officers and five military observers to MINUSMA, for the time being until 31 December 2016.

Due to the early recognition of defeat by President Goodluck Jonathan, the elections held in Nigeria in March and April led to a non-violent change of government – the first-ever in the history of the country. The electoral triumph achieved by the opposition party APC and its candidate and former military dictator Muhammadu Buhari did not only involve taking over control in both chambers of Parliament, but also in 23 of the 36 provinces. Appointed on 11 November, the first government led by President Buhari was aligned to the pre-defined priorities promoting security, combating corruption and diversifying and reviving the economy. The low oil price and the loss of market shares had led to a drop in oil revenues and subdued the economic and investment climate. Although exports and trade between Austria and Nigeria have registered good growth rates over the last few years, rates are expected to decline as a result of the economic crisis. Upon pressure from and with the involvement of the neighbouring states (Niger, Chad, Cameroon) the Nigerian army stepped up its efforts in fighting Boko Haram, which were intensified after the government led by President Buhari had taken office.

In Senegal, the government maintained its focus on implementing the “Plan Sénégal Emergent“(PSE), which had already been launched the previous
The ongoing fight against the illegal enrichment the previous government had been accused of culminated for the time being in the final conviction of Karim Wade, former super-minister and son of the country's former head of state on 23 March. Another key topic in the political debate was the announcement by the president to deliver on his electoral promise and hold a referendum in May 2016 on reducing his term in office from seven to five years. On 15 October, Senegal was elected non-permanent member of the UNSC for the years 2016–2017. The government’s efforts towards a negotiated solution of the Casamance conflict continued to be thwarted by lack of agreement among its negotiation partners. The government therefore decided instead to focus on developing the local infrastructure in order to stimulate the economy and counter the smouldering dissatisfaction in the region.

Following the ongoing resurgence of violence between Muslims and Christians in the Central African Republic, the holding of a constitutional referendum and of presidential and parliamentary elections at the end of 2015 marked the beginning of the return of democratic order. In view of the strong presence of international troops, there is hope that most of the groups renounce the armed fight. Large parts of the population still lived in refugee camps and depended on international assistance. After the mandate of the EU Military Operation EUFOR RCA had ended, the EU Military Advisory Mission (EUMAM) RCA, to which Austria contributes four staff officers, has been active on the ground since 15 March.

By adopting resolution 2212 on 26 March, the UNSC unanimously authorized an increase of 750 military personnel, 280 police personnel and 20 corrections officers for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). By unanimously adopting resolution 2217 (2015) on 28 April, the UNSC also unanimously extended the mission’s mandate until 30 April 2016.

Some progress was achieved in tackling the challenges in the Sahel region. The implementation of a regional EU action plan for the Sahel contributed significantly to improved coordination of the activities launched by EU Member States and enabled synergies to be used. The EU’s civil advice and training missions aimed at strengthening the security capabilities in the EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUCAP Sahel Mali region were continued. Cooperation between the EU and the Organisation G5 Sahel, consisting of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, was also strengthened. The EU-G5 Roadmap provides for joint action, especially in the fields of security, the fight against terrorism, preventing radicalisation and migration.

3.2.2.5. Western Sahara

On 28 April, the mandate of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was extended under UNSC resolution 2218 by another twelve months. The efforts of the UNSG’s Special Representative Christo-
pher Ross to convince Morocco and POLISARIO to engage in negotiations remained unsuccessful and reflected the parties’ polarised positions.

On 10 December, the General Court of the European Union annulled the Council decision on the conclusion of an agriculture protocol between the EU and Morocco to the extent that the Council had approved of including Western Sahara into the scope covered by the protocol.

Notwithstanding this territorial conflict, Austria attaches special importance to the respect for and observance of human rights in Western Sahara.

3.2.3. Regional Integration Issues

The African Union (AU) strengthened its commitment towards promoting peace and security. The 24th AU Summit held in Addis Ababa from 26 to 31 January was dedicated to the motto “Year of Women Empowerment and Development towards Agenda 2063”. Agenda 2063 is the most important project pursued by the AU Commission Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. The plan of action for Agenda 2063 defines the African development goals for the post–2015 period extending over the next fifty years. However, some very concrete aspects related to implementation and application have not yet been resolved. The election of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe to the position of new Chairman of the AU Assembly was met with criticism on the part of the international community. The 25th Summit, held in Johannesburg from 7 to 15 June, was overshadowed by the affair involving the attendance of Sudanese President Omar al Bashir. The latter should have been arrested and handed over to the International Criminal Court (ICC) by South Africa but with the assistance of the country’s government he was, however, able to leave the country before being detained.

Although the East African Community (EAC) is at the centre of regional integration efforts in East Africa, there was a lack of political will to implement its decisions – which is to some extent attributable to the elections held in the region. Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda, however, made headway in implementing the currency and customs union in autumn, the EAC decided to set up a regional East African Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (EACREE). This centre, which is supported by Austria and the UNIDO, is to be established in the Ugandan capital Kampala.

On behalf of the AU, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has been actively supporting peace-building and peace-keeping in the region since 1996. In the context of these efforts it can draw on the services provided by the Conflict Early Warning and Response Center (CEWARN). In July, Austria, which is the most important CEWARN donor, signed a Memorandum of Understanding on its role as coordinator of the donors group.

The crises in Mali and Burkina Faso as well as the elections in Nigeria, Togo, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea and Burkina Faso are the main challenges facing the
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Although the negotiations between the EU and ECOWAS on an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) based on the Cotonou Agreement were successfully completed, Nigeria and Gambia have not yet initialled the EPA. The internal reform process launched by ECOWAS with a view to improving its institutional implementation capabilities is making only slow progress. Regional cooperation between ECOWAS and the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC) as well as the increased use of police and naval forces by the new Nigerian government led by President Muhammadu Buhari is beginning to show initial success in the fight against piracy off the Gulf of Guinea.

3.3. America

3.3.1. USA

3.3.1.1. General Developments

Following the mid-term elections of 4 November 2014, the Administration led by President Obama was faced with a Republican majority in both chambers of Congress. Since gaining nine Senators, the Republican Party had been able to take over the majority in the Senate. Although confrontations between the government and Congress remained intensive and were sometimes not free from polemics, the feared further aggravation of the confrontations between the two parties did not materialise. Following fierce debates and disputes, compromises and solutions were reached on major issues, in particular on the adoption of the budget in December. Other important legislative proposals such as the immigration reform, however, could not be implemented. On 17 February, the new Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter took office and on 27 April the new Attorney General Loretta Lynch was sworn in.

As a result of the significant increase in oil and natural gas production in the USA, mainly as a result of the exploitation of unconventional resources in shale (fracking), the restrictions imposed on oil exports were lifted in December. The Keystone XL Pipeline project to transport crude oil from Canadian tar sands to the Gulf of Mexico was, however, not approved by the Administration.

At foreign policy level, President Obama was able to press ahead with essential plans and projects. After the international community had negotiated for years with Iran on the termination of the country’s nuclear programme, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, see Chapter 3.1.6.2.3.) was signed in Vienna on 14 July. In September, the agreement was approved by Congress.

Significant progress was also made towards normalising the USA’s relations with Cuba. On the margins of the America Summit in Panama the two presidents, Obama and Castro, convened for a historic meeting on 11 April. After
the USA had in May deleted Cuba from the list of states that support terrorism, diplomatic relations were resumed on 20 July and the embassies were reopened. In addition, the travel ban on US citizens was gradually relaxed, transport and communication capacities were expanded and the exchange of services developed.

The USA continued to work pro-actively towards a peaceful resolution of the Ukraine conflict. The sanctions regime imposed against Russian individuals and entities remained in place, although there was cooperation with Russia in certain selected areas and a cautious rapprochement was generally noticeable.

The fight against ISIL/Da'esh in Iraq and Syria was conducted in a multi-dimensional manner in close cooperation with numerous other states. The USA’s contribution was more of a military nature with military advisors, special troops and air strikes against ISIL/Da'esh positions. The deployment of ground troops, however, was still ruled out.

Following the withdrawal of US combat troops from Afghanistan, special troops and security forces were primarily mandated with providing training and advice and fighting terrorism.

The Administration’s strong focus on the Asia/Pacific region was reflected in the signing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement and an intensive exchange of visits. After Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had visited the U.S. in April, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Washington in September, followed by South Korean President Park Geun-hye in October. In November, President Obama attended the summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Relations with China, however, remained strained mainly as a result of suspected industrial espionage and China’s territorial conflicts with the states in the South and East Chinese Sea region.

In 2015, a total of 28 people were executed (7 less than in the previous year) and 49 were sentenced to death (24 less than in the year before). The State of Nebraska abolished capital punishment in 2015, thus the number of states without capital punishment rose to 19.

3.3.1.2. EU-USA

The traditionally close cooperation between the EU and the USA in fighting terrorism and extremism (House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism und Transatlantic Cooperation for Global Security) was intensified even further, and the same held true for the planned Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). In the course of the year, the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and a further 20 EU Commissioners met with their US counterparts. In the four rounds of TTIP negotiations good progress was made in the fields of trade regulations, market access, regulatory cooperation and transparency.
In its ruling on 6 October in the Maximilian Schrems vs. Facebook case, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) invalidated the Safe Harbor Decision on the storage of personal data. Subsequently, negotiations on a new agreement to regulate the transfer of personal data between the EU and the USA were launched. Furthermore, the EU-US Data Protection Framework Agreement (Umbrella Agreement) on police and judicial cooperation was initialised.

3.3.1.3. Bilateral Relations between Austria and the USA

Bilateral relations between Austria and the US continued to develop positively. Alongside the regular exchange of visits at diplomatic level, close cooperation at various levels in multi-lateral bodies (UN, HRC) is particularly noteworthy. Vienna, as home to many international organisations (especially the UN, OSCE, IAEA), has again proven to be an important hub. The city hosted the negotiations settling the nuclear dispute with Iran and the talks on resolving the Syria conflict. Austria’s expert knowledge as an active political player, and an important economic factor and investor in Central Europe as well as in the Balkans is appreciated by the USA.

Trade relations have increased and developed to the benefit of Austria. The USA has overtaken Italy as the second most important export market for Austrian products. Austrian exports to the USA rose by 18%. The trade balance surplus with the USA totalled some 2 billion euros, which makes it Austria’s highest surplus worldwide. On 5 May, 21st Austria and ADVANTAGE AUSTRIA organised an international conference in New York directed at investors and key decision-makers in the USA. The largest networking event involving Austrian companies in North America was organised in Chicago in mid-September and attracted more than 100 participants.

The Office of Science and Technology Austria (OSTA) at the Austrian embassy in Washington contributed towards the further deepening of relations in the fields of research, technology and innovation. The annual Austrian Research and Innovation Talk (ARIT), organised by OSTA, has established itself as Austria’s most important innovation platform in North America. It is the largest networking event for the approximately 2,500 Austrian researchers and innovators registered with OSTA’s Research and Innovation Network (RINA). Opened by Federal Minister Alois Stöger, the annual meeting in San Francisco focused on the difference between innovation systems in Austria and in the USA, especially against the background of the enduring appeal of Silicon Valley.

In the context of his trip to the USA, Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz visited San Francisco and Silicon Valley from 28 April to 1 May. Accompanied by 22 representatives from the Austrian start-up scene, the Federal Minister also had meetings with representatives from companies such as “500 Startups”, “Facebook” and “Google”.

133
In the cultural field, the cultural forums in New York and Washington are well-established centres for the presentation of contemporary Austrian art and culture. Apart from focusing on cultural and educational policy content, the events that were supported and/or organised by the cultural forums dealt mainly with current topics of social and cross-cultural relevance. Both cultural forums also belong to the respective local EUNIC clusters, which regularly present joint Europe-related events.

The development and expansion of positive and future-oriented relations with the Jewish Community is a central concern of the Austrian representations in the USA. Considering the density of organisations, this holds especially true for the Austrian Consulate-General in New York whose jurisdiction includes the headquarters of the World Jewish Congress, (WJC), the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish American Organizations and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). There is also close cooperation with the Holocaust museums and research institutions, especially those in which Austrian Holocaust Memorial Service representatives are active.

The implementation of the comprehensive restitution and reparation measures, to which Austria had committed itself under the Washington Agreement, is considered exemplary by the Obama Administration.

An American-Austrian exchange of journalists, initiated in 2007 by the International Center for Journalists and the Austrian Board for Journalist Education (Austrian Media Academy) was organised for the ninth time.

### 3.3.2. Canada

#### 3.3.2.1. General Developments

The longest electoral campaign for the Lower House in the history of Canada ended on 19 October with a clear victory for the Liberal Party led by Justin Trudeau over the governing Conservative Party led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, which had been in power since 2006. After having been sworn in on 4 November, Trudeau announced a return to the paradigms of previous liberal governments: relaxed fiscal policy, redistribution of income through social transfers and infrastructure investments.

At foreign policy level, the government led by Trudeau also started to set new priorities. For instance, it ended the direct combat missions against the terrorist organisation ISIL/Da‘esh and announced that it would join the arms trade agreement the Harper government had refused to join. It is to be expected that Canada will also assume a more pro-active role in other multilateral areas as well. In December, for instance, Canada already contributed very pro-actively to the Paris Climate Summit.
3.3.2.2. EU-Canada

Canada and the EU cooperate as like-minded partners on a wide range of levels; in regular meetings they address a large number of topics in a comprehensive manner. Following the completion of negotiations on a Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) and on a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) in 2014, both agreements were subjected to legal review. CETA is considered one of the most far-reaching agreements that have ever been signed between trade partners. Its implementation is to largely remove still existing customs duties and will open both markets to services and the procurement sectors. The Strategic Partnership Agreement seeks to improve cooperation in the energy, environmental and climate sectors and in the field of crisis management.

There are EU centres at three Canadian universities, whose incorporation in the Jean Monnet programme has been initiated.

3.3.2.3. Bilateral Relations between Austria and Canada

Austria and Canada maintain particularly close ties in the fields of business and culture. Canada is Austria’s fourth largest export market overseas and the positive trend is continuing. Some 80 Austrian companies have subsidiaries in Canada. The by far most important group of export goods is machinery and vehicles. The export of pharmaceutical products and food also showed a clear increase in 2015.

Austria enjoys a very positive image as a cultural nation, which is mainly attributable to classical music. The premises of the University of Alberta in Edmonton house the unique Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies.

3.3.3. Latin America and the Caribbean

3.3.3.1. EU-LAC

The EU rank Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) as a partner region that is important and close to the Union. The strategic partnership that has been institutionalised since 1999 is an important engine for bi-regional relations between the EU and Latin America as well as the Caribbean. Since its inception in December 2011, CELAC has been the EU’s contact partner in this bi-regional process. Summit meetings at the Heads of State and Government level take place every two years. At the 2nd EU-CELAC Summit (and 8th EU-LAC Summit), held in Brussels on 10 and 11 June, it was agreed to strengthen political dialogue by holding EU-CELAC Foreign Ministers’ Meetings in the year between summits, to launch a reflection process on the future of the strategic partnership and to develop convergence on multilateral and global issues, such as climate change, the world drug problem and the 2030
Agenda. At the same time, the bi-regional Action Plan was expanded by the chapter Citizen Security and Higher Education and now consists of a total of ten chapters.

The EU-LAC Foundation, which was established in 2011, seeks to foster institutional cooperation between the EU and the Latin American and Caribbean region. More specifically, it is to serve as a permanent contact between EU-CELAC summit meetings. Furthermore, it is planned to turn the EU-LAC Foundation into an international organisation based on an international agreement. The relevant negotiations were concluded at the end of January and the agreement was initialled in June.

The EU continues to adhere to the concept of a sub-regional approach based on association or economic partnership agreements in order to promote regional integration of the LAC partners and to improve the legal framework conditions for trade relations and investments. The EU’s central policy focus in this context is on contributing towards strengthening stability, prosperity and social cohesion in Latin America and the Caribbean, establishing a common area of higher education and fighting drugs and organised crime. The EU maintains a dense network of contractual relations with the LAC region featuring association agreements with Mexico (2000) and Chile (2002) as well as Strategic Partnerships and Action Plans with Brazil (2007) and Mexico (2008). At the 7th EU-Mexico Summit, held on 12 June, it was agreed to update the global agreement with Mexico. The summit furthermore confirmed the close cooperation with Mexico, one of the strategic partners with the highest levels of agreement on global issues, especially on climate change, human rights, trade and investment and the 2030 Agenda. With a view to sounding out opportunities for updating the Association Agreement with Chile, a joint working group was established. Work was continued on the implementation of the EU Free Trade Agreements with Colombia and Peru, including the ratification of the accession treaty with Ecuador, as well as the Association Agreements with six Central American countries (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama). Furthermore, major headway was made with respect to the negotiations opened between the EU and Cuba in 2014 on a bilateral agreement on political dialogue and cooperation. Regarding the continuation of negotiations on an EU-MERCOSUR Association Agreement, it was agreed during a ministerial meeting on the margins of the EU-CELAC Summit in June to consider an exchange of market access offers by the end of the year. However, due to diverging levels of ambition this has not yet been realised. With a new Argentinian government that focuses on opening the market, and a Brazil that is more flexible on foreign trade issues as a consequence of economic decline, the political signs for a swift continuation of negotiations in the two largest economies of the MERCOSUR have changed.

Since the Fourth EU-LAC Summit was held in Vienna in 2006, bilateral ties between Austria and the region have intensified. Austria maintains good and
friendly relations with the states in the region. The Austrian economy continues to benefit from interesting investment and export opportunities. Another hallmark of relations is good cooperation in the science and research sectors.

3.3.3.2. Developments in the Region

The key political developments of regional importance in Latin America and the Caribbean include the normalisation process between the USA and Cuba, the end of the twelve-year long Kirchner era in Argentina and the first national electoral defeat of “Chavismo” in Venezuela since 1998, the considerable progress made by the Colombian peace process, and the political stagnation and economic recession in Brazil. The months of protests against corruption in Guatemala and Honduras are a reflection of a re-invigorated and emancipated civil society. In Guatemala this led to the – unprecedented – resignation of an incumbent president.

The normalisation of relations between Cuba and the USA, launched in December 2014, resulted on 20 July in the resumption of full diplomatic relations with embassies being opened. It constitutes an essential building block for the consolidation of the opening and reform process sought by the Cuban government and has changed Cuba’s position in the regional and international context. Following the lifting of the US embargo, Cuba is perceived as a future economic hub in the Caribbean, which has brought a large number of economic missions and high-level political delegations from across the world to Cuba. Austria has also responded to this development. Accompanied by a 30-member business delegation, federal ministers Wolfgang Brandstetter and Alois Stöger visited Havana in December and sounded out opportunities for cooperation in the fields of e-justice, infrastructure development, renewable energies, food processing as well as tourism and management education. As early as in March, the regular bilateral consultations between Austria and Cuba, covering a wide range of topics including human rights, were continued at the level of political directors.

At the presidential elections in Argentina in November, Mauricio Macri from the centre right party PRO was able to score a surprise victory. For the first time in a century, the president thus neither belongs to the Peronism nor the Unión Cívica Radical camp. Immediately after having taking office, President Macri effected a radical change in the country’s economic and currency policy, thus preparing the ground for an opening and diversification of Argentina’s regional and foreign policies.

In Venezuela, the government’s interventionistic economic policy and the low oil price exacerbated the profound political and economic crisis. The difficult economic situation, especially the serious supply shortages and the critical security situation were decisive factors that contributed towards the two-thirds majority by which the opposition won the parliamentary elections on 6 December. In summer, relations with neighbouring Colombia
deteriorated. President Maduro strongly criticised Columbia for not cracking down on the flourishing smuggling in the border region and closed the national border. In the Caribbean region, Venezuela was forced to markedly reduce the low-price oil supplies and aid programmes under the Petrocaribe programme.

Considerable progress was achieved in the peace negotiations held in Havana between Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) under which preliminary agreement was reached on transitional justice and compensation for victims. Thus the conclusion of negotiations envisaged for the end of March 2016 has moved within reach. With a view to providing financial assistance towards implementing the future peace agreement, the EU is considering setting up a trust fund. Furthermore, the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini appointed former Irish Deputy Prime Minister Eamon Gilmore as EU Special Envoy for the Peace Process in Colombia. Austria has also strengthened its ties with Colombia. On the occasion of a visit he paid to the country in October, Federal Minister Wolfgang Brandstetter signed a memorandum of understanding in the field of the judiciary. Austria also supported an agricultural UN project focusing on combating drugs and crime. In light of Colombia’s growing political and economic importance, Austria decided to re-open its embassy in Bogotá in 2016. Since December, the visa requirement has been lifted for Colombian nationals staying within the Schengen countries for up to ninety days.

Both politically and economically, 2015 was a difficult year for Brazil. After having been re-elected by a narrow margin in 2014, President Dilma Rousseff faced tough opposition in Parliament and often also on the part of her coalition partners. In the course of the investigations into the corruption scandal involving the state-owned oil company Petrobras, a number of high-level politicians and entrepreneurs close to her were arrested and some have already been sentenced. At the beginning of December, a special parliamentary commission initiated impeachment proceedings against the president for irregularities in the 2014 budget. The poor economic situation forced the government to introduce a number of spending cuts and tougher regulations, including in the unemployment insurance and the pension systems.

In Mexico, a group of experts from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights investigated the abduction and suspected assassination of 43 students from a teacher college in Iguala in September 2014. The final report presented on 6 September pointed to many inconsistencies and omissions in the investigations conducted by the general prosecution. The reports contain a number of recommendations for effective investigations and criminal prosecution. The Institute of Legal Medicine at the Medical University of Innsbruck was also involved in the analysis of DNA samples. In February, bilateral political consultations were held that focused in particular on the topics of human rights, disarmament and non-proliferation as well as intensified economic cooperation.
Bolivia registered one of the highest economic growth rates in the region. In October, Federal President Heinz Fischer, accompanied by Federal Minister Wolfgang Brandstetter and an economic delegation paid an official visit to Bolivia during which a memorandum of understanding in the infrastructure sector was signed. Austria furthermore supported an agricultural UN project focusing on combating drugs and crime and funded a musical education project in Cochabamba that seeks to promote social integration and personal development of young people from deprived backgrounds.

Peru sought to stimulate its struggling economy by launching major construction projects in the mining sector. The annual meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund was held in Lima in October. During a bilateral visit, Federal Minister Wolfgang Brandstetter signed a memorandum of understanding in the field of justice. Austria supported the preparation of an EU report on coca cultivation in Peru. Representatives from Austria also attended an international conference on human rights and public administration.

In Chile, the centre-left government continued to implement its far-reaching reform programme in the face of difficult economic and political conditions. With respect to educational reform, Chile considers the Austrian system of dual training as a benchmark. This topic was also one of the key issues addressed during the working visit President Michelle Bachelet paid to Federal President Heinz Fischer at the beginning of December.

Displaying high growth rates in bi-regional trade, the Latin American and Caribbean region is an important economic partner for the EU, which is at the same time the largest investor in the region. While the region has demonstrated a remarkable resilience in the global economic and financial crisis of the last few years, this year’s gross domestic product declined by −0.4 %, making 2015 the weakest since 2009 in terms of economic development. Regional and country-specific differences, however, could be noted. While Central America (+4.4 %, including Mexico +2.9 %) and the English and Dutch-speaking countries of the Caribbean (+1.0 %) registered increases, the economy in South America shrank by −1.6 %. This was mainly attributable to the recession in Venezuela (estimated −10 %) and in Brazil (−3.5 %), the largest national economy in the region. The strongest growth rates were produced by the Dominican Republic (+6.6 %), Panama (+5.9 %), Saint Kitts and Nevis (+5.2 %) and Bolivia (+4.5 %), Cuba (+4.0 %) and Colombia (+3.1 %).

Lower economic growth rates were mainly attributable to the massive decline in raw material prices and lower demand from China, which exacerbated the lack of economic diversification, low productivity rates and the widest income gap worldwide. Increasing unemployment rates, declining foreign investment and falling internal demand meant that for the first time since 2009 all Latin American and Caribbean countries registered a fiscal deficit. Countries with flexible exchange rate systems were faced with sometimes very serious devaluations. Compared with the US dollar exchange rate, cur-
Challenges and Developments on all Five Continents

Currency depreciations were highest for the Brazilian real (−41.0 %), the Colombian peso (−36.9 %) and the Mexican peso (−19.4 %).

The promotion of regional cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean is the goal pursued by a number of regional and sub-regional integration fora. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), for instance, held its third summit on 28 and 29 January in Belén (Costa Rica). At this summit, Costa Rica handed over the annually rotating pro tempore CELAC presidency to Ecuador. Adopting a Declaration on the Urgent Need for a Nuclear Weapon Free World, the 33 Heads of State and Government embraced Austria’s call for nuclear disarmament in the context of the humanitarian initiative. The main tasks pursued by CELAC are the promotion of political, economic, social and cultural integration of Latin American and the Caribbean states.

At the 48th Summit of the Market of the South (MERCOSUR) that convened in Brasilia on 16 and 17 July, the semi-annually rotating chair passed from Brazil to Paraguay. The most important event of the summit was the signing of Bolivia’s accession protocol to MERCOSUR. At the 49th MERCOSUR Summit, held in Asunción in December, Uruguay took over the chair from Paraguay. Irritations between Argentina and Venezuela regarding the human rights situation and political prisoners in Venezuela thwarted progress in reducing internal trade barriers and rapprochement with Pacific Alliance.

At the beginning of July, Peru took over the pro tempore presidency of the Pacific Alliance set up in 2011. The organisation’s foremost goal is the establishment of a free trade area including a customs union, freedom to travel and visa-free travel between its members (Chile, Peru, Colombia and Mexico). At the 10th Summit of the Pacific Alliance (Paracas, Peru, 1 to 3 July), Austria was granted observer status in what is currently the most dynamic integration forum in the region. The main topics dealt with at the meeting included fostering innovative power as well as the international focus of mostly small and medium-sized enterprises, and increasing spending on education.

At the summit held by the Central American Integration System SICA on 18 December, El Salvador handed over the annually rotating chair to Honduras. Most recently, this inter-governmental organisation, which includes all Central American states and the Dominican Republic has placed the focus of its activities on preparing common security strategies towards fighting trafficking in drugs, arms and human beings, and on developing coordinated positions on climate issues as well as facilitating inter-regional trade and competition.
3.4. Asia

3.4.1. EU-Asia

The EU continued its efforts towards establishing closer relations with Asia. As early as in June, a Joint Communication by the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission was adopted that provides for enhanced sector-specific and political cooperation between the EU and ASEAN. Following the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), it also provides for the re-launching of the planned regional free trade agreement between the EU and ASEAN. At the General Affairs Council (GAC) in June, the EU ministers’ deliberations focused on potential strategies for future cooperation between the EU and Asia, placing a special emphasis on the areas of trade, investment and security. Under the Asia Europe Meetings (ASEM), the dialogue forum between the two continents founded in 1996, a Foreign Ministers’ Meeting was held in Luxemburg in November. At this meeting, and also with a view to the 20th anniversary of ASEM, participants agreed on launching further initiatives relating in particular to the fields of climate change, the 2030 Agenda, disaster protection and connectivity. The Board of Governors’ Meeting 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 Singapore in December.

Asia figures prominently in the revised EU Trade and Investment Strategy published in October. The new initiatives provided for under this strategy include free trade negotiations with Australia and New Zealand and investment negotiations with Hong Kong and Taiwan. Under the existing mandates and in connection with on-going negotiations, it was possible to successfully conclude free trade negotiations with Vietnam at the end of the year. The negotiations on a Strategic Partnership Agreement and on a Free Trade Agreement that had been conducted simultaneously were continued in several rounds. Negotiations with China and Myanmar on an Investment Agreement were continued. However, little progress and even standstill were the hallmarks of the negotiations with Malaysia and India. In December, the EU and the Philippines decided to open negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement. Before signing the initialed and fully negotiated agreements with Singapore, the decision of the ECJ on the free trade agreement was awaited. The signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement with Thailand remained suspended.

The EU continued to play an active role in the security policy forums accessible to it in Asia, (such as the ASEAN Regional Forum – ARF), remained strongly committed to human rights (including in country-specific human rights dialogues and condemnation of the death penalty) and again demonstrated solidarity with the Asian victims of terror attacks and natural disasters (such as the bombing in Bangkok and the earthquake in Nepal). Afghanistan
remained a particular focus of the EU’s commitment to Asia, with the largest bilateral EU ODA programme (1.4 billion euros for the period 2014–2020) and the continuation of the EU Police Mission (EUPOL). At the beginning of July, a Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development was initialled between the EU and Afghanistan.

3.4.2. General Developments

In 2015, Asia again saw highly heterogeneous developments. Although it was possible to keep the simmering conflicts in the Far East, particularly in the Korean peninsula, the East China Sea and the South China Sea under control, they were far from being resolved. The situation in Afghanistan also remained fragile and the security and domestic policy challenges triggered further migration movements, which also affected Austria. Some initial steps towards rapprochement were launched in the decade-long conflicts between India and Pakistan and/or Japan and Korea, respectively. The elections in Sri Lanka and Myanmar were generally welcomed by the international community of states, including Austria.

Overall, Asia again experienced an overall relatively sound and comparably high-level economic growth of approximately 4.5 % in 2015. This growth was mainly driven by India, but China and Vietnam also contributed to an over-proportionally high extent to this development. The Austrian export industry succeeded in tapping into these growth markets in a number of ways, Austrian exports to India and Vietnam for instance registered double-digit percentage increases.

The trend towards further integration and networking continued in Asia at sub-regional, regional and supra-regional level. In this spirit, an economic community of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) – was set up and further negotiations on a regional free trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) between ASEAN, China, India, Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, were held. Following completion of the negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), a comprehensive free trade agreement that spans the whole of Asia and Pacific (Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific, FTAAP) is being considered. Especially in the infrastructure sector, further impetus was added to intra-Asian and supra-regional interlinking, for instance under China’s Silk Road Initiative (“One Belt One Road”, OBOR) and through the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), in which Austria is also involved.

As in previous years, many parts of Asia were struggling with increasing environmental problems. Especially in large cities, people are increasingly negatively impacted by deteriorating air quality, as a result of which the respective governments are facing more and more health and social policy issues.
3.4.2.1. North East Asia

3.4.2.1.1. People's Republic of China

China continues to strive to combine a foreign policy approach that is based on economic power and/or power and “real politics” on the one hand, with “soft power” elements on the other. The guiding principles are the re-establishment and/or preservation of national unity, safeguarding the process of Chinese modernisation at an external level and the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. At the same time, China likes to stress its role as a developing country that has enabled millions of people to exit poverty. China propagates the development of the Silk Road Economic Belt, which aims to create a strategic infrastructure and trading route from China – via Central Asia and by sea – to Europe. On the initiative of China, the AIIB was established and by the end of the year already boasted 57 signatories, including 14 EU Member States. Austria was among the first states to deposit the ratification instrument at the end of the year. Beijing’s strongly asserted ownership claims to large parts of the South China Sea and its territories (the “Nine-Dash Line”) have put a strain on relations with the other coastal states. After more than sixty years, a meeting – regarded by many as historic – between the presidents of China and Taiwan was held in Singapore in November.

The annual meeting of the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference held in March focused on the economy, environmental protection and fighting corruption. For the first time, the growth target defined for 2015 amounted to only 7%. China’s new economic policy approach is directed at redesigning the economic model with a view to generating better quality, albeit slower, growth that also addresses new priorities such as innovation and environmental protection. The main focus of China’s reform efforts is economic reform (including the opening of the Chinese market, liberalisation of investment and structural adjustments in state-owned companies) and the fight against corruption.

In March, Federal President Heinz Fischer paid a visit to the People’s Republic of China, the second during his term in office, and met President Xi Jinping.

3.4.2.1.2. Japan

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe began the new year clearly strengthened politically in the wake of his striking victory in the December 2014 elections and was able to continue his “Abenomics” course at economic level. In September, he was confirmed by a vast majority as chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and a month later he replaced half of his cabinet members. Subsequently, PM Abe was free to actually tackle the long announced economic reforms and also to re-address sensitive issues, such as security policy legislation or the recommissioning of nuclear power plants.
Celebrating the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, Prime Minister Abe delivered a well-prepared statement on 14 August after having sought comprehensive advice from a specifically set-up panel. In his speech, Abe ultimately referred mainly to statements made by his predecessors, which was met with both approval and criticism; his speech elicited a somewhat subdued response from Beijing and Seoul. At the end of December, the public apology by Prime Minister Abe for forced prostitution during the Japanese occupation in Korea, and the establishment of a fund by Japan which is endowed with 8 million euros for the “comfort women” still alive today, were met with a positive response worldwide.

The guiding principles of Japanese foreign policy were clearly re-affirmed again this year. Firstly, the alliance Japan-USA; secondly, deepened cooperation with the neighbouring countries China, South Korea, Russia and the regional organisations ASEAN and ASEM; and thirdly, the priority of economic diplomacy as one of the supporting pillars of the Japanese economy (negotiation of free trade agreements and investments overseas).

3.4.2.1.3. Republic of Korea

In her third year of office, President Park Geun-hye was faced with massive domestic criticism triggered mainly by her staffing choices, the alleged lack of transparency of her administration, and the lacking implementation of her foreign policy initiatives. Furthermore, she was not able to deliver on her electoral promises to implement social and economic policy reforms without introducing tax increases. Launched by the President, the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI) seeks to promote peace and cooperation in the region through confidence-building measures. The Eurasia Initiative aimed at placing the focus on Eurasia as a geographic area and to especially promote cooperation in the fields of transport, logistics and energy is considered another key project.

The main topics on the foreign policy agenda were regional security policy issues and the attitude towards North Korea, economic policy and interpretation of the past. In this context, highly symbolic anniversaries marking, for instance, seventy years since the end of Japanese rule and fifty years of separation of the Korean peninsula, played a key role.

The hosting of a trilateral meeting involving the foreign ministers of Japan, China and South Korea in Seoul on 21 March, which was followed by a trilateral meeting of the Heads of States likewise in Seoul on 1 November, can be considered a foreign policy success.

3.4.2.1.4. Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK)

The international community’s concern over the North Korean nuclear and missile programmes persisted and the sanctions imposed by both the UN and the EU in this connection remained in place.
Asia

Inner-Korean relations continued to be characterised by approximation alternating with provocation. A more or less widely expected long-distance or nuclear test marking the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the Workers’ Party of North Korea was, however, not conducted.

Based on reports on serious human rights violations, the country’s leadership remained a focus of international criticism. At domestic level, the country’s ruler Kim Jong-un continued to work towards strengthening his position. The main topics on his political agenda were nuclear and security policy, while at the same time seeking to stimulate the economy.

3.4.2.1.5. Mongolia

Mongolia seeks to maintain good and balanced relations with its two large neighbours China and Russia. In addition, the country is interested in intensifying relations with “third neighbours”, i.e., the USA, Japan and the EU in order to reduce dependency on its direct neighbours.

A trilateral meeting between the presidents of Mongolia, Russia and China was held on the margins of the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Ufa (Russia) in July. Rich in natural resources, the country’s economy largely depends on exports to China.

3.4.2.2. South and South East Asia

3.4.2.2.1. ASEAN and ASEAN States

This year’s agenda of the ten member states (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was mainly dominated by the final preparations for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which was adopted at the 27th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur (18 to 22 November). The Declaration of Kuala Lumpur on ASEAN 2025 (Forging Ahead Together) defines the next milestone for the organisation. The first of the two annual summits was held on 26 and 27 April in Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi.

In Indonesia, President Joko Widodo’s popularity was impacted by his efforts towards implementing an ambitious reform programme. He used his first year in office to consolidate his position and streamline administrative structures. At the same time, he succeeded in winning over part of the opposition parties for his ideas. Following the 2014 elections, an opposition coalition held a majority of the seats in Parliament. The political parties remained divided over the question regarding to what extent and in which respects they were willing to support the President’s reform programme, which noticeably obstructed work in Parliament.

In Cambodia, the domestic policy situation remained tense even after the members of the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CRNP) had
Challenges and Developments on all Five Continents

returned to Parliament. Austria supports Cambodia by seconding judge Claudia Fenz to the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.

In Laos, political development continued to stagnate. Austria supports Laos through the provision of soft loan projects in the fields of medical care, bridge building and irrigation.

In Malaysia, the year was marked by domestic policy turbulences, dominated by a controversy over the State Fund 1MDB (1 Malaysia Development Berhad). In July, incumbent Prime Minister Najib replaced key figures in his cabinet and continued the fight against Islamic terrorists and followers of the “Islamic State” in his country. At the end of August more than 200,000 Malaysians of mainly Chinese and Indian backgrounds demonstrated in Kuala Lumpur against mismanagement and called for free and fair elections. At foreign policy level, Malaysia scored a success by hosting the 27th Summit of the ASEAN Group of States in Kuala Lumpur at the end of November, which was also attended by US President Barrack Obama, China’s Prime Minister Li Keqiang, India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UNSG Ban Ki-moon.

In Myanmar, both economic and political players assumed a wait-and-see attitude in the lead-up to the parliamentary elections of 8 November. The elections, which were considered to be an important step towards democratisation, resulted in an overwhelming victory for Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD). Winning the absolute majority in both chambers of Parliament, the NLD was thus entitled to form the government and elect the country’s president. The major challenges to be tackled by the new government include the continuation of the ceasefire and peace negotiations with the armed ethnic groups and countering discrimination against the Muslim Rohingya in the province Rakhine who are considered economic refugees from Bangladesh by Myanmar. The increasing number of refugees from Rakhine heading by boat for Malaysia has attracted international attention.

In the Philippines, the struggle against corruption and poverty topped the domestic policy agenda of the government led by President Benigno Aquino. The signing of a comprehensive peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in March 2014 enabled the decade-long armed clashes on the island of Mindanao, which are estimated to have claimed 150,000 lives, to be defused. However, the fundamental law for the planned autonomous province of Bangsamoro provided for under the peace agreement has not yet been adopted by the Philippine congress. This has again given rise to uncertainties over the peace process on Mindanao that had been launched with great difficulty by President Aquino. At foreign policy level, it had not been possible to defuse tensions with China over competing sovereignty claims in the South China Sea. China opposed the international arbitration proceedings under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea initiated by the Philippine government and insisted on bilateral negotiations. In November, the Philippines successfully hosted the 23rd APEC Summit.
In Singapore, the death of the nation’s highly regarded “founding father” and long-standing Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on 23 March was of symbolic significance. In the elections on 11 September, the governing People’s Action Party (PAP) was able to win back voters’ confidence, almost reaching previous levels of support. Over the last few years, the government had delivered on some of the voters’ demands in the social area. The new government was sworn in on 1 October, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced a generational change at the political leadership level. Discussions on demographic development and the “Singapore social model” were continued, and the development of Singapore’s position as a business location was further pursued.

In Thailand, the political situation remained unchanged following the political coup of May 2014. A new draft constitution proved controversial and was eventually not put to the vote. Consequently, the elections scheduled for autumn 2017 were postponed in order to enable the drafting of a new constitution. Martial law that had been declared in Thailand the year before was lifted on 1 April and replaced by the Prime Minister’s power to issue emergency decrees; fundamental political rights remained restricted.

In Vietnam, the government was able to meet the economic growth targets it had set itself. At domestic policy level, the year was marked by the preparations for the next Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) scheduled for the beginning of 2016, which translated in a tougher attitude towards critics of the regime. At foreign policy level, Vietnam continued its course towards integration into international institutions. In this context, it successfully hosted the 132nd Assembly of Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Regarding its relations with China, Vietnam sought to normalise relations in the aftermath of last year’s bilateral crisis. The process of cautious further rapprochement with the USA was continued also by the first-ever visit of a Secretary General of the CPV to Washington in July.

3.4.2.2.2. SAARC States

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 regional forum for regional economic policy integration in South Asia. Since 2006, the EU has enjoyed observer status. From 26 to 27 November 2014, the 18th SAARC Summit at the Heads of State and Government level was held in Kathmandu (Nepal); the next SAARC Summit is to be held in Pakistan in 2016.

In Afghanistan, the security situation continued to pose a central challenge to the National Unity Government in which Ashraf Ghani, holding the office of President of State, and Abdullah Abdullah in his capacity as Chief Executive Officer (quasi Prime Minister), govern the country together. Succeeding the ISAF, the Resolute Support Mission (RSM), to which Austria contributes
up to ten members of the Austrian Armed Forces, has since 1 January supported the development of efficient civilian and military capabilities and the Afghan security forces’ structures. Following the withdrawal of the international troops as a consequence of the termination of the ISAF mission, the security situation in the country deteriorated. As Taliban and terrorist groups stepped up their military offensives, the Afghan armed and security forces came under increasing pressure. Many parts of the country were shaken by terrorist attacks. Between the end of September and the beginning of October, even the city of Kunduz was temporarily captured. At the end of December, the government announced that parliamentary and district council elections would be held in the second half of 2016. The Mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was again extended for another year (until March 2016).

In Bangladesh, the domestic policy situation continued to be dominated by the outcome of the parliamentary elections of January 2014, which were won by a two-thirds majority by the Awami League (AL), but had been boycotted by the oppositional Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which did not recognise the government. The special war crimes tribunals set up to investigate crimes committed during the 1971 war of independence sentenced several perpetrators, including leading opposition party officials. The death sentences pronounced in this context met with international criticism, including from the EU. At the end of the year, Islamist-inspired attacks were launched against western NGO staff.

Bhutan, with which the Bhutan Country Strategy 2015–2018 had been prepared by Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC), remains a priority country of ADC also in the years to come.

In India, the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from the previously oppositional Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in office since 2014, focused on fostering economic development, developing the country’s infrastructure and promoting good governance. Despite Modi’s persistently high popularity ratings, the governing BJP, which had hitherto been accustomed to success, was for the first time faced with defeat. In such important regional elections as in New Delhi, the Aami Admi Partei (AAP) led by anti-corruption activist Arvind Kejrival was able to score a clear success and in Bihar, the BJP lost against a broad-based oppositional alliance. In the context of numerous visits paid to all relevant political and economic partners (USA, China and the Russian Federation), Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought to present India as an attractive investment location and global policy player. Relations with Africa were further intensified by the Africa Summit hosted by New Delhi on 28 and 29 October. Priority was attached to the normalisation of relations with neighbouring states. The resumption of the Indian-Pakistani Dialogue Process culminated in a somewhat unexpected visit paid by Prime Minister Modi to Prime Minister Sharif in Pakistan on 25 December.
In the **Maldives**, the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) has governed the country since it had won a clear majority in the parliamentary elections of March 2014. An explosion on the presidential yacht on 28 September in which the President’s wife was seriously injured, led to the arrest and removal from office of Deputy President Ahmed Adeeb on 24 October, the declaration of a state of emergency from 4 to 10 November and aggravated the domestic policy crisis against the background of a rise in Islamist tendencies.

In **Nepal**, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake that shook the country on 25 April claimed 9,000 lives and massive destructions (aftershocks on 12 May and 22 June) and led to the temporary proclamation of a state of emergency. After eight years of negotiations, the Constitutional Assembly adopted the new constitution based on federal principles on 19 September. The election of the new President Bidyia Devi Bhandari as the first woman to hold this office and of the new Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli was already based on this new constitution. Demonstrations in the south of the country against the demarcation of the new provinces led to an on-going blockade of the Indian-Nepalese border and supply shortages throughout the country.

In **Pakistan**, the domestic policy situation continued to be dominated by the fight against terrorism. Although extremist violence against institutions of the state and the minorities (also within the Muslim community but also among Christians) continued, the number of attacks decreased. The military offensive Zarb-e-Azb against terrorist groups in the tribal areas (North Waziristan), launched in June 2014, and operations by paramilitary units (Pakistan Rangers) in Karachi against terrorist and criminal elements was continued and produced results. The fight against terrorism also included the scrutiny of religious schools and relevant coordination with the provinces. Implementation of the twenty-point National Action Plan, adopted at the end of 2014, was continued.

In **Sri Lanka**, Maithripala Sirisena from the electoral alliance New Democratic Front won the early presidential elections of 9 January – which had been moved forward by two years – against the incumbent Mahinda Rajapaksa from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) who had been in office for nine years. The parliamentary elections of 17 August confirmed the transition of power. This also added new impetus to the national reconciliation process launched after the civil war between the Singhalese majority and the Tamil minority. In the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), a joint approach towards investigating the human rights violations committed in the final stages of the civil war was agreed on.

### 3.5. Australia and Oceania

In **Australia**, September was marked by a change at the head of government level. In a step that also came as a surprise to his own party, Minister of Communication Malcom Turnbull resigned from office. Subsequently, he suc-
cessfully defeated Prime Minister and leader of the Liberal Party Tony Abbott in an internal party ballot, winning 54 of the 44 votes, and took over the office of Prime Minister. The main reason given for this move was the negative results the governing party had for a long time shown in opinion polls. The country’s asylum policy, which adopts a tough stance vis-à-vis refugees, was continued under the new Head of Government. Asylum seekers trying to reach Australia mainly by boat, are not admitted to the Australian mainland but have to await the outcome of their further proceedings in accommodation facilities; also if refugee status is granted, they may be taken in by third countries with whom Australia holds the respective agreements.

In New Zealand, the domestic policy debate was significantly influenced by the discussions over a new national flag. Focussing primarily on New Zealand’s identity, this issue will finally be decided on in a referendum to be held next year. The objective pursued by the discussion launched by Prime Minister John Key is to overcome the symbolism of the British colonial era.

In Oceania, political discussions were mainly dominated by concerns over the impact of climate change and the associated rise in the sea level. In this context, the Pacific Island Forum Leaders Declaration on Climate Change Action was adopted at this year’s Pacific Island Forum, held in Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea) in September.
4. Security Policy Dimension

The year 2015 saw a deterioration in the international security situation. In the context of this negative trend, the simultaneous occurrence of the various threats to security was considered particularly alarming.

This related on the one hand to the developments in the trouble hot spots in the Middle East, in parts of the Arab and Islamic world as well as in parts of Africa – including their impact on Europe as a result of terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism. On the other hand, Russia’s activities in Ukraine, especially in Crimea, in further regions of the former Soviet Union and in the area of ‘hybrid threats’ led especially central and northern European EU (and NATO) Member States to the perception that their security was seriously compromised.

Some other developments in the South China Sea and/or the stance taken by China were interpreted by numerous experts as a deterioration of international security and as having potential for conflict.

Another global challenge has been the rapidly increasing exposure to threats from cyber space, particularly with a view to their potential impact on the stability and ability to act of entire states and societies.

4.1. Common Security and Defence Policy (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 (see Chapter 2.5.1.1.). Against the backdrop of the changes witnessed in the European neighbourhood in recent years, the European Council in December 2013 agreed to strengthen the Union’s Foreign and Security Policy. In its meeting in June 2015, the European Council adopted a number of additional steps towards further developing the CSDP. It thus not only took account of the changes in the geopolitical situation and the resulting call by numerous EU Member States for a re-orientation of the CSDP, but also of the increasing linkage between internal and external security, as illustrated by the refugee and migration issue – the biggest challenge to be faced by the EU within the foreseeable future.

In response to the terrorist attack in Paris in November, the Mutual Assistance clause under Article 42 (7) of the TEU was invoked for the first time ever by France on 16 November. According to this article, all EU Member States are under direct obligation to provide France with aid and assistance by all the means in their power, which they indeed committed to do. Subsequently, France asked all Member States individually for bilateral assistance; the Austrian answer was provided to France on 23 December.
4.1.1. Ongoing CSDP Operations and Missions and Austria’s Involvement

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

Civilian CSDP Missions:
- EUBAM Rafah (Palestinian territories)
- EUBAM Libya
- EUCAP Nestor (Djibouti, Kenya, Seychelles, Somalia and Tanzania)
- EUCAP Sahel Niger
- EUCAP Sahel Mali
- EULEX Kosovo (with Austrian contribution)
- EUMM Georgia (with Austrian contribution)
- EUAM Ukraine (with Austrian contribution)
- EUPOL Afghanistan
- EUPOL COPPS (Palestinian territories; with Austrian contribution)
- EUSEC RD Congo (with Austrian contribution)

Military CSDP Operations and Missions:
- EUFOR Althea (Bosnia and Herzegovina; with Austrian contribution)
- EU NAVFOR Atalanta (at the Horn von Africa)
- EUTM Mali (with Austrian contribution)
- EUTM Somalia
- EUFOR RCA (Central African Republic; with Austrian contribution; ended in March)
- EUMAM RCA (Central African Republic; with Austrian contribution)
- EUNAVFOR MED Sophia (Mediterranean; with Austrian contribution from 2016 onwards)

For further information on individual missions/operations, please see the respective country sections under Chapter 3.

4.1.2. Development of Civilian and Military Capabilities for Crisis Management

After a longer period of time, the European Council of December 2013 once again dealt intensively with CFSP and provided an impetus for its further development, notably with a view to increasing the effectiveness and visibility of CSDP, enhancing the development of capabilities and strengthening Europe’s defence industry.
In preparation for the European Council in June, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted comprehensive Conclusions in May, which set out both the progress achieved and the tasks yet to be accomplished. Progress was made with respect to cooperation with partners, positioning the Union vis-à-vis new security challenges and with respect to Capacity Building in support of Security and Development (CBSD). A joint communication on the topic of CBSD was published by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (EU HR) and the Commission. Limited progress was made with respect to force generation, rapid response (especially with respect to the deployment of an EU Battlegroup), civilian capability development (finalisation of a List of Generic Civilian CSDP Tasks), financing of civilian and military CSDP missions and operations as well as the use of as yet not (fully) utilized provisions under the Treaty of Lisbon. The preparation of a joint framework with actionable proposals to help counter hybrid threats and foster the resilience of the EU, its Member States and partners was commissioned. The Council also underlined the need to further strengthen the links between external and internal security. The goal is to enable a better response by the EU to horizontal issues such as terrorism, organised crime, smuggling of human beings, hybrid threats and threats to cyber security. It also emphasised the need to further strengthen efforts towards the development and availability of civilian (CSDP) capabilities, including revisiting the priority areas for civilian crisis management which were endorsed by the European Council in Feira, as well as for a sustainable solution for training qualified experts in this field. The Council also recalled the importance of efficient crisis management structures within the EEAS, including the need for more civilian crisis management expertise.

The European Council in June also mandated further action. The EU HR was invited to continue the process of strategic reflection with a view to preparing an EU global strategy on foreign and security policy in close cooperation with Member States to be submitted to the European Council in June 2016. In line with previous conclusions, work on a more effective, visible and results-oriented CSDP is to be continued. The goal is to further develop both civilian and military capabilities, and to strengthen Europe’s defence industry, including SMEs. With a view to reaching this goal, the EU Member States were reminded of the necessity to allocate a sufficient level of expenditure for defence and to ensure appropriate funding for CSDP-related research in the EU budget. In addition, the European Council declared its support for a greater European defence cooperation and encouraged the mobilisation of EU instruments to counter hybrid threats.

Also the issue of further developing the concept of Battlegroups available at short notice was further discussed. Based on a semi-annual rotation system, two such Battlegroups comprising approximately 1,500 troops each stand ready to be deployed when necessary within five to fifteen days. It is generally recognised that exercises such as Multi-Layer 2015, conducted in Octo-
Security Policy Dimension

ber and November, are important for interoperability, modernisation of the armed forces and compliance with common European standards. Since the Battlegroups have, however, not yet been deployed, the concept has been questioned by several Member States. Furthermore, the possibility of using Battlegroups in the framework of UN operations was discussed with the UN. Concrete results are, however, not yet available.

As regards practical crisis management action, the EU increasingly needs to take account of the fact that in the area of operation, there are usually a large number of international organisations active in different areas. This first and foremost requires enhanced cooperation and division of labour in line with the principle of comparative advantages between the EU and other organisations, in particular the UN, NATO (see Chapter 4.2), the OSCE, the Council of Europe (CoE) and the African Union (AU). After having consulted the EU Member States and other important political, military, development cooperation and humanitarian players, the Council in May adopted an action plan for the new concept of the EU Comprehensive Approach.

The Joint Statement on EU-UN Co-operation in Crisis Management (2007) provides for close coordination between both organisations in the areas of conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Regular joint meetings promote the implementation of the Joint Statement. The experience of CSDP and UN missions and operations conducted in the same region (for instance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Central African Republic and Mali), has shown that efficient and well-functioning cooperation between the EU and the UN plays a key role in maintaining international peace and security.

Cooperation between the EU and NATO was continued. Thus, the CSDP operation EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina is thus carried out in accordance with the Berlin Plus Agreement by making use of NATO assets and capabilities. The EU and NATO are also jointly engaged in crisis management in Afghanistan and in Kosovo; the EU with civilian capabilities, while NATO in both cases carries out military tasks. In the seas off the Horn of Africa, there is close coordination between the EU Operation Atalanta and the NATO Operation Ocean Shield aimed at fighting piracy off the coast of Somalia. In military capability development, the EU also works in coordination with NATO, whose membership also includes 22 EU Member States. This ensures that the requirements to be fulfilled by the Member States’ armed forces in the context of the EU and NATO are compatible and complement each other. Cooperation in the field of cyber security and hybrid threats has also become increasingly important. The European Council pointed out that the CSDP reforms outlined above are to take place in close cooperation with NATO and in full coherence with NATO planning processes.

Cooperation between the EU and the OSCE is especially close in the Western Balkans and in the states covered by the EU’s European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), especially in Ukraine.
4.2. North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

4.2.1. Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and Partnership for Peace (PfP)

Austria has been a member of PfP since 1995 and a member of EAPC, the forum of cooperation between NATO and its partner countries in the field of security policy, since 1997. 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 takes part and also plays a major role in a number of future-oriented NATO programmes, for instance in the Cyber area, and is a recognised troop contributor.

With around 500 soldiers, Austria provided the largest contingent of any partner country for the NATO-led peace operation in Kosovo (KFOR) in 2015 and was thus the third-largest KFOR troop contributor. Since June 2009, the KFOR force level has been reduced in several steps, ranging at around 4,900 troops by the end of 2015. Together with EULEX and the Kosovo police, KFOR continued to contribute towards maintaining a safe and secure environment and ensuring freedom of movement in Kosovo. Although the security situation in Kosovo was generally considered stable, it remained fragile in the North. The current situation on the ground did, however, not allow for any reduction of the KFOR troops.

In Afghanistan, Austria contributed ten staff officers to the headquarters of the NATO-led training, advice and assistance mission Resolute Support (RSM), which succeeded the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) with a total of 12,000 troops at the beginning of the year. Also in 2016, the country will continue to be supported by this NATO-led mission.

With a view to enshrining the topic of protection of civilians (Protection of Civilians, PoC) more strongly in the framework of NATO/EAPC/PfP, Austria together with Norway set up a Tiger Team in 2013. Since the EAPC Ambassadorial meeting in November 2013, this Tiger Team has met several times under Austrian chairmanship. In the context of the preparations for the NATO summit in Warsaw in summer 2016, a Food for Thought Paper proposing to develop a NATO policy on protection of civilians, which was prepared by the Tiger Team, was submitted to the NATO Secretary General.

Together with the Western European partner countries Finland, Ireland, Malta, Sweden and Switzerland (WEP–6), Austria contributed pro-actively to the debate on the future design and further development of NATO Partnerships. In view of the end of ISAF by the end of 2014, NATO sought not to lose the interoperability achieved with its operational partners. Consequently, NATO adopted the Partnership Interoperability Initiative in June 2014 that aims to make effective use of partnership programmes, support partners participating in the Interoperability Instruments and offer enhanced opportuni-
ties for partners to contribute with force and capabilities to NATO activities. Partners’ participation in NATO-led crisis management operations, in the NATO Response Force (NRF) and in its exercises with a view to creating a pool of certified troops and capabilities should contribute to these objectives. This initiative is part of the Connected Forces Initiative (CFI) and is directed at all operational partners, including international organisations such as the EU, UN, OSCE and AU.

Austria also actively participated in the political consultations on developments in the Balkans, the Middle East and the emerging security challenges. The alliance’s current Strategic Concept was adopted in November 2010. The core tasks outlined in this concept is to safeguard the freedom and security of all its members by political and military means in the three core areas of collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security.

As has been called for for many years, the number of areas in which the EU and NATO cooperate has increased, as reflected in the review of CSDP and numerous references in EU documents. Currently, this cooperation focuses primarily on political areas of action. It is, however, also conceivable in military matters, such as the provision of forces packages that are available at short notice (EU Battlegroups or NATO Response Force). The underlying reasons for this approach are the current crises and problems both NATO and the EU are facing, even though the perception of such developments may vary somewhat in some aspects.

The now routine participation of the NATO Secretary General in the Foreign Affairs Council and most recently in the June European Council, as well as the participation of the EU HR in NATO Foreign Ministers Meeting and in numerous other meetings at all levels, demonstrate both organisations’ willingness to engage in enhanced cooperation. Cooperation currently focuses on the topics of hybrid threats, civil-military cooperation, cyber security and strategic communication.

4.3. Fighting International Terrorism

At the very beginning of the year, the need for and urgency of further intensified action against terrorism was highlighted very clearly by the murderous attack on the editorial offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris on 7 January.

The guiding principles of EU external action were outlined in the Council Conclusions on external relations adopted on 9 February: strengthening partnerships with key countries (especially in the Middle East region, Turkey and the Western Balkans), supporting capacity building (for instance against foreign terrorist fighters), countering radicalisation and violent extremism, promoting international cooperation (for instance in the context of the UN including in the Global Coalition to Counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the
Levant (ISIL), in which Austria also participates, and in the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum) and efforts aimed at addressing the underlying factors of terrorism (such as the ongoing conflict in Syria and the crisis-ridden situation on Iraq).

The statement issued by the Heads of State or Government following the informal European Council meeting on 12 February was based on the three pillars of ensuring the security of citizens, preventing radicalisation and safeguarding values, as well as cooperating with the EU's international partners, which over the next few months were to form the basis for the counter-terrorism activities launched by the Union. In the aftermath of the massive terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November, the Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs agreed on 20 November on accelerating the implementation of the EU Passenger Name Record (PNR) directive reiterating the urgency to finalise it before the end of the year, countering illicit traffic in fire arms, strengthening controls of the EU's external borders, targeted fight against financing of terrorism, as well as enhanced information sharing and judicial cooperation. The Heads of State or Government also adopted Conclusions on stepping up the criminal justice response to terrorism and violent extremism that leads to radicalisation. On 18 December, the European Council emphasised the need to further improve the sharing of information, seeking to further deepen cooperation between security services, implementing systematic and coordinated checks at external borders, rapidly examining the Commission’s proposals on firearms and taking rapid action against terrorist financing in all domains.

In 2015, the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopted three resolutions on fighting terrorism: UNSC resolution 2199, which is based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter and sets out binding decisions and recommendations on financial and material support to inter alia ISIL. UNSC resolution 2249, which was adopted in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November and calls upon the UN member states to “take all necessary measures” on the territory under the control of ISIL to prevent and suppress terrorist attacks. UNSC resolution 2253, which focuses primarily on ways and means to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorism and is specifically directed against ISIL that is now explicitly covered by sanctions imposed by the UNSC. Resolutions 2199 and 2253 were co-sponsored by Austria.

Austria fully supported the comprehensive approach of the EU and the UN in fighting terrorism. With respect to the fight against terrorism, Austria also placed a special focus on cooperation with the Western Balkan states. In this context, Austria organised the international anti-terrorism conference “Tackling Jihadism Together – Shaping, Preventing, Reacting” in Vienna on 20 March. At the high-level Western Balkans Summit held in Vienna under the Berlin Process on 27 August, the topics of fighting terrorism, extremism and radicalisation likewise topped the agenda. In December, the Integrative Plan of Action 2015/2017 prepared under the Austrian co-chair by the EU/West-
ern Balkans Counter-Terrorism Initiative, was endorsed at a meeting between the EU ministers of justice and home affairs and the Western Balkan states. In the context of its involvement in the Global Coalition against ISIL/Da’esh, it was decided in September that Austria will contribute specifically to the working groups on “foreign terrorist fighters” and “stabilisation”. In December, Austria made available one million euros from ADA funds to a special fund under the UN Development Programme (UNDP) that served as stabilisation assistance for the “livelihoods” project (directed inter alia at revitalising agriculture, provision of seeds and fertilisers, employment creation activities) in Iraq.

Austria places a special focus on the topics of prevention, de-radicalisation and integration inter alia by cooperating with internet providers in order to remove terrorist propaganda from the net, through close cooperation with Muslim communities, de-radicalisation measures in prisons, and the “Extremism Information Centre” (an advice and counselling centre established at the Federal Ministry of Families and Youth). In addition, a special hotline was established at the Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs on 2 February and provides support and counselling services to callers who feel discriminated against because of their ethnic background, origin or religion.
5. The United Nations and its Specialised Agencies

5.1. Introduction

The year 2015 marked the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations (UN) and the 60th anniversary of Austria’s accession to the UN. Austria thus organised a number of events to celebrate the anniversary of its UN membership. At the Open House event at the MFA on 26 October, for instance, a major focus was placed on the UN. Other celebratory events included an anniversary concert given by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra in the Vienna Konzerthaus on 15 November. At the end of April, Federal Minister Kurz officially opened the ‘Vienna Café’, whose refurbishment and redesign had been funded by Austria in the context of the general renovation of the UN Headquarters building in New York.

From the UN perspective, the two key events marking this 70th anniversary were the successful Summit of Heads of State and Government, that was held from 25 to 27 September and resulted in the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development setting out the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the historic climate protection agreement (UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) adopted on 12 December at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris. By adopting the universally applicable 17 sustainable development goals including their 169 associated targets, the UN member states have set themselves a ground-breaking agenda that seeks not only to eliminate poverty, reduce inequality, strengthen peace, protect human rights, achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, but also to promote and ensure the protection and sustainable use of our natural resources. As chair of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Austria was closely involved in the development of the SDGs. The binding Paris Agreement on Climate Change is a hallmark and milestone of multilateral diplomacy and – just like 2030 Agenda – forms a key element of the political legacy of UN Secretary-General (UNSG) Ban Ki-moon whose mandate will expire on 31 December 2016.

Other topics that dominated the UN’s agenda and were addressed in all of the organisation’s bodies and specialised agencies were the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, the related extremist terrorism as well as the largest refugee and migration flows since the end of the Second World War they have triggered. Special attention was also paid to the conflicts and trouble spots on the African continent, including especially Mali and the Central African Republic, and to the efforts aimed at improving and strengthening the UN’s capacities in matters relating to peacekeeping operations (PKO).

Austria continued its traditional efforts in the fields of protection of human rights, rule of law, protection of civilians in armed conflict, and in connection with the topic of women, peace and security. Austria furthermore added a special impetus to the continuation of targeted deliberations in the field
of nuclear disarmament. Together with like-minded states, Austria strongly advocated a more transparent process for selecting the next UNSG.

5.2. The General Assembly

5.2.1. Procedural Matters

The General Debate of the 70th General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGA) was held from 28 September to 3 October. Prior to this ‘Ministerial Week’, the Heads of State had convened for a summit meeting from 25 to 27 September to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that specifies the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Pope Francis had also addressed the UNGA in a much acclaimed speech on 25 September. On the margins of these major events, a large number of high-level (semi) official events or side events took place, including the Gender Summit, organised jointly by China and the UN on 27 September celebrating the 20th anniversary of the World Conference on Women and on Advancing Women’s Rights (Beijing+20), the Peacekeeping Summit organised and chaired by US President Barack Obama on 28 September; and – led by the USA – the Leaders’ Summit on Countering Daesh/the Islamic State (IS) and Violent Extremism on 29 September, as well as the High-level Meeting on Migration convened at the invitation of the UNSG on 30 September. This unprecedented succession of high-level meetings at the same time marked the largest assembly of Heads of State or Government and foreign ministers in the history of the UN.

During the UNGA’s Ministerial Week and at earlier meetings and side events, Austria was represented by Federal President Heinz Fischer and Federal Ministers Sebastian Kurz, Andrä Rupprechter and Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek. The Federal President delivered statements at the SDG summit (27 September), the gender summit (27 September) and the summit on migration (30 September). As a panellist, Federal Minister Rupprechter spoke on UN Private Sector Forum addressing the role of the private sector in implementing the SDGs (26 September). Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz took the floor inter alia during the Interactive Dialogue on fostering sustainable and inclusive economic growth (26 September), at the Open Debate of the UN Security Council on countering terrorism (30 September) and in the context of the meeting on the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons (30 September).

On 1 October, Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz addressed the UNGA and delivered the Austrian speech, in which he focused in particular on the conflict in Syria and the refugee crisis. Minister Kurz called for a holistic approach towards resolving the refugee crisis, pointing out that no country and no region will be able to solve this issue singlehandedly. He also highlighted the need to step up the fight against terrorist groups and the IS, and to involve all parties in the efforts towards finding a political solution in Syria,
stressing that such efforts towards achieving peace involve talking to all parties to the conflict and not only to one’s friends. Minister Kurz pointed out that the same held true for the conflict in Ukraine, which remains a long way from being resolved, and where dialogue and negotiations are the only means for achieving a peaceful solution. In his concluding remarks, he referred to the current geopolitical situation stressing that 70 years after its foundation the world needed the UN more than ever.

On the margins of the SDG summit and during the Ministerial Week, the Austrian representatives held a number of bilateral talks, including a joint meeting with UNSG Ban Ki-moon.

5.2.2. Political Affairs

5.2.2.1. Middle East

The situation in Palestine has always been a special priority of the UNGA’s work. Largely on the initiative of Palestine, the UNGA again adopted a total of 19 resolutions inter alia on the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and on various aspects of the political, humanitarian and security policy situation in the Occupied Territories. As in previous years, the resolution on assistance to the Palestinian people, sponsored by the EU, was again the only resolution on the Middle East adopted by consensus by all UN Member States. Votes were taken on all other resolutions. The Palestinian resolution on the illegitimate settlement construction in the Occupied Territories was sponsored by the EU and endorsed by all EU Member States.

On the initiative of the delegation of Palestine, which, independent of the question of bilateral recognition by the UN member states, has enjoyed observer status with the UN since 2012, a resolution on raising the flags of all non-UN member observer states – which currently consist of two: the Holy See and Palestine – at the UN Headquarters was adopted. Austria abstained from voting.

5.2.2.2. 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 pursued by international security policy.

In the field of nuclear disarmament, this year’s focus was again on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. For the first time specifically addressed in the Action Plan developed by the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the increasing relevance of humanitarian impact was reflected in numerous disarmament bodies. During the NPT Review Conference held at the UN headquar-
The United Nations and its Specialised Agencies

ters in New York in spring, the humanitarian dimension of nuclear weapons was also one of the key issues dealt with. On behalf of 159 states, Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz also read out a declaration on this topic which had been coordinated by Austria. Ultimately, however, the conference did not produce any tangible outcomes. The agenda of the UNGA’s First Committee, which deals with disarmament and international security, was dominated by four nuclear disarmament resolutions in autumn. Two resolutions, initiated by Austria, on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and on the humanitarian pledge for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons were adopted by a more than two thirds majority. A new forum that seeks to promote progress towards nuclear disarmament also contributed substantially towards strengthening the humanitarian dimension in the UN context. This forum, which is based on an open working group format, was likewise co-initiated by Austria. Other key topics dealt with included “Women in Disarmament”, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and measures to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

At the beginning of its three-year negotiation cycle 2015–2017, the UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC) was again unable to agree on recommendations on nuclear disarmament and practical confidence building measures in the field of conventional weapons.

5.2.3. Economic, Development and Environmental Affairs

The UN-wide efforts for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (previously known as the Post–2015 Development Agenda), which is to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as of 2016 and remain in force until 2030, dominated the agenda. At their dedicated summit on 25 September, the UN member states formally adopted the final document including the 17 Sustainability Goals specified in it (also see Chapter 5.1.).

The Third International Conference on Financing for Development was held in Addis Ababa from 13 to 16 July and made an important contribution towards implementing the 2030 Agenda.

On 12 December, the adoption of a binding agreement and an explanatory declaration marked the successful end of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris. Austria was represented at the Paris conference by Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann and Federal Minister Andrä Rupprechter.

The 2030 Agenda was also a central topic on the agenda of the Second Committee of the UNGA (Economic and Social Affairs). A large number of resolutions on various topics including Landlocked Developing Countries and Least Developed Countries, environment, finances, agriculture, tourism and the shaping of the follow-up processes to the Rio+20 Conference as well as on sustainable development in general were adopted. Austria supported a
The General Assembly

number of resolutions as co-sponsor including a resolution which proclaims 2017 as “International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development”.

For further information on the Economic and Social Council, please also see Chapter 5.5.

For further information on international climate and environmental policy, please also see Chapter 13.

5.2.4. Human Rights

Please see Chapter 8.2.

5.2.5. International Drug Control

The Vienna-based United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) coordinates all drug-related UN activities, assists member states in implementing the international drug conventions and is responsible for planning and implementing programmes aimed at fighting illicit drugs.

In 2015, Austria pro-actively – and especially in the context of UNODC – supported the efforts launched by the UN towards promoting international cooperation in countering the world drug problem based on a holistic approach which takes account of human rights, health-related and criminal law aspects.

Austria also continued to provide voluntary contributions to the funding of numerous international projects and programmes aimed at fighting illicit drugs.

The United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), which meets annually in Vienna, is the central intergovernmental institution for formulating and implementing the UN’s drug policy. The 58th CND session was held from 9 to 17 March.

One of the main topics on the meeting’s agenda were the preparations for UNGASS 2016, the Special Session of the UNGA on the World Drug Problem (New York, April 2016). The enormous scope of activities ranges from raising children and young people’s awareness of the dangers associated with using drugs, to guaranteed global provision of treatment for people with drug problems to managing new challenges including drug selling on the internet.

The resumed session of the CND from 9 to 11 December also focused on this topic. In his speech, Federal Minister Rudolf Hundstorfer outlined the principles guiding Austrian anti-drug policies, highlighting the important role the respect of human rights played in this context and the explicit rejection of the death penalty at all events – including in connection with drug-related crimes. In his speech he also appealed to member states to place a stronger emphasis on the social dimension when discussing drug issues.
5.2.6. International Crime Prevention and the Fight against Corruption

Austria continued to provide substantial support to activities launched by the UN and UNODC in the field of international crime prevention and also made voluntary contributions to the funding of numerous UNODC projects and programmes.

The basis for international activities in this field is provided by the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crimes (UNTOC) and the Protocols Thereto. These international law instruments enable and facilitate cross-border cooperation in a wide range of areas, including the fight against money laundering or the illicit sale of firearms.

Another key document in this field is the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), as corrupt behaviour may erode democracy and the rule of law in states. At the Sixth Session of the Conference of States Parties to the UN Convention against Corruption that convened in St. Petersburg (Russia) from 2 to 6 November, it was agreed to continue the international review mechanism aimed at monitoring implementation of the convention in the States Parties.

The topic of international crime prevention was dealt with by the 13th Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Doha (Qatar) from 12 to 19 April. At this largest event ever in the history of this series of congresses, participants adopted the Doha Declaration. This document stresses the interrelation between the rule of law and development and had previously been negotiated in Vienna.

One month later, the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) convened in Vienna for its annual meeting. Austria contributed to this event by organising a meeting on the issue of radicalised youth, which was met with great interest among participants.

5.2.7. Social Policy

The resolutions on social development dealt with by the UNGA's Third Committee focused on ageing, youth, voluntary work, social development and social integration and were adopted by consensus by the UNGA in December. The resolutions on the World Summit on Social Development, the International Year of the Family and the Second World Assembly on Ageing, traditionally introduced by the G–77, were, however, withdrawn and thus not adopted.

The 53rd session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD), a subsidiary body of the ECOSOC, was held in New York from 4 to 13 February and considered the priority topic “Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world”. During the session, a high-level commemorative event marking the twentieth anniversary of the World Sum-
The General Assembly

The CSocD approved by consensus four draft resolutions for adoption. The texts dealt with the social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), policies and programmes involving youth, the rights of persons with disabilities, and the modalities for the third review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002. Austria participated pro-actively in the negotiations and was able to contribute towards enshrining inter alia that better account be taken of the rights of elderly people, the recognition of the Special Rapporteur’s activities towards promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, the importance of gender equality, and the empowerment of women and girls in the field of social development. Austria also delivered national statements on strengthening social development and on the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. Austria’s experience in the field of youth employment was presented in the ECOSOC Youth Forum that had met immediately prior to the CSocD.

5.2.8. International Women’s Affairs

See Chapter 8.2.3.

5.2.9. Humanitarian Affairs

The thematic resolutions adopted in the UNGA plenary dealt with coordination of humanitarian aid, safety and security of humanitarian personnel, cooperation in providing assistance following natural 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, assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa. The resolution on internally displaced persons adopted by the Third Committee, and the resolution on assistance in mine action adopted by the Fourth Committee, dealt primarily with humanitarian issues. In the relevant negotiations, the EU assumed a pivotal role as one of the most important humanitarian donors. Austria supported five humanitarian resolutions as co-sponsor.

5.2.10. Peaceful Use of Outer Space

The 58th session of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) held in Vienna from 10 to 19 June confirmed the value of using space-based applications and technologies in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Austria contributed constructively to the dialogue by making three statements.

By announcing the entry into force of the “Weltraumverordnung” (Space Ordinance, Federal Law Gazette II No 36/2015), which governs its outer
space activities from a legal point of view, Austria sent out a visible signal underlining the importance of national space legislation.

Austria continued its support for the Vienna-based Office for Outer Space Affairs (OOSA).

5.2.11. Administrative and Budgetary Affairs

The topic that featured most prominently on the agenda of the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary Affairs) was the regular UN budget for the period 2016–2017, on which agreement was reached just before Christmas 2015. The budget was set at 5.402 billion US dollars and is thus below the level of funds requested by the UNSG and below the final budget for the 2014–2015. The UN Secretariat’s headcount was reduced by 63 staff positions with the cuts being made particularly in the administrative area. At the same time, additional staff positions were established for the implementation of the Outcome Document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). Individual positions were also created in the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and in the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Austria succeeded in ensuring that Vienna as a headquarters location will continue to play a meaningful role. The staffing changes called for by the UNSG and recommended by the UN Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) with respect to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the UN Office at Vienna (UNOV) were adopted. The Austrian share in the regular UN budget for 2015 amounted to 0.798 % (i.e. 21.65 million US dollars).

In line with the scale of assessments for member states’ contributions to the regular UN budget and peacekeeping operations (PKO), the Austrian share of currently 0.798 % will be reduced to 0.720 % for the period 2016–2018.

The annual budget adopted for peacekeeping operations (PKO) from July 2015 to June 2016 amounts to 8.276 billion US dollars and is thus below the level for the previous period. A number of measures have been launched to enhance the efficiency of current PKOs. In contrast to last year, it was possible to conclude the relevant negotiations before the end of the PKO budget period. For the first time in three years and following difficult negotiations, members were also able to agree on a resolution on cross-cutting themes.

5.2.12. UN Procurement

Safeguarding Austria’s economic policy interests is among the objectives pursued by Austrian foreign policy. This principle also relates to appropriate participation in public procurement of international organisations like the UN and its specialised agencies.
According to the 2014 Annual Statistical Report on United Nations Procurement, 0.7% of all orders (goods and services) were awarded to Austrian companies, which corresponds to a total value of 120.9 million US dollars (2013: 136.9 million US dollars). In 2014, the total value of orders awarded by the UN system amounted to 17.2 billion US dollars. Again, the goods sourced by the UN system in Austria included mainly equipment for IT, products for medical use and labs, as well as vehicles.

Requests for services mainly related to the areas of humanitarian assistance, construction, air services and cleaning. Of the orders and contracts awarded by the UN and its specialised agencies to Austrian companies (goods and services), again in 2014 more than 75% were placed by the IAEA amounting to 91 million US dollars. As regards the other Vienna-based organisations, relevant orders were place by UNDP and UNPD amounting to some 10 million dollars each; the volume of orders placed by other organisations and agencies including UNOV, WHO, UNIDO and UNICEF was around 2 million dollars and below.

Potential UN contractors are recommended to adhere to the UN Global Compact’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) principles. In 2014, Global Compact companies were awarded an estimated share of 25% of all UN orders.

5.2.13. International Law

The agenda dealt with by the UNGA’s Sixth Committee (Legal Committee) ranged from the debate on the report of the UN International Law Commission (ILC) during the annual International Law Week to topics related to the rule of law, measures to eliminate international terrorism, and criminal accountability of UN experts and officials. Other topics addressed by the Sixth Committee included the annual report of the UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), the principle of universal jurisdiction and the granting of observer status in the UNGA.

5.2.13.1. International Law Week

International Law Week, named after an Austrian proposal, brings together all legal advisers of UN member states to discuss international law issues in the UNGA’s Sixth Committee. This year’s meeting was held from 2 to 6 November. Discussions focused on the ILC report on current international law issues such as the latter’s projects related to the codification and further development of international law, especially with respect to the impact of subsequent agreements and subsequent practice in the interpretation of treaties, crimes against humanity, immunity of state officials from foreign criminal jurisdiction, establishment of customary international law, provisional application of treaties and protection of the environment in connection with armed conflict. Austria made detailed statements on all agenda items.
Under the Austrian-Swedish initiative aimed at revitalising the Sixth Committee, another interactive dialogue meeting was held with Special Rapporteurs from the ILC. The resolution on the ILC report suggests that in future part of the meeting be held in New York in order to stimulate exchange with delegates.

5.2.13.2. The Rule of Law
The sub-theme of this year’s debate in the Sixth Committee was the role of multilateral treaty processes in promoting and advancing the rule of law. In its statement, Austria inter alia focused especially on the key importance of observing and implementing treaties governed by international law. As coordinator of the Rule of Law Group of Friends, Austria strongly advocated enshrining the rule of law in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals and in the 2030 Agenda. In this function, Austria together with Mexico, Liechtenstein and the UN Rule of Law Unit, held five informal information events aimed at enabling delegates to gain more detailed insights into the practical aspects of the work performed by the various UN bodies active in the rule of law field. The relevant efforts and events also received positive mention and were acknowledged in the resolution adopted by the Sixth Committee.

5.2.13.3. Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism
For many years there has been a distinct lack of progress in resolving open issues related to developing a comprehensive convention on international terrorism and holding a high-level conference on this topic. In 2015, talks were again characterised by diverging opinions and the setting-up of a working group was again envisaged for the 71st UNGA. However, with a view to working towards overcoming this deadlock, participants agreed on holding informal consultations in the lead-up.

5.2.13.4. Observer Status in the UN General Assembly
Discussions again focused on applications for granting observer status to organisations. Three organisations (Union for the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean Rim Association, and International Civil Defence Organisation) were granted observer status, four other applications were adjourned.

5.2.13.5. Scope and Application of the Principle of Universal Jurisdiction
Only minimal progress was made in the Working Group on Universal Jurisdiction with respect to clarifying the questions of enshrining the principle of universal jurisdiction in existing international law, its application and potential politicization. A number of delegations again advocated referring this topic to the ILC. Due to lack of agreement, this was, however, not included
in the UNGA resolution. The Working Group’s mandate was renewed for the 71th UNGA.

5.2.13.6. Further Topics
As host country, Austria coordinates the annual resolution on the work of UNCITRAL. The resolution focused on the implementation of the transparency rules, established in line with the new rules on transparency in treaty-based investor-state arbitration, and on the importance of the work of UNCITRAL in promoting the rule of law and sustainable development.

The discussions on the criminal accountability of UN experts and officials on mission were again marked by the crimes of soldiers on UN missions and corruption scandals. Hence, the resolution adopted by the UNGA focused on enhancing the exchange of information between the UN and its member states in cases of misconduct. Participants also agreed that the working group dealing with this topic be again set up at the 73rd UNGA.

Other resolutions adopted by the UNGA dealt with the UN Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law, the report of the Special Committee on the Charter of the UN, the report of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, and administration of justice at the United Nations.

The presidents of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the International Criminal Court (ICC), and of the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and for Rwanda (ICTR) presented their annual reports to the UNGA.

5.3. The United Nations Security Council
5.3.1. Cross-sectional Issues
5.3.1.1. The Reform Debate
The debate on a reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which has been ongoing for several years, again yielded only modest results in 2015. The various states and groups of states – such as the “G4” (Germany, Japan, Brazil and India), or the “Uniting for Consensus” group (which includes inter alia Italy, the Republic of Korea, Argentina and Pakistan), but also Permanent Members of the UNSC such as Russia and China – continue to hold largely incompatible positions on the size of the UNSC, veto issues and its regional composition.

As member of a group of 27 like-minded states (including inter alia Switzerland and Lichtenstein) called ACT (“Accountability, Coherence and Transparency”), Austria supports an improvement of UNSC working methods in its current configuration. One of the objectives is to provide inter alia non-
member states of the UNSC with greater opportunities to contribute, make a larger number of debates publicly accessible, and improve working methods in general. ACT likewise supports limiting the use of veto in cases of potential crimes against humanity (as suggested by France and Mexico for instance). Under the leadership of Liechtenstein it also launched an even further reaching initiative for a code of conduct under which member states refrain from using their veto in cases of suspected mass atrocities. As yet, more than 100 states have joined this initiative.

5.3.1.2. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

Chaired by Chile, an open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict was held in the UNSC on 30 January. This year’s open debate focused especially on the challenges and requirements in connection with protection of women and girls during and after armed conflicts. Austria contributed a national statement and a statement in its capacity as Chair of the Human Security Network. In its national statement, Austria highlighted the importance of implementing UNSC resolution 1894 (2009), of cooperation with the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in implementing a training seminar in Austria on the protection of civilians directed at staff involved in UN peacekeeping operations, and of avoiding the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Referring to the 15th anniversary of the adoption of UNSC resolution 1325 (2000) (please see Chapter 5.3.1.3.), Austria – like many other states too – highlighted the need to consider gender aspects in conflict prevention and conflict resolution. Recurring topics addressed in the debate were the rise in targeted attacks against women and girls in the Middle East and in Africa, attacks on civilian targets, the fight against impunity and – related to that – the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the protection of humanitarian convoys.

The inter-disciplinary leadership training programme on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, developed in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports and the Federal Ministry of the Interior in 2012, was successfully continued in November with a national seminar at the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR). At the same time, Austria, together with the ASPR, supported the UN Secretariat in holding a training course for the protection of civilians and children in armed conflict directed at leaders of peace operations. In December 2014, this course was certified according to UN standards and held in Austria in March. Austria remains ready and committed to cooperating with the DPKO in the field of training measures aimed at improving protection of civilians.

5.3.1.3. Women, Peace and Security – Combating Sexual Violence in Conflict

Marking the 15th anniversary of the adoption of UNSC resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, the UNSC held a high-level debate on
The United Nations Security Council

13 and 14 October, which was opened by UNSC Ban Ki-moon and chaired by the Spanish PM Mariano Rajoy. In the subsequent debate 112 member states took the floor. Resolution 2242 (2015) was unanimously adopted by the UNSC. What is by now the eighth resolution on women, peace and security represents another important step towards implementing resolution 1325 and also establishes a link to the findings of the HIPPO Report (see Chapter 5.3.2.), the review of the UN peace building architecture (see Chapter 5.4.) and the 2030 Agenda. Austria presented very tangible steps towards further promoting the implementation of resolution 1325. In its statement, Austria called for supporting criminal accountability of perpetrators of sexual violence against women in armed conflict and for concrete measures aimed at improving the UN’s working methods. Austria also announced a conference on fighting sexual violence in armed conflict, which it will host in Graz in June 2016. Furthermore, Austria contributed to a statement by the Human Security Network (HSN).

In parallel to the UNSC debate, the global study on the status of implementation of the Agenda on Women, Peace and Security, conducted by UN WOMEN and prepared with pro-active support from Austria, was presented. In the course of the year Austria, together with civil society partner organisations, organised several side events in New York and was thus able to maintain its active profile in this thematic field.

5.3.1.4. Children and Armed Conflict

The UNSC held two open debates on children and armed conflict. Chaired by France, the first debate on 25 March was dedicated to the priority topic “children as victims of non-state armed groups”. Austria delivered a statement on behalf of the Human Security Network (HSN). The debate primarily dealt with violations of children’s rights by armed groups, such as Boko Haram and ISIL/Da’esh.

Chaired by Malaysia, the eleventh resolution on this topic, which was supported by 56 co-sponsors (including Austria) was adopted unanimously in the context of a UNSC debate on children and armed conflict on 18 June. UNSC resolution 2225 (2015) focused on the topic of child abductions in the context of armed conflict and adds child abductions as an additional fifth trigger for the UNSC mechanism on children in armed conflict. Austria delivered a national statement and also contributed towards preparation of the statement by the EU.

Austria took part in an international conference on the safety of schools, held in Oslo on 29 May. This conference resulted in the adoption of the Safe Schools Declaration on protecting and ensuring continued education during armed conflict. Led by Norway and Argentina, a core group, which also included Austria, had developed this declaration, which endorses the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use
during Armed Conflict. By the end of the year, the Safe Schools Declaration had been endorsed by some 50 countries.

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

Since the end of its membership of the UNSC in the years 2009 and 2010, Austria has remained consistent in its commitment 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), to which natural and legal persons on the consolidated list of the ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee may turn in order to request delisting, has enabled major progress in this respect. In the context of an informal group of like-minded states on targeted sanctions, Austria continues to support further improvements, particularly with respect to the ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee but also in other UNSC sanctions committees. Adopted by the UNSC in December, resolution 2253 (2015) states that the body – hitherto known as the Al-Qaida Committee – will from now on explicitly cover Da’esh/the Islamic States in Iraq and Syria (ISIL) as well. Although it focuses primarily on preventing and stopping the financing of terrorism, the resolution – in line with the demands of the like-minded states – at the same time also provides for a further strengthening of the ombudsperson’s office.

5.3.2. Peacekeeping Operations

At the end of the year more than 105,000 troops, police officers and over 15,000 civilian experts were deployed in a total of 16 peacekeeping operations (UNPKO) adopted by the UNSC. Commissioned by the UNSG, an independent experts’ report (High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations – HIPPO) prepared under the leadership of the former President of Timor Leste, José Ramos-Horta, confirmed the importance of being prepared in order to be able to respond to the increasingly complex crises in the UN’s areas of action and of pro-actively protecting civilians against assaults and attacks. This more pro-active role, however, presents both the UN and the individual troop contributors with major challenges: training and preparation, standardisation, technical equipment and machinery have to be updated, which translates to a significant increase in mission costs. The report also highlighted the need to improve training with a view to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeeping staff.

In 2015, the UNGA’s Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, which is responsible for the political guidelines of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), again negotiated a report to which Austria had contributed pro-actively in the fields of protection of civilians and the rule of law.
Including comprehensive recommendations on these topics, the report was subsequently adopted by the UNGA.

5.3.2.1. Austria’s Involvement in Peacekeeping Operations

Austria’s commitment to PKOs builds on a long-standing tradition of participation 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. The Austrian Federal Government is committed to active participation in foreign missions and enshrined this goal in the Austrian Security Strategy, adopted by the Austrian Federal Government in 2013.

As of the end of 2015, Austria contributed 177 soldiers to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), five military observers to the UN Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO), four staff officers to the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and five military observers to the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) as well as one military advisor to the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) in Senegal. By seconding one Austrian police officer to the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) at the beginning of 2014, Austria is once more among the police troop contributing countries in a UNPKO.

5.3.3. Country-specific and Regional Issues

See Chapter 3.

5.4. The UN Peacebuilding Commission

The UN activities in the field of peacebuilding cover a wide range from conflict prevention to post-conflict activities, such as institution building after armed conflict and crises. Responding to this range of action, the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) was established in December 2005 by the UNGA and the UNSC as a joint subsidiary organ and thus assumes a special position within the UN system. The PBC’s main task is to bridge the gap between the end of a peacekeeping operation and the beginning of effective development cooperation efforts and thus to avoid relapse into renewed conflict. Apart from the globally active Commission, there were six country-specific configurations (Burundi, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Central African Republic, Liberia and Guinea). The PBC’s efforts are supported by the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), which together with national and international partners provide support to projects in the field of peacebuilding. An independent review commissioned in 2015 by the UNGA and the UNSC recommended a number of actions towards increasing the efficiency of the measures taken so far.
5.5. The Economic and Social Council

5.5.1. General Part

The activities of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) continued to be dominated by the implementation of the resolutions on the reform of the council (A/68/1) adopted in 2013, the establishment of a High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF, A/67/290), and the negotiations on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

For the second time in the ECOSOC’s history, its sessions and meeting segments – including those of the Integration Segment established in the context of the council’s reform – were held throughout the year.

The ECOSOC’s high-level week from 6 to 10 July, including the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR), and the HLPF which was held for the second time in the context of the Council, were two of the year’s highlights. As the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expired in 2015, the AMR was held for the last time this year.

5.5.2. Austria’s Presidency of the Economic and Social Council in 2015

At the end of Austria’s eighteen months term as President of the ECOSOC, the outgoing Permanent Representative of Austria to the UN, Martin Sajdik handed over to his South Korean successor on 24 July. This hand-over at the same time marked the end of the transition phase, which also covered the reform of the ECOSOC and the establishment of the HLPF. Building on the successful completion of this phase, the ECOSOC and the HLPF are now prepared and ready for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, adopted in September 2015. As in the previous year, work was mainly dominated by the implementation of the ECOSOC reform and the organisation of the HLPF under the council’s auspices. Holding the Presidency of the ECOSOC, Austria again played a leading role in the preparations for the various meetings on economic, social and environment-related topics including the respective decision-making processes in 2015.

The HLPF, which in terms of timing was coupled with the high-level week of the ECOSOC, was attended by some 2,000 participants from all UN member states. In the context of the HLPF, the attendants, including numerous ministers from the fields of foreign affairs, development, finance, environment and social affairs deliberated on the challenges associated with the implementation of the new development agenda – such as provision of the necessary funds and resources, efficiency reviews, dialogue with the population and all relevant players and stakeholders. Federal Minister Rudolf Hundstorfer took part as guest speaker in the opening of the HLPF and highlighted the importance of the social dimension of the global sustainability goals in his
address. He stressed the central role played by promotion of employment and development of social protection systems in eliminating poverty. The Federal Minister pointed out that decent work, inclusion of disadvantaged groups and the involvement of social partners had to play a key role in implementing the global sustainability goals.

One of the keynote speakers at the high-level segment of ECOSOC was State Secretary Sonja Steßl. In a panel discussion held in the context of the HLPF, the President of the Court of Auditors Josef Moser dealt with the topic of monitoring and auditing. In 2015, the final ministerial declaration was again facilitated by the Austrian chair and adopted without prior negotiations.

At the beginning of the year, the ECOSOC convened a stocktaking meeting at the Second UN Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries held in Vienna in November 2014. The ECOSOC Youth Forum (2–3 February) brought together more than 600 young people from all continents to discuss their ideas on the Post–2015 Development Agenda.

A dynamic and action-oriented agenda again ensured that the new challenges in the field of sustainable development were dealt with appropriately involving broad-based civil society participation.

5.5.3. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

The Geneva-based United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is one of five UN regional commissions and is responsible for Europe including all successor states to the former Soviet Union as well as Canada, the USA and Israel.

The organisation aims to promote economic cooperation among member states through the development of regulations and norms as well as through technical cooperation in the field of transport, environment, energy, trade and statistics. In its region, the UNECE will, for instance, be directly involved in the implementation of sixteen out of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN in September.

The 66th session of the UNECE was held in April and dedicated to “Committing to action for sustainable energy in times of change“.

Austria supports the UNECE in particular in the thematic fields of efficient housing construction and ageing societies, in projects related to trans-European roads and trans-European railways as well as in the environmental sector.

5.6. The International Court of Justice

Of the six principal organs of the United Nations, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), responsible for settling disputes between states, is the only
organ based in The Hague. Austria is one of 72 states that recognises the ICJ’s compulsory jurisdiction according to Art. 36 para. 2 of its statute. Since it began its activities in April 1946, the ICJ has handled a total of 161 disputes. Currently, twelve cases are pending before the court. In 2015, the ICJ passed four judgements.

In its judgement of 3 February in the case of Croatia against Serbia concerning the Application of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the ICJ rejected both countries claims and counter-claims and found that neither Croatia nor Serbia had violated the UN Convention with their conduct in the 1990s.

In the case of Bolivia versus Chile concerning the question as to whether Chile is obliged to negotiate with Bolivia on access to the Pacific Ocean, the ICJ granted the claim by Bolivia in 24 September.

On 16 December, the ICJ decided on two pending cases concerning the territorial dispute between Costa Rica and Nicaragua in the border area of the San Juan River.

On 6 February, Judge Ronny Abraham (France) was elected President of the ICJ and Judge Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf (Somalia) Vice-President.

5.7. The United Nations Specialised Agencies

Between November 2011 and November 2015 Austria was a member of the UNESCO Executive Board. In this function it was also active in the Human Rights Committee and in the Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations. Just like Austria’s membership of the Executive Board, its membership of the Inter-governmental Council for the Information for All programme ended with the 38th session of the General Conference in November 2015.

At the same time, Austria was elected to five intergovernmental steering bodies for the next four years: the Council of the International Programme for Biodiversity, the Council for the International Hydrological Programme, the Intergovernmental Council for 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, and the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee. Austria’s term as a member of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression continues until 2017.

The Austrian contribution to the UNESCO biennial budget amounts to 2.018 million euros (0.72 % of the organisation’s regular budget), and an additional amount of some 26,000 US dollars each is made available to the World Heritage Fund and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund. For the biennium 2015/16, UNESCO’s effective budget from regular contributions amounted to 507 million US dollars.
In the context of its membership of the UNESCO Executive Board, Austria in particular advocated human rights, safety of journalists, protection of cultural heritage in conflict situations, Global Citizenship Education/Human Rights Education/Holocaust Education and organisational reform. On the topic of Global Citizenship Education, Austria initiated the first Executive Board decision and laid the foundations for a stronger role to be played by UNESCO in the field of “Education against Radicalisation”.

At the 38th session of the General Conference in November 2015, which coincided with the 70th anniversary of the organisation’s establishment, numerous projects pursued by Austria were completed. The integration of the Global Geopark Network into UNESCO, an instrument (recommendation) on digital heritage – which had been co-developed by Austria, and new areas of action for UNESCO in the fields of internet/freedom of expression/privacy were unanimously adopted. The 38th session of the General Conference also saw the adoption of the global Education 2030 Framework for Action. Kosovo’s bid to join UNESCO was narrowly denied.

Further highlights were the inclusion of the Spanish Riding School Vienna in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the recognition of two new UNESCO chairs in Austria (in Human Rights and Human Security at the University of Graz and on Bioethics at the Medical University of Vienna).

Established in 1950, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) became a specialised agency of the UN in 1951 which coordinates and supports the global development of a meteorological and hydrological measuring and observation network.

At the 17th session of the World Meteorological Congress that convened in Geneva from 25 May to 12 June, Petteri Taalas (Finland) was appointed new Secretary-General, and a new strategy as well as the budget for the period 2016–2019 were adopted. The WMO Strategy Plan 2016–2019 provides inter alia for a strengthening of national meteorological and hydrological capabilities and services in developing countries with a view to investigating climate change and preventing weather-related natural disasters.

Under the general heading of “Social Protection and Sustainable Agricultural Development”, the members of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) met for the biennial FAO Conference in Rome from 6 to 13 June. Austria was represented by Federal Minister Andrä Rupprechter, who in his speech made a case for the protection of rural areas and biodiversity, and also placed a special focus on Austria’s position against genetically modified plants. Referring to the conference’s main topic, he presented the “Green Care” model as a potential opportunity to generate income in agriculture. The conference also re-elected the FAO’s incumbent Director-General José Graziano da Silva, in office since 2011, by a large majority for a second term. The organisation’s budget was adopted for the years 2016–2017 and set at
1.035 billion US dollars for both years, which represents an increase of 30 million US dollars. Austria’s share will remain at 0.798%. The main topic on the meeting’s agenda was the presentation of the State of Food and Agriculture report according to which the malnutrition rate had declined despite the growing world population and currently ranges at 795 million people. The report states that this positive development is mainly attributable to successful regional measures launched by China, India and Latin America. In a festive ceremony, 72 states were recognised for having achieved Millennium Development Goal no 1 (to reduce the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by half).

The 42nd Session of the Committee on World Food Safety (CFS) was held in autumn. The two key items on the agenda were global nutrition issues and the adoption of a report by the high-level panel of experts on “Water”. Immediately after the meeting, World Food Day was celebrated on 16 October in the presence of inter alia UNSG Ban Ki-moon and Director-General da Silva on the premises of Expo 2015 in Milan that was dedicated to the topic of “Feeding the Planet, Energy for All”. Austria contributed to Expo 2015 and was represented with an Austria pavilion (“breathe Austria”) that contained a 560 m² large living forest, thus very visibly highlighting the important role played by forests in securing sustainable livelihoods.

The **International Labour Organisation (ILO)** held the 104th Session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in June. The conference, which was attended by Federal Minister Rudolf Hundstorfer, adopted a recommendation (no. 204) regarding the transition from the informal to the formal economy and dealt with topics related to occupational health and safety and the creation of decent work in small and medium-sized companies.

After having overcome last year’s difficulties, the ILC’s Committee on the Application of Standards was again able to perform all country reviews as planned. Based on an overall package agreed in February at a technical meeting on the contentious issue of the right to strike, a Standards Review Mechanism was established that is to start its substantive work in 2016. On 8 October, the 1997 amendment to the Constitution of the ILO entered into force, which facilitates the abrogation of ILO conventions that have lost their purpose.

Austria participates as observer in the Sessions of the ILO Governing Board and contributes pro-actively to legal issues and the strengthening of the standards system. The central topics dealt with by this body were the ILO monitoring system, the UN 2030 Development Agenda, delimitation of powers between the ILO and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in standardisation issues as well as aspects related to the migration and refugee crisis.

In 2015, the work of the **World Health Organization (WHO)** was again dominated by the fight against the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa.
The United Nations Specialised Agencies

and the need for WHO reform with a view to building up a more effective emergency and response programme.

This issue also topped the agenda of the 68th World Health Assembly (Geneva, 18 to 26 May). As guest speaker, the German Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, announced an investment of 200 million euros over the next two years to strengthen the relevant healthcare systems. Other issues considered very material by Austria that were addressed at the assembly included measures towards tackling antibiotic resistance under a Global Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance, the adoption of a Global Vaccine Action Plan, and a long-term global Malaria Strategy. The course was also set for other important measures towards tackling epilepsy, polio, nutritional issues and health aspects related to air pollution.

The 65th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (Vilnius, 14 to 17 September) adopted inter alia a first “Physical Activity Strategy for the WHO European Region 2016–2025“, following up on the Vienna Declaration adopted by a WHO Ministerial Conference in July 2013. Against the background of the influx of refugees and irregular migrants to Europe, the topic of migration and health (proper healthcare for persons seeking protection, facts-based communication with the population, exchange of experience among the affected countries) was discussed at length.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which mainly dealt with the situation in Syria, expressed grave concern over the results provided by the OPCW Fact Finding Mission to examine the alleged use of chemical weapons. Based on UNSC resolution 2235, a Joint Investigation Mechanism (JIM) to identify perpetrators using chemical weapons in Syria was established on 7 August. The stockpiles of chemical weapons declared by Syria were completely eliminated.

Austria, together with numerous other states, supported a Joint Paper initiated by Australia and Switzerland on chemicals that act on the central nervous system.

On 21 April, the OPCW marked the centenary of the first large-scale use of chemical weapons with a commemorative meeting of its members in Ieper (Belgium).

Myanmar and Angola joined the Chemical Weapons Convention, thus bringing the number of States Parties to 192.

Based in Montreal, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is a specialised UN agency that seeks to promote the development of international civil aviation in the fields of aviation safety, business, legislation and environmental protection. A total of 191 state parties are members of ICAO.

Also with a view to preparing for the organisation’s plenary session in 2016, the ICAO placed the focus of this year’s work on two areas – the decision on a global market-based system to involve aviation in the efforts towards fighting climate change and the “No Country Left Behind” programme which aims to
The United Nations and its Specialised Agencies

achieve effective and global implementation of the UN standards and policies in the field of aviation.

In March, the ICAO Council appointed Fang Liu (China) ICAO Secretary General for a term of three years, starting in August.

The 8th ICAO Air Services Negotiation Conference (ICAN), held in Antalya (Turkey) from 19 to 23 October, was attended by representatives from approximately 80 countries and served as a forum for negotiating bilateral air transport agreements. Austria used the opportunity of ICAN 2015 to hold negotiations and talks with twelve states.

The London-based International Maritime Organization (IMO) is a specialised UN agency and comprises 171 Member States. Austria has been a member of the IMO since 1975. Although it had closed its shipping register for commercial deep sea shipping in 2012, Austria as a strongly foreign trade oriented national economy is nevertheless very much interested in safe and ecologically sustainable deep sea shipping.

The 29th session of the IMO Assembly, held in London from 23 November to 2 December, was dominated by the election to the IMO Council. The members of Categories A and B were confirmed by acclamation, while 23 countries vied for the 20 places in Category C. The Assembly also confirmed the new Secretary-General elect Kitack Lim (Republic of Korea), who will succeed Koji Sekimizu (Japan) in January 2016, as the incumbent did not stand for a second term. Richard Q. Quartey (Ghana) was re-elected for the period 2016–2020 and will continue to hold the position of External Auditor.

The Geneva-based International Telecommunications Union (ITU) is a United Nations 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.

The World Radiocommunication Conference was held in Geneva from 2 to 27 November. The meeting inter alia adopted regulations governing various telecommunication frequency ranges, focussing especially on the compatibility between broadcasting and wireless broadband systems, and between such systems and aeronautical radio navigation systems.
6. Austria as the Seat of International Organisations and Institutions

6.1. Headquartered in Austria – an Overview

A dynamic and future-oriented headquarters policy is one of Austria’s foreign policy priorities. Since the opening of the Vienna International Center (VIC) in 1979, Vienna has served as one of the four headquarters of the United Nations (UN). As home to the offices of many international organisations, Austria is a hub in the promotion of peace, security, sustainable development, energy policy and international dialogue. Under its pro-active headquarters policy, Austria seeks to attract new international entities and remain an attractive location for the established offices inter alia by providing improved legal framework conditions.

The presence of some 40 international organisations in Austria, and especially in Vienna, translates in an annual positive net effect of more than 500 million euros, thus making a substantial contribution to Austria’s prosperity while at the same time enhancing Vienna’s international presence and attractiveness as a venue for dialogue and multilateral diplomacy.

The VIC is home to a large number of UN organisations and specialised agencies, including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA, see Chapter 6.3.), the United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO, see Chapter 6.5.), the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO, see Chapter 6.4.), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) which is active in fighting crime, drug abuse and terrorism, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR, see Chapter 6.9.), and an outposted office of the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) Regional Office which also administers the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention (Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians, see Chapter 6.8).

A number of other important international organisations are located outside of the VIC, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, see Chapter 6.2.), the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID), the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, see Chapter 8), the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) which is active in promoting transparency in the field of disarmament, and the Secretariat of the Hague Code of Conduct (HCoC).
Since 2011, Vienna has also been home to three institutes of the World Bank Group (the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development – IBRD, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency – MIGA, and the International Finance Corporation – IFC). Likewise in 2011, and in addition to the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the International Organization for Migration (IOM, see Chapter 6.7.) established a regional office in Vienna. In the same year, the International Peace Institute (IPI) also opened its Vienna office. Since 2012, the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID, see Chapter 14.2.) has also been based in the Austrian capital.

A number of international organisations and NGOs that are active in the energy field and based in Vienna, joined and formed the Vienna Energy Club in order to make more successful use of synergy effects. This includes, for instance, the Energy Community of South East Europe and the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP). Vienna’s role as energy hub and Austria’s pro-active role in the field of promoting sustainable energy was recognised inter alia by the decision to make Vienna the permanent home of the Sustainable Energy for All Initiative (SE4All, see Chapter 6.6.) that has been based in the city since 2013.

Austria’s position as home to international institutions was further enhanced with the opening of the International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA) 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, see Chapter 6.8.) has been located in the Tyrolean capital Innsbruck.

6.2. OSCE

6.2.1. The OSCE Security Community in the Context of the Crisis in and around Ukraine

The crisis in and around Ukraine continued to substantially influence work within the OSCE. The annexation of Crimea, which violated international law, and support given to the armed formations in eastern Ukraine by way of arms and fighters on the part of the Russian Federation resulted in a loss of trust and a deep divide in the understanding of values between the western participating States and the Russian Federation. The political limits of an organisation that is based on consensus became clear while at the same time highlighting the high relevance of the OSCE as a security community. Since the onset of the crisis, the OSCE has asserted itself as a platform for dialogue. By using its operational instruments and by establishing a large observer mission as well as a political negotiation group, the OSCE contributed substantially to de-escalation, crisis management and improving civilians’ conditions of life in eastern Ukraine (see Chapters 4.2.2. and 3.1.5.1.).
The renewal of the foundations of the European security structure is thus a major challenge to be tackled by the OSCE and thus also under its Austrian Chairmanship in 2017. From 2016 on, Austria will be able to further strengthen its traditional pro-active commitment and contribution to the OSCE and support within the OSCE Troika a longer-term setting of the course towards enhanced security and cooperation in Europe.

6.2.2. Regional Issues and Field Activities

6.2.2.1. South East Europe

The OSCE field operations in South East Europe with field presences in Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia are still the organisation’s largest such operations.

Although the situation in many parts of South East Europe is largely stabilising, as was also taken into account in relative reductions in the budgets allocated to field operations in this region, these OSCE operations continue to make an important contribution towards strengthening democratic and rule of law structures as well as consolidating multi-ethnic societies in South East Europe. With respect to the OSCE’s central tasks, i.e. promoting respect for human rights and minority rights, freedom of the media, strengthening of democratic structures and control mechanisms governed by the rule of law at national and local level, fostering of an active civil society, combating corruption as well as strengthening the judiciary and law enforcement authorities, activities are increasingly shifting towards strengthening local administrative and political structures.

6.2.2.2. Moldova/Transnistria

See Chapter 3.1.5.2.2.

6.2.2.3. Belarus

See Chapter 3.1.5.2.3.

6.2.2.4. Ukraine

See Chapter 3.1.5.2.1.

6.2.2.5. Southern Caucasus

Within the framework of the Minsk Process, led by France, the Russian Federation and the USA, the OSCE strives to contribute towards a sustainable resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Following repeated military escalation which killed and wounded dozens of people, a meeting of the two
presidents held in Bern at the invitation of the Swiss Federal President Didier Burkhalter was able to contribute towards a slight easing of the situation.

In July, Azerbaijan had the office of the **OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Baku** closed somewhat unexpectedly, and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (**ODIHR**) had to cancel its planned **election observation mission** of the parliamentary elections on 1 November **at short notice**. Azerbaijan was also repeatedly the subject of statements by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

The OSCE Office in **Yerevan** supports Armenia in implementing its OSCE commitments in the fields of democratisation, rule of law, environmental policy and in the security sector.

In **Georgia**, Austria together with the European Union supported the OSCE's efforts towards defusing and settling the conflicts involving South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the framework of the **Geneva International Discussions**. The EU calls upon the separatist provinces as well as the Russian Federation not to restrict free movement of civilians even further by establishing and reinforcing internal borders. The Russian Federation recognises Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states and has also concluded extensive cooperation agreements with both.

As the Russian Federation rejected the establishment of an OSCE Mission in Georgia, the EU in 2008 established a Monitoring Mission (**EUMM Georgia**) in the country, to which Austria contributes by seconding members of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and of the Federal Armed Forces.

### 6.2.2.6. Central Asia

The OSCE’s enhanced engagement in all **Central Asian states** confirms the organisation’s role as one of the most important players in the region. Apart from dealing with **traditional security policy issues**, the OSCE field presences seek to place the focus on the **human dimension**. Topics that are relevant for all structures under this transversal approach are border management, gender equality, and the fight against terrorism and human trafficking.

The OSCE Centre in Astana (**Kazakhstan**) places an additional focus on control of small and light weapons, strengthening civil society as well as good governance. On **1 January 2015**, the **OSCE Office in Astana** was changed into a **Programme Office**.

The OSCE Centre in Bishkek (**Kyrgyzstan**) also focuses its efforts on political consolidation, transparent election processes, rule of law, conflict prevention, more efficient use of water resources and distribution of land. The Centre furthermore supported the preparations for the presidential election in 2015. The **OSCE Academy in Bishkek**, which is co-funded by Austria, serves both as a training centre and a platform for dialogue.
The OSCE Office in Dushanbe (Tajikistan) likewise places its main focus on border management. It also houses the Border Management Staff College, which is supported by Austria.

The activities launched by the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan) and the OSCE Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan mainly focus on the Politico-Military Dimension.

**6.2.3. Election Observation**

The provision of support in implementing democratic elections in the OSCE is one of the tasks that are assumed jointly by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and ODIHR (see Chapter 6.2.4.).

The OSCE organised observation missions for elections at national level in six participating States (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Albania, Belarus, Ukraine). Austria participated in election observation missions by seconding a total of twenty observers (sixteen short-term observers and four long-term observers). In addition, six parliamentarians contributed to election observation missions in the context of Parliamentary Assembly delegations.

**6.2.4. The Human Dimension of the OSCE**

The Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is the OSCE’s operational institution for its “third” or “Human Dimension”. Alongside the promotion and observation of democratic elections (see Chapter 6.2.3.), the ODIHR’s scope covers provision of support to participating States in implementing their human rights commitments.

The 19th Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) was held in Warsaw from 21 September to 2 October. With its more than 1,000 participants, the HDIM has traditionally been the most important forum for exchange between the OSCE participating States and Non-Governmental Institutions (NGOs) with a view to the evaluation of the implementation of the participating States’ OSCE commitments.

The three annual Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings (SHDIM), held in Vienna, dealt with the following topics: Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association (16 to 17 April), Freedom of Religion (2 to 3 July), and National Minorities (29 to 30 October). This year, the special annual seminar of the Human Dimension was held from 1 to 2 June and dedicated to the topic of National Human Rights Institutions.

With their large number of country-specific and thematic activities, the High Commissioner on National Minorities in The Hague and the Vienna-based OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media play an important role in the field of the OSCE’s Human Dimension.
As a result of the general crisis of trust within the organisation, it was not possible to reach a consensus on the Human Dimension at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Belgrade, and thus no decision was adopted.

6.2.5. The OSCE’s Security Policy Dimension

Against the background of the crisis in and around Ukraine as well as the immediate threat posed by terrorism, special attention was dedicated to the OSCE’s Security Policy Dimension.

A comprehensive approach towards fighting terrorism and radicalisation was therefore a recurring topic addressed in numerous conferences and also reflected in two Ministerial Council decisions.

The OSCE participating States engaged in regular exchange on the protection of information and communication technology (cyber security) in the context of confidence building measures and deliberated on further opportunities for cooperation.

Austria supported the efforts towards the implementation of the Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures, the Code of Conduct on the Politico-Military Aspects of Security and the Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons. The Ministerial Council was again not able to reach a consensus that would have enabled strengthening the implementation of the instruments and linking them to recent UN developments, inter alia on women, peace and security. Austria continued to support the initiation of a strategic security dialogue on conventional arms control in Europe.

6.2.6. The OSCE’s Economic and Environmental Dimension

The OSCE’s economic and environmental policy work is mainly implemented by the organisation’s field operations in South East Europe, in Moldova and Ukraine, in the Caucasus and in Central Asia. In this context, the main focus of activities is placed on anti-corruption work, counselling in the fields of transport, customs, labour migration and environmental policy support.

The Serbian Chairmanship chose the topic of Water Diplomacy for negotiations on new OSCE tasks. At a total of three preparatory meetings of national experts, held in Vienna (January), Belgrade (May) and at the final forum in Prague (September), ideas for a Chairmanship proposal for a decision to be submitted to the December Ministerial Council in Belgrade were discussed. Despite broad-based support from the majority of participating States, it was not possible to reach a consensus on such a decision due to lack of approval by certain delegations.

Launched on the initiative of the OSCE Secretary General, the OSCE Security Days event held in Vienna on 28 October also focused on climate change and
security. At the conference, which supported the process of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris World Climate Conference COP21 at the OSCE level, papers were delivered inter alia by Federal Minister Andrä Rupprechter and Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General Jeffrey Sachs.

6.2.7. The OSCE’s Regional Policy Dimension

With a total of 57 participating States, the OSCE is not only the world’s largest regional security policy organisation, but also maintains structured dialogues that reach beyond its current membership. By having established privileged partnerships with individual countries in Asia (Afghanistan, Australia, Japan, Korea and Thailand) as well as on the Mediterranean (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia), it introduces these partners to its activities and establishes closer links with them. In 2016, Austria will chair the Mediterranean Contact Group.

The organisation continued to focus more strongly on horizontal issues. Alongside the fight against human trafficking, radicalisation and terrorism as well as countering discrimination, this includes in particular supporting cooperation among police and judicial authorities, activities in the field of gender equality and with respect to migration-related issues. There has also been increased inclusion of youth issues; the CiO’s Special Representatives on Youth also include an Austrian woman.

6.3. 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 peaceful use of nuclear energy, increasing nuclear safety and security and 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 2,400 employees, it is also the largest of the Vienna-based UN organisations. Since 2009, Yukiya Amano (Japan) has held the office of Director General of the IAEA.

The IAEA plays a key role in the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was agreed upon by Iran and the E3/EU+3 (China, Germany, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the USA) under the leadership of the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (EU HR) on 14 July. The negotiations on the JCPOA mostly took place Vienna. On the topic of Syria, however, no progress was made. The North Korean nuclear programme, to which the IAEA inspectors have not had any access for many years, was a recurring topic of discussion.
6.4. **Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)**

The Preparatory Commission for 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-technology solutions for seismic, hydroacoustic, infrasound and radionuclide measurements continued to progress. The Treaty’s ratification process, however, proceeded only sluggishly. As not all of the 44 Key States listed in Annex 2 have ratified the Treaty, the CTBT has not yet entered into force. To date it has been signed by 183 states and ratified by 164. Its entry into force requires ratification by Egypt, China, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and the USA. Again, a special focus was placed on building-up synergies in the exchange between science and research with the organisation’s in-house expertise.

6.5. **United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)**

The 16th Session of the UNIDO General Conference was held in Vienna under Austrian presidency from 30 November to 3 December. Celebrating four anniversaries (70 years of United Nations, 60 years of Austrian UN membership, the forthcoming 50th anniversary of the establishment of UNIDO and 30 years as a Specialized Agency), Federal President Heinz Fischer held the opening address attended by ministers from 30 member states. In his address, Director General Li Yong (China) described the change from MDGs to SDGs as accomplished.

The projects co-funded by Austria focused inter alia on developing centres for renewable energies in the Pacific island states, youth employment, resource efficiency, private sector development and environmental protection in the priority countries of Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC).

6.6. **Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All)**

As decided in July 2015, the headquarters of Sustainable Energy For All (SE4All) – launched in 2011 as a global initiative by the UNSG and set up in Vienna – will continue to be based in Vienna. SE4All pursues three goals: universal access to energy, doubling of energy efficiency and doubling of the share of renewable energies in the global energy mix. These goals are to be implemented primarily by regional and thematic hubs.
In conjunction with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, adopted in December 2015, and the Sustainable Development Goals, likewise adopted in 2015 by the UN, SE4All can make an important contribution to decarbonisation and the fight against energy poverty.

The decision to base SE4All in Vienna contributes to further strengthening Vienna’s position as an energy hub and Austria as home to the headquarters of international organisations and institutions.

6.7. The International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Established in 1951, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) currently comprises 157 Member States and employs more than 8,400 staff worldwide. With its global network of offices in more than 150 countries, IOM is an important cooperation partner for Austria as it enables Austria to become active in regions in which it lacks the necessary infrastructure. Since 2008, IOM has been headed by Director General William Lacy Swing (USA); the office of Deputy Director General is held by Laura Thompson (Costa Rica).

Alongside its country office in Austria, IOM has operated a regional office in Vienna since 2011 that is responsible for East and South East Europe as well as Central Asia. A headquarters agreement between Austria and IOM has been in force since 2014. Austria has cooperated with the IOM country office on a wide range of issues for many years now.

The IOM country office in Vienna is at the same time “National Contact Point Austria” of the European Migration network, set up by the European Commission in 2003, and cooperates closely with the relevant Austrian institutions. Against the background of the refugee and migration crisis, close cooperation between Austria and IOM in implementing the humanitarian admission programme involving 1,500 Syrian refugees in 2014 was further expanded, especially with respect to preparatory integration of refugees prior to immigration. Furthermore, IOM projects aimed at supporting the voluntary return and reintegration of returnees to Afghanistan, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Nigeria, Pakistan, and the Russian Federation/Republic of Chechnya were co-funded by the Federal Ministry of the Interior. In the field of integration of young refugees, IOM is also increasingly active in Austria to help meet current requirements. This also includes the provision of specific training activities for this target group. Support was again provided in 2015 to Austrian institutions, such as the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, in building up capacities inter alia with respect to identification of victims of human trafficking during asylum procedures.
6.8. **Alpine Convention and Carpathian Convention**

Together with Germany, France, Italy, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Switzerland, Slovenia and the EU, Austria is a Party to the Convention on the Protection of the Alps (Alpine Convention). In the context of the thematic preparations for the 14th Conference of the Contracting Parties 2016 (Alpine Conference 2016) under German chairmanship, workshops were held inter alia on nearly zero-energy buildings and the mountain partnership initiative between the Alps and the Carpathians. The Alpine countries were also able to use the Expo2015 in Milan as a platform for presenting activities relevant for mountain areas.

Under the heading of “Demographic Changes in the Alps”, the Fifth Report on the State of the Alps was published and work on the Sixth Report, entitled “Greening the Economy in the Alpine Region”, commenced.

The Secretariat of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention) is administered by the Regional Office in Vienna of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). In force since 2006, the Convention focuses in particular on biological diversity, spatial planning, water resources, sustainable agriculture and forestry, sustainable transport and infrastructure and sustainable tourism. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine are member states of the Carpathian Convention.


The Permanent Secretariat of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) is based in Vienna. In force since 1998, membership of the Convention on Cooperation for the Sustainable Use of the Danube River (Danube River Convention) includes all 14 riparian states covering a share of more than 2,000 km² of the Danube’s catchment area. It focuses on promoting integrated river management of the Danube, thus implementing the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Water Courses and International Lakes (Helsinki Water Convention) as well as the EU Floods Directive and the EU Water Framework Directive. For further information on the Danube Commission, please see Chapter 7.3.

Chaired by Croatia, the 18th Ordinary Meeting of the ICPDR (Vienna, 1 and 2 December) adopted the management plan and the flood risk management plan for the catchment area of the Danube. Both plans were made accessible to the public and will be formally adopted by the Ministerial Conference in 2016. Supplemented by national management plans, this set of Danube-wide plans defines the framework for action to be taken over the next six years.
On the initiative of Austria and in response to the dry and hot summer of 2015, the ICPDR will place a stronger focus on the impact of droughts and water shortages on agriculture and water management, and on the topic of water ecology.
7. Austria in European Regional Organisations

7.1. Council of Europe

7.1.1. Key Political Issues

The main political issues of the year, namely the fight against terrorism as well as the migration and refugee crisis, were also reflected in the work of the Council of Europe (CoE) and accounted for a major share of its activities. Another main item on the CoE’s agenda was the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

The 125th Session of the Committee of Ministers was held in Brussels on 19 May and was attended by 29 foreign ministers. The Austrian delegation was headed by Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz. On the topic of the fight against terrorism, participants adopted a political declaration and an action plan as well as an Additional Protocol on Foreign Terrorist Fighters to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism, which was opened for signature in Riga in October.

At a conference organised by the Belgian Chairmanship in Brussels, a declaration and an action plan were adopted on the implementation of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and endorsed by the Session of the Committee of Ministers (see Chapter 8.4.). At the Session of the Committee of Ministers, Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland also submitted his second report on the State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Europe.

On the situation in and around Ukraine and on the human rights situation in the eastern part of the country as well as in the Crimea, the Ministers’ Deputies Committee (MDC) adopted a number of decisions and declarations, some of which were subject to a vote.

An Action Plan for Ukraine 2015–2017 was adopted supporting the reform programme launched by the Ukrainian government. The European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and specialised bodies of the CoE advised the Ukrainian government on numerous legislative and legal topics as well as on minority issues. Established in 2014 in order to investigate the events of winter 2013/2014 in Kiev and those of 2 May 2014 in Odessa, the International Advisory Panel submitted its final activity reports. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) extended the suspension of voting and certain other rights of the delegation of the Russian parliament to the PA until January 2016.

On 23 September, the MDC adopted a decision on the pressing refugee and migration issue in Europe. In this decision it also reminds Member States of their commitment to observe human rights and existing obligations under international law, some of which are based on Council of Europe conventions, as well as the CoE’s applicable monitoring mechanisms. The Council of Europe Development Bank set up an Emergency Trust Fund, funded with 25 million euros, for the building of dedicated reception centres (hot spots).
In a number of member States, worrying developments regarding potential restrictions of the obligation to implement the judgements passed by the ECtHR had been witnessed. Similar controversial developments were observed in some member States with respect to the CoE’s core topics human rights, democracy and the rule of law (see Chapter 8.4.).

In April, the online Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists became operational. This platform offers constantly updated information on the risks journalists are subject to in the CoE member States. The platform was initiated based on a thematic debate of December 2013 under the Austrian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

In 2015, the following Council of Europe Ministers’ Conferences were held: Conference of Ministers responsible for Cultural Heritage, Namur (Belgium) 23 to 24 April; Informal Ministerial Networking Event “How to promote the social sustainability of major sports events”, Baku (Azerbaijan) 13 June 2015.

In 2015, two new convention texts were opened for signature: the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs, and the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism.

Thematic debates in the MDC were held on the following topics: the fight against terrorism, radicalisation and extremism (19 March); “migration challenges for Europe – need for collective action” (15 September); freedom of association and assembly (7 and 8 October).

Since 2012, the CoE has organised the annual World Forum for Democracy (WFD) in cooperation with the relevant French bodies. Held in November, the fourth WFD forum on “Freedom vs. Control: For a Democratic Response” was marked by the terrorist attacks that shook Paris on 13 November 2015. Recommendations to authorities, the media and civil society were prepared by the approximately 1,700 participants from more than 100 countries.

In November, the MDC adopted the CoE’s double budget for 2016/2017 which provides for an annual volume of 253 million euros.

### 7.1.2. Relations with Other International Organisations

The CoE maintains liaison offices in Brussels (EU), Vienna (OSCE and UN), Warsaw (ODIHR) and Geneva (UN). The EU Delegation in Strasbourg participates in the sessions of the CoE.

Relations between the CoE and the EU are governed by the Memorandum of Understanding, signed in 2007, which defines the framework for close cooperation in areas of shared interest – such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, culture, education and social cohesion – and confirms the role played by the CoE as a point of reference for democracy, human rights and the rule of law. In April 2014, the European Commission and the CoE
signed a framework agreement on strategic partnership. Every two years, the Council of the EU adopts priorities for the Union’s cooperation with the CoE. This cooperation is implemented via numerous common projects and programmes. Jointly prepared and co-funded, these projects and programmes are directed at South East and Eastern European countries, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia and focus primarily on promoting human rights, the rule of law and democracy. With an annual volume of more than 100 million euros, they make up a significant share of the CoE’s programme-related activities. Making available an additional amount of 20 million euros annually, the EU is thus by far the largest voluntary donor with regard to CoE projects. Under the EU’s Eastern Partnership policy, the CoE participates in several platforms (“democracy, rule of law and stability” as well as “contacts between people”), an activity for which the EU is providing funding of a further 33.8 million euros for the period 2015–2017.

At the political level, there is frequent contact between the Secretary General of the CoE and members of the European Commission (EC) that is supplemented by the regular exchange of information between the Secretariat of the CoE and the EC. There is successful cooperation in place with the Vienna-based EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), in the context of which both institutions act in close coordination and inform each other in advance about planned activities.

On the negotiations regarding the accession of the EU to the ECHR, please see Chapter 2.3.8.

The **CoE and the OSCE** hold two meetings a year in the context of the “Council of Europe-OSCE Coordination Group” in Vienna and in Strasbourg. Agreed topics for cooperation are fighting terrorism, protection of national minorities, combating trafficking in human beings and promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination. The OSCE has, however, not been able to reach a consensus on the update of cooperation topics requested by the CoE. The chairmen and secretaries generals of the respective other organisation are regularly invited to meetings of the MDC in Strasbourg and the Permanent Council of the OSCE in Vienna. In addition to the good, if somewhat limited, formal cooperation, there is successful ongoing daily informal cooperation between the relevant secretariat offices.

There is regular exchange between the **Council of Europe and the United Nations**, the Secretary General of the CoE regularly attends the UNGAs and UNSG Ban Ki-moon regularly addresses the PACE. The CoE fully supports the UN initiative for the worldwide abolition of the death penalty. The 69th UNGA adopted a comprehensive resolution on cooperation between the CoE and the UN.

### 7.1.3. Human Rights

See Chapter 8.4.
7.1.4. 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 freedom of expression and information. These commitments entered into effect either due to the member States’ accession to the CoE or to specific conventions of the CoE.

Monitoring by the MDC of the national implementation of the judgements passed by the ECtHR is based on Article 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 the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the CoE is responsible for monitoring compliance with commitments member States undertook upon accession to the CoE. This Monitoring Committee deals with member States until full compliance with obligations and commitments has been ascertained. Currently nine states are being dealt with: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Ukraine. A Post-Monitoring Dialogue on strengthening the respective country’s democratic institutions is being conducted with Bulgaria, Macedonia and Turkey. The Post-Monitoring Dialogue with Monaco was successfully completed in 2015. With a view to ensuring political balance, the Monitoring Committee has since 2015 also reviewed those CoE member States which are not subject to a monitoring process. It also prepares country reports and recommendations that are adopted by the plenary of the PACE. In 2016, Austria will also be subject to such a review.

Monitoring by the Committee of Ministers (dialogue-based regular stock-taking and progress with the fulfilment of statutory commitments and democratic processes) is based on obligations arising from the accession procedures (as in the cases of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina). All monitoring processes are flexible processes that are carried out over an extended period of time. Georgia considers itself no longer subject to monitoring, although the MDC has never taken a formal decision on ending this process.

At increasingly greater intervals, reports on Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as on Serbia are issued by the Secretariat to the MDC. Reports on the conflict in Georgia are issued every six months. In the framework of “stock-taking”, Moldova is subject to de facto monitoring. Furthermore, the CoE Offices in Baku, Belgrade, Yerevan, Chisinau, Kiev, Pristina, Sarajevo, Tbilisi, Tirana, Rabat and Tunis report on developments and implementation of CoE programmes in the respective states. The impact of the armed conflict that broke out in August 2008 between Georgia and the Russian Federation continues to feature on the agenda of the MDC, which seeks to contribute towards
improving the human rights situation in all affected areas and implements confidence-building measures.

**Thematic monitoring** is related to commitments and obligations arising from member States' accession to specific Council of Europe Conventions (on the ECtHR judgments, please see Chapter 8.4.). 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, carries out 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 evaluation and peer pressure to ensure that countries comply with the CoE standards. Membership of GRECO comprises 49 states (all CoE member States as well as Belarus and the USA). An experts’ committee (GRETA) monitors the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. The Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities assesses the national implementation of the commitments contained in the Convention. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) focuses primarily on conducting country reviews and considers specific topics including cooperation with civil society. The European Committee on Social Rights (ECSR) monitors the implementation of the provisions set out in the European Social Charter by the state Parties. The Group of Experts on Acting against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) provided for in the CoE Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) became operational in 2015.

In October and November, the reports on the three monitoring visits paid by CPT, ECRI and GRETA, respectively, to Austria in 2014 were published.

The **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe** (CLRAE) also monitors compliance with the specific commitments aimed at promoting democracy at local and regional level, which involves all 47 CoE member States and has already taken place at least once in each of the member States.

### 7.1.5. Assistance Programmes

The CoE runs assistance and cooperation programmes in the Balkans, the South Caucasus, Turkey, Ukraine and Russia (covering a total of 24 member States, further states such as Belarus, Kosovo and numerous Mediterranean states). These assistance programmes relate to the promotion of human rights, the implementation of pluralist democracy and the rule of law (political, legislative and constitutional law reform) and also address social issues, such as discrimination against minorities, drugs and organised crime.
7.1.6. Organs of the Council of Europe

7.1.6.1. The Committee of Ministers (CM)

The CM is the supreme decision-making body of the Council of Europe. It is composed of the foreign ministers of the 47 member States or their permanent representatives (Ministers’ Deputies). The Committee’s chair rotates on a biannual basis, each May and November. In 2015, the chair was held by Belgium (until May), Bosnia and Herzegovina (May to November) and Bulgaria (as of November). The CM generally meets once a year at ministerial level, while the Ministers Deputies’ Committee (MDC) convenes for sessions once a week. The MDC discusses political issues and takes decisions on topics which are largely prepared by the numerous thematic committees, to which representatives from the relevant Austrian ministries and/or the representations in Strasbourg contribute.

7.1.6.2. The Parliamentary Assembly (PACE)

The PACE is composed of 324 representatives and 324 deputies from national parliaments, who have formed five parliamentary groups: the Group of the European People’s Party/Christian Democrats (EPP/CD), the Socialist Group (SOC), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), the European Conservatives Group (EC), and the Group of the Unified European Left (UEL). There are 71 members who are not attached to any group. Austria is represented by six representatives and six deputies who are seconded by the National Council and the Federal Council. The PACE meets four times a year for a one week-long plenary session and convenes periodically in committees. It issues resolutions, recommendations and opinions to the CM, national governments, parliaments and political parties. The PACE also carries out monitoring and election observation activities. Since January 2014, the office of President of the Parliamentary Assembly has been held by Anne Brasseur (Luxembourg, ALDE), whose term will end in January 2016.

7.1.6.3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe (CLRAE)

The CLRAE is a consultative body of the CoE whose 324 members meet twice a year in Strasbourg for one week. It is composed of a chamber of regional authorities and a chamber of local authorities. The CLRAE formulates recommendations to the CM in the areas of regional, urban and municipal democracy, environmental protection, disaster protection and social cohesion. In Austria, these recommendations are then followed up by the Association of Towns and Cities and the Association of Municipalities, the Liaison Office of the Federal Provinces and the relevant ministries. The CLRAE monitors compliance with the commitments undertaken by the CoE member States in its scope of activity and also engages in election monitoring at regional and
local level. With a view to developing and strengthening democracy at local level, the CLRAE also offers projects to South East Europe and the Southern Mediterranean programme countries. The office of President of the CLRAE is held by Jean-Claude Frécon (France, SOC). Since October 2014, the Second President of the Salzburg Diet Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (SOC) has held the position of President of the Chamber of Regions.

7.1.6.4. The Secretary General

The Secretary General (SG) of the CoE is elected by PACE on recommendation of the CM for a term of five years and sets the strategic course for the organisation’s work programme and budget. The Secretary General also heads the CoE’s Secretariat and its approximately 2,750 employees. Since October 2009, Thorbjorn Jagland (Norway) has held the office of Secretary General of the CoE. He started his second five-year term on 1 October 2014.

7.1.6.5. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)

The ECtHR can be appealed to by the some 800 million inhabitants of the CoE member States as well as by the CoE member States themselves on questions relating to the respect of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) by the CoE member States. The judgements passed by the ECtHR are binding on all member States. The court’s 47 judges, one from each CoE member State, are elected by PACE on recommendation of the respective government for a term of nine years. Since 1 November Guido Raimondi (Italy) has been the President of the ECtHR. For further information, please also see Chapter 8.4.

7.1.6.6. The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe

Since 1 April 2012, the position of Commissioner for Human Rights of the CoE has been held by Nils Muiznieks (Latvia). The Commissioner, who is independent and not subject to instructions, prepares country reports that identify shortcomings in the respective legislation and contributes to awareness raising, promoting human rights education and human rights institutions (such as ombudspersons) in the member States.

7.1.6.7. The Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO)

The INGO comprises more than 400 supra-regional NGOs and enjoys consultative status. It is involved in the CoE’s activities based on a range of consultation procedures.
7.1.7. The Council of Europe and Austria

Austria, which has been a member of the CoE since 1956, traditionally shows a high level of commitment in the CoE and has already been represented by three Secretaries General, two Presidents of PACE and two Presidents of the CLRAE. In total, about 35 Austrians are employed at the CoE.

In 2015, the following encounters at political and supreme court level between Austria and CoE officials took place: on 29 January, the President of the Constitutional Court Gerhart Holzinger took part in the opening of the judicial year at the ECtHR. On 23 August, the President of the Austrian National Council Doris Bures met the President of PACE Anne Brasseur in Salzburg in order to discuss Austria’s involvement in the CoE’s “no hate-speech” movement. On 5 September, Federal President Heinz Fischer received SG Thorbjørn Jagland for an exchange of views. On 2 November, Federal Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner delivered a speech at a CoE congress in Sarajevo, where she also met SG Thorbjørn Jagland and PACE President Anne Brasseur for working discussions. On 4 December, PACE President Anne Brasseur took part in an event organised by the Austrian Parliament’s Demokratiewerkstatt (democracy workshop).

In the context of the ECHR reform, Austria supports ensuring that the highest human rights standards be maintained, including the right of individual petition. Austria’s thematic priorities include human rights issues, particularly in relation to freedom of expression and freedom of the media, issues related to internet governance as well as country monitoring in South East Europe and the Black Sea region. The Representation of Austria to the CoE also continuously provides interested Austrians with information on the objectives and tasks of the CoE.

Established in 1994, the Graz-based European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) is being implemented by way of an enlarged partial agreement. The ECML supports member States in implementing language-policy measures and promotes innovation in language learning. The centre’s current thematic priorities of work include education for children whose mother tongue is not the language of schooling, and development of the first curriculum in Roma languages.

In the Republic of Moldova, Austria – via the ADA – supported confidence-building measures between journalists and NGOs on both sides of the Dniester River.

In 2015, Austria ratified the CoE Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, the European Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (revised) and the Third Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Extradition. Austria signed the CoE Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs, which had been opened for signature in Santiago de Compostela on 25 March.
Under the heading of “building inclusive societies together”, the annual CoE Exchange on the Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue was held in Sarajevo on 2 and 3 November. The topic of preventing radicalisation and extremism dominated the debates and was also dealt with by Federal Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner in a highly acclaimed keynote address.

The Austrian member of the Venice Commission Christoph Grabenwarter was elected Vice-President.

The Austrian Andreas Kiefer was elected for a second term in office as Secretary General of the CLRAE which started on 1 July.

In May, an exhibition celebrating the 200th anniversary of the signing of the final act of the Congress of Vienna was held in the CoE building. The exhibition, which sought to assess the sustainability of outcomes and processes of this first-ever multilateral summit, was opened by SG Thorbjørn Jagland.

### 7.2. Central European Initiative (CEI)

Set up in 1989 by Austria, Italy, Hungary and the SFR Yugoslavia, the Trieste-based Central European Initiative (CEI) consists of 18 Member States, of which ten also hold EU membership. The CEI is a political forum that strives to promote regional cooperation among the states of Central, East and South East Europe and seeks to assist non-EU members in their EU relations. CEI projects, which are funded from a range of sources including the EU, are important instruments in this respect and play a highly relevant role as multipliers. Another very distinctive tool developed by the CEI are the Knowhow Exchange Programmes (KEP). One such programme is also funded by the ADA (Austrian Development Agency). After Italy, where the CEI Secretariat is based, Austria is the initiative’s second largest contributor of funding. Alongside its project orientation, the organisation is increasingly developing into a bridge between the individual European (macro) regions. As a result of the Ukraine crisis, the three eastern EU Partner States in the CEI, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, have come to play a more important role. From 1 January to 31 December, Macedonia held the Presidency of the CEI. On 1 April Margot Klestil-Löffler was appointed Alternate Secretary General to work alongside SG Giovanni Caracciolo di Vietri (Italy). In May, a meeting of national coordinators was held in Vienna which was linked with a networking event involving Vienna-based international organisations.

### 7.3. Danube Commission

Headquartered in Budapest, the Danube Commission (DC) manages issues related to navigation on the Danube. Membership of the DC consists of the countries located along the Danube and the Russian Federation.
The economic situation of navigation on the Danube remains unsatisfactory and comparably poor use is still being made of the Danube as an inland waterway for the environmentally-friendly transport of goods; only passenger ship services continued to perform well.

The Commission continued its work on standardising the technical and nautical provisions, on fairway development, rehabilitation and maintenance, and on the regulation relating to the treatment of ship-borne waste and hazardous goods.

On 24 July, a framework agreement on institutional cooperation between the Secretariat of the DC and the EC Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE) was signed. By coordinating both institutions’ work, this agreement seeks to contribute to a higher level of standardisation in European inland waterway navigation.

No progress was, however, made with respect to the entry into force of the revised Belgrade Convention.

(Topics related to environmental protection of the Danube and its river basin are dealt with by the International Commission for the Protection of the River Danube, ICPDR. For information on the ICPDR, please see Chapter 6.9).
8. The International Protection of Human Rights

8.1. Introduction

The priorities of Austria’s human rights policy include freedom of religion and conscience, with a special focus on the protection of religious minorities, the protection of journalists, the promotion of the rights of the child and the protection of 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 (HRC). Other priorities pursued in the context of Austria’s international human rights policy include strengthening 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.

This year saw several reviews of Austria before UN human rights bodies. In October, the implementation of Austria’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) were subject to a review, followed by the review of Austria by the UN Committee against Torture in November. Both reviews translated in concrete recommendations to be implemented by Austria. Likewise in November, the HRC performed a review of the Austrian human rights situation in the context of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

8.2. Human Rights in the United Nations

8.2.1. Human Rights Council

The HRC is mandated with promoting and monitoring human rights around the globe. To this end, it holds at least three regular sessions a year in Geneva and may, as required, also convene for special sessions. Austria held its first membership of the HRC, which is composed of 47 states, from 2011 to 2014 and has already announced that it will stand for another three-year term from 2019–2021.

Every four years, all UN member states are subject to a review of their national human rights situation known as Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which is carried out by the HRC. In November, Austria was for the second time subject to such a review. In the interactive dialogue on 9 November, Federal Minister of Justice Wolfgang Brandstetter led the Austrian delegation. A total of 98 states from all regions were involved in reviewing Austria and contributed comments, questions and recommendations. During the oral dialogue, a total of 229 recommendations were made, of which Austria immediately accepted 135 and rejected 23. Until the final adoption of the
Providing concrete recommendations on improving the protection of human rights, Austria actively participated in 2015 in the reviews of Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Honduras, Kenya, Kirgizstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malawi, Mongolia, Myanmar, Ruanda, Sweden, Spain, Turkey and the USA.

The beginning of the **28th Regular Session of the HRC** in March was marked by the high-level segment attended by Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz, who dealt inter alia with the efforts launched by Austria to end the inhuman imprisonment of the Saudi blogger Raif Badawi, the protection of minorities and the promotion of freedom of speech. During his visit, Federal Minister Kurz also met the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Prince Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein for bilateral talks.

The resolution on the **right to privacy in the digital age**, introduced by Austria as one of the main sponsors, was adopted by consensus in the HRC. The efforts launched by a group of like-minded states led by Brazil and Germany since 2013 were effectively enhanced with the establishment of the mandate of a Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy in the Digital Age. The HRC appointed Professor. Joseph Cannataci (Malta) as the first-ever Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy.

During this session, the HRC also adopted resolutions on Syria, DPR of Korea, Iraq, Iran, Myanmar and a **number of African states**. Several initiatives aimed at achieving a resolution, dealt with the situation in the **occupied Palestinian Territories**. Supra-regional statements were also made on the human rights situation in Ukraine and in South Sudan. The negotiations on thematic resolutions focused inter alia on the EU resolution on **freedom of religion or belief, as well as on initiatives on the rights of the child, terrorism and human rights, the use of armed drones, and on the rights of persons with disabilities**.

During the 28th session, Austria also organised a number of successful **side events** on the topics of self-determination of persons with disabilities, implementation of linguistic rights of minorities, the use of barrel bombs in Syria and on the human rights aspects of over-incarceration and prison overcrowding.

At the **29th Regular Session of the HRC in June**, Austria – together with Morocco and several other countries – initiated a resolution on the “**negative impact of corruption on the enjoyment of human rights**”. The text of the resolution also makes appreciative mention of the International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA) in Laxenburg. The fact that the resolution was adopted by consensus and introduced by 144 co-sponsors, reflects the broad supra-regional support for addressing corruption issues in the context of the HRC.
On the initiative of the EU, the suppression of human rights in Belarus was condemned and the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus was extended for another year. With respect to South Sudan, it was decided to conduct a Human Rights Mission led by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The HRC also adopted resolutions on Ukraine, Syria and Eritrea as well as on the Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict with the votes of all EU Member States on the HRC. Other resolutions adopted dealt inter alia with the topics of violence against women (focus on domestic violence), on children and forced marriage, and on the human rights of migrants.

During the June session of the HRC, Austria organised side events on corruption in prison; protection of older women against violence, anonymity and encryption technologies and on the protection of freedom of expression online.

At the 30th regular session of the HRC in September, the Austrian initiative for a resolution on human rights in the administration of justice, including juvenile justice which had been co-sponsored by some 60 states, was adopted by consensus. The issues addressed by this resolution include the excessive use of pre-trial detention, over-incarceration and the problem of prison overcrowding.

In the context of this session, the adoption of thematic resolutions on preventing and countering violent extremism as well as on the death penalty was of major importance. The country resolutions adopted dealt with Syria, Sudan, Yemen, Central African Republic and the DR of the Congo.

The Independent UN Expert on the Enjoyment of All Human Rights by Older Persons, Rosa Kornfeld-Matte, presented her very positive report on her visit to Austria from 22 to 23 January. Austria also organised side events on the topics of safety of journalists, the rights of older persons, and on human rights and corruption.

On 2 October, Professor Katharina Pabel (University of Linz) was re-elected for a three-year term as a member of the HRC Advisory Committee.

In 2015, the HRC held special sessions on the terrorist attacks and the human rights violations by Boko Haram (April) and on the situation in Burundi (December).

The special session of the HRC on Boko Haram was convened on the initiative of the African Group and primarily sought to underline the clear commitment towards providing political support to the affected African states in the fight against religiously motivated terrorism.

As a result of the special session on Burundi, the HRC adopted a resolution by consensus which requests the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to urgently dispatch an expert mission composed of Special Rapporteurs to Burundi to investigate violations and abuses of human rights.
8.2.2. General Assembly

A total of 62 resolutions on human rights-related and social issues were dealt with and adopted by the Third Committee at the 70th session of the UNGA.

In the Third Committee, Austria introduced a resolution on the promotion of human rights of persons belonging to minorities, which was co-sponsored by 63 countries from all regions and adopted by consensus. For the first time ever it was possible to include the prevention of violence against minorities and the protection of minorities from violence in this resolution. The text also deals with women and children who belong to minorities and their increased need for protection in conflict situations. The resolution builds on the recommendations developed by the 7th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva.

Austria belonged to a small group of states which, for a third time, introduced a resolution on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity and also played an active role in this context. The resolution was adopted by consensus and the number of co-sponsors totalled 83, which marks an increase over the previous year. The core elements addressed by this resolution include a call on all UN member states towards ensuring a safe environment for journalists and taking concrete measures towards ensuring accountability for crimes against journalists. The inclusion of the need to respect human rights of journalists when states take action towards fighting terrorism and maintaining national security, marks an important further development. In the lead-up to the presentation to the UNGA of the report on the protection of sources and whistleblowers, prepared by UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression David Kaye, the MFA thus organised preparatory expert talks in Vienna in June.

From the Austrian point of view, the adoption of the traditional EU initiatives regarding the human rights situation in Myanmar and the DPR of Korea, and on freedom of religion or belief are to be considered a success. The unanimously adopted country resolution on Myanmar includes elements that recognise the positive developments on the ground, while at the same time addressing concrete expectations regarding full respect of human rights, and especially the human rights of minorities.

The negotiation process on the resolution on the rights of the child, initiated by the EU and Latin American states, which focused on the topic of education this year, again proved difficult. For the first time in many years, the resolution text was put to the vote, whose outcome was clearly in favour of the resolution. The EU and Austria also co-sponsored the resolutions on the human rights situation in Syria and in Iran. The resolution on freedom of religion or belief introduced by the EU and the resolution on religious intolerance introduced by the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), were again adopted by consensus. The negotiations on a resolution on contemporary forms of racism and glorification of Nazism and/or Neo-Nazism,
The International Protection of Human Rights

initiated by Russia, were overshadowed by the Ukraine crisis. Eventually, the EU Member States again jointly abstained from voting on this initiative, in which context the EU condemned all crimes committed during the Nazi regime, and 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 Moroccan Chairman of the Third Committee presented a resolution on the follow-up of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Negotiations also focused on a resolution on the improvement of the situation of women living in rural areas, which includes important references to education, data collection (such as the criterion of disability), involvement of women in conflict prevention and women’s sexual and reproductive rights, and a resolution on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. All these resolutions were adopted by consensus and co-sponsored by Austria.

Austria contributed pro-actively to the negotiations on numerous other resolutions and also assumed an active role within the EU, for instance by taking over the EU burden sharing regarding the resolution on the universal realization of the right of peoples to self-determination. Austria played a particularly active role in the negotiations on the resolution on human rights defenders, on women’s rights and the rights of the child, and on the world drug problem. In addition to the respective statements by the EU, Austria also contributed national statements on the topic of social development (presented by the Austrian Youth Delegate), on minorities, on freedom of opinion, expression and information, on freedom of religion or belief and on internally displaced persons. Austria furthermore participated pro-actively in the interactive dialogues with the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Representative of the UNSG for Children in Armed Conflict. Austria also contributed to a joint statement by 35 states on the human rights situation on the Crimea, and to several side events on the topics of civil society response and involvement of civil society in the migration and refugee crisis, protection of journalists’ sources and whistle blowers, prevention of gender-based killings of women and girls, as well as girls in the criminal justice system.

8.2.3. Commission on the Status of Women

The 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which was held in New York from 9 to 20 March, was dominated by the 20th anniversary of the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing and dedicated to the “Follow-up on the Fourth World Conference on Women and on the 23rd special session of the UN General Assembly (entitled Women 2000)”. The formal result produced by this meeting was a political declaration adopted by the political representatives of the UN member states. Participants also adopted a resolution on the working methods of the CSW.
Austria contributed actively to the negotiations and delivered a **national statement** in the general debate. It furthermore co-organised three very well attended side events on the topics of engaging men and boys in the promotion of gender equality, the role of national norms for gender equality, and on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and of UNSC resolution 1325.

### 8.3. Human Rights in the European Union

#### 8.3.1. 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 the EU’s human rights policy within the EU are dealt with by the EU Council Working Party on Fundamental Rights, Citizens’ Rights and Free Movement of Persons (FREMP). Issues related to the EU’s human rights policy towards third countries are addressed by the EU Council Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM), responsible for human rights issues in the EU’s external relations, in cooperation with geographical Council Working Parties. Austria continued its commitment towards 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.

In 2015, priority was attached to advancing the implementation of the EU Human Rights Policy for the CFSP and the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, adopted in 2012, with a view to further strengthening the EU’s effectiveness and coherence as a global power for the promotion of human rights. Following the evaluation of the first Action Plan, the new Action Plan for the period 2015–2019 was adopted in July by the EU External Relations Council. Setting out numerous concrete measures related to central human rights issues, this new plan seeks to establish coherent links between human rights and other EU foreign policy areas, such as trade, fighting terrorism, migration and development cooperation. The concrete measures foreseen in this plan aim inter alia 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. A review of the Action Plan’s implementation status is envisaged for 2017.

The mandate of the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis, was extended until 2017. In 2015, the EUSR continued his successful efforts towards promoting dialogue on human rights in the context of visits paid to Morocco, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Myanmar, China, Ruanda and South Africa. On the margins of a working visit by the EU Agency for
Fundamental Rights (FRA), EUSR Lambrinidis took part in a strategy discussion held at the MFA in September.

Identifying eleven priority areas, the EU Guidelines on Human Rights strive 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 measures for the EU’s permanent commitment to third countries on individual human rights issues such as 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, on combating violence against women, on international humanitarian law, on the human rights of LGBT persons, and on freedom of religion and belief. The Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline were the latest such guidelines to be adopted. 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 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. A total of 23 Austrians were selected to participate as short- and long-term observers in the seven missions to Nigeria, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Sri Lanka, Guinea, Myanmar and Tanzania conducted in 2015. Austria thus ranks fourth compared with other EU Member States.

The Vienna-based European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) provides advice to the European Commission, the Council, the European Parliament, other organs of the Union and the Member States. It collects information on the fundamental rights situation in the entire EU, and based on this information, it provides recommendations for improvement. Against the background of the current political developments, the FRA focused in 2015 in particular on the priorities of migration, integration, safety and security as well as the digital age. These topics will also be on the agenda of the Fundamental Rights Forum to be held in Vienna in June 2016. In 2015, the FRA assisted EU Member States by providing hands-on advice and support, such as a toolkit on legal immigration routes into the EU for people who require international protection, or a position paper on alternatives to detention of asylum seekers and deprivation of liberty for persons in return procedures.

Austria has cooperated closely with the FRA from the very beginning. Following an EU-wide call for applications, Michael O’Flaherty (Ireland) was selected and assumed office as the Agency’s new Director on 16 December.
The European Endowment for Democracy (EED) was set up in 2011 as an association under Belgian law and is funded by contributions from governments and the European Commission. Membership of the EED includes all EU Member States, Switzerland, and since 2015 also Norway. The EED was established to facilitate direct unbureaucratic funding of democracy activists and/or organisations that support democratic change and transition processes. In June, the EED’s Executive Director Jerzy Pomianowski visited Vienna.

8.3.2. 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. Topics that feature frequently in these talks include minority rights, women’s rights, the death penalty, freedom of religion or belief, democratisation, the rule of law, children’s rights and civil society development. The EU strives to actively involve civil society in these dialogues, for instance by organising joint preparatory meetings in the lead-up to the dialogues. The human rights dialogues are held on an alternating basis in the EU and in the respective partner country.

In 2015, EU human rights dialogues, consultations and subcommittee meetings were held with the African Union (AU), the EU candidate countries, Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Egypt, Georgia, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, the Republic of Korea, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Morocco, Mexico, Moldova, Myanmar (Burma), Pakistan, Peru, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, the USA, Uzbekistan, the United Arab Emirates and Vietnam. The dialogue with Iran has been suspended since 2004. No dialogue has been scheduled with the Russian Federation.

The EU-China Human Rights Dialogue was held this year in Beijing from 30 November to 1 December. Besides the treatment of human rights defenders and individual human rights cases, the EU inter alia addressed the situation of minorities in China, the topic of environmental protection and human rights as well as the issue of torture.

On 16 October, the representative of Thailand to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights Seree Nonthasoot travelled to Vienna for a working visit. He held talks with representatives from the office of the Austrian Disability Ombudsman, the FRA and the ADA on the situation of persons with disabilities in Austria and the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
8.4. Human Rights in the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe (CoE)’s human rights protection system is based on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the legally binding effect of the judgments passed by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Since the entry into force of Protocol 14 to the ECHR in 2010, the introduction of procedural improvements has enabled a significant reduction in the very high number of pending cases (more than 160,000 at that time). Between 1 January and 31 December, the number of pending cases thus further declined from 69,900 to 64,850.

On 26 and 27 March, the Belgian chair of the Committee of Ministers organised a conference in Brussels focusing on efforts towards further reform of the ECHR system, which built on the results produced by previous conferences held in Interlaken, Izmir and Brighton. After the largely successful reduction of the backlog of cases at the ECtHR, this year’s meeting focused on the implementation of ECtHR judgments by member states. After the largely successful reduction of the backlog of cases at the ECtHR, this year’s meeting focused on the implementation of ECtHR judgments by member states, which was also reflected in the Brussels Declaration passed by the conference, which was also reflected in the Brussels Declaration passed by the conference.

In light of the political security situation, the Ukraine (annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and armed conflict in eastern Ukraine) and France (terrorist attacks in Paris) suspended the application of individual provisions of the EHRC under Art. 15 (emergency clause). The non-implementation of ECtHR judgments has triggered controversial debates in the Council of Europe, inter alia with the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan and the United Kingdom.

In 2015, the ECtHR concluded a total of fifteen cases pending against Austria, in eight cases a judgment was delivered, in six 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 with regard to their compatibility with the ECHR by the ECtHR also based on individual applications. Finalised in April 2013, the European Commission submitted the draft agreement on this accession, to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) for review. In its opinion issued on 18 December 2014, the ECJ found that some items in the draft agreement on the accession of the EU to the ECHR were incompatible with Union law. On the status of the negotiations with the CoE on the EU’s accession to the ECHR, please see Chapter 2.3.8.

At the 125th Session of the Committee of Ministers (CM), held in Brussels on 19 May, CoE Secretary General Thorbjorn Jagland presented his second report on the status of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe, which builds on his first report (presented at the 124th Session of the Committee of Ministers held in Vienna in May 2014). The report that
Human Rights in the OSCE

takes a cross-cutting approach building on the term of “Democratic Security”, identified most urgent need for action in the CoE member states with respect to freedom of the media and independence of the judiciary. Policy options highlighted by this report relate especially to the consolidation and closing of gaps in the fields of CoE monitoring (for instance with respect to “frozen conflicts”).

The Ministers’ Deputies Committee (MDC) regularly deals with the full and worldwide abolition of the death penalty and adopted three declarations on executions in the USA and Japan.

The countries visited by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the CoE, Nils Muižnieks, included Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Georgia, Hungary, Norway (twice), San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain and Ukraine. His reports and statements on both country-specific and thematic developments contribute towards raising awareness of human rights in the member states.

The term of the Austrian judge at the ECtHR, Elisabeth Steiner, ended on 31 October. Based on a shortlist of three candidates submitted by the Federal Government, judge Gabriele Kucsko-Stadlmayer was elected in April by the Parliamentary Assembly (PA) as her successor and took office on 2 November.

The Austrian members currently represented on the monitoring bodies are Gerald Schöpfer (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, ECRI), Julia Kozma (European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, CPT), Helmut Sax (2nd President of the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, GRETA), Brigitta Busch (Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, FCNM), Dieter Halwachs (Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages) and Karin Lukas (European Committee of Social Rights, ECSR).

Rosa Logar was elected First Vice-President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence – GREVIO), the Permanent Representative of Austria to the CoE, Ambassador Rudolf Lennkh, was elected First Vice-Chair of the Committee of the Parties to the CoE Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

8.5. Human Rights in the OSCE

See Chapter 6.2.4.
8.6. Austrian Priorities in the Field of Human Rights

8.6.1. Freedom of Religion and Protection of Religious Minorities

In response to the global rise in violence and discrimination against religious minorities, Austria has stepped up its commitment to promoting religious freedom and the protection of religious minorities at bilateral and international level.

Austria has made this topic a priority of its work in the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and regularly addressed the difficult situation of religious minorities in the country debates and in the context of the Universal Periodic Reviews (UPRs) of countries. This approach is also in line with the increasing focus being placed by the EU on this topic. At multilateral level, the EU again introduced the annual thematic resolution on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in both the UNGA and the HRC which, together with the resolutions introduced by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), generally cover the topic of freedom of religion. At the 70th UNGA, Austria furthermore contributed a national statement to the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion of Belief Heiner Bielefeldt.

At 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 national minorities, inter-religious dialogue and improvement of the flow of communication within the EU.

Austria furthermore contributed to a supra-regional Contact Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB Contact Group), initiated by Canada, under which relevant information is exchanged and activities and projects in third countries are coordinated.

Austria participated as observer in the meeting held by the Contact Group in Brussels on 15 June.

In the context of the OSCE, Austria also provides pro-active support to initiatives aimed at the protection of religious minorities and freedom of religion or belief.

8.6.2. Human Rights of Children

The promotion and the protection of the rights of children are a major priority of Austrian foreign policy. Austria thus pro-actively supports strengthening children’s rights at international level.
At the 70th UNGA, Austria formally withdrew all its declarations and reservations relating to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and thus the convention is henceforth binding for Austria under international law without any restriction. Likewise at the UNGA, Austria supported the adoption of the resolution on the rights of the child. Austria also contributed proactively to the annual negotiations on the resolution on the rights of the child in the HRC in Geneva.

Austria cooperates closely with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Marta Santos Pais and also organises joint awareness-raising events, most recently in October on the topic of violence against girls.

On two levels, Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) is also committed to supporting the rights of the child in a targeted manner. On the one hand, ADC in all its activities – including political dialogue – takes special account of the needs and rights of children in the context of implementing the human rights approach. On the other hand, ADC promotes projects and programmes that are specifically tailored towards strengthening and promoting the rights of children. The relevant activities are directed inter alia towards creating education and training opportunities for children in armed conflict (EU Children for Peace Initiative), school education for nomad children and young people in Ethiopia as well as Roma children in South East Europe, including children with disabilities, programmes aimed at strengthening families via NGO financing in Uganda, Ethiopia and Tanzania.

In the context of the negotiations by the Open Working Group on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, Austria actively promoted greater consideration of the rights of the child. Projects aimed at strengthening children’s rights launched by the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) are funded via multilateral development cooperation.

8.6.3. Human Rights of Women

Improving the human rights situation of women has been a long-standing central concern of Austrian foreign policy. Austria participated actively in the 59th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (see Chapter 8.2.3.), in the “Global Leaders Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment” and in the open debates of the UN Security Council (UNSC) on the topic of women, peace and security that marked the 15th anniversary of UNSC resolution 325 (see Chapter 6.3.1.3.).

During the negotiations held in New York in the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, which were adopted on 25 September, Austria strongly supported the inclusion of a separate sustainability goal on gender equality and empowerment of women in the new Post–2015 Development Agenda. At the same time, Austria advocated the consideration of gender aspects also in the other sustainability goals.

Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a “Global Leaders Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment” was convened at the invitation of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and Chinese President Xi Jinping in New York on 27 September. At this event, the UN member states were invited to commit themselves to further implementing the Declaration and Platform for Action. In his statement, Federal President Heinz Fischer pledged to adopt a number of commitments and outlined the measures Austria is taking over the next few years in order to make further progress towards dismantling gender stereotypes, promoting gender equality in the labour market and in public life, in fighting violence against women and girls, in the healthcare field and in combatting discrimination. Austria furthermore contributed proactively to the development of the commitment statements made by the EU in this context.

In the Third Committee of the 70th Session of the UNGA (see Chapter 8.2.2.), Austria participated in the negotiations on a range of resolutions aimed at strengthening women’s rights. Austria, for instance, actively supported and contributed to the negotiations on the resolution on the follow-up on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action initiated by Morocco, the resolution on the improvement of the situation of women living in rural areas facilitated by Mongolia, and the resolution on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) sponsored by the Nordic states. It was possible to inter alia strengthen the texts with respect to the role of and the need for sufficient and reliable financing of UN Women, references to education, data collection, involving women in conflict prevention, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. All these resolutions were supported and co-sponsored by Austria.

In the context of the sessions held by the HRC in June and September, Austria supported a number of resolutions on violence against women, forced and child marriage, and on eliminating discrimination against women as co-sponsor and also contributed pro-actively to the negotiations. Furthermore, Austria co-organised a side event on the topic of violence against older women.

In the context of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) carried out by the HRC, Austria regularly provides recommendations on equality between women and men, stronger political participation of women and ending discrimination and violence against women (in January for instance on Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Spain and Turkey; in May on Bulgaria, Croa-
Austrian Priorities in the Field of Human Rights

tia, Honduras, Libya, Malawi and Mongolia; and in November on Georgia and Myanmar).

In the EU context, Austria participated actively in the meetings of the EU Task Force on UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000) in Brussels, which focused this year on the topic of women, peace and security, and – in light of the 15th anniversary of its adoption – on measures aimed at improving the implementation of resolution 1325.

On 4 May, Rosa Lugar (the head of the Domestic Abuse Intervention Centre Vienna) was elected First Vice-President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), the independent expert body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the CoE Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) by the Parties.

Alongside a voluntary contribution to the core budget of UN Women, Austria made a financial contribution to the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women to support UNiTE – the UNSG’s system-wide campaign to end violence against women. Furthermore, Austria co-funded a project in Brazil aimed at enhanced coordination of the judiciary in combating lethal violence against women.

Gender equality, the empowerment of women and the protection of their rights are also among the declared objectives pursued by Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC). Apart from taking special account of the needs and rights of women and men with respect to all activities (gender mainstreaming), specific projects and programmes aimed at strengthening the rights and the participation of women and girls were supported (including, for instance, the Gender, Peace and Security programme of the African Union (AU), aimed at supporting the development of effective mechanisms for the implementation of the latter’s action plans and measures towards promoting gender equality and strengthening the role of women in peace processes; support is also provided to projects aimed at preventing violence in Central America and strengthening women’s rights in Egypt, Nigeria and South Sudan). With a view to increasing the involvement of men and boys in preventing violence against women and promoting gender equality, a project was financed in the Western Balkans.

8.6.4. Freedom of the Media and Protection of Journalists

In view of the global rise in targeted attacks against journalists and the problem of widespread impunity, Austria – building on its recent membership of the HRC – made improving journalists’ safety and defending freedom of the press and the media a major concern of its human rights activities. Building on the first resolution on the safety of journalists, introduced by Austria and adopted with broad support from the international community in the HRC in September 2012, Austria again launched a number of activities in 2015 in
order to better enshrine this important topic in the UN human rights bodies and to further develop its content.

The objective pursued was to consolidate the broad supra-regional coalition of states and civil society for the safety of journalists and to raise awareness for measures to be taken at national, regional and international level in order to create a safe working environment for journalists. In this spirit, Austria (co)organised side events at the HRC sessions in June and September on potential synergies with the CoE in the field of protection of the freedom of expression online and on the safety of journalists.

On 12 June, expert consultations on “The Protection of Sources and Whistleblowers” involving the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression David Kaye, were supported by Austria and organised in cooperation with the International Press Institute (IPI).

For the third time, the resolution on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, which was co-sponsored by Austria, was adopted unanimously. Austria was able to contribute substantially to the positive further development of the resolution, for instance through the inclusion of references to the need for adapting laws, policies and practices which impede the work of journalists, or with regard to wording aimed at promoting the respect of human rights in the context of measures towards fighting terrorism and maintaining national security.

Building on the results of the thematic debate by the Ministers’ Deputies Committee (MDC) initiated by the Austrian chairmanship of the CoE in December 2013, an internet platform dedicated to the security of journalists was made available online. Relevant incidents reported by specific NGOs are entered in this database. Austria contributes regularly to the respective debates in the CoE in which the situation of journalists in the various countries is critically addressed.

Austria participated in the fifth Freedom Online conference in Ulan Bator Tallinn on 4 to 5 May. Austria is a founding member of the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC), initiated by the Netherlands in December 2011. This informal group of interested states supports respect for human rights on the internet worldwide and currently consists of 29 members. Spain, New Zealand, Norway and Australia joined in 2015. On the margins of the conference, a NGO roundtable on freedom of the press in Mongolia was co-organised by Austria. In the context of this meeting, the topics of online freedom, de-criminalisation of defamation and censorship were discussed with members of Mongolian civil society.

8.6.5. Protection of Minorities

The protection of the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities has traditionally been an Austrian priority issue within the UN. Austria regu-
Austrian Priorities in the Field of Human Rights

larly introduces thematic resolutions on this topic both in the **HRC** and in the **UNGA**. In the 70th UNGA, the resolution on the protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities was strengthened with the inclusion of important aspects, such as the protection of minorities against violence and the difficult situation of women and children belonging to minorities. The resolution builds on the recommendations prepared by the UN Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva, supported by Austria, and constitutes another Austrian contribution towards the protection of minorities by the UN.

The **8th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues**, held from 24 to 25 November, dealt with the topic of minorities in the Criminal Justice System. Initiated by Austria, this forum provides an important platform for dialogue on the implementation of the UN Declaration on Minority Rights and focuses on giving space to civil society and minority representatives from all around the world. This years’ session analysed the large number of challenges minorities are facing in the judicial and penal system and adopted relevant recommendations to the HRC. Austria was again able to enhance its visibility as a supporter of this forum, thus expressing its commitment to promoting the issue of minorities within the UN context. The resolutions on the protection of persons belonging to minorities that are regularly initiated by Austria include concrete recommendations stemming from the Forum on Minority Issues as instructions for action aimed at promoting the implementation of international obligations. The future design of the Forum on Minority Issues was discussed in a panel debate, which also involved an Austrian representative and was organised by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Furthermore, Austria provides special support to the mandate of the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, which has been held by the Hungarian Rita Izsak since August 2011. Her priorities include the protection of religious minorities, minority protection in conflict prevention, recognition issues, women as members of minorities and minorities in the context of reaching the Millennium Development Goals.

In the **EU** context, major importance is attached to the protection and integration of Roma. This is also underlined by the review of the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies by 2020. Austria works consistently on implementing its National Roma Integration Strategy and regularly reports to the European Commission on progress made. This is done by the National Contact Point at the Federal Chancellery, which inter alia also reviews the implementation of the national concepts for the inclusion of Roma in Austria. The Contact Point also organises regular meetings of the dialogue platform for Roma focusing on specific topics related to the inclusion of Roma.

Austria cooperates closely with the **Council of Europe (CoE)** monitoring mechanisms related to minorities. The recommendations made to Austria in 2012 by the two committees – the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Committee of
Experts of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages – serve as a blueprint for further strengthening the protection of minorities in Austria.

In autumn, the Fourth Austrian National Report on the implementation of the obligations under the CoE Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was submitted to the competent bodies in Strasbourg and is currently being reviewed by a committee of experts.

In 2013, Astrid Thors (Norway) was appointed Fourth High Commissioner on National Minorities of the OSCE. This function is another important element in the densely structured network for the protection of minorities at European level.

### 8.6.6. 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 comprehensive and informed understanding, awareness of human rights shall thus be sustainably strengthened and implemented in society. As a member of the UNESCO Executive Committee (2011–2015), Austria defined human rights education as a priority and was able to continue its commitment towards enshrining human rights and tolerance education in the international educational agenda. In this spirit, Austria initiated a decision on enshrining the topic of Global Citizenship Education in the UNESCO programme, which was unanimously adopted at the Executive Board meeting in spring 2015. As a member of the core group on Education against Radicalisation, launched by the USA, Austria was invited to the “High-Level Event on Preventing Violent Extremism through Education“, held in the context of the 38th session of the UNESCO General Conference in November. Funded by the MFA, Professor Wolfgang Benedek (from the European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, ETC, in Graz) participated as panellist and was able to successfully and very visibly introduce the human rights aspect in the debate.

The “Understanding Human Rights” manual on human rights education, published by the ETC Graz, has enabled Austria to provide an important tool that is used towards this end worldwide. The manual has already been translated into 17 languages and is used successfully by numerous countries and regions in training and education programmes.

### 8.6.7. Combating the Death Penalty

The consistent efforts towards the worldwide abolition of the death penalty enjoy top priority on Austria’s foreign policy agenda. Together with a large
group of states from all regions, Austria supports the worldwide abolition of the death penalty. The ongoing trend towards banning capital punishment is also reflected by the fact that states such as Fiji and Surinam abolished the death penalty in 2015.

For Austria, the relevant efforts by the United Nations, the creation of a worldwide alliance against executions, and the EU Guidelines on the Death Penalty aiming at the worldwide abolition of capital punishment are the key tools in combating the death penalty. In the UN Human Rights Council, Austria co-sponsored an initiative against the death penalty, which focuses primarily on linking capital punishment with torture and inhuman treatment. The relevant resolution (30/5) was adopted on 1 October with 26 votes in favour, 13 votes against and eight abstentions. In September, Austria also contributed to the debate on the report prepared by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the impact of the worldwide drug problem on human rights.

The subject of death penalty is regularly addressed in bilateral contacts with states that use capital punishment. In the context of the Universal Periodic Reviews (UPRs) of states conducted by the UN Human Rights Council in 2015, Austria recommended abolishing the death penalty and/or introducing a moratorium particularly to the USA and Belarus. The MFA also cooperates closely with local and international civil society organisations that support the abolition of the death penalty.

8.6.8. **International Humanitarian Law**

See Chapter 9.4.

8.6.9. **Combating Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking is a grave violation of the most fundamental human rights. According to estimates by the UN, several million people – mainly women and children – fall victim to human trafficking every year. According to UN estimates, profits of 32 billion US dollars are generated with the “human being as a commodity” every year. Alongside arms and drug trafficking, trafficking in human beings is thus one of the largest sectors of transnational organised crime worldwide.

Due to its geographical location at the centre of Europe, Austria is affected by human trafficking both as a transit and a destination country. Human trafficking cases in Austria predominantly involve sexual exploitation, but also include labour exploitation and child trafficking.

**Austria** is a **party to all relevant international legal instruments on combating human trafficking**, including particularly the “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Chil-
The International Protection of Human Rights

dren Suppleenting the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime” (2005) and the “Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings” (2006). National implementation of the CoE Convention was evaluated by the independent expert group GRETA in 2014/2015, which reported largely positive results for Austria. Austria has continued its **intensive cooperation with international organisations** such as the Vienna-based UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the **UN Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons** (chaired by former Federal Minister Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)).

On a national level, the efforts towards combating human trafficking are based on the National Action Plan on Combating Human Trafficking 2015–2017, adopted by the Federal Government on 21 April, and coordinated by the **Task Force on Human Trafficking** chaired by the **National Coordinator on Combating Human Trafficking**, Ambassador Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger, Director General of the Service Section at the MFA. Relevant public and government institutions, federal provinces and NGOs cooperate closely within the Task Force. In 2015, social partner representatives were included as permanent members in the Task Force. On 18 May, a province-level **conference on combating human trafficking** was held in Klagenfurt that was particularly dedicated to topics falling into the competence of the federal provinces.

With a view to promoting prevention and/or awareness-raising, the MFA organised the annual **public event “Gemeinsam gegen Menschenhandel”** (joining forces against human trafficking) at the Vienna Diplomatic Academy on 14 October. The event that marked the EU Anti-Trafficking-Day 2015, focused on the topic of human trafficking in times of growing migration flows and also featured the **exhibition “Human Trafficking – Slavery of the 21st Century”**, which had been coordinated by the MFA.

Within the framework of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC), Austria assisted potential victims of human trafficking locally in the countries of origin, for instance through projects implemented by the IOM and the UNODC in West Africa, South East Europe and Moldova.

In order to enhance the **protection of private domestic staff** of diplomats or international officials accredited to Austria, the MFA, in cooperation with victim protection institutions, developed a wide range of control measures aimed at preventing potential exploitation. Austria has assumed a leading role in these efforts at international level.

### 8.7. The International Criminal Court

The **International Criminal Court (ICC)** is a permanent international court. It was established by the Rome Statute (RS) of 1998 and is based in The Hague. It has jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes
The International Criminal Court

(under certain conditions also the crime of aggression as of 1 January 2017), provided that they were committed after the RS came into force on 1 July 2002, either on the territory or by a national of a State Party. The RS stipulates 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 prosecution. The UNSC may also refer a situation to the ICC, even if the states in question are not State Parties to the RS. Since the accession of Palestine on 2 January (that lodged a declaration under Art. 12 par. 3 of the RS accepting the jurisdiction of the ICC since 13 June 2014), 123 states are party to the RS as of the end of 2015.

At the end of 2015, nine situations were pending with the ICC, involving the DR of the Congo, Uganda, Central African Republic, Darfur/Sudan (referral by UNSC resolution 1593 (2005), Libya (referral by UNSC resolution 1970 (2011), Cote d’Ivoire, Kenya and Mali. On 8 September, Ukraine – which is not a State Party to the RS – lodged another declaration under Article 12 (3) of the RS accepting the jurisdiction of the ICC retroactively over crimes committed on its territory since 22 February 2014. On 13 October, the ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda requested authorisation from the Pre-Trial Chamber I to open a formal investigation into the Situation of Georgia in relation to alleged crimes committed in the context of the August 2008 armed conflict.

On 16 January, Dominic Ongwen, Brigade Commander of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, against whom an international arrest warrant was issued in 2005, was handed over to the ICC. Preliminary proceedings to clarify the question as to whether there is sufficient evidence for opening proceedings before the Pre-Trial Chamber are scheduled for January 2016.

On 2 September, the trial against Bosco Ntaganda regarding the situation in the DR of the Congo was opened. Ntaganda is tried for having committed numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity between 2002 and 2003. On 13 November, the Appeals Chamber decided that the time Germain Katanga, former Rebel leader in the DR of the Congo, had spent in detention at the ICC, which amounts to two thirds of the 12 years of imprisonment he had been sentenced to by the judgment passed on 7 March 2014, is to be deducted from the sentence.

On 10 September, the Pre-Trial Chamber published two arrest warrants against Paul Gicheru and Philip Kipkoech Bett for influencing witnesses regarding cases in connection with the situation in Kenya, which had been issued under seal in March.

Based on a previously issued arrest warrant, Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi was transferred to the ICC on 26 September for war crimes consisting in intentionally directing attacks against religious and historic buildings in Mali.

On 29 September, a trial for corruptly influencing witnesses was opened against Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo and four other accused in the case of Pros-
The International Protection of Human Rights

ecutor vs. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo regarding the situation in the Central African Republic.

The main items on the agenda of the 14th Session of the Assembly of States Parties (ASP) to the RS, held in The Hague from 18 to 26 November, were relations between the ICC and the African Union (AU) and the negotiations on the ICC budget for 2016. The resolution on the ICC budget 2016, whose negotiations had been chaired by Austria, was again adopted by consensus. The State Parties also agreed to delete Art. 124 of the RS, which had provided new State Parties with the opportunity to suspend the ICC’s jurisdiction over war crimes for a period of seven years.

At the request of South Africa, a plenary debate was held on the question of the application and implementation of Articles 97 and 98 of the RS. The request was submitted against the backdrop of the non-implementation by South Africa of an arrest warrant issued against the Sudanese President Al Bashir, who had travelled to South Africa to attend an AU summit and was allowed to leave the country without being arrested. On the concerns voiced by South Africa regarding the consultations under Art. 97 and the interpretation of Articles 27 and 98 of the RS, a compromise text acceptable for all parties was agreed on for the ASP report.

Despite serious concerns by the ICC and numerous States Parties regarding the independence of the ICC, a plenary debate was held at the request of Kenya on the application of the amendments to the ICC’s Rules of Procedure adopted in 2013 regarding the use of pre-recorded witness testimony. Kenya demanded confirmation that the amended Rule 68 would not be applied retroactively to cases that had been pending prior to its entry into force in 2013 (such as the proceedings against Kenyan Vice-President Ruto). As this issue was pending before the Appeals Chamber, many States Parties regarded this demand inadmissible interference with an ongoing trial. After Kenya had openly threatened to leave the session prematurely and to withdraw from the ICC, the Senegalese ASP President Kaba suggested a compromise text for the ASP report which was eventually adopted. In a joint statement Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Austria voiced their concerns over the content and about the way in which the compromise had been reached.

Austria is among the traditional supporters of the ICC. It was, for instance, the first State Party to sign an agreement with the ICC on the enforcement of sentences and held discussions on an arrangement on witness protection. The amendment to the Criminal Code (Federal Law Gazette I No. 106/2014) by which Austrian criminal law is adapted to the crimes set out in the RS (by including, for instance, crimes against humanity and a catalogue of war crimes) entered into force on 1 January.
9. Austrian Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief

9.1. Austrian Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief

9.1.1. 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 of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, the Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports, the federal provinces, municipalities and other public institutions.

An increasingly large number of people worldwide depends on humanitarian aid. The number, scope and level of complexity of disasters and risks has clearly risen over the last few years. Armed, long-standing conflicts that are often fought within states have become a more frequent feature. The number of refugees and internally displaced persons has reached the highest level since the Second World War. As has been the case in the previous years, the dramatic humanitarian crises triggered by the conflicts in Syria and Iraq defined the priorities of bilateral humanitarian aid. Further priorities were the heavy earthquake in Nepal and the conflict in eastern Ukraine. In connection with the Syria crisis, a total of some 10.4 million euros was made available for providing basic services and food aid as well as regional refugee assistance. Some 2.9 million euros were made available from the Foreign Disaster Relief Fund (FDRF) for refugee assistance in Turkey and in Lebanon, and for the provision of basic services to internally displaced persons in Syria. The Austrian Development Agency (ADA) contributed 1.5 million euros to the EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis (“Madad Fund”) and supported refugee projects run by Austrian non-governmental organisations in Jordan. The Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports provided food aid for internally displaced persons and Syrian refugees in the region totalling 5.45 million euros. In response to the humanitarian emergency situation in Iraq, a total of 2.45 million euros from FDRF and ADA funds was made available to support the provision of basic care services to internally displaced persons and refugees as well as for economic stimulus measures at local level to enable quick return of internally displaced persons to the areas that have been liberated from ISIL/Da’esh. In addition, the acquisition of mine detection equipment and protective gear for the regional government Kurdistan-Iraq was financed with these funds. With a view to alleviating the consequences of the earthquake in Nepal, a total of 0.5 million euros from the FDRF and 250,000 euros in food aid were made available to the suffering population. As a result of the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, a total of 1 million euros from the FDRF and the ADA was made available for providing basic services to internally displaced persons. In addition, benefits in kind, i.e., tent heaters, financed from ADA funds and handled by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, were made available to internally displaced person in Ukraine (please also see Chapter 9.1.1.1.). With a view to alleviat-
ing the impacts of the serious humanitarian crises in South Sudan, Ethiopia and Yemen food aid funded by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management was provided to the affected population.

In 2015, total bilateral humanitarian aid, including humanitarian aid for international disasters coordinated by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, amounted to 19.63 million euros. Funds and assistance provided were channelled through humanitarian organisations such as the UN, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movements and Austrian NGOs. Together with the Federal Ministry of Finance, it has been possible to achieve a four-fold increase in funding for the Foreign Disaster Relief Fund from 2016 onwards, from currently 5 million euros to 20 million euros.

9.1.1.1. 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 EC/Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC).

Following civil unrest in Ukraine in January, Austria supported the Ukrainian civil protection authorities and made available 25 gas fired heaters for family tents. To alleviate the impacts of the flooding in Albania in February relief supplies including 1,000 blankets, 500 camp beds, 20 family tents and 8 electrical generators were made available. After the heavy earthquake in Nepal in April, two national experts of SARUV (Search and Rescue Unit Vorarlberg) were seconded to support local authorities. Following the environmental disaster in Guatemala in June, Austria provided one national expert to support an EC/UN mission (analysis of drinking water reserves). In response to the flooding in Macedonia in August, a national expert from the Province of Lower Austria was made available. In the aftermath of the flooding in Myanmar in August, a total of 10,000 mosquito nets as well as 2,000 plastic tarpaulins for the establishment of emergency shelters were shipped to Myanmar with logistical support from the Austrian Red Cross and handed over to UN staff. In addition, a national UNDAC member supported a local OCHA mission. In response to the migration crisis in Slovenia in October, Austria made available 900 pieces of sanitary protective clothing, 500 winter sleeping bags, and 2,500 woollen blankets. Providing assistance in the context of the migration crisis in Croatia in October, Austria made available 50,000 disposable gloves, 2,500 woollen blankets, 500 winter sleeping bags and 24,000 rain ponchos. In the context of the migration crisis in Serbia in October, 50,000 disposable gloves and 500 pillows were made available. In the context of the migration crisis in Greece in December, 1,000 winter sleeping bags, 30,000 rain ponchos and 500 camping beds were made available.
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.

9.1.2. Multilateral Humanitarian Aid

9.1.2.1. Austrian Food Aid

The provision of food aid by Austria is generally based on Austria’s membership of the Food Assistance Convention, which replaced the previously applicable Food Aid Convention. By ratifying the convention at the beginning of 2013, Austria committed itself to providing annual food assistance to food-insecure third countries (totalling 1.7 million euros in 2015). In 2015, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management launched a reorganisation of food aid, which will be handled based on a cooperation agreement concluded with the ADA. Alongside reducing the administrative burden and enabling synergies to be used, this is to facilitate inter alia a focussed implementation of the Development Cooperation Strategy adopted by the Federal Government in the field of food aid. Austria supported relief projects implemented by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) in Syria, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Yemen and Nepal.

In response to the refugee problem that became increasingly pressing from summer onwards and the dramatic humanitarian situation of Syrian refugees who had sought refuge in the camps set up in neighbouring countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt), the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management – in addition to the support outlined above – made available one-time funding of 5 million euros for a dedicated WFP relief programme. Thus the motion for a resolution adopted by the National Council on 24 September 2015, 514/UEA, had been implemented.

9.1.2.2. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

Set up in 1863, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been active in more than 80 countries. Together with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the national organisations, it made an important contribution towards alleviating humanitarian suffering. Austria supported the ICRC’s operational work in the field of provision of basic services to the people in Iraq and in Ukraine. Austria also contributed to the ICRC’s headquarters budget. Funds were made available to the IFRC for the provision of assistance to internally displaced persons and refugees in Iraq and the earthquake victims in Nepal. Besides, funding was made available to the ICRC for implementing food aid projects in South Sudan, Ethiopia and Yemen (please also see Chapter 9.1.2.1).
9.2. Humanitarian Aid in the Context of the United Nations

9.2.1. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is responsible for international coordination of humanitarian aid 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. 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 efforts through an untied contribution to the core budget. In addition to these contributions, OCHA received funding to coordinate refugee aid and relief in Syria and in Ukraine. In October, OCHA representatives paid a working visit to Vienna.

9.2.2. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is one of the largest UN relief organisations. It operates in 125 countries, employs some 9,300 staff and funds its activities mainly through voluntary contributions from its member states. This year, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, former Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres, ended his more than ten years of activity at the helm of the organisation. The humanitarian crises in Syria and Iraq and the humanitarian emergencies and distress in other regions of the world, such the Horn of Africa, and the massive expulsions, displacements and refugee movements triggered by these crises faced the UNHCR with particular challenges in 2015.

As has already been the case in previous years, Austria provided an untied core contribution to UNHCR also in 2015. In addition, Austria supported the relief activities launched by UNHCR for internally displaced persons in Syria and in northern Iraq as well as for Syrian refugees in the region, especially in Turkey. In 2015, UNHCR was thus again one of the largest single recipients of Austrian humanitarian assistance.

9.2.3. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP)

Set up in 1961, the Rome-based UN World Food Programme (WFP) is the UN’s largest humanitarian organisation. By way of the WFP, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management provided food aid to victims of the earthquake in Nepal and for internally displaced
persons in Syria and refugees in the region. The relevant funding was handled by the ADA.

9.2.4. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA)

As in previous years, Austria made core payments to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to support projects in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. In addition, the ADA also provided financial assistance to the UNRWA healthcare programme.

9.3. 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 some 1.5 billion euros. The largest portions of funds were used to provide aid for the humanitarian crises on the African continent and in Syria.

9.4. International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

From 8 to 10 December, the 32nd Conference of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent was held in Geneva. Convening every four years, this meeting involves the ISCRC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the recognised National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the States Parties to the Geneva Conventions. Austria was represented at the conference by a national delegation and a delegation from the Austrian Red Cross.

In its statement to the plenary, Austria referred to the current challenges being faced by IHL, pointing especially to the frequent lack of compliance by non-government actors, the destruction of cultural heritage, attacks against protected individuals and objects and the ongoing lack of clarity regarding the relationship between IHL and human rights. Austria highlighted its long-standing support of efforts aimed at strengthening international humanitarian law. Addressing the challenges resulting from migration, Austria also took the opportunity to thank civil society and most of all the Austrian Red Cross and other volunteers for their support.

The conference focused on attempts towards strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law and legal protection for persons deprived of their liberty in relation to armed conflict. Regarding strengthening compliance with IHL, however, some states opposed a proposal prepared as a result of long years of consultations by the ICRC and Switzerland, namely to provide for annual meetings of states to deal with IHL issues. The resolution
that was eventually adopted by the conference thus merely provides for the continuation of the consultation process on enhancing the effectiveness of such a compliance mechanism. Likewise, the resolution on legal protection for persons deprived of their liberty in relation to armed conflict only led to the adoption of a mandate to further deal with this matter.

In the context of the conference, Austria, together with Mexico and the ICRC, organised two side events on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Moreover, Austria made pledges, some together with the Austrian Red Cross, that are to be implemented by the next conference in 2019 and relate to activities in the following areas: humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, activities against cluster munitions, anti-personnel mines and explosive weapons in populated areas, implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), organising seminars aimed at raising awareness of and disseminating IHL, providing further support to the initiative launched by the ICRC and Switzerland to strengthen compliance with the IHL and sharing it with the young generation. In addition, Austria supported some pledges by other states and institutions including, for instance, protection of education and education institutions during armed conflict, also in the context of joint pledges made by all EU Member States.

The pledge to organise seminars on sharing and disseminating IHL, which had already been made at previous conferences, was implemented in 2015. Together with the Austrian Red Cross and the universities of Graz and Linz, the MFA organised a conference on autonomous weapons in Linz on 9 October, which dealt with the legal problems related to using such weapons (potential criminal liability and responsibility of states).

### 9.5. Global Environmental Protection Agreements

In the context of disaster management, the focus is not only placed on managing the consequences, but also on addressing the root causes of such events (please also see Chapter 13.3.).
10. Global Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Means of Delivery

10.1. Introduction

Disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction as well as arms control are central objectives in the pursuit of international security policy. Austria, which plays a leading and pro-active role in this context, places its main focus on the humanitarian dimension and the protection, safety and security of each individual citizen. Austria has played a pioneering role in multilateral nuclear disarmament initiatives and continues to advocate introducing a legally binding prohibition of nuclear weapons. Austria’s active role in the field of multilateral disarmament was clearly illustrated by the humanitarian pledge as presented at the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons of December 2014. The pledge sets an international benchmark on the way towards a world free of nuclear weapons, which framed the discussions during the NPT Review Conference in May and at the First Committee of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in October.

The successful completion of the negotiations between the E3/EU+3 (China, Germany, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the USA), led by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (EUHR), and Iran in Vienna can be considered a success. On 14 July, agreement was reached on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), whose implementation is verified by the IAEA that is likewise based in Vienna.

With respect to chemical weapons and the developments in Syria, Austria supported the destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons arsenal, inter alia by providing relevant expert knowledge.

Alongside disarmament of weapons of mass destruction, conventional arms control was another key topic on the agenda. The entry into force of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) on 24 December 2014 and the organisation of the second preparatory meeting for the first Conference of States Parties in Vienna marked an important step towards enhanced arms control.
10.2. Arms Control and Disarmament in the Field of Weapons of Mass Destruction

10.2.1. Initiatives for the Worldwide Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

Nuclear disarmament and the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons leading to a world free of weapons of mass destruction are among the priorities of Austria’s foreign and security policy. Austria holds the view that the proliferation of nuclear weapons can only be prevented by a general prohibition and eventual elimination of such weapons. The most important point of reference for the multilateral initiatives that have been launched by Austria to date was the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in December 2014. The Austrian pledge issued on this occasion, in which Austria committed itself to vigorously pursue its efforts towards nuclear disarmament, was subsequently embraced by more than 120 states and internationalised as Humanitarian Pledge. Also referred to as Humanitarian Initiative, this Austrian approach then had a strong bearing on the discussions during the NPT Review Conference in May, where Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz – on behalf of 159 states – delivered a statement on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. In October, the UNGA’s First Committee on disarmament and international security, placed a strong focus on four nuclear disarmament resolutions. Austria again adopted a proactive approach and introduced two resolutions on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and on the Pledge, which were eventually both adopted by the UNGA, winning the support of more than two thirds of States. Based on a resolution that was also co-initiated by Austria, an open-ended working group aimed at taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations was established in Geneva. Thus, the humanitarian dimension was successfully put on the UN agenda also for the year 2016.

10.2.2. 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), with its 189 States Parties, has formed the legal basis of the international nuclear regime whilst serving as the cornerstone of nuclear non-proliferation. The treaty obligates its States Parties to renounce nuclear weapons and at the same time establishes the peaceful use of nuclear energy as a right. The five nuclear weapons states recognised in the treaty – China, France, the UK, Russia and the USA – for their part, 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 Democratic People’s Republic of North Korea declared its withdrawal from the NPT in 2003. The States Parties meet every five years for a review
conference in order to evaluate the implementation of the NPT. Major challenges for the NPT are the slow progress made by nuclear weapons states in putting disarmament commitments into practice, and violations of non-proliferation obligations.

From 27 April to 22 May, the ninth Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT convened in New York. Despite lengthy negotiations it proved impossible to reach agreement on a final document. Central topics for discussion were the question of establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, and lack of progress on nuclear disarmament. As the coordinator of the humanitarian group, Austria was able to shift the negotiations’ focus to the humanitarian dimension of nuclear weapons by making a humanitarian statement on behalf of 159 states.

10.2.3. 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 its draft by the UNGA in 1996, the CTBT has been signed by 183 States and ratified by 164. Thanks to its international monitoring system the CTBT will, following its entry into force, make the secret development of nuclear weapons impossible. However, as to date eight of the key States listed in Annex 2, namely Egypt, China, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and the USA, have not ratified the treaty, the CTBT has as yet not entered into force. The CTBT Preparatory Commission has in the meantime made considerable 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 radiological measurements following the nuclear power plant disaster in Fukushima (Japan). The monitoring system is supplemented by an inspection regime enshrined in the treaty. In June, the CTBT Science and Technology Conference, held in Vienna, facilitated synergies in the exchange between science and research with the organisation’s expertise.

10.2.4. 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. Again in 2015, the 65 Member States, including Austria since 1996, could, however, not overcome the political differences on disarmament issues, and the resulting blockade of substantial negotiations that has now been ongoing for some 19 years.
10.2.5. 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 192 States Parties, the convention has now come close to reaching its stated objective of having universal validity. The UN member States that are still outside of the convention are Angola, Egypt, Israel (signatory state), North Korea and South Sudan. Three States Parties (the USA, Russia and Libya) have not yet fully destroyed their chemical weapons arsenals.

Although the destruction of the chemical weapons arsenal of Syria has largely been completed, poison gas (mainly chlorine gas) was repeatedly used in the Syrian civil war also in 2015, as confirmed by the fact-finding mission set up by the Director-General of Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). On 7 August, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2235, by which a Joint Investigative Mechanism was established to ascertain responsibility for these incidents. An initial report prepared by this body is expected for February 2016.

10.2.6. Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

Signed in 1972, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) prohibits the development, production and stockpiling of biological and toxin weapons. Currently, 173 countries are States Parties to the BWC and nine countries are signatory States. In the annual experts meetings and meetings of States Parties, deliberations focus on the development of measures aimed at enhancing biosafety, monitoring, training and exchange of experience. In Austria, a seminar on bio-security as current challenge to politics and science, organised jointly by the MFA, the Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports and the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna on 25 June, has contributed to raising awareness of this important topic. The findings produced by this seminar were set out in a working paper presented to the conference of the States Parties to the BWC held in Geneva from 14 to 18 December. In contrast to the Chemical Weapons Convention, the BWC is not equipped with a verification system. Negotiations towards setting up such a system failed in 2001 and could not be resumed since then.

10.2.7. Ballistic Missiles

Along with the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the Hague Code of Conduct (HCoC) is the only instrument dealing with the non-proliferation of ballistic missiles. Chaired by Canada, the 14th Regular Meeting of Subscribing States convened in Vienna from 28 to 29 May.
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 137 States have subscribed to the HCoC, which receives substantial support from the EU.

10.3. Arms Control and Disarmament in the Field of Conventional Weapons

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

The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction (Ottawa Convention) entered into force in 1999. Currently, 162 countries are States Parties to the convention. The Ottawa Convention’s success is reflected in the fact that sixteen years after its entry into force, both use and production of anti-personnel mines have been significantly reduced, while 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 clearly declined. From 30 November to 4 December, the Fourteenth Conference of States Parties to the Convention was held in Geneva.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions (Oslo Convention) entered into force in 2010. By the end of the year, a total of 98 States out of 118 signatories had ratified the Oslo Convention. The Convention makes an essential contribution to the further development of international law. 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 First Review Conference of the Oslo Convention was held in Dubrovnik (Croatia) from 7 to 11 September. As co-chair of the Committee for Cooperation and Assistance, Austria contributed actively to preparing the documents adopted at the conference, especially the Political Declaration and the Dubrovnik Action Plan.

In recent armed conflicts, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has claimed an increasingly high death toll, mainly among the civilian population, and has become one of the most important driving forces of the refugee and migration movements observed in the course of the year. In line with its
comprehensive commitment for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, Austria plays a leading role in international discussions on enabling better protection of civilians against this harmful practice. In this spirit, the MFA and UN-OCHA jointly organised an international experts meeting in Vienna on 21 and 22 September. Attendants included representatives from 16 States, UN organisations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and civil society. Views expressed at the meeting clearly reflected support for an international political declaration dedicated to the issue.

10.3.1. Latest Developments in Arms Technology

Based on a mandate given by the meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons in 2014, an international meeting of experts on lethal autonomous weapon systems convened in Geneva from 13 to 17 April. The position presented by Austria was that the use of lethal weapons systems must always remain subject to meaningful human control. Austria stressed that this was the only way to ensure respect for the limits set by ethics and humanitarian international law with regard to conflict-related violence. In this context, Austria also called on all actors to voluntarily refrain from promoting development of new weapons technologies whose impacts are, as yet, not sufficiently understood.

10.4. Export Control Regimes

10.4.1. Multilateral Export Control

The objective of the current five control regimes is to prevent – through the coordination of national export controls – sensitive technology and knowledge from falling into the hands of states that could use them for military purposes. The main instruments under these regimes are lists of relevant goods and substances as well as 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 of 2011 (see Chapter 10.4.3.).

The relevant regimes in the nuclear context are the Vienna-based Zangger Committee (ZC), which has 39 members, and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) which comprises 48 participating governments. 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. This year’s NSG Plenary Session was held in San Carlos de Bariloche (Argentina) from 1 to 5 June.

Having 42 members, the Australia Group (AG) endeavours 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 34 members (partners) who have committed themselves to adhering to guidelines preventing the proliferation of nuclear-weapons-capable rocket and missile technology (missiles with guidance systems and cruise missiles).

Founded in 1996, the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA), which comprises 41 Participating States, aims to prevent destabilising accumulations of conventional weapons and dual-use goods and technologies by coordinating national export controls and enhancing transparency and accountability. The Vienna-based Secretariat is headed by Ambassador Philip Griffiths (New Zealand). Vienna was also the venue of the annual meeting of participating States from 2 to 3 December.

10.4.2. Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

The text of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) which sets the rules for international trade in conventional weapons, was adopted by the UNGA with an overwhelming majority in 2013. Austria, which supported a robust ATT, was among the first states to sign the treaty. Signed by 130 states and ratified by 79, the ATT 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 as well as on sustainable economic and development policy. Arms exports are, for instance, banned if they have been or could be used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights; and in decisions on the export of arms, criteria such as their impact on peace and security, the risk of illicit transfer and trafficking (including exchange of information on corruption) or gender-based violence are to be taken into account. The ATT, however, does not contain a ban on weapons nor an obligation to destroy existing weapons. The right to individual or collective self-defence as defined under Art. 51 of the UN Charter remains untouched by the treaty.

Austria has successfully advocated ensuring that the international Arms Trade Treaty lives up to the highest possible standards. This includes inter alia the development of mandatory human rights criteria in approval procedures, a comprehensive and complete scope, as well as efficient enforcement mechanisms.

From 24 to 27 August, the First Conference of States Parties to the ATT was held in Cancun (Mexico) and was attended by representatives from 120 states, numerous international and regional organisations, civil society and industry. Prior to this conference, preparatory meetings had been held both at informal (Berlin and Vienna) and formal level (Port of Spain and Geneva). Voting and decision-making rights were granted to those 69 states that had
Global Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation

deposited their instruments of ratification or accession with the UNSG ninety
days prior to the opening of the conference. At the Conference of States Par-
ties all decisions aimed at ensuring the smooth functioning of the ATT were
adopted by consensus. It was decided that the ATT Secretariat be based in
Geneva; rules for financing (mandatory contributions) both the Secretariat
and the conferences of the States Parties, as well as decision-making modal-
ties were adopted.

10.4.3. National Export Control

In Austria, exports of conventional arms are governed by the Foreign Trade
Act of 2011 (previously the Foreign Trade Act of 2005) and the War Material
Act. Defence equipment subject to approval is defined 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, respectively. Austria is also commit-
ted to adhering to the Common Position defining common rules governing
the control of exports of military technology and equipment, adopted by
the EU Council in December 2008. This legally binding Common EU Posi-
tion makes a significant contribution towards further harmonising national
export regimes and implementation activities.
11. Foreign Trade
11.1. Bilateral Foreign Trade Policy

11.1.1. Austrian Investment

Both Austrian investment abroad and foreign investment in Austria are of importance to the Austrian economy – the latter also due to its direct impact on the Austrian labour market. According to most recent figures, the EU 13 (new EU Member States) constituted the most important target region for Austrian investment abroad with investment flows worth 3.0 billion euros (27 %). The country attracting the major share of Austrian investment abroad was Croatia with 1.31 billion euros, ahead of Romania that attracted 1.25 billion euros, followed by the United Arab Emirates with 0.85 billion euros. In 2015, direct investments from Austria in Eastern Europe (excluding EU Member States) amounted to 1.68 billion euros.

In 2015, the most important region of origin for foreign direct investment in Austria was the EU 28. From a country perspective, Germany was the largest investor with a volume of 2.2 billion euros, followed by Luxembourg (2.0 billion euros) and Russia (1.2 billion euros). High divestment was registered on the part of the USA reaching a volume of 3.7 billion euros. Alongside Russia, Japan was the most important non-European investor in 2015 with investments totalling 395 million euros, followed by the United Arab Emirates (299 million euros) and India (21 million euros).

Of the 810,325 employees of foreign affiliates of Austrian investors, around two thirds are active in Central and Eastern Europe – the highest number in the Czech Republic, i.e. 99,079, followed by Bulgaria with 72,883 (as of 2013). With a total of 103,508 staff, Austrian companies are rather less active outside of Europe. As of 2013, a total of 250,252 Austrians (equalling approximately 6 % of the total labour force) worked for foreign direct investment companies in Austria).

11.1.2. Investment Protection

The purpose of investment protection agreements is to create an investment-friendly climate by increasing legal security for companies that invest abroad. Since the 1950s, more than 3,400 BITs (Bilateral Investment Treaties) have been concluded worldwide. The most recent such agreement is to be found in the UNCITRAL transparency rules (United Nations Commission on International Trade Law), which have been applied since 1 April 2014 and provide among other things for the mandatory publication of all relevant procedural contents. Although the EU holds responsibility for the conclusion of investment agreements, the individual Member States are still able to

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2 At the time of printing, the figures for 2014 were not yet available.
conclude BITs – provided no such agreement has been or is being negotiated by the EU.

11.1.2.1. Investment Protection Agreements at EU level

The EU negotiated investment protection chapters with the USA, Japan, China, Myanmar and Tunisia. It also has negotiation mandates for India, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and all ASEAN countries. In the meantime, negotiations on the respective parts of the agreements have been completed with three states (Canada, Singapore and Vietnam). CETA is now in the linguistic-legal review phase and is due to be signed at the EU-Canada Summit in October 2016. In September, the European Commission requested an opinion from the European Court of Justice with regards to the allocation of competence between the EU and the Member States as regards the material content of the agreement with Singapore. The Court’s opinion is expected to be issued in spring 2017. In January, the European Commission presented its report on the public consultation process on investment protection and based to some extent on this report submitted a proposal for a new Investor-State Dispute Settlement system (ISDS) which is to replace the current dispute settlement mechanism in EU negotiations on investment agreements. In December, the conclusion of the negotiations on an EU-Vietnam free trade and investment agreement was announced. It is the first agreement to include the reformed investor protection provisions. The European Commission assumes that the agreement will enter into effect in 2018. For further information on investment protection in the context of the Free Trade Agreement between the EU and the USA, please see Chapter 3.3.1.

11.1.2.2. Austrian Investment Protection Agreements

A total of 60 Austrian investment protection agreements are currently in effect. For a further three agreements, which are no longer effective\(^3\), transitional provisions are in force and applicable to existing investments. In the context of new negotiations, which now have to be approved by the European Commission, the MFA – in agreement with the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy and the Austrian Economic Chamber – focused on potential future markets for Austrian companies in order to facilitate foreign investment based on respect of international human rights, labour and environmental standards as well as adherence to international anti-corruption standards. Negotiations with Kyrgyzstan were completed.

\(^3\) Bolivia (no longer in effect since 1 July 2013, validity continues until 1 July 2023), Cabo Verde (no longer in effect since 31 March 2013, validity continues until 31 March 2023), South Africa (no longer in effect since 11 October 2014, validity continues until 11 October 2034).
11.1.3. Bilateral Air Transport Agreements

Against the background of the liberalisation of international civil aviation regulations which took place over the past few years, in combination with the rise of strong state-owned airlines, which have joined the international competition and enjoy substantial cost benefits, the entire aviation sector is currently in a difficult state of transition. In spite of agreements between the EU and third countries, bilateral air transport agreements are still necessary and play an important role in ensuring fair competition and safeguarding the position of the Austrian aviation sector. To this end, bilateral air transport negotiations and talks with thirteen states (Azerbaijan, Iran, the Republic of Korea, Nigeria, Panama, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uganda, Vietnam and Zimbabwe) and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region were conducted.

11.2. Multilateral Foreign Economic Policy

11.2.1. World Trade Organization (WTO)

As the Trade Facilitation Agreement was adopted only as late as November 2014 due to India’s continued opposition, further work and activities under the Doha Round had to be rescheduled. The first half of the year was thus dominated by efforts aimed at using novel approaches to work on the remaining Doha topics not dealt with under the 9th Ministerial Conference in Bali 2013. The focus was placed on the core topics such as market access in agricultural and industrial products as well as domestic agricultural subsidies. However, it soon became clear that the USA and China were not able to reach common ground on the latter topic.

At the end of July, it became evident that it would not be possible to prepare a working programme based on which the Doha Round could be completed within the near future. After the summer recess, efforts were thus undertaken to define a smaller package – as had already been the case in Bali – on which agreement could be reached at the 10th Ministerial Conference in Nairobi in December. This included in particular the export competition pillar in the area of agriculture, a development package consisting of measures from which mainly the least developed countries benefit, as well as general rules aimed at enhancing transparency. After these difficult preparations, the substantive progress eventually achieved at the 10th Ministerial Conference (Nairobi, 15 to 19 December) was indeed somewhat surprising. The main results produced by the MC10 were an agreement on the export competition pillar (especially on the immediate phase-out of export subsidies for industrialised countries), a development package for the least developed countries involving decisions reached on cotton, on preferential treatment with respect to services, and on rules of origin. Besides, agreement was reached on expanding the Information Technology Agreement – the first pluri-lateral
tariff reduction agreement adopted in the WTO context since the organisation’s inception.

Even in the preparatory phase, the discussion on the future of the Doha Round proved highly controversial. The USA, followed by other industrialised countries, called for ending this rather unsuccessful negotiation format, while the developing countries (led by India) were in favour of retaining it. The wording of the Ministerial Declaration on the future of the WTO leaves many questions unanswered. Discussions on the future approach to be held in 2016 are therefore expected to be difficult.

The WTO welcomed three new members: Kazakhstan joined in early spring; Afghanistan and Liberia in December, thus increasing the organization’s membership to 164 states.

11.2.2. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

11.2.2.1. Developments and General Trends

Discussions at the annual Ministerial Council meeting in June focused on “Unlocking Investment for Sustainable Growth and Jobs”. In this context, the importance of global economic recovery was highlighted with attention also drawn to the problems of unemployment, low growth rates and the general decline in productivity. In this context, boosting investment and stimulating demand as well as investment in education and strengthening social justice were considered imperative. As had already been the case in the last few years, the OECD generally worked increasingly on cross-sectoral activities and horizontal projects addressing various impacts (including at the economic, social, environmental, societal levels).

In the field of statistics, one of the OECD’s core areas of work, new approaches are increasingly being adopted – especially in the context of the OECD Better Life Initiative – enabling better depiction of the wealth and well-being of a country’s society based on a range of indicators.

11.2.2.2. Economic and Financial Policy

Under the OECD’s re-orientation, the trend towards shifting the focus and dealing increasingly with wage, distribution and environmental policy aspects in economic policy analyses was continued and is also reflected in the horizontal approach taken in the OECD project on New Approaches to Economic Challenges.

In its economic outlook, the OECD states that the main risk to global development has shifted back from the Eurozone to the emerging countries, and China in particular. At the same time, issues relating to the poor development of investments, productivity and trade were analysed in the context of
expansive monetary policy. The OECD also analysed impacts of the refugee and migration movements, such as their effects on public budgets, the labour market and economic growth.

The OECD also performed 20 country reviews. The OECD Country Review of Austria, which also included a special chapter on gender equality, was presented by Deputy SG Stefan Kapferer in Vienna in July.

With regard to the financial markets, work continued, for instance, on implicit government guarantees for banks, in which context the OECD called for their reduction using functioning settlement mechanisms, and acknowledged progress made (also in Austria). Likewise, a revision of the Financial Market Committee’s mandate was undertaken. In the next few years, the focus of the OECD’s activities is to be shifted to the nexus between financial markets and real economy.

### 11.2.2.3. International Tax Policy

In the tax sector, the BEPS project (Base Erosion Profit Shifting) was largely completed and adopted by the G20 in November, which enabled the OECD to set an essential milestone towards a change in international tax law. The objective is to counter loss of tax income as a result of tax avoidance by multilateral groups, which is estimated to range between 100 and 240 billion US dollars every year, and to ensure that profits are increasingly taxed at the place where value is actually added. At the end of the year, activities towards establishing a framework for monitoring the implementation of these provisions were launched with a focus on closely involving and supporting developing countries.

As regards the Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI) on financial account data, the global standard model developed in 2014 was adopted and the relevant multilateral implementation agreement signed by more than 90 states and other international law subjects, including Austria. From 2017 onwards, the AEOI will be introduced by Austria in a step-by-step process. In 2015, Austria underwent an additional review of its tax transparency provisions by the Global Forum on Tax Transparency and succeeded in improving its ratings to “largely compliant”.

### 11.2.2.4. 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 of education and skills are prepared for students (Programme for International Student Assessment, PISA) and adults (PIAAC, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) and national skills strategies are developed. A range of data and analyses prepared by the OECD provide insights, for instance, into the funding of education systems, equal
Foreign Trade

opportunities in terms of access to education, and the impact of education on the various sectors of society, such as civic engagement.

The most important publications in the educational sector included reports on gender equality in the education system, and on the impact of increased migration flows on national education systems.

11.2.2.5. Trade and Investment

A key topic in the area of trade was the OECD’s continued work on value-added measurement of trade flows (Trade in Value Added – TiVA). Activities also focused on export restrictions for raw materials, on competitive neutrality and on state-owned enterprises in international markets. One of the OECD’s most important projects in the field of trade is and has been the development and ongoing updating of the Services Trade Restrictiveness Index, which aims to enable a comparative analysis of trade barriers. In the field of investment, the year was marked by activities related to the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and continued work on the Policy Framework for Investment.

11.2.2.6. Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection

In 2015, OECD work in the employment area remained focused on particularly vulnerable groups. In this context, a major focus continues to be placed on young people, the long-term unemployed and women. A report on Austria was launched on the topic of the inclusion of persons with mental health disabilities in the labour market. The OECD also worked intensively on the topic of workplace quality. Against the background of the massive increase in migration in Europe in 2015, special attention was given to social and labour market policy integration measures that enable the challenges related to the current refugee situation to be better addressed.

Not least due to the growing imbalances in the OECD area, the OECD continued to place a strong focus on this issue. By establishing the Centre for Opportunity and Equality (COPE), it furthermore seeks to highlight its pioneering role in analysing related developments and challenges.

In the field of consumer protection, the OECD Guidelines on E-Commerce were comprehensively revised and updated.

11.2.2.7. Responsible Business Conduct

The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises include comprehensive recommendations for responsible business conduct directed at companies and their foreign business activities in all areas of corporate management. With a view to facilitating the implementation and promotion of these guidelines, National Contact Points are being established. The Austrian National
Contact Point (NCP) is based at the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy. The MFA – just like other ministries, stakeholder representatives and representatives of civil society – is a member of the NCP steering committee.

In this context, special mention is to be made of the discussion on “extending” the guidelines to third parties and on enhancing coherence and strengthening the National Contact Points.

11.2.2.8. Agriculture and Environment

In the Agricultural Outlook 2015, prepared jointly with the FAO, the OECD forecasted a gradual decline in prices as a result of high productivity levels and slower increases in demand (particularly in developing countries). The priorities of work in the field of agriculture included risk management in agriculture, improving sustainable productivity, reduction of food losses in the production process, evaluation of regional trade agreements as well as climate change. On this topic, an OECD conference was held in September at which the area of tension between agriculture, climate change and food security was discussed and contributions were prepared for the UN Climate Change Conference COP21.

In the environmental field, the topics of climate change and climate protection dominated the respective activities launched by the OECD. With a report on the status of climate financing, the OECD together with the Climate Policy Initiative (CPI) made an essential contribution to the preparations for the COP21.

11.2.2.9. Global Relations

Progress was made in the accession negotiations with Latvia and Colombia, and accession negotiations were opened with Lithuania and Costa Rica. Against the background of the unchanged political situation, accession negotiations with Russia remained suspended. With a view to strengthening global reach, joint work programmes were prepared with China and Indonesia under Key Partnerships, and a cooperation agreement was concluded with Brazil. Implementation of the country programmes with Kazakhstan and Peru also began. In June, a biennial country programme was agreed with Morocco that seeks to assist the country in its reform agenda. Not least thanks to Austria’s commitment, an intensification of the South-East Europe Regional Programmes was also adopted.

11.2.2.10. Development Policy

In 2015, work in the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) was mainly dominated by three large conferences: one was held in Addis Ababa and focused on development funding, the second was held in New York in
September (adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs) and the third, the Climate Change Conference, was held in Paris. Alongside contributions for the conferences, an initial draft for a “strategic response by the OECD” on the adoption of the SDGs was prepared. Likewise, new initiatives in development funding (such as the Addis Tax Initiative), in the governance area and in the field of women’s equality were launched. Work on the reform of the DAC Statistics system used to measure the financial development contributions (Official Development Assistance – ODA) of donor countries was further promoted.

11.2.3. International Energy Agency (IEA)

In November, the IEA published the annual World Energy Outlook (WEO) which serves as the authoritative source of information for strategic analyses of the energy markets. The WEO 2015 dealt with the low oil prices and potential future scenarios, shale gas production in the USA, the Indian and the Chinese energy policies and – with a view to COP21 – the topics of renewable energies and energy efficiency.

Another highlight from an energy policy point of view was the IEA Ministerial Meeting in November. Based on the number of participating countries, ministers and corporate representatives, this meeting brought together the largest number of attendants ever and was dedicated to the topic of “Innovation for a clean, secure energy future”. It offered the new IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol the opportunity to present his vision for the future course of the Agency. The meeting also adopted the IEA’s contribution to the COP21 negotiations, the strengthening of the IEA Technology Collaboration Programme and the deepened association with China, Indonesia and Thailand. Mexico’s application for full membership was favourably received.

11.2.4. International Financial Institutions

11.2.4.1. The International Monetary Fund (IMF)

An important aspect of the IMF’s work is crisis prevention by monitoring its Member States’ national economies under the Article IV Consultations, which foresee annual talks. This year, the IMF stated that following the robust economic development in the years immediately following the economic crisis 2009, the Austrian economy has now embarked on a moderate growth path. The IMF identified major structural changes in the healthcare system, in the field of secondary education and in the pensions sector. As regards the regulation of the banking system, the IMF highlighted clear progress attributable to the implementation of key elements of the European Banking Union, and pointed to improvements as regards problem management of crisis-ridden banks.
11.2.4.2. Multilateral Development Banks

In 2015, the activities of Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) were again dominated by the fight against global poverty and rising imbalances. These were, however, impeded by the sometimes dramatic slow-down in growth rates witnessed in important emerging countries, sluggish growth in industrialised countries and the increasing challenges related to climate change. During the financial and economic crisis from 2008 onwards, the MDBs had already played an important anti-cyclical role in fighting the crisis and quickly increased their lending volumes significantly. In terms of the – partial – achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the key year 2015, the MDBs “soft” (i.e. concessional) funds for the poorest development countries played an especially important role. Likewise, the discussion on financing the SDGs also showed that the MDBs constitute an important mechanism in leveraging development funding via the financial markets.

In order to promote economic and social development in Eastern and South East Europe, active use was made of the programmes launched by the Vienna Office of the World Bank Group, and technical assistance programmes in this region were supported by Austria. The expansion of the EBRD’s (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) operational range to the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean was further implemented. Major challenges continue to result from the situation in Ukraine and Russia where a large share of the EBRD’s portfolio is based.

All MDBs continued to implement measures towards modernisation, relating, among others, to the banks’ strategic orientation, the reform of their governance structures, measures aimed at strengthening these institutions’ financial power and adapting their financing tools as well as maintaining a stronger focus on monitoring results and/or performance. A profound reform process is currently being driven forward by the World Bank, which seeks to reduce the number of people living in absolute poverty to 3% of the global population by 2030 and to promote specifically the bottom 40% of the income pyramid in developing countries through inclusive and sustainable growth (“shared prosperity”).

After having been located for more than eleven years in its temporary premises in Tunis due to the civil war in Côte d’Ivoire, the African Development Bank (AfDB) was able to return to its headquarters in Abidjan, where it held its 50th Annual Meeting (25 to 29 May) at which Akinwumi Adesina (Nigeria) was elected new President. In the Asian Development Bank (AsDB), the pooling of the assets of the Asian Development Fund (ADF) and the bank’s capital resources will lead to a tripling of the bank’s capital from 2017 onwards without generating any costs for the donor countries. In the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Board of Governors decided to consolidate the Inter-American Investment Corporation (IIC) with the private sector activities of IDB, and to implement a capital increase for the IIC, thus
establishing a financially sound and strengthened institution to promote the private sector in Latin America.

Furthermore, Austria is a founding member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a new, regional, multilateral development bank in which the majority is held by the loan-taking developing and emerging countries. The Austrian IFI Contribution Act 2015 covered the tenth replenishment of the resources of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD 10) and Austrian capital shares in the IIC. In 2015, Austria declared its withdrawal from the Common Fund for Commodities, as this mechanism is no longer considered relevant. This withdrawal will become effective in 2016.
12. **Austrian Development Cooperation**

12.1. **Introduction**

Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) creates opportunities and contributes to promoting freedom and self-determination of all. Its primary goal is to reduce global poverty in all its dimensions. In this context, a special focus is being placed on the empowerment of poor, disadvantaged and discriminated groups of the population in order to enable them to fully develop their economic capabilities and participate in social consensus-building processes. Securing peace and human security, combating poverty in developing countries as well as preserving the environment and protecting natural resources are the key objectives of Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) and are as such enshrined in the Federal Development Cooperation Act (DCA). The basic principles applied by ADC are the partner countries’ right to choose their own development agenda, consideration of cultural and social conditions, equality between women and men as well as respecting the needs of children and people with disabilities. Relevant activities in the field of development cooperation policies are coordinated by the MFA, which also holds responsibility for the strategic orientation of ADC. The Austrian Development Agency (ADA) implements the ADC programmes and projects. As a member of the EU, the OECD, the UN and the World Bank Group, Austria contributes proactively to shaping international development policy within the relevant bodies.

The Three-Year Programme on Austrian Development Policy applicable for the period 2016 to 2018 was prepared in a broad-based inclusive process from October 2014 to May 2015. Led by the MFA, the process involved all state actors and partners in development cooperation from the fields of politics, civil society, business and industry. Taking account of international developments, migration and development was included as new topic with a view to contributing towards improving local living conditions and perspectives. Further priorities are first of all cooperation with business and industry in order to facilitate the creation of jobs, training opportunities and tax income, secondly education as an essential topic for the future of the local population, and thirdly interaction with other development-relevant strategies. Essential targets defined by the Climate Finance Strategy, the Strategic Guidelines for International Financial Institutions and the Austrian Development Bank were presented for the first time. Introduction of a joint planning rhythm for content-related harmonisation is envisaged from 2018 onwards. The new Three-Year Programme was adopted by the Ministerial Council on 9 December. Alongside the Mission Statement, Austrian Development Policy was thus given a comprehensive framework for the years to come.
12.1.1. Thematic Priorities

The primary goal of ADC is the reduction of global poverty in all its dimensions. In this context, a special focus is placed on empowering poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of the population to enable them to make full use of their economic opportunities and express their political interests. This elimination of social and regional imbalances also plays an important role in the context of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

The common consideration of the topics water, energy and food security is covered by the nexus approach, which focuses on the interaction between these areas of work in order to achieve optimal development outcomes. The nexus approach was also enshrined from a strategic point of view in the new Three-Year Programme on Austrian Development Policy 2016–2018. In addition, the ADC understanding of the nexus approach and levers for implementing this approach at various levels, ranging from the local project level to the national policy levels, were presented in a focus paper.

Issues relating to food security and the human right to food continued to play a central role. The challenges related to sustainable rural development were taken account of in Austria and at international level both in the relevant discussions and by coordinating systemic, integrated and territorial approaches. In this context, mitigating the impact of climate change, increasing resilience, enhancing local value added and common guidelines for the use of and access to land and other natural resources are playing an increasingly important role. Two major events organised in Austria on this topic were substantially influenced by ADC through its pro-active participation. These were the conference “Bodenlos – Brotlos – Chancenlos“ (no land – no food – no opportunities) organised jointly by the ‘Ökosoziales Forum’ and the ‘Institut für Umwelt, Friede und Entwicklung’, and an expert meeting on “The global impact of land degradation” organised by the Centre for Development Research of the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences in Vienna.

With a view to the systematic consideration of social issues and the application of the human rights based approach, defined in the Three-Year Programme as an overriding principle in all intervention areas, the ADA introduced social audit procedures for all international projects and programmes. Training workshops on implementing the human-rights-based approach directed at some fifty staff members of the ADA and the MFA as well as some selected representatives from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, the Ministry of Science, Research and Economy, the Ministry of Finance, the Oesterreichische Entwicklungsbank AG (OeEB, Austrian Development Bank) and the Oesterreichische Kontrollbank Aktiengesellschaft (OeKB) were held in January and in September. A common understanding on the human-rights-based approach at strategic-political level was established and concrete recommendations were prepared in order to ensure
Introduction

that human rights analyses and relevant goals and indicators are considered in the country strategies. As regards cooperation in Albania and South East Europe, governance was defined as new priority sector and organised accordingly, and concrete measures were prepared for the new country strategy for Moldova to enable better consideration of governance and human rights as a cross-cutting issue. At project level, the ADA co-funded ‘Salzburg Global LGBT Forum’ provided a protected platform for exchange and strategy development among inter alia 10 LGBTI activists and human rights defenders from ADC partner countries. Furthermore, substantial contributions were made towards the new NAP Human Trafficking and the NAP Human Rights.

In the field of **peace promotion and conflict prevention**, the programme aimed at strengthening local capacities in crisis and disaster regions was successfully implemented in West Africa based on dedicated training courses on civil-military cooperation in humanitarian crisis missions that were developed and implemented together with the Ministry of Defence and Sports and the Österreichisches Studienzentrum für Frieden und Konfliktlösung (OSFK, the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution – ASPR). This marks an important milestone in the efforts towards a whole-of-government approach and the implementation of the Strategic Guideline on Security and Development.

Austria was able to live up to its tradition of offering a neutral venue for mediation and encounter between parties to a conflict, thus facilitating peace processes. By promoting a meeting involving the leading rebel groups in the Darfur conflict, who signed a joint agreement on the protection of the rights of children in armed conflict, ADC was able to make a contribution to the peace process in Darfur.

In the context of the annual “3 C Retreat” held at the ASPR Peace Castle Schlaining, progress made with respect to the whole-of-government approach in the field of peace and security, and the evaluation of the Strategic Guideline on Security and Development scheduled for 2016 were discussed with Austrian stakeholders.

A priority in the field of **gender** was the organisation of a conference on the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and civil society representatives from Austria, Uganda, Nepal and South Africa. Following-up on this conference, a workshop that was organised jointly by the ‘Wiener Institut für Internationalen Dialog und Zusammenarbeit’ (VIDC, Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation) and the ADA gender section and involving the UN Women National Committee, brought together experts from the university sector and civil society organisations who jointly prepared recommendations on involving men and boys in gender equality work. In-house, the ADA also developed standardised gender training programmes directed at cooperation office staff and partner organi-
Austrian Development Cooperation

sations at local level and implemented successfully for the first time in the cooperation office Moldova.

In the **education and science** sector, the priorities pursued by ADC relate to vocational education and higher education. The higher education cooperation programme ‘Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research for Development’ (APPEAR) enables multi-annual partnerships between higher education and/or research institutions in the priority countries of ADC and Austria, and is aimed at enabling comprehensive capacity development (strengthening training, research and management). The beginning of the year saw the start of the second programme phase under which a total of 12 million euros will be made available by the end of 2020. Partner countries in the key regions Danube region/Western Balkans and Black Sea region/South Caucasus were supported in the reform of their respective vocational training sectors (with the focus on practical and needs-oriented training) and – in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy – in their integration within the European Higher Education and Research Area.

In the **water and sanitation** sector, Austria is active at bilateral level in Albania, Moldova, Mozambique, Uganda and in the occupied Palestinian territories. In Moldova, Austria has cooperated for many years with Switzerland. After having undertaken a common comprehensive analysis of the water sector in Moldova, a joint programme aimed at strengthening the institutions in this sector was prepared and will be launched in 2016. In the spirit of the nexus approach to water-energy and food security, a project aimed at strengthening water-saving drip irrigation technology was launched. The ADA continues to cooperate closely with the Austrian Federal Ministry of Finance in supporting the African Water Facility and makes available a technical expert on water resource management and sanitation. Together with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, support was provided to the Laxenburg-based International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in launching the Water Futures and Solutions Initiative that seeks to develop local and global approaches to strengthening water supply security. The ADA’s budget in the water sector is doubled by the allocation of EU and third party funding, thus making Austria a reliable and important partner, particularly in Uganda, Albania and Moldova.

In the area of **sustainable energy**, activities inter alia focused on the necessary organisational preparations for the establishment of further regional centres for renewable energy and energy efficiency. In Africa, ADC contributed to establishing the energy centre in Cabo Verde. Support for the establishment of two further energy centres for the eastern (East African Community, EAC) and southern (Southern African Development Community, SADC) communities was contractually agreed with UNIDO. By 2016, the potential for using clean energy is thus promoted for a total of 34 African states, pro-
In the thematic area of **environment and natural resources**, two surveys were conducted in 2015. One was the strategic evaluation Environment Policy of the Austrian Development Co-operation and its implementation by the main ODA Actors (MFA, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Federal Ministry of Finance and ADA) for the period 2007–2014, and the other was an impact assessment on environment-relevant projects and programmes launched by the ADA in South East Europe during the same period. The Three-Year Programme 2016–2018 for the first time defines concrete targets for the cross-cutting issue environment and climate protection.

### 12.1.2. Policy Coherence

Development Policy should follow a whole-of-government approach. This principle of policy coherence is thus also enshrined in Article 1 paragraph 5 of the Federal Development Cooperation Act. In its current Government Programme 2013–2018, the Federal Government also refers explicitly to policy coherence.

The level of coherence is to be increased inter alia by involving all stakeholders in strategic planning processes, such as the Three-Year Programme of Austrian Development Policy, country and regional strategies or thematic-strategic guidelines. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda will also require a particularly high level of policy coherence. To this end, the preparation of the Three-Year Programme 2016–2018 was based on a comprehensive consultation process. With a view to enhancing policy coherence, consultations were also held on country and regional strategies.

In the thematic area of “environment and development” and “security and development”, progress was made towards a whole-of-government approach. In line with the Strategic Guideline “Security and Development in Austrian Development Policy” of October 2011, the Austrian Peacebuilding Platform, a platform for governmental and non-governmental players in the field of peacebuilding was set up on 16 January 2014.

The dedicated training programme established at the Verwaltungsakademie des Bundes (Austrian Federal Academy of Public Administration) under the heading of “development policy, a whole-of-government task” was continued. This programme is directed at staff working for federal and province administration authorities and their independent agencies who deal directly or indirectly with development policy and development cooperation as part of their work.

Austria also participates regularly in both the EU’s and the OECD’s policy coherence networks.
Austrian Development Cooperation

12.1.3. Budget for Development Cooperation

According to preliminary data, Austrian Official Development Assistance (ODA) amounted to 1.193 billion euros, i.e. 0.35 % of gross national income (GNI) in 2015.

12.1.4. Evaluation

Under the sharing of responsibilities agreement, the MFA is responsible for selecting the strategic evaluations and their themes, while the ADA is in charge of operational management. Strategic evaluations generally cover specific ADC themes, sectors, instruments or country strategies.

The evaluation processes for “Kooperation der Österreichischen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit mit der österreichischen Wirtschaft“ (cooperation between Austrian Development Cooperation and Austrian business) and the Country Strategy Uganda were completed and the strategic evaluation on the topic of environment was supported, while preliminary work was commenced on the review of the strategic guideline on security and development. Recommendations on existing evaluations/reviews were further implemented.

At international level, the MFA and the ADA were regularly represented on the competent evaluation bodies and networks within the EU, the group of German-speaking evaluation services (DACH) and in the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), in which Austria has held the vice-chair in the DAC Evaluation Committee since 2013 via the ADA.

Together with ADA, the OSCE and other multilateral organisations, an event marking the International Year of Evaluation 2015 was organised in Vienna on 21 April. A workshop on the Theory of Change was held on 16 October. Being a key tool of development cooperation, it enables a realistic and transparent presentation of targets defined for projects and programmes as well as assumptions on how these targets may be achieved.

12.2. Bilateral Development Cooperation

12.2.1. Geographic Priorities

12.2.1.1. South East/Eastern Europe

12.2.1.1.1. Key Region Danube Region / Western Balkans

Austria’s foreign, security and economic policy interest in the region requires an active development policy. A new focus was thus placed on the countries in transition in the Danube and Western Balkans region as well as the completion of a regional cooperation strategy and its harmonisation with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). Based on the regional strategy Danube
Bilateral Development Cooperation

Region/Western Balkans, regional cooperation is to be intensified and EU pre-accession support is provided in three key development policy areas:

Economy and Development: focusing on employment; Education: focusing on labour-market oriented, socially inclusive vocational education and higher education; Governance, Human Rights and Rule of Law: focusing on institution-building in the context of EU pre-accession.

Alongside the country priorities Albania (governance and rule of law, labour-market oriented vocational education/employability as well as integrated water management) and Kosovo (education with a focus on tertiary education, economy and private sector development focusing on rural areas with special account being taken of the cross-cutting issue governance), projects aimed at strengthening regional cooperation in the six Western Balkan states and in the Republic of Moldova are funded using the ADA regional budget line endowed with 4 million euros. New whole-of-government country strategies have been prepared for Albania and Moldova which were coordinated with the partner countries. The country strategy Albania (2015–2020) was officially presented in Tirana on 6 October.

In view of the continuing ethnic and religious potential for conflict, Austria also continues to maintain its security policy commitment, including international peace missions (Kosovo as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina) in this region.

Austria also continues to pursue targeted measures in the field of vocational education and higher education as well as committed promotion of networks and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans and in the Danube region.

12.2.1.1.2. Key Region Black Sea / South Caucasus

One of the major concerns of Austrian foreign policy is connecting the Black Sea Region to the Danube region. The countries of the South Caucasus and the Republic of Moldova are among the poorest states in Europe. As a result of the conflict in Ukraine and the crisis in relations between the EU and Russia, the South Caucasus and the Republic of Moldova are becoming increasingly important from a security and energy policy point of view.

Building on bilateral country strategies for Armenia and Georgia (2012–2020), Austrian development involvement in the South Caucasus focuses on agriculture and forestry in Georgia and on agriculture in Armenia. The objectives pursued are creating income and jobs and improving food security in order to contribute to productivity and local value added, to counter the enormous rural exodus and especially the negative impacts of brain drain. Austria’s involvement focuses particularly on fighting poverty in both countries’ border regions. Cross-cutting themes include conflict prevention based on confidence and security building measures – including security sector reforms – in the Georgian and Armenian border regions, gender equality as well as governance and decentralisation. Since the opening of the ADC
Office in Yerevan in September 2014, Austria has been officially represented in all three South Caucus states. The planned opening of Austrian embassies in the three Eastern Partnership States, including the ADC priority countries Moldova and Georgia, will facilitate bilateral relations on all levels and the provision of Austrian support in implementing the Association and Free Trade Agreements with the EU.

As a link between the Danube and the Black Sea regions, the Republic of Moldova is a priority country of ADC. The focal areas of attention are the areas of water, environment and climate change, education based on equality of opportunities with a special focus on labour-market oriented, socially inclusive vocational training as well as governance, the rule of law and the promotion of peace. The cross-cutting themes gender equality and social inclusion/promotion of social protection form another important priority. A new Country Strategy 2016–2020, coordinated with the partner country, supports development and Moldova’s efforts towards establishing closer ties with the EU.

12.2.1.1.3. Special Programme Ukraine
In conflict-ridden Ukraine, Austria – as a supportive Central European partner – continues to provide humanitarian assistance in eastern Ukraine and prepares a whole-of-government specialised ADC programme for medium and long-term development cooperation in the two priority areas rural development and promotion of private sector development, as well as governance, rule of law and peacebuilding.

12.2.1.2. Priority Palestinian Territories
The criteria for the selection of ADC programmes and projects are in compliance with the Palestinian National Development Plan 2014–2016 and regard for both parts of the Palestinian Territories, i.e. the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. ADC involvement focuses on the areas of health, water, humanitarian aid and co-funding 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 (such as the UNRWA, UNDP, ICRC). Other projects currently in place relate to NGO co-funding as well as to cooperation in the higher education sector in the context of the APPEAR Programme. A special priority is improving water supply, which is becoming increasingly precarious particularly in the Gaza Strip, by supporting the relevant operating organisations (counselling, training of employees and equipment).

12.2.1.3. Key Region East Africa and Horn of Africa
In the priority country Ethiopia, ADC was mainly active in the Amhara region, placing a focus on the fields of rural development and food secu-
Bilateral Development Cooperation

rity. In cooperation with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), continued support was provided to a project aimed at strengthening institutions that are active in the fields of transparency (including ombuds facilities), the rule of law and human rights. Activities in the fields of protection of natural resources, gender, science and research were also funded. ADC furthermore contributed to funding a national multi-donor programme, managed by the World Bank and co-financed by the Ethiopian government with a share of 50 percent. The programme aims to improve decentralised public services in the healthcare, education, agricultural and water supply sectors. Thanks to ADC funding, it was possible to contribute to remarkable success:

Funding of agricultural advisory services contributed to increasing yields for the most important crops across the country and enabled promotion of more resource-friendly soil and land management. In the healthcare sector, funding under this programme improves antenatal care, use of contraception and the share of medically attended births. This enabled Ethiopia to reach Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 4 (reduction of infant mortality) and MDG 5 (reduction of maternal mortality).

In line with the national Poverty Eradication Action Plan adopted by the Ugandan government, ADC activities in the priority country Uganda focus on financing the areas of water supply and sanitation as well as law, the justice sector and peace. ADC also supports common donor/basket funding programmes in both areas. Together with other donors, Austria supports a facility for the promotion of democracy and good governance which supports NGOs as well as government institutions. In addition to this funding, the EU commissioned ADC with allocating a further 3.5 million euros for this facility. For the period from June 2016 to July 2017, it held out the prospect of additional funding of 7.5 million euros. In both sectors, ADC also cooperates with NGOs. In the field of law, justice and peace this is with a view to strengthening accountability and access to law in Uganda and in the field of water and sanitation it is with a view to strengthening drinking water supply and hygiene. This is supplemented by funding provided to NGO, scholarship, study and science programmes.

The implementation of an EU-funded project involving a total volume of more than 30 million euros for investments in water supply and sanitation in small rural cities is also progressing successfully.

12.2.1.4. Key Region West Africa

In the key region West Africa, Austria focuses on the thematic priorities of energy and conflict prevention. As well as on projects involving civil society organisations and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) aimed at supporting local and regional capacities for peace and security in the region, training courses on civil-military cooperation in humanitarian crisis missions were developed and implemented in cooperation with the Federal
Ministry of Defence and Sports at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre – KAIPTC (Accra, Ghana).

The regional centre for renewable energy and energy efficiency (ECREEE) was able to successfully strengthen its position as a specialised regional institution for renewable energies and energy efficiency at regional and international level. Austria, which provides both personnel and financial support to the centre remains an important partner of the energy centre. ADC moreover continued to support the regional Ebola crisis programme operated by the EC’s Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) in the field of preventive action in Burkina Faso.

The range of topics related to resilience and food security remains another priority in the region. This strategic goal is mainly pursued in cooperation with the OECD Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) and the three regional organisations ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS. To date, national resilience plans have been prepared in seven countries, including Burkina Faso. In connection with the SWAC week at the Expo in Milan, a declaration was developed which defines fundamental parameters for food security and resilience.

It was an eventful year for the priority country Burkina Faso. Thirteen months after the resignation of the long-standing Head of State Blaise Compaoré, Roch Kaboré was elected new president on 29 November. The peaceful elections marked the highlight of the successful democratisation process in the West African country. With a view to strengthening democracy, Austria contributed a total of 700,000 euros to the successful conduct of the elections. In addition, Austria co-funded a project by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) that supported the peaceful conduct of the elections through the implementation of conflict-reducing measures.

Based on the bilateral cooperation programme that was extended in coordination with the Ministry of Economy and Finance of Burkina Faso until 2016, Austria continued to provide support in the areas of vocational education and training, the promotion of trades and crafts and rural development as well as the development and implementation of national sectoral policies in these areas. In the region Boucle du Mouhon – a priority region of ADC – a regional development fund, for instance, is supported – which has proved to be an effective tool.

12.2.1.5. Key Region Southern Africa

In the key region Southern Africa, the rule of law, land use and renewable energy are the central areas of ADC activities. This thematic focus of cooperation is outlined in the open-ended Memorandum of Understanding between Austria and the Southern Development Community (SADC), which is valid for an unlimited period. Regional involvement of ADC takes place under the “Regional Strategy Paper and Regional Indicative Programme” concluded
between the EC and cooperation partners with the SADC, which builds on the SADC regional development plans, the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan and the Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ on Peace and Security.

The general objective of regional ADC involvement is based on strengthening democratic processes as the prerequisite for sustainable social and economic growth. ADC thus contributes to reducing poverty in the SADC area.

Thus ADC, together with other donors, contributes towards the implementation of the strategic plan, adopted by the SADC Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (SADC-CNGO), placing a special focus on the programme component poverty and development.

Together with other donors, ADC also contributes to the SADC-UNODC regional programme “Making the SADC Region Safer from Drugs and Crime”. In this context, ADC focuses in particular on fighting violence against women and children. This contribution is in accordance with the EU Action Plan on Gender Equality, the EU Victims Protection Guideline and the Austrian National Action Plan Against Human Trafficking.

Together with the Department for International Development and in delegated cooperation with the Finnish Foreign Ministry, ADC also contributes to the Second Phase of the Energy and Environment Partnership Programme with Southern and Eastern Africa (EEP S&EA). This partnership improves the ecological energy balance of the 13 participating countries and makes an important contribution towards poverty reduction through economic development. Analogous to ECREE in West Africa, ADC promotes the establishment of the SADC Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (SACREEE). In the context of the 34th Meeting of the SADC Ministers of Energy in Johannesburg on 24 July, it was decided to set up the SACREEE in Windhoek (Namibia). In this connection, the outstanding role played by Austria in the energy sector was highlighted. In October, Austria supported the 6th South Africa International Renewable Energy Conference (SAIREC).

In line with its regional priorities, Austria has held the donors’ chair in the thematic energy working group since 2014 in which it is represented by the Austrian Embassy in Pretoria.

ADC involvement the priority country Mozambique is based on the country’s current government programme 2015–2020. As agreed with the government of Mozambique, the province of Sofala is an ADC priority region; in cooperation with the government of Mozambique, preparatory work on the development of a new country strategy 2016–2020 is currently underway.

The focus is placed on the areas of agriculture, rural water supply and sanitation.

ADC contributes to the implementation of the investment plan in the agricultural sector and dedicates its contribution to the promotion of the agricultural counselling service. Together with other donors, ADC supports com-
mon donor/basket funding programmes in the areas of rural water supply and sanitation. ADC also contributes to general budget assistance. Regarding the implementation of the indicators specified in the Paris Declaration in 2014, Austria was ranked best in the group of small donors in May 2015. At the level of the Province of Sofala, ADC promotes the application of conserving cultivation methods and irrigation via small-scale systems in order to link national sectoral policy with sub-national implementation.

12.2.1.6. Key Region Caribbean

Since 2007, the Caribbean region has been a priority region of ADC. With a view to promoting regional integration, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is the main cooperation partner. The focus is on strengthening local capacities in the field of disaster risk management as well as renewable energies and energy efficiency.

A central element of cooperation with the Caribbean states is the Caribbean Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (CCREEE), a regional centre initiated in cooperation with UNIDO. A celebratory event was held on 28 October marking the opening of the CCREEE, which is based in Bridgetown (Barbados).

Based on support provided by the centre and in close cooperation with CARICOM, the goal is to sustainably improve both the legal and the financial framework conditions for investment in renewable energies and energy efficient technologies in the Caribbean. Talks about potential future cooperation at local level have already been held with the EC and the EU delegation in Barbados.

Supplementing the activities launched by the CCREEE, a programme aimed at promoting energy efficiency in Latin America and the Caribbean (PALCEE) is being implemented together with the Organización Latinoamericana de Energia (OLADE). The goal is to strengthen institutions in Guyana and Belize that are responsible for energy efficiency enhancing programmes. Main project partners are the energy agency of Guyana and the Ministry for Energy, Science and Technology and Public Utilities of Belize.

12.2.1.7. Key Region Himalayas – Hindu Kush

ADC supports common goals of the region Himalayas – Hindu Kush pursued in the context of the programmes launched by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

Activities focus on strengthening resilience against environmental and climate change as well as the protection of natural resources and the improvement of living conditions through enhanced cross-border cooperation.

In April and May, the region was shaken by a serious earthquake, which hit Nepal particularly hard and claimed some 9,000 lives. After having provided
humanitarian emergency assistance, Austria also contributed towards recon-
struction activities in the fields of cultural heritage (Patan Museum, Garden of Dreams) and energy (economic partnership for the Namche Bazar power plant) under a whole-of-government initiative involving the Federal Chancellery, the MFA, the ADA and the federal provinces.

The new country strategy for the priority country Bhutan 2015–2018, which is closely aligned with the 11th Five Year Plan of Bhutan, focuses on the traditional priority sectors energy, tourism and governance.

With a view to ensuring investment security and the ecosystem, the Austrian involvement in the energy sector is diversified and sustainably secured. Furthermore, a broad-based programme in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energies was prepared for 2016. Preparations for the commissioning of the hydro power plant in Dagachhu were completed with the objective of opening the plant in the second half of 2016.

Cooperation in the field of tourism focuses on the high-quality development of the training centre for tourism and hotel management, the Royal Institute for Tourism and Hospitality. By the end of September, four training courses had already been held in cooperation with ARGE Salzburg and 180 students had graduated. The fifth training course has already started. ADC also assists the Tourism Council Bhutan in preparing a tourism plan for three districts in the East of the country (Mongar, Lhuentse and Trashiyangtse). Based on the development of value added chains, the local population’s quality of life is to be improved and a contribution is also to be made towards preserving the ecosystems. In addition, ADA economic partnerships are also to be established with a view to supporting these efforts.

Together with Switzerland, cooperation in the legal sector is being continued with the Supreme Court of Bhutan. So far, fourteen judges have completed their master studies. All 300 judicial officers have benefited from attending basic and advanced law training courses. Contributions were also made to the construction and technical equipment of six district courts. The construction of two courthouses in Punakha and Wangduephodrang is making progress and the academic training provided to judges and lawyers continues.

Relations at university level between the three countries are also to be strengthened, inter alia with the planned establishment of a university partnership between the Royal Institute of Law and an Austrian law school. The relevant preliminary talks were held from 23 to 27 November in Vienna and Salzburg.

Further measures relate to the ADC contribution to the One UN Programme in Bhutan (protection and empowerment of victims of gender-specific violence as well as the further development of gender specific budget planning). These measures are supplemented by cooperation with the Royal Audit Authority on gender-balanced auditing. In addition, a large-scale programme on Public Finance Management that is co-funded by ADC and the EU will
be launched in 2016. In cooperation with the Civil Service Commission, a modern Performance Management System is being introduced.

12.2.1.8. Measures in and around the Southern Neighbourhood

The crisis in Syria, just like other conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East, especially the situation in Libya and Iraq, but also the resurging fighting with the Taliban in Afghanistan, have led to a rise in refugee and migration movements which by summer at the latest dominated global events.

Particularly with a view to countering the crisis in Syria and its impacts on neighbouring states as well as other affected regions, Austria supported the regional EU trust fund in response to the Syrian crisis (MADAD Trust Fund). This fund is to provide medium and long-term help to the affected countries, their refugees and the host communities caring for these refugees – especially in the field of education, in strengthening the local economy, and the provision of healthcare and water. While the measures launched under the funds were initially focused on Syria and its neighbours Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt, they were subsequently expanded to the Western Balkans and other affected countries such as Armenia.

In the context of the Global Alliance against ISIL/Da’esh, Austria contributed under the working group “Stabilisation” to the UNDP Stabilisation facility in Iraq, which seeks to contribute to promoting the quick stabilisation of the areas liberated from ISIL/Da’esh. Under this facility, Austria supports the re-establishment of the local economy in Iraq, inter alia in the provinces Ninive and Salah al-Din.

Between 2012 and 2015, Austria provided humanitarian assistance totalling some 20 million euros to Syria and the neighbours that were most severely impacted by the refugee crisis and an additional amount of 4 million euros was provided to Iraq.

Another very important tool in this context is the EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa, established at the EU summit in Valletta on 12 November. The goal is to improve people’s living conditions in the three most important regions of origin and transit of refugees in Africa faster and more efficiently, and especially in the areas of food security, migration management and good governance. In this context, Austria places a special focus on providing support to the ADC priority countries in the Horn of Africa, such as Ethiopia.

12.2.2. Promotion of Civil Society Commitment

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are important partners of ADC. Under Civil Society Cooperation International, programmes and projects launched on civil society’s own initiative and financed by both their own funding as
well as funding provided by ADC are being implemented. In terms of content-related design and orientation, the relevant efforts are based on an ADC guideline. The total annual budget for CSO co-funding amounts to 12.8 million euros.

Eleven Austrian CSOs hold framework programme agreements with a total contractual value of approximately 20 million euros, covering a period of three years and implement important initiatives in the fields of education, rural development, food security, women’s empowerment, health, disaster prevention, inclusion, strengthening of families and capacity building.

In the field of Personnel Development Cooperation, a programme for the posting of experts and interns has been successfully implemented. Under the funding instruments Individual Projects South and Individual Projects East, 14 new projects in the developing countries of the South and in South East Europe, Eastern Europe as well as in the Caucasus were approved. In addition to the ongoing EU co-funding projects, 20 new funding agreements were concluded for the next few years.

Civil society organisations as independent and indispensable development cooperation players play a key role at international level. In their work, CSOs are increasingly focusing on political dialogue in order to achieve sustainable changes and improvements in the partner countries. On this priority, a consortia project involving five Austrian CSOs and eight local CSOs is being successfully implemented in East Africa. Together with further donors, ADC co-funds the international programme CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE). CPDE provides a worldwide platform to CSOs that facilitates networking among CSOs campaigning for effective global development. Together with the Austrian CSO umbrella association “AG Globale Verantwortung” (WG global responsibility), a three-year programme is being successfully implemented. The objective of the programme is the strengthening of the competences of Austrian CSOs as well as active co-shaping of development policy framework conditions at European and international level. The project “1zu1-Vernetzung entwickeln, Entwicklung vernetzen” (1to1, developing networks, networking development) is dedicated to interlinking and promoting networking among small development policy initiatives from across Austria.

12.3. Multilateral Development Cooperation

12.3.1. The European Union

The EU (Member States and Commission) is still the largest donor of Official Development Assistance (ODA) worldwide. Austria’s financial contribution to the EU’s development cooperation is one of the largest single items of Austrian ODA. In 2015, Austria contributed 241.20 million euros to develop-
Austrian Development Cooperation

ment cooperation under the EU budget and the European Development Fund (EDF). This amounts to 20.22 per cent of Austria’s total ODA.

**2015** was the year of international conferences, which were to set the course for sustainable global development. The 3rd International Conference on Development Funding in Addis Ababa in July marked the start, followed by the UN Sustainable Development Summit which adopted the 2030 Agenda in New York in September and the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in December. The negotiations in the lead-up to the three conferences proved very difficult. Constant work on strong common positions enabled the EU to assume a very constructive role and thus to contribute to the success of the conferences. The 2030 Agenda was adopted in New York and a binding climate protection agreement adopted in Paris.

Work in cross-cutting working groups has proved successful and will be continued.

2015 was also the European Year for Development (EYD 2015) and was dedicated to the motto of “our world, our dignity our future”. Numerous events were organised to inform the public about concerns and activities related to development cooperation. The implementation of activities on the EYD 2015 were among the most important topics of the year: at the initiative of the MFA, a steering committee was established to coordinate the numerous EYD activities launched in Austria.

Against the background of the refugee crisis, migration was made the de facto priority of development cooperation, with calls for a European refugee policy becoming ever louder. While the EU Home Affairs Ministers and the EC’s Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs are responsible for the topic as such, development cooperation focuses on the area of migration and development.

With a view to enabling faster responses to the migration and refugee crisis, the EC set up trust funds to which Austria contributes, i.e. the EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa (EUTF Africa) and the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis.

The Latvian EU Council Presidency made “Gender and development” the priority topic of the first half of the year. Instead of an informal meeting of the ministers responsible for development cooperation, a high-level conference on gender and development was held in Riga with a view to the 2030 Agenda.

In the second half of the year, Luxembourg took over the EU Council Presidency and placed the focus on topics such as EU-ACP relations following the expiry of the Cotonou Agreement in 2020, and Policy Coherence for Development (PCD).

Austria focused specifically on the preparations for international conferences and the implementation of the European Year for Development. Being
one of the countries that were most severely affected by the migration and refugee crisis, Austria has again and again advocated solutions at EU level. Austria likewise contributes to those areas in which it can draw on its long-standing experience and specialised know-how, such as water, sustainable energy or private sector cooperation.

Following ratification by all EU Member States, the 11th EDF, in effect for the period until 2020, entered into force at the beginning of March. Within the EEF Committee, Austria contributed pro-actively to programme design, including in the context of the cooperation programme for the Austrian priority country Mozambique.

12.3.2. The United Nations

The year was dominated by the international discussion on the range of topics relating to sustainable development, which takes equal account of economic, social and environmental aspects, and seeks to enable a life in dignity, free of the worst forms of poverty and in an intact environment. In 2015, three major international conferences were held, which were closely related in terms of content, each addressing a specific aspect of sustainable development: the conference on Financing for Development (FfD) in Addis Ababa in July, a Summit of Heads of State and Government in New York in September, which adopted the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, including a catalogue of goals to be implemented by the year 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs), and the 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris in December, at which a new global climate compact for the protection of the world climate and the mitigation of the negative consequences of climate change was adopted.

At the Financing for Development conference, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda was adopted, which by a comprehensive Means of Implementation Package relating to the fields of taxes, promotion of private investment, international public financing, trade, technology transfer, innovation and management of public debt seeks to improve the financing of sustainable development.

The final document of the Summit of Heads of State and Government “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” marks a milestone in the debate on sustainable development. All 193 UN member states have committed themselves to designing their future development paths in an economic, socially and environmentally compatible way and to implementing the 2030 Agenda with its 17 SDGs and 169 targets by the year 2030 at national, regional and international level. The 2030 Agenda contains a package of measures towards implementing these goals and introduces a mechanism to monitor and review the respective level of implementation.
Austria was represented at the summit by a high-level delegation led by Federal President Heinz Fischer who was accompanied by Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz, Federal Minister Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek and Federal Minister Andrä Rupprechter. The delegation also included members of the Austrian National Council and civil society representatives.

Austria started to contribute at a very early stage to the negotiations on the SDGs. The thematic priorities were guided by a 10 Points Catalogue, prepared under the leadership of the MFA in cooperation with other ministries and civil society. It covers inter alia the topics of economy and development; water, energy, climate protection and agriculture and forestry, as well as human security, human rights, employment, decent work, social protection, gender equality, rights of people with disabilities, and rule of law. Special attention was dedicated to the topics of education/vocational training, strengthening the private sector, as well as innovation/technology transfer.

In the context of its Presidency of the UN’s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Austria successfully advocated a reform of the ECOSOC and the strengthening of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) as a framework for effective monitoring of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at international level. This also includes the central role of national supervisory bodies, such as parliament and courts of auditors in the national review of implementation. Organised by the Austrian presidency, the second HLPF was held from 26 June to 8 July under the auspices of ECOSOC. Deliberations focused specifically on issues related to the implementation and effective monitoring of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (please see also Chapter 5.5.2.).

12.3.3. The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC)

By seconding a DAC delegate who is permanently based in Paris, cooperation with the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) was clearly intensified from May onwards. From a thematic point of view, the work towards reforming the statistics system that has been ongoing since 2014, was one of the most relevant topics. This includes the reform of Official Development Assistance (ODA), in which context topics such as eligibility of security-related spending and of the private sector were discussed, as well as the establishment of a new additional indicator (Total Official Support for Sustainable Development – TOSSD).

In another core area of DAC, known as the peer reviews, the results of the review of the Austrian development cooperation were presented at a public event by the DAC Chairman held in Vienna in January. Some of the recommendations made as a result of this review have already been included in the new Three-Year Programme 2016-2018. In his presentation, the DAC Chairman stated that “Austria is doing the right things, but needs to do more of these”. In the context of a peer review to be conducted in 2016, Austria will review Poland’s development cooperation.
The DAC continued its efforts aimed at engaging new donors and stepping up recipient countries’ involvement. In addition, a High Level Panel is tasked with preparing proposals in 2016 for an institutional reform of the DAC in order to enable the Committee to accommodate the rapidly changing framework conditions in development financing and to continue to position the DAC as one of the central players of development cooperation.

12.3.4. Assignments of Young Austrians

Young Austrian university graduates are given the opportunity to serve on duty tours lasting a maximum of two years as Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) with UN organisations in order to gain first-hand experience of working in a multilateral environment. The MFA bears the costs of such placements. A total of four Austrian Junior Professional Officers worked with various UN organisations, including UNICEF, SE4All and UNIS, in Armenia, Burundi, New York and Vienna.

The EC’s Junior Experts in Delegations Training Programme enables qualified Austrian university graduates to complete a nine-month tour of duty with an EU delegation or with the Commission. After having passed the selection procedure for 2014–2016, one male Austrian worked with the EU delegation in Cuba and one female Austrian worked with the EU delegation in Cairo.
13. Global Environmental and Climate Policy

13.1. Climate Change and Climate Policy

The 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 21), held in Paris from 30 November to 12 December, succeeded – in the extension – in reaching agreement on a new climate convention. The Paris Agreement seeks to keep the increase in the global average temperature caused by greenhouse gases at well below 2° Celsius above pre-industrial levels, hand in hand with efforts towards reducing this limit to 1.5° Celsius.

For the first time ever and not least due to the diplomatic skills of the French conference chairmanship, an ambitious global and legally binding major agreement on climate protection which sets out obligations for all states will be effective from 2020 onwards. The content of the Paris Agreement to some extent clearly exceeds what had been considered politically possible in the lead-up. In the long term, global greenhouse gas emissions are to reach their peak as soon as possible and then decrease quickly afterwards in order to strike a balance between emissions and carbon sequestration (for instance in forests) by the second half of the century. In order to reach this goal, it is necessary to reach zero emissions from 2050 onwards, which requires ensuring both the protection and strengthening of carbon sinks and comprehensive phasing out of fossil energy sources. The parties to the Agreement thus undertake to submit Nationally Determined Contributions ("NDCs") every five years. Such new pledges must be more ambitious than the previous ones. Developing countries are encouraged to move towards absolute and comprehensive contribution targets.

In parallel to this and in the interests of transparency, all states have to report regularly on their emission reduction achievements and additional reduction measures taken. As the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) already submitted by 187 states are not sufficient for reaching the 2° Celsius path, a ‘global stock-take’ is to be undertaken every five years from 2018 and formally from 2023 onwards.

The industrialised countries will continue to provide funding for climate protection in the developing countries and other countries (such as emerging countries) are also called upon to do so.

Ahead of this negotiation result, four international preparatory conferences were held in Geneva and Bonn in the course of the year. As part of the internal EU coordination process to define a uniform negotiation line, the EU Environment Ministers’ Council had adopted the Intended National Contributions (INDCs) of the EU and its Member States on 6 March. Subsequently, the EU and its Member States were able to announce their goal of reducing their greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 by 40% compared with 1990. In the final stages of the preparations for the Paris Climate Conference, an extraordinary Environment Council held on 18 September had unanimously
adopted Conclusions on the EU position on a global climate protection agreement effective as of 2020.

13.2. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

In terms of content and procedures, UNEP focused on the preparations for the Second Session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) planned for May 2016. The main topics on the agenda were contributions to the 2030 Agenda.

From an operational point of view, UNEP is mainly active in the fields of climate change, natural disasters and conflicts, management of ecosystems, environmental governance, harmful chemical substances and hazardous waste as well as resource efficiency.

13.3. Global Environmental Protection Agreements and Initiatives

The Third Session of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), which serves as an interface between research and politics, was held in Bonn from 12 to 17 January. Based on its work programme, the meeting focused especially on capacity building, data, indigenous and local knowledge systems, impact assessments, soil degradation and soil rehabilitation. Other topics addressed were communication with and involvement of stakeholders and other cooperation partnerships with UN institutions.

At the Third WCDRR World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai, Japan, 14 to 18 March), agreement was reached on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 as the successor to the Hyogo Framework of Action 2005–2015 (HFA). This new framework goes beyond the HFA, particularly as regards participation of women and other groups in the development and implementation of national strategies on disaster risk reduction (DRR), placing the focus on taking preparatory measures in advance rather than post disaster management, and on the link between DRR, long-term development planning and taking account of underlying risks. In view of the steep increase in damage resulting from natural and technical disasters witnessed worldwide over the last ten years that had claimed some 700,000 lives, directly affected 1.5 billion people and led to economic losses of 1.3 trillion US dollars (approximately two thirds related to flooding and/or droughts), the Sendai Framework calls for a number of national and international measures, such as provision of coordinated, sustainable and adequate technical as well as financial support to developing countries for DRR, including technology transfer based on mutually agreed concessional and/or preferential conditions. This shall apply in particular to Small Island
Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), which are often subject to special disaster risks.

The joint Meeting of the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions (Geneva, 4 to 15 May) on transboundary movements of hazardous waste and certain pollutants brought together more than 1,000 participants from 171 states. On the topics relating specifically to the conventions, progress was made in the negotiations which translated in the listing of new chemical substances under the Stockholm and the Rotterdam Conventions and the adoption of technical guidelines on mercury and on waste consisting of or contaminated with persistent organic pollutants under the Basel Convention. In addition, it was possible to adopt a compliance mechanism under the Rotterdam Convention. Topics that related to at least two of the conventions were jointly addressed, i.e. compliance mechanism, budget and funding as well as technical support for the implementation of the conventions.

The 12th Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, which is of international importance particularly as regards the issue of habitat of waterfowl and waders, was held in Punta del Este (Uruguay, 1 to 9 June). The conference adopted the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016–2024 and a communication and participation programme for 2016–2021; the main topics on the agenda were the relationship between wetlands and water supply, climate protection, urban development and disaster prevention. Among the objectives pursued was enhancing conservation of Mediterranean Basin Island Wetlands.

The Fourth Session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM4) that is based on the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, convened in Geneva from 28 September to 2 October. The agenda focused on environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants from production processes or hospitals and their impacts on drinking water and foodstuffs, information on chemicals in products along the supply chain, and highly hazardous pesticides. The objective defined for the meeting was to make progress towards the achievement of the 2020 goal of sound chemicals and waste management, and to consider further sound management approaches beyond 2020.

The 12th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was held in Ankara from 12 to 23 October. The meeting succeeded in positioning the convention as one of the most important tools towards achieving the SDG 15.3 (aimed at Land Degradation Neutrality). It was possible to reconcile this goal with the Convention’s mandate (i.e. combating soil degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas). It was furthermore possible to expand (by way of interpretation, without a change to the mandate) the Convention’s rigid mandate to the extent that countries that are affected by aridity and apply for assistance may now expect support from the Convention’s Secretariat.
The 27th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (Dubai, 1 to 5 November), agreed inter alia on the Dubai Pathway. This Pathway envisages a series of preparatory conferences to be held in 2016 with a view to defining an amendment to the Protocol to include restrictions on hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) in the Protocol. Austria holds the co-chair in these preparatory conferences.

The 7th Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Budapest, 17 to 19 November) was marked by the opening of the Convention to all UN member states beyond the ECE region. In future, the convention will thus come to play a global role in transboundary cooperation in water matters. As well as dealing with topics related to the implementation of the convention, participants also adopted the work programme for 2016–2018.

13.4. Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All)

Please see Chapter 6.6.

13.5. Nuclear Safety

Austria remains committed to maintaining its clear opposition to nuclear power both bilaterally and within 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 is clearly not economically viable. Operating countries are thus increasingly calling for public subsidies.

Against this background, Austria brought an action for annulment against the decision of the European Commission according to which the granting of British state aid to the construction of the reactor blocs Hinkley Point C was compatible with Union law (case T–356/15). Under these state aid proceedings, Austria holds the view that a mature, per se unprofitable technology is inconsistent with EU state aid rules. The Austrian complaint was published in the Official Journal of the EU on 12 October (C 337).

Luxembourg joined the action on the part of Austria, while Slovakia, Hungary, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, France, Poland and Romania joined the action on the side of the Commission as interveners in support of the defendant.

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.
Concerning the planned expansion of nuclear power plants in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, planned lifetime extensions of nuclear power plants in the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Hungary, as well as plans regarding the identification of sites for permanent nuclear waste repositories in the Czech Republic and in Switzerland – particularly those close to the Austrian border – Austria continues to make full use of all available means of intervention and influence in the context of bilateral “Nuclear Information Agreements” and of cross-border Environmental Impact Assessments in line with the relevant international agreements and EU legislation.

The safety and security dialogues, likewise conducted on the basis of “Nuclear Information Agreements”, on concrete nuclear power plant projects in neighbouring states were continued. Within the framework of these agreements, regular experts meetings were held in 2015 with the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland and Poland.

14.1. Objectives and Priorities

International cultural policy is one of those formative and pro-active elements of Austrian foreign policy that promote communication and heightened awareness of Austria's foreign policy concerns in an increasingly interlinked world and against the background of mutually influencing cultures. Along with its rich artistic and cultural heritage, Austria boasts a vibrant creative and innovative contemporary culture. Austria is associated with its cultural and scientific achievements in many countries around the world. This is a benefit that should indeed be used.

The focus of international cultural policy activities is thus directed towards presenting and supporting Austria’s contemporary creative achievements in the fields of arts and science. The further development of culture, arts and science requires international exchange. Contacts and encounters across borders are a source of creative ideas and impulses and at the same time create opportunities for further professional and personal development.

The worldwide international cultural network prepares the ground for future cooperation, explores opportunities for international collaboration, defines topics and formulates contents, prepares cooperation activities, finds partnerships and facilitates encounters.

International cultural policy provides a proactive contribution towards promoting European integration and by launching initiatives in the field of dialogue among cultures and religions it also makes contributions towards building confidence and peace.

All these activities are implemented by Austria's international cultural policy network, which currently consists of 31 Austrian Cultural Fora and Cooperation Offices, 87 embassies and consulates-general, 65 Austria Libraries (Österreich-Bibliotheken), eight Austria Institutes (Österreich-Institute) and two scientific-technical offices.

Cultural activities abroad must be based on clearly defined priorities. Within a multi-year planning period, the MFA thus sets both geographic (neighbouring states, Western Balkan countries) and content-related (film and new media, architecture, dance, women in art and science, Austria as a venue for dialogue) priorities, which are managed through the allocation of varying annual cultural budgets to the representations abroad.

This also influences the setting of priorities, especially when Austria assumes a more pro-active role in the context of a (macro-)regional initiative or strategy.

This is, for instance, the case in the context of Platform Culture – Central Europe, which was set up in 2001 on the initiative of Austria, and under which Austria assumed a pro-active role also in 2015, be it through its involvement in the exhibition “How Central Europe Helps the World” cel-
International Cultural Policy

Celebrating the **European Year for Development** in Oslo (Norway) in May or under an **initiative of the Platform partner countries for refugee children from the Donbass region of Ukraine** under the heading of “**art for children**”. In 2016, Platform Culture – Central Europe celebrates the 15th anniversary of its establishment, which coincides with Austria’s platform presidency in the second half of the year.

Another focus of Austrian activities was the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) which reflects the cultural, political, economic and human relations that have developed over the centuries in the **Danube region** and continues to form a strong foundation for future joint regional development. **Cross-border cooperation involving 14 partners** – nine EU Member States and five European countries – opens up a wide range of opportunities for joint activities in the fields of politics and business, culture, science and education as well as information and communication. Building on this, a new coordination centre (**Danube Strategy Point**) was established in **Brussels in July** with a view to promoting and benefiting from synergies in the fields of communication and coordination under the EUSDR.

The translation programme **Traduki** is dedicated to the geographic priority region of the **Western Balkans**. The programme was launched in 2008 by the MFA, KulturKontakt Austria, the Swiss culture foundation Pro Helvetia, the German Foreign Office, the Goethe-Institute and the S. Fischer Foundation. Other partners that have joined the network in the last few years include the Slovenian book agency JAK, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, the Department for Cultural Affairs of the government of the Principality of Liechtenstein, the Kulturstiftung Liechtenstein (Liechtenstein Cultural Foundation), the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Albania, the Ministry of Culture and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Romania, bringing its membership to 13 countries. **Traduki** promotes translations of fiction and non-fiction books as well as of children’s and adolescents’ literature between the countries participating in the programme. Translators as important mediators of culture are motivated by being granted reasonable levels of remuneration. The participation of **Traduki** – boasting a comprehensive programme in the Leipzig Book Fair – marks a traditional priority at various events. Book readings by authors and encounters between authors, translators, critics, academics and librarians are also organised. The activities launched by **Traduki** seek to contribute towards promoting mutual understanding and friendship between the Western Balkan countries and German-speaking countries. The number of translations funded under this programme increases by some 100 titles every year.

The **Writer-in-Residence Atelier Westbalkan**, set up in cooperation with the Quartier21 at the MuseumsQuartier in Vienna, takes account of this geographic priority of the MFA. Under this residence programme, authors from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia are invited as visiting guests to Vienna for a period of one to two months.
Objectives and Priorities

This year, the invitation extended by the MFA under this programme was accepted by Zlatko Paković, Dalibor Plečić, Ljiljana Ilić, Dragan Protić from Belgrade, Jonila Godole from Tirana, Petar Andonovski from Skopje, Ognjen Spahic from Montenegro and Tanija Šljivar from Banja Luka.

Under the exchange programme “Westbalkan Calling” directed at visual artists from Austria, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, the Graz-based cultural association rotor was commissioned with developing residences for artists in the participating countries. The programme is implemented by rotor and Cultural City Network from Graz together with “Kunstraum lend|hauer” in Klagenfurt, AIR–ART-IST IN RESIDENCE Krems, the “Atelierhaus Salzamt” in Linz, the “Kunsthalle Exnergasse” in Vienna, the Tirana Institute of Contemporary Art, Public ROOM Sarajevo, Stacion – Center for Contemporary Art Pristhina, the “press to exit project space” in Skopje, the Art Research Center 42° in Cetinje and the “Kontekst Collective / Zadruga Oktobar” in Belgrade. The programme seeks to promote institutional exchange of artists between Austria and the Western Balkan countries with a view to learning more about one another and strengthening mutual understanding.

From 2015 onwards, an additional focus is to be placed on the Western Balkans priority region by introducing annual country priorities. This was first initiated with Serbia. Special highlights of the Cultural Year Austria – Serbia 2015 were the Helnwein retrospective in the Museum of Modern Arts in Belgrade, the exhibition “Tracks and Traces” involving Andreas Fogarasi, a special focus on Austria in the context of World Poetry Day, a “Writer-in-Residence” programme for young authors, the Belgrade cabaret evening featuring Alfred Dorfer, the contributions Austria as guest country made to the Serbian long night of museums, more than a dozen top-level concerts, a major film festival as well as workshops on an ambitious project implemented together with the Museum of Yugoslav History on the topic of “Gasstarbeiter” (“guest” or foreign workers). The highlights of the Serbian Year of Culture in Vienna included a Serbian film about the trial of the assassins of Sarajevo, the presentation of the exhibition “Bewegte Beziehungen” (eventful relations) in Palais Porcia and the “Serbischer November” organised by the Volkstheater in Vienna that made Serbian theatre productions also accessible to the Austrian audience.

In the field of bilateral cultural relations with Russia, the “Austrian-Russian Cultural Seasons 2013–2015” were successfully concluded. The project “Nadezhda – Prinzip Hoffnung” (Nadezhda – principle hope) proved a compelling follow-up project organised for this cultural season. Led by the Austrian Cultural Forum Moscow and in cooperation with the Vienna Kunsthalle” as well as the embassies and cultural institutes of Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, the largest and internationally most successful European exhibition project of the year was organised in Moscow which boasts a rich cultural life. A total of 20 Russian and European artists travelled
to and explored seven selected industrial cities. These trips led them to the depths of the mine shafts of Norilsk to the blast furnaces of Magnitogorsk and inspired artists to design works of art specifically dedicated to these places which were then presented in a historic factory building that had been renovated especially for this project. The exhibition brought together some of the most important Austrian and Russian institutions in a joint project that not only proved a major success with the Moscow audience but also beyond Russia, and was met with significant positive publicity, particularly by the specialised press in German-speaking countries.

Austria contributed a rich programme to the European Capitals of Culture 2015 (Mons and Pilsen). With a view to presenting Austria as an innovative-creative country with a diverse and historically grown rich cultural and scientific diversity and to living up to the motto “Où la technologie rencontre la culture” (where technology meets culture), the priorities defined for Capital of Culture Mons 2015 focused in particular on the fields of new media, digital art, electroacoustic music, and multimedia. From 3 to 7 September, an Austria Week was held in Mons, which dealt with digitalisation and its impact on education systems and creative production processes. In the context of the Capital of Culture Pilsen 2015, Austrian involvement focused in particular on cooperation with “Ars Electronica“, the work of Adolf Loos, films as well as exhibitions on contemporary art. With the contribution of the Federal Chancellery, the Austrian Cultural Forum Prague organised an Austria Week that was also held in Pilsen in March.

In the field of exhibitions, it was possible to present an innovative and at the same time dynamic picture of Austria, its artists and its cultural heritage and wealth based on both the established programme of travelling exhibitions and the targeted promotion of individual exhibitions, group exhibitions and thematic exhibitions. The objective pursued is to (better) promote contemporary Austrian artists at international level.

Since 2009, the MFA has supported the quartier21 in the MuseumsQuartier in Vienna in designing an international exhibition programme. In the context of this cooperation entitled “freiraum Q21 INTERNATIONAL”, three exhibitions were organised this year, namely the “united nations extended – The Vienna Dialog”, which provided insights into the area of tension between art and politics based on the example of the United Nations; “Anmerkungen zum Beginn des kurzen 20. Jahrhunderts“ (Notes on the Beginning of the Short 20th Century) – an attempt at presenting the historic traces of the First World War in modern times and reflecting the way these are being dealt with; the anti-war exhibition “Levitate“ – alluding to the protests against the Vietnam War organised in the USA in 1967 under the heading of “Levitate the Pentagon” – as levitation was the leitmotiv for protest, resistance and freedom.

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. The support International Cultural Policy provides to contemporary Austrian music thus remains an important highlight of cultural programmes. In this connection, the network of Austrian international culture supports musical performances that cover a very wide range from classical, to world music and pop through to new music and experimental approaches (electronic, sound installations). Support was provided in particular to musicians that had been selected for “The New Austrian Sound of Music” (NASOM), the highly successful support programme for young Austrian soloists and ensembles, initiated in 2002. In spring 2015, a total of 25 new NASOM acts were selected for the biennium 2016/2017.

Authors’ book readings made up the major part of the activities in the field of literature, with the following authors featuring in the literature promotion programme “schreibART AUSTRIA” playing a most active role: Xaver Bayer, Leopold Federmann, Hanno Millesi, Clemens Setz and Thomas Stangl as well as authors Ann Cotton, Olga Flor, Sabine Gruber, Maja Haderlap, Angelika Reitzer and Gerhild Steinbuch. Numerous other renowned Austrian authors were also invited to participate in reading tours abroad including: Martin Amanshauser, Thomas Antonic, Anna Baar, Christoph Bauer, Zdenka Becker, Antonio Fian, Milena Michiko Flašar, Marjana Gaponenko, Karl-Markus Gauß, Thomas Glavinic, Constantin Göttfert, Sandra Gugić, Josef Haslinger, Cornelius Hell, Konstantin Kaiser, Vea Kaiser, Daniel Kehlmann, Markus Köhle, Alfred Komarek, Mieze Medusa (Doris Mitterbacher), Eva Menasse, Lydia Mischkulnig, Alexander Peer, Karin Peschka, Dine Petrik, Ursula Poznanski, Teresa Präauer, Julya Rabinowich, Christoph Ransmayr, Eva Rossmann, Tex Rubinowitz, Robert Schindel, Sabine Scholl, Raoul Schrott, Caroline Schutti, Michael Stavarič, Heinrich Steinfest, Marlene Streeruwitz, Judith Taschner, Vladimir Vertlib, Peter Waterhouse, Peter Waugh, Renate Welsh and Josef Winkler.

In the theatrical arena, the year saw performances of plays by Austrian playwrights, the participation of Austrian theatre groups in international theatre festivals, scenic readings of theatre plays by Austrian authors and playwrights, as well as performances of Austrian productions such as ARTIG, Walter Bacó, Editta Braun Company, Annette Grömminger/Isabel Blumen-schlager, Irrwisch, Karin Schäfer Figurentheater, Theater.nuu, teatro caprile, Toihaus Theater and Max Reinhardt Seminar.

In the focus area of dance, performances by choreographers, dancers and dance companies from Austria were supported at festivals and workshops abroad. The innovative funding programme INTPA (Internationales Netz für Tanz und Performance Austria, international network for dance and performance Austria), a cooperation between TanzQuartier Wien, the Federal Chancellery and the MFA, played a major role in this respect. Thus inter alia alien productions, Ziya Azazi, Gloria Benedict, Dagmar Dachauer, Willi Dorner, Alexander Gottfarb und Alexander Deuting, Silke Grabinger, Andrea Hackl, Anne Juren, Melanie Maar, Rosa Rodelius, Jasmine Schaitl,
SEAD Salzburg, Superamas, Christian Ubl, Martin Ubl, Doris Uhlich and Dorothea Zeyringer performed abroad.

In the field of film, support was provided to facilitate the participation of Austrian films in European and international festivals and a number of Austrian film weeks or film days were initiated by the Austrian representation authorities and Cultural Fora. Due to the ongoing high level of interest since it was first launched in 2011, the cooperation with Ars Electronica Linz in the field of animation film was continued and so far events have been organised in 26 countries. Likewise, the cooperation with Österreichische Akademie des Films (Austrian Academy of Film) was continued in the short film area. Since 2013, selected short films have been presented as part of the “Österreichische Kurzfilmschau” (Austrian short film series) by the international cultural network of the MFA abroad. To date 121 such presentations have been organised in 20 different countries.

The “Österreichische Kurzfilmschau” managed to provide both a platform for focused presentation of Austria as a whole as well as for individual events aimed at presenting the work of young Austrian filmmakers. The involvement of Austria lecturers abroad in the “Österreichischen Kurzfilmschau” programme, meant that the short films were shown to a wider audience in the school and university sectors and met with an excellent response. In collaboration with the international film festival “Tricky Women” in Vienna – the only film festival worldwide exclusively dedicated to animation films produced by women – a number of selected animation films by female Austrian filmmakers were presented in eleven countries. The programme offers the opportunity to contribute to an improved gender balance and/or taking encouraging steps towards the realisation of this objective also in the area of film.

14.2. Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue

Against the background of extremist acts of violence in the name of – and thus abusing – religion as well as in the area of tension between migration and integration, Austria stepped up its efforts in the field of dialogue. In this context, methods for dialogue were also further developed. The regular exchange on common values of coexistence in the diversity of cultures, religions, faiths, philosophies and views of the world as well as the foundations of our legal order are of pivotal importance in this context. Dialogue is an important tool, both in terms of prevention and in dealing with terrorist acts, in the context of seeking to preserve our open and inclusive societies.

The dialogue with Islam, in which Austria has engaged for many years now both at sovereign state level as well as on scientific and civil society level, was further intensified (6th Religious Dialogue with Iran in Vienna, 5 to 7 October, 5th Religious Dialogue with Indonesia in Vienna, 5 to 7 November). The dialogues focused on topics such as freedom, religion and vio-
Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue

ience, acculturation of religions and the question of dealing with religious diversity. The relevant discussions with the Western Balkan states focused on dialogue as a measure in the fight against Jihadism, and on development of an Islam of a European notion. Building on the experience of the training events for women’s representatives, the international symposium “Islam in der Stimme der Frau: im Dialog mit zeitgenössischen muslimischen Schriftstellerinnen” (Islam in the voice of women: in dialogue with contemporary Muslim authors) was organised in Hittisau (Vorarlberg) from 18 to 21 August, which placed the intellectual and shaping role of women in Islam in an intercultural dialogue with western perspectives.

At the multilateral level, the Task Force “Dialog of Cultures” at the MFA was invited to report on its work at the meeting of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue (Sarajevo, 2 and 3 November). On 6 July, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the institutional strengthening of the UN Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC).

The Austrian diplomatic and consular missions abroad contribute proactively to the tradition of dialogue in Austrian foreign policy which has been pursued since the 1980s, for instance by promoting dialogue among cultures involving creative artists in the context of numerous dialogue projects. This worldwide thematic networking and interlinking, which also reaches out to and involves development cooperation, the media area and integration, is reflected in the Intercultural Achievement Award, initiated by the MFA and awarded for the second time on 2 September by Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz.

In April, the Vienna-based International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) adopted a re-orientation which contains a clear commitment to freedom of religion and a stronger focus on the relationship between religious freedom and human rights. The gradual implementation of this re-orientation is monitored and supported in ongoing manner by Austria, the other states parties and the Vatican. As a consequence of this re-orientation process, the Centre’s public relations work was improved and also received positive coverage in the international media.

The Centre continues to further develop and expand its international partnerships, especially with the UN (including the UNESCO school books programme for the Middle East) and civil society (inter alia through the Peace Mapping Programme) and initiated and supported international conferences on the topic of violence and religion as well as protection of religious minorities in the Middle East. From a country-specific point of view, the International Dialogue Centre is active in Myanmar, Nigeria and the Central African Republic.

According to Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), competence for cultural policy lies exclusively with the Member States. The EU is only assigned a supportive and coordinating role in order to promote cooperation among Member States in this field.

Culture as a central element in EU external relations was, however, recognised for the first time in the Cultural Agenda 2007. The promotion of cultural diversity as well as intercultural dialogue are enshrined as priorities in this document. Ever since, Austria has repeatedly advocated the strategic inclusion of culture in the Union’s external relations.

From 3 to 4 September, the Luxembourg EU Council Presidency organised an experts conference on the topic of “culture and development”. On 24 November, the Council adopted “Conclusions on the role of culture in the EU’s external relations with a focus on culture in development cooperation”. The Council also adopted a change to the Work Plan for Culture (2015–2018) with respect to giving preference to intercultural dialogue. On the priority topic of “integration of refugees through art and culture”, a group of experts was tasked with identifying successful practices and preparing a manual.

Of the 29 Austrian Cultural Fora, 14 are active in the EU and the same holds true for 38 of the 65 Austria Libraries and for seven of the eight Austria Institutes worldwide. Within the European Union, they work pro-actively towards promoting cultural exchange, European multi-lingualism, 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.

The network of European National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) is another form of cooperation at a cultural level. Founded in 2006 as an informal network, it was constituted as an association with relevant articles in 2011. Currently, 34 Institutes for Culture belong to EUNIC. Worldwide, more than 100 EUNIC clusters have formed as cooperation networks between local EU cultural institutes.

14.4. Bilateral Agreements in the Fields of Culture and Science

Cultural and scientific agreements are valuable instruments to enhance bilateral cooperation in the fields of education, higher education, research as well as art and culture. They seek to facilitate better mutual understanding among people from two countries and strengthen relations between states. They form useful bases for cultural and scientific exchange, ranging from the promotion of language teaching, literature as well as regional and cultural studies, to granting scholarships, the exchange of lecturers, to cooperation in
the fields of protection and preservation of monuments, science, youth and sports to promoting contemporary arts.

In the context of the “Cultural Year Austria-Serbia 2015”, a new cultural work programme for the years 2015–2019 was signed at the end of the fourth meeting of the Austrian-Serbian Cultural Commission in Belgrade on 12 May. Important institutions of this cooperation include the Austrian Cultural Forum Belgrade, the two Austria Libraries in Belgrade and Novi Sad, KulturKontakt Austria, the educational coordinator for Serbia and the Embassy of Serbia in Vienna.

On 19 May, the sixth meeting of the Austro-Ukrainian Joint Commission on Scientific-Technical Cooperation (S&T) met in Kyiv and on 29 May the Austro-Indian Joint Commission on S&T held its third meeting in Vienna.

At the second meeting of the Austrian-Czech Cultural Commission in Prague on 30 June, it was decided to continue and intensify cultural cooperation between Austria and the Czech Republic. The new work programme contributes to further intensifying common cultural exchange over the next five years. It was also agreed to continue the programme “Aktion Österreich – Tschechische Republik, Wissenschafts- und Erziehungskooperation“ (Action Austria – Czech Republic, cooperation in the fields of science and education). This programme seeks in particular to promote young scientists and science students in order to contribute to better mutual understanding between Czech and Austrian students, and academic as well as scientific staff.

On 15 September, the Austrian-Polish Cultural Commission adopted the new Austrian-Polish cultural work programme 2015–2019 in Vienna. The Austria Days (involving brief seminars on Austrian regional and cultural studies directed at Polish German-language teachers), organised every year by the Austrian Cultural Forum in Warsaw in cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Education and Women’s Affairs, the regional teacher training institute in Katowice and the Austria Institute Warsaw will also be continued as part of the cultural work programme over the next five years. Likewise, it is envisaged that cooperation between film makers and film institutions will be intensified to enable film cycles and participation in international film festivals in the respective other country. In the field of cooperation among libraries, the outstanding position enjoyed by the Austria Libraries in Warsaw, Cracow, Opole, Poznan, Rzeszów and Wroclaw was highlighted.

Further cultural talks were held in October with Montenegro in Podgorica and with Israel in Tel Aviv. In November and December, the Joint Commissions on S&T with Croatia, Slovakia and Slovenia met in Vienna, and the Joint Commission on S&T with Serbia met in Belgrade.

14.5. Science, Education and Language

Austria Professorships and Centres of Austrian Studies have been established at universities mainly in Europe, the USA and Israel. These facili-
International Cultural Policy

ties 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 substantially towards enabling chairs and centres for Austrian studies to fulfil their tasks.

The OeAD-GmbH provides services to scholarship and grant holders and administers the various mobility programmes such as Erasmus+, bilateral grant programmes, Austrian Development Cooperation programmes and scientific and technical cooperation programmes. In implementing these tasks, the OeAD-GmbH acts as the partner of the MFA, which is in turn responsible for relevant coordination and information sharing activities involving Austrian representations abroad and foreign representations in Austria.

In the 21st century, science and technology are playing an increasingly important key role in addressing and dealing with the major challenges of our times that require worldwide international cooperation, such as strengthening the economy’s competitiveness, climate change, global tasks in the healthcare sector or energy-related matters. Thus, the area of science is playing an ever more relevant role in Austrian foreign policy. Against this background, the Offices of Science and Technology Austria (OSTA) in Washington D.C. and in Beijing market 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, the Österreichische Forschungsförderungsgesellschaft (Austrian Research Promotion Agency), Austria Wirtschaftsservice (the Austrian Federal Promotional Bank), Wissenschaftsfonds (the Austrian Science Fund), Österreichischer Austauschdienst (Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research), AustriaTech and the international offices of the Austrian Economic Chamber.

The Österreich Institut G.m.b.H. (Austria Institute Ltd.) organises German language courses, supports and promotes German language instruction abroad, and cooperates with national and international organisations. It was founded in 1997 to further develop German courses on an independent basis. These courses, which are an important element of Austria’s international cultural policy, had previously been offered at the Austrian Cultural Institutes. Based in Vienna, the organisation maintains institutes in Belgrade, Bratislava, Brno, Budapest, Krakow, Rome, Warsaw and Wroclaw. All of the Österreich Institut facilities see themselves as centres for the promotion of the study and cultivation of the German language as it is written and spoken in Austria.
Currently, there are eight Auslandsschulen (Austrian Schools Abroad): two in Budapest and one each in Prague, Istanbul, Guatemala City, Shkodra, Queretaro and Liechtenstein. Lessons at these schools are based on the Austrian curriculum in combination with relevant adaptations to the respective host country.

The project-related work by the “Beauftragte für Bildungskooperation des BMBF” (educational coordination officers at the Federal Ministry of Education and Research) contributes to supporting relevant reforms in Eastern and South-East Europe.

14.6. Austria Libraries

Over the last 25 years, the Austria Libraries (Österreich-Bibliotheken) abroad have evolved into well-established platforms of inter-cultural dialogue. Set up in 1989, they have made a special contribution to overcoming the intellectual and mentality-related division of Europe into East and West. Austria Libraries are primarily located in Central, Eastern and South-East Europe, the Caucasus, the Black Sea region and Central Asia.

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 scientific satellites abroad, they have developed into information and cultural centres that organise cultural and scientific events in cooperation with cultural fora and embassies. Being an indispensable and integral element of Austrian international cultural policy, they provide important and sustainable impetus to fostering the sharing of Austrian culture and philosophy in all its diversity abroad, also going beyond the Central European scope.

The network of Austria Libraries abroad currently consists of 65 libraries in 28 countries. Besides providing traditional library services, the Austria Libraries organise some 1,000 events that attract more than 120,000 visitors every year. In 2015, more than 135,000 individuals used the Austria Libraries whose stocks were increased and comprise some 414,000 books, more than 5,300 audio items, 2,400 CD-ROMs and 5,200 DVDs and some 3,100 videos. All Austria Libraries are equipped with WLAN.

Accessible via the Austria Libraries’ web portal (www.oesterreich-bibliotheken.at), the database of Austrian literature already includes more than 21,480 foreign language translations of Austrian literature (international austriaca), not including the external data bases in Japan, Russia and Italy. The translations produced in the context of Austria Libraries frequently win translation awards sponsored by the Federal Chancellery and often receive distinctions in the respective host countries.

The Austria Libraries at the Departments for German Studies abroad are often managed by lecturers of the Austrian Agency for International Cooperation.
International Cultural Policy

in Education and Research (Österreichischer Austauschdienst, OeAD), who are highly valued by the heads of Austria Libraries as competent networkers in matters relating to Austrian cultural, educational and scientific activities. Facilities which house Austria Libraries also award the Austrian German Language Diploma (Österreichisches Sprachdiplom Deutsch, ÖSD) and conduct the relevant exams.

In a long-standing cooperation with the “Culture and Language” department at the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Austria Days were organised at selected locations abroad. These events, which were conducted 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 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. Since 2009, publications produced in the context of the Austria Libraries network have been published in the series on “Transkulturelle Forschungen an den Österreich-Bibliotheken im Ausland” (trans-cultural research at Austria Libraries abroad) by the LIT publishing company. A board composed of renowned Austrian editors supervises this series of scientific works published by the Austria Libraries; volume 11 published under this series is “Universities and Elite formation in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe“ (editors: Florian Bieber and Harald Heppner). In the series of publications edited by Rudolf Agstner, likewise published by the LIT publishing company and entitled “Forschungen zur Geschichte des österreichischen Auswärtigen Dienstes” (research on the history of the Austrian Foreign Service), volume 11 entitled “Handbuch des Österreichischen Auswärtigen Dienstes, volume 1: 1918–1938 – Zentrale, Gesandtschaften und Konsulate“ was published.

Other publications presented included the anthology on contemporary Austrian literature by Evelyne Polt-Heinzl entitled “Die Generation nach 1960. Texte österreichischer Autoren“.

Every year, the Austria Libraries contribute to the campaign “Österreich liest. Treffpunkt Bibliothek“ (Austria reads. Meeting point library), which attracts more than half a million visitors in Austria and abroad – and is also very popular and highly appreciated by co-organisers abroad.

In September, the tenth anniversary meeting of heads of staff and scientific advisors from Austria Libraries abroad was held at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. At this celebratory event, the publications and ongoing publication projects organised in the context of Austria Libraries abroad were presented
and workshops were organised on the topics of “Mediale Selbstreferenzen. Das Netzwerk der Presse in der Habsburgermonarchie und ihren Nachfolgestaaten 1855–1925” (Self reflections in the media: the press network in the Habsburg Monarchy and its successor states 1855–1925) and “Frauen unterwegs. Migrationsgeschichten in der Gegenwartsliteratur“ (Women on the move. Migration stories in contemporary literature).

Gala events, symposia, series of lectures, exhibitions and concerts were organised celebrating the anniversaries of the establishment of Austria Libraries, inter alia in Osijek and Trient/Trento (20th anniversary) and Posen/Poznań (25th anniversary).

The Austria Library in Zagreb was the most recent addition to be integrated into the network of Austrian libraries abroad. The opening event on 11 June was attended by the Deputy Head of the Cultural Policy Department at the MFA Teresa Indjein. A major share of the book holdings of the former library of the Austrian Cultural Forum Zagreb, that had as one of the first Austrian international cultural centres been opened as a “Österreichische Lesehalle” (Austrian reading hall) as early as 1955, was integrated into the newly established Austria Library’s holdings.

Book donations were not only made to Austria Libraries abroad but also to German language and social science institutes at universities around the world, including those to Japan, Israel, South Africa, Poland, and the Russian Federation.

14.7. Multilateral Scientific and Technical Cooperation

Austria has continued to place a special focus on multilateral scientific and technical cooperation both inside and outside of Europe in order to strengthen its position as a location for high-tech industry and research. Austria thus participates in numerous programmes including the European Cooperation in the Field of Scientific and Technical Research (COST) in Brussels, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, the European Space Agency (ESA) in Paris and the European Organisation for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites (EUMETSAT) in Darmstadt. Austria is represented in these organisations by the MFA, the Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research. In addition, Austria’s foreign policy interests are also represented through its involvement in the European Molecular Biology Conference (EMBC) in Heidelberg, the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in Laxenburg, the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) in Reading (United Kingdom) as well as the European Space Policy Institute (ESPI) in Vienna.
14.8. International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and Issues related to the National Socialist Past

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), an international Institution with a Permanent Secretariat based in Berlin, was set up in 1998 on the initiative of Sweden under the name of 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, remembrance and research at national and international level. In accomplishing its tasks it is able to draw on the support of renowned international scientific experts. By establishing its Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial, by placing an additional focus on Roma, and by the reaction to the refugee crisis adopted at the IHRA autumn plenary in Debrecen (Hungary), the Alliance has also responded to current developments. 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 of 2008 and has since been one of the central players within the Alliance. The Austrian delegation is co-headed by the MFA and the National Fund of the Republic of Austria. Austrian government representatives. 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, the organisation “_erinnern.at_” as well as the association “Gedenkdienst” 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.

14.9. 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 and academic work which serve the remembrance of the victims of the Nazi regime, are a reminder of the threat posed by totalitarian systems and dictatorships, serve international cooperation and promote the respect of human rights and mutual tolerance in these areas.

The MFA provides technical and administrative support to the Future Fund. In a large number of the international projects supported by the Fund, the MFA and its respective diplomatic representations cooperate closely with the Fund. Such projects include, for example, the re-design of the exhibition at the Austrian memorial site in the former concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, the education initiative on Holocaust and genocide prevention
The Future Fund of the Republic of Austria

launched by the Salzburg Global Seminar and in the context of the Intercultural Achievement Award (IAA) 2015. Cooperation also included training courses for master degree students from Israel, Palestine and Jordan that were organised by the Diplomatic Academy. The “workshop talks”, organised in cooperation with the Diplomatic Academy to present selected projects funded by the Future Fund, were continued, including on 29 January on the new design of the Austrian country exhibition in Auschwitz-Birkenau. At the 19th “workshop talk” on 24 November, the research study prepared by Günter Bischof, Barbara Stelzl-Marx and Alexandra Kofler entitled “Der Zukunftsfonds der Republik Österreich – Entstehung, Entwicklung und Bedeutung“ (Future Fund of the Republic of Austria: Formation, Development and Impact), was presented. The study takes stock of the fund’s activities over the last ten years and provides an overview of the 1,370 projects supported thus far.
15. Integration

15.1. Introduction

With the entry into force of the amendment to the Federal Ministries Act 2014, the topic of integration of persons with a migration background was for the first time included in the Federal Ministries Act and became part of the MFA’s scope of responsibilities. Thus it had become possible to make successful use of synergies between domestic integration work and foreign affairs. Integration is to start as early as possible – preferably in the country of origin, prior to immigration. Pursuing the approach of “integration through performance”, Austria has succeeded within just a few years in achieving essential structural and substantive improvements in an area of tasks that had hitherto not been a major focus of attention. Considering the huge challenges that undoubtedly lie ahead, this positive trend is definitely encouraging.

15.2. Targets and the Key to Successful Integration

The National Action Plan for Integration (NAP.I) was adopted in January 2010. It focuses on integration based on participation in economic, social, political and cultural processes as well as compliance with the relevant obligations, and contains a comprehensive catalogue of general integration policy guidelines, challenges and goals. The NAP.I consists of seven fields of action: language and education, work and employment, rule of law and values, health and social issues, intercultural dialogue, sports and leisure, housing and the regional dimension of integration – each with clearly defined challenges, principles and goals.

The target groups of the National Action Plan for Integration include society at large, foreign nationals who have settled permanently in Austria, Austrian citizens who were born abroad, as well as persons with a migration background who have settled permanently in Austria and/or who hold Austrian citizenship but whose parents were born abroad.

In this connection, the “integration through performance” approach means that people must not be judged based on their background, colour of skin or religion but based on what they want to contribute to Austria. The state thus has to call for this performance, facilitate and recognise it. A key element in this context is the clear sharing of Austrian values – as these values, together with proficiency in the German language and rapid financial independence form the foundations of our coexistence in Austria. At the same time, it is necessary to create the appropriate framework conditions for integration – because integration is a reciprocal process which contributes to dismantling prejudice within the majority population, while at the same time motivating immigrants and inspiring them with confidence that they will be able to achieve their individual goals in Austria.
15.2.1. Work Programme of the Federal Government 2013–2018
Integration was firmly enshrined in the Federal Government’s work programme for the current term. In this context special importance is being attached to issues such as the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad and qualified immigration as well as improved promotion of German language skills, which are already being implemented.

15.3. Integration Bodies
15.3.1. Advisory Board on Integration
The Advisory Board on Integration, which is enshrined in Article 18 of the Settlement and Residence Act (Niederlassungs- und Aufenthaltsgesetzes, NAG), is composed of representatives of the Federal Government, the federal provinces, social partners, stakeholders and NGOs. The Advisory Board meets twice a year for interdisciplinary exchange and coordination across the respective areas of responsibility. It thus takes account of the fact that integration is a cross-cutting theme affecting many different public players. Discussions focus on progress made and implementation of the targets defined in the National Action Plan for Integration. The topics addressed in 2015 included in particular integration of persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection.

The integration measures and projects presented by the Advisory Board members are included in the annual Integration Report and saved in the online database “Integrationsprojekte in Österreich” (integration projects in Austria), which is available for download at www.bmeia.gv.at/integration/datenbankintegrationsprojekte/.

15.3.2. Expert Council for Integration
Chaired by Professor Heinz Faßmann, the independent Expert Council for Integration is composed of two experts, academics and practitioners, for each of the seven fields of action; one mandate is abeyant for the time being. The Council is the competence centre for integration issues and advises on questions and challenges related to the process of integration. One of the Expert Council’s main tasks is the preparation of the annual Integration Report. This year’s report takes stock of the last five years of integration in Austria and sets out some guiding principles for the future.

15.4. Review of the Thematic Priorities 2015
15.4.1. Integration Plan
The objective pursued by the ‘50 Action Points Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria’ (Integration
Plan) is to integrate persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection as quickly as possible and enable them to participate in all areas of society in order to ensure peaceful coexistence in Austria and counteract negative long-term economic impacts of failed integration. The focus is on the opportunities and the refugees’ willingness to actively seek to progress and advance and to make a positive contribution to society.

What is required in this context are measures at all levels in keeping with the principle of subsidiarity in order to develop social framework conditions that enable the best-possible integration of refugees, without releasing them from their responsibility to undertake integration efforts. In line with the cross-cutting character of integration, the Integration Plan thus proposes measures in the seven fields of action defined in the National Action Plan for Integration 2010 (NAPI).

15.4.2. Islam Law of 2015

The Islam Law (Law of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, ILG No 159/1912) dated from the time prior to the establishment of the Austrian Federal Constitution and present-day general legal regulations on religions. Following the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918, the law continued to remain in effect in the Republic of Austria – although virtually no Muslims lived within the new borders. The number of Muslims in Austria only started to rise with the recruitment of foreign workers from the 1960s onwards and has continuously risen to some 570,000 individuals in 2015.

As a result of this development, it became necessary to regulate numerous areas of coexistence from a legal point of view. The “old” Islam Law consisted merely of a few paragraphs and no longer lived up to modern legal and societal requirements. It was the express wish of the Islamic Community in Austria (Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich, IGGiÖ) that a new legal basis be created. The State Secretariat for Integration led the necessary preparatory work in the context of the forum for dialogue “Dialogforum Islam” (2012), which also defined the key elements for the new draft. The Islam Act was developed over a period of three years. All Islamic religious societies were involved in all phases of the development process. Furthermore, the process also included civil society representatives and Islamic academics and legal experts. The Islamic Alevi Community supported the draft law and all of its content from the beginning; the Islamic Community (IGGiÖ) consented after numerous rounds of negotiations. The Islam Law 2015 (Federal Law Gazette I No 39/2015) was adopted on 25 February 2015 and entered into force on 31 March 2015.

15.4.3. Recognition Act

About one quarter (23.5 %) of the persons born abroad are overqualified in relation to the professional activity they currently perform. This figure even
increases to **27.1 %** in cases where professional qualifications have also been **acquired abroad**. As profession and gainful activity are **two key factors in the integration process**, it is important to promote integration in the labour market, alongside other measures – also through the enhanced recognition of qualifications acquired abroad. At European level, Directive 2005/36/EG on the recognition of professional qualifications has already defined a legal framework. In Austria, the contents of a Recognition Act were developed over a **period of around two years** in cooperation with the most important players in the field of recognition. The objective pursued by the Recognition Act is on the one hand **simplification of existing recognition procedures** and, on the other hand the introduction of procedures to **evaluate qualifications acquired** abroad. The review process for the draft started on 22 December.

**15.4.4. Promoting Integration**

The MFA 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 domestic field. The content-related basis for integration policy and the national funding strategy is provided by the National Action Plan for Integration (NAP. I), which consists of seven fields of action and was adopted by the Federal Government in 2010.

The **target group for the promotion of integration at national level** includes immigrated third country citizens with a longer-term residence perspective, persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection, immigrated EU citizens, Austrian citizens with a migration background as well as those members of the Austrian population whose mother tongue is not German, and members of the receiving society. **In the context of the implementation of the NAPI, a total of 134 national integration projects involving total funding of 4.6 million euros were supported in 2015.**

Promotion of integration at national level was supplemented with funding from the **Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)**, the successor to the four EU-SOLID-Funds⁴. **Overall funding** of the AMIF for the funding period 2014–2020 amounts to 3.137 billion euros, of which **Austria receives some 64.5 million euros** for activities in the fields of asylum, integration and return of which 44 % are earmarked for improving integration of third-country nationals.

The **target group for AMIF integration measures** are exclusively **third country nationals who hold a residence permit entitling them to long-term stay in Austria**, i.e. persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection, which does, however, not include asylum applicants. The Federal Ministry of the Interior is responsible for allocating funding under the AMIF. Since the amendment

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⁴ From 2007–2013, the EU-SOLID funds included the European Refugee Fund (ERF), the European Integration Fund, the European Return Fund (ERF) and the External Border Fund (EBF)
of the Federal Ministries Act entered into force in 2014, the MFA has been the authority responsible for matters relating to integration – and thus also the allocation of funding under the AMIF. In the course of the first round of allocation of funding under the AMIF at the beginning of July 2015, a total of 38 integration projects were selected. Funding made available for these projects for 2015 and 2016 amounts to some 8.2 million euros, of which some 6.5 million euros are allocated from EU funds.

In 2015, the MFA provided funding of some 7.68 million euros for a total of 172 integration projects, whose joint goal has been improving integration of third country nationals with a longer residence perspective, persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection, EU citizens and Austrian nationals with a migration background based on needs-based investment into personal and societal integration. As shown on the funding map 2015, the projects are distributed across Austria as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2015</th>
<th>Projects</th>
<th>Funding volume</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>€ 7,687,518.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15.4.5. Early Language Tuition

In August, the agreement under Article 15a of the Federal Constitutional Act on early language tuition for the kindergarten years 2015/16 to 2017/18 entered into force. Thus the agreement on supporting three to six year old children attending an institutional child care facility that was concluded for the first time in 2012 between the Federal Government and the federal provinces, was both extended and expanded in terms of content.

From the kindergarten year 2015/16 onwards, a total of 60 million euros in federal funding is thus made available for providing individualised and targeted language support/tuition. This means a four-fold increase in funding
provided by the Federal Government, which amounted to 15 million euros under the previous agreement concluded for the period 2012 to 2014. From the kindergarten year 2015/16 onwards, the federal provinces will also invest a further 30 million euros. For the next three kindergarten years until 2018, a total of **90 million euros is thus being made available for early language tuition of children in kindergartens.**

As has been the case for the previous agreement concluded in 2012, the objective pursued by this new agreement is to support three to six year old children attending an institutional child care facility in such a way that enables them to attain the best possible command of German as the language of instruction by the time they start primary school (Art.1). Between 2012 and 2014, Federal Government and federal provinces invested **some 30 million euros** towards reaching this objective.

The funding thus made available was specifically invested in additional linguistic support staff, such as peripatetic language advisers, and in conducting language proficiency assessments, based on which targeted and individualised early language tuition for children who require support was provided. Special teaching materials, for setting up a digital library for children’s books for instance, were also acquired and further teacher training activities with a special focus on early language support for children who are non-native German speakers were financed. In this context, a special focus was placed on supporting children who are non-native speakers of German.

Between 2012 and 2014 language proficiency assessments were thus conducted for approximately 206,484 children attending institutional child care facilities. Based on these assessments, **language learning support services** were provided to 61,844 children. The relevant services were provided by 15,074 and additional linguistic support staff.

Building on the success of the agreement under Article 15a of the Federal Constitutional Act for the period 2012 to 2014, the MFA conducted negotiations as early as from summer 2014 onwards with the federal provinces on concluding a follow-up agreement with a view to ensuring early language support/tuition in institutional child care facilities also in the years after 2014. Following several rounds of negotiations between the Federal Government and the federal provinces, the new agreement under Article 15a of the Federal Constitutional Act for the kindergarten years 2015/16 to 2017/18 entered into force on 20 August 2015 in all federal provinces and thus in time for the start of the kindergarten year 2015/16. This agreement provides for co-funding based on a 2 : 1 ratio between Federal Government and federal provinces. By the end of the kindergarten year 2017/2018, federal funding of 60 million euros and funding provided by the federal provinces amounting to 30 million euros will be made available, i.e. in total 90 million euros will be invested in early language support and tuition.

This additional funding is to be used to further intensify early language support and tuition, to enable the enhanced implementation of target group spe-
cific projects, hire even more language support staff and provide specific targeted and individualised support to children in further consolidating their proficiency in German as the language of instruction. This additional funding furthermore enables **nationwide language proficiency assessments** to be conducted, and – as required – also supports the **level of development** of those children who display language support and tuition needs. With a view to enhancing quality assurance, Article 15a of the Federal Constitutional Act provides for on-site visits by representatives of the Austrian Integration Fund to the childcare facilities, and inspection by Federal Government representatives of the federal provinces’ statements.

The provision of funding for the period until the entry into effect of the new agreement, i.e. from January to August 2015 was ensured. Expenditure made by the federal provinces for early language tuition/support during this period may thus be invoiced under the new agreement.

### 15.4.6. International Bodies

The **exchange of experience** in the context of integration was **pursued** under the Network of National Contact Points on Integration (NCPI). In compliance with the Conclusions of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, the NCPI network was set up in 2002 and is coordinated by the European Commission. The target group defined for this exchange are third-country nationals and EU citizens as well as the receiving society.

As of January 2015, the European Integration Forum was transformed into the European Migration Forum. It continues to be organised by the European Commission in cooperation with the European Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC). The forum serves as a dialogue platform and facilitates meetings between representatives from civil society, the European institutions and Member States.
16. Media and Information

16.1. Press Work

Keeping the public informed about international policy developments, European issues, crises, and consular assistance for Austrians in need abroad is one of the MFA’s key tasks. At peak times, the Ministry’s staff thus handle more than 100 media enquiries a day, providing information via electronic, print or other media. In order to ensure optimum service for journalists representing national and international media, the MFA not only organises press conferences but also holds a number of background information briefings on important issues. Staff also provide support and services to media representatives at international conferences and other events.

16.2. PR, New Media, Web Presence

As in many other areas, social media has come to play an important role in the field of foreign policy. It may be used as a tool to communicate content quickly and to offer a wide range of opportunities for digital interaction to the interested public. Pro-active presence and involvement on the web and in social media are thus a necessary continuation and logical consequence of the MFA’s philosophy that service to Austrian citizens is one of the Ministry’s central tasks (in line with its motto “Worldwide at Your Service”).

Although the MFA already plays a pioneering role in using social media within public administration, it continues to step-up its relevant efforts even further. In 2015, the number of followers on Facebook increased by some 16,000 to a total of 48,000. The priority goal pursued in this context, i.e. to present both the MFA’s work and also the Ministry’s staff, was implemented under the Facebook initiative “Das BMEIA stellt sich vor“ (introducing the MFA). Likewise, the MFA increasingly uses live streams via Facebook, thus offering direct “insights” to events that take place at the Ministry to the interested public. The number of followers on Twitter also saw a clear increase, growing to some 16,500 in 2015. Apart from these two accounts, the MFA shares relevant information via YouTube, FlickR and the smartphone app “Auslandsservice”, providing consular support for those travelling abroad. Since 2015, the MFA has also been on Instagram.

Generally speaking, the MFA’s websites are, however, still used as the main source of information. Apart from its homepage, the Ministry’s web presence comprises more than 100 websites of Austrian representations that are operated on the same technical platform. In 2015, the Ministry’s website www.bmeia.gv.at alone registered some 7.5 million clicks. The most frequently visited pages provide travel information and contact details of Austrian representations abroad and foreign representations in Austria. A pivotal element of the MFA’s web presence are the sites www.auslandsservice.at and www.
reiseregistrierung.at providing consular support and information to those travelling abroad.

The range of information services offered by the MFA also includes the highly popular headquarters visiting and lecturing programme tailor-made for students and school pupils, which provides children and young people with insights into the Ministry’s comprehensive range of activities.

16.3. Information about Europe

The topic that dominated the provision of information about Europe in 2015 was the 20th anniversary of Austria’s EU membership. In cooperation with the European Commission Representation in Austria, the European Parliament Information Office in Austria, the EuropeDirect offices and the Austrian Society for European Politics (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Europapolitik, ÖGfE) a number of activities were launched to raise the public’s awareness of this anniversary. The sports initiative “Die EU bewegt“ (the EU moves), a T-shirt campaign and the placing of EU information ads in the media were supported by a social medial campaign launched by the MFA. The activities succeeded in reaching very broad-based and diverse interest groups (marathon participants and viewers, visitors who attended an education fair, young persons with disabilities, senior citizens etc.). The anniversary of Austria’s accession to the EU was also a key information topic at the Open House event that is traditionally hosted by the MFA on 26 October, Austrian National Day. Another source of EU-related information, the interested public could turn to, were brief videos, which provide the latest updated information on the EU and on the MFA’s EU information initiatives and were again made available online by the Ministry in 2015. In the field of European policy education in schools, cooperation with the European Commission Representation in Austria and the Austrian Society for European Politics was continued. During the numerous visits by school classes to the MFA, pupils and students also had the opportunity to seek information on current EU topics provided by the Ministry’s experts in presentations and lectures. MFA staff, furthermore, regularly participated as guest speakers at EU information events.

16.4. The Initiative “Europa fängt in der Gemeinde an“ (Europe starts at local level)

The initiative “Europa fängt in den Gemeinden an” (Europe starts at local level), was launched at the beginning of 2010 by the MFA and the European Commission Representation in Austria. The initiative aims to establish mayors and/municipal councillors 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 750 mayors and municipal councillors across all federal provinces and political parties had already joined the initiative. Examples of relevant activities launched by Municipal Councillors for European Affairs in their respective municipalities and cities include a regular EU information page in the local council newsletters, regular “EU tables” in local pubs and restaurants, EU-related activities directed at pupils at schools as well as “EU committees” at municipal level. The MFA acts as a central information, contact and service point Municipal Councillors for European Affairs can turn to for information. The range of services provided by the Ministry to Municipal Councillors for European Affairs also includes an email information system they can access for concise facts on current EU issues, an electronic EU information platform enabling Municipal Councillors for European Affairs to network with one another, EU information training seminars for initiative members and information trips to Brussels. From 1 to 3 June and 18 to 20 November, 25 Municipal Councillors for European Affairs each participated in the eighth and ninth such information trips to Brussels.

**16.5. Publications**

The MFA issues publications on a range of topics aimed at informing the public as comprehensively as possible about its activities. In this context, a special focus is placed on the annual Foreign and European Policy Report, in which the Federal Minister for European and International Affairs informs the Austrian Parliament and the general public about international and European policy developments during the year under review. This report is published both in a printed format and in an electronic version available on the MFA’s website in German and in English. Other publications included the latest edition of “Advice for Travellers Abroad” and a new brochure on Vienna as seat and headquarters of international organisations “Wien – Zentrum des internationalen Dialogs” (Vienna – Centre of International Dialogue) in German and English.

**16.6. Press Officers’ Meeting**

Acknowledging the important role played by press and PR work carried out at Austrian representations abroad, the MFA again organised the annual meeting of staff directly involved in these areas at embassies, consulates and cultural fora. The event organised in the context of the annual Ambassadors’ Conference hosted by the MFA, focused on the targeted use of social media by the Austrian representations abroad.
17. The Austrian Foreign Service

17.1. Introduction

The provisions governing the Foreign Service of the Republic of Austria are laid down in the “Statut” law on the organisation and tasks of the Foreign Service, passed in 1999 (Federal Law Gazette 129/1999). Since 1 March 2014, the Foreign Ministry, renamed “Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs” (MFA), has also been responsible for matters relating to the social integration of people with migration background in Austria.

By international standards, the Austrian Foreign Service, which currently comprises 99 diplomatic and consular missions abroad, is a lean organisation. With a total of 1,149 staff, the MFA is also one of the smaller departments of the Austrian Federal Government. A high level of staff mobility (alternating domestic and foreign postings) and the extensive use of information and communication technology (ICT) enable the MFA to execute its comprehensive foreign policy mandate and to expand its range of consular services.

An efficient network of embassies and consulates is a sine qua non for safeguarding and promoting Austrian interests around the world. Presence and diplomatic efforts in new and established markets as well as in growth regions around the world also enable the provision of support to Austria’s foreign trade. Austria’s commitment to promoting peace and development, and Vienna’s role as headquarters for numerous international organisations and as venue for international dialogue, require constant activities in international organisations, and on all continents.

The MFA regularly evaluates its international network. In response to geopolitical changes, and to ensure efficient use of resources, it thus opens new missions while closing others.

17.2. Working at the MFA

For the majority of its personnel, the system of rotation applied within the MFA means regular transfers between headquarters in Vienna and missions abroad and requires a high level of flexibility on the part of the individual employees and their families. Every year, up to 180 MFA staff are transferred to new positions.

At the end of 2015, the MFA employed a total of 1,149 staff, 567 (49%) of whom worked at headquarters and 582 (51%) abroad.
Working at the MFA

Staffing levels at the MFA 2015 by career scheme and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career scheme</th>
<th>Men Austria</th>
<th>Men Abroad</th>
<th>Women Austria</th>
<th>Women Abroad</th>
<th>Total/Career scheme</th>
<th>Share of women in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diplomatic staff</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consular and administrative staff</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>42.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical, clerical and support staff</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>62.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT specialists</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>1,149</td>
<td>48.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>1,149</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As of 31 Dec. 2015, Austrian missions abroad employ a further total of 723 local employees worldwide.

The MFA complies with the mandatory employment quota for employees with disabilities with a total of 43 individuals (as of 31 Dec. 2015).

In the diplomatic service, the share of female staff reached 35.6% in 2015.

The total number of staff at the MFA has continuously declined over the last few years.

Students and recent university graduates are offered internships of up to 12 months, in Austria and at embassies abroad. In 2015, a total of 310 young persons made use of this opportunity.
The Austrian Foreign Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internships</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abroad</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term internships</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2015, the average actual retirement age of public officials at the MFA was 64.7 years. Over the last ten years, the average retirement age has always been above 60 years.

17.3. The Foreign Ministry’s Budget

The 2015 budget for the MFA was set at 409 million euros, with 69.6 million euros budgeted for head office expenses, 163.9 million euros for operating the Austrian missions abroad, 5.6 million euros for cultural projects, 1.7 million euros for international conferences, 80.6 million euros for international organisations and 65.4 million euros for the Austrian Development Agency GmbH and the Foreign Disaster Relief Fund, as well as 22.2 million euros for integration projects.
17.4. Worldwide Infrastructure

17.4.1. Real Estate Management and Construction Projects

The MFA’s real estate portfolio includes some 230 properties and/or 350 premises, used for office, cultural and residential purposes. Just over half of these are owned by the Republic of Austria, the rest is either rented or leased. The properties are managed by in-house experts on the basis of a Facility Management Strategy.
The MFA pays particular attention to energy efficiency, the use of renewable energies and the ecological footprint of its premises.

In 15 locations, embassies share their premises with offices of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber. In seven locations, premises are shared with the missions of other European states and the EEAS.

**17.4.2. Information Technology**

The MFA has for many years played a pioneering role in developing and using innovative IT tools. One such solutions is MOVE-IT, a system designed by the MFA, features tailor-made workflows and communication, and provides world-wide secure remote access to enable 7/24 operations around the globe.

Another IT solution is the online registration tool for Austrians travelling abroad, which was used more than 55,000 times in 2015. This service, which enables authorities to contact and provide services to Austrians abroad in the event of a crisis, is becoming increasingly popular.

**17.4.3. Information and Knowledge Management**

The MFA Library at the Diplomatic Academy Vienna houses more than 110,300 books, magazines and other publications, which are all accessible for international research. Academics and researchers may also be provided with access to MFA files, and a number of scientific publications based on these documents was published in 2015.

**17.5. Austrian Missions Abroad and Honorary Consulates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diplomatic and Other Missions of the MFA</th>
<th>As of 31 Dec. 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilateral Embassies</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Representations at International Organisations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulates-General</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Institutes</td>
<td>6</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>

In addition to the representations that fall directly under the MFA’s responsibility, Austria’s international presence also includes the Austrian Development Agency (ADA). In 2015, the ADA maintained 10 offices abroad.

The Austrian Foreign Service receives valuable support from more than 300 Honorary Consuls around the world. Honorary Consuls are either Austrians
Austrian Missions Abroad and Honorary Consulates

who live abroad or eminent local figures with close ties to Austria. Thanks to their commitment and dedication, they extend the network of Austria’s international presence and contribute to the promotion of economic and cultural relations between Austria and the respective host country.

In 2015, eight new honorary consulates were opened:

- Honorary Consulate Chernivtsi, Ukraine
- Honorary Consulate Blumenau, Brazil
- Honorary Consulate Tawau, Malaysia
- Honorary Consulate Juba, South Sudan
- Honorary Consulate Recife, Brazil
- Honorary Consulate Manaus, Brazil
- Honorary Consulate Cancun, Mexico
- Honorary Consulate Sevilla, Spain
17.6. Organisational Chart

The Austrian Foreign Service
17.7. 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 one of the oldest schools of its kind. After having been shut down during the 2nd World War, it was re-established in 1964 under its current name as a postgraduate training institution. In 1996, having until then been run and funded by the Austrian federal administration, it was granted the status of an independent public training institution.

The following postgraduate academic programmes were offered in 2015:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Number of Austrians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51st Diploma programme</td>
<td>25 (24 graduates)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52nd Diploma programme</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th Master of Advanced International Studies (MAIS) programme; joint degree of the DA and the University of Vienna</td>
<td>70 (all graduates)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th MAIS programme</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th MAIS programme (1st year)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Master of Science in Environmental Technology and International Affairs (ETIA) programme; conducted in cooperation with the Vienna University of Technology</td>
<td>22 (17 graduates, 5 eligibility period extensions)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th ETIA programme</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th ETIA programme (1st year)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st PhD programme</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the academic year 2015–16, a total of 173 students from 48 countries and all continents studied at the DA.

In the context of diplomatic training and further training programmes (Executive Training Programmes), the DA offered special courses tailored to the needs of diplomats and other civil service officials from the following countries or groups of countries: Black Sea region/Southern Caucasus, Danube area/Western Balkans, Africa, Middle East (M.A.-students) and Kazakhstan. Likewise, several seminars were conducted locally in Africa. The DA
also conducted training modules for the MFA, the Austrian Economic Chamber and the EU-Presidency of Slovakia, and a preparatory course for the MFA entrance exam (A-Préalable). The DA also offered training courses in cultural diplomacy and protocol that could be booked individually.

The **Summer Course in German Language and Austrian Studies** was attended by 64 participants from 36 countries worldwide. **Summer Schools** were also organised for the Free University of Brussels and the University of North Carolina as well as for the School of Youth Diplomacy at the MGIMO University (Moscow). For the first time, the DA organised a multi-day regional seminar in cooperation with the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), and a German-language course free of charge for accredited Syrian refugees in cooperation with the University of Vienna and the Austrian Integration Fund.

The DA is also a very popular venue for **conferences**. In 2015, it hosted some 120 public events involving inter alia the President of Croatia, the former President of Slovakia, the Prime Ministers of Albania and Serbia, Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz, numerous ambassadors and representatives from the EU and international organisations. The events and conferences organised at the DA included the **European Remembrance 4th International Symposium, Joining Forces against Human Trafficking** and **Congress of Vienna 2015**. The Milton Wolf Seminar 2015 dealt with **Triumphs and Tragedies: Media and Global Events in 2014**. The series of **Werkstattgespräche** (public presentation and debate on selected projects) with the Austrian Future Fund were continued.

The **International Forum on Diplomatic Training** (IFDT, annual meeting of Deans and Directors of Diplomatic Academies and Institutes of International Relations chaired by the DA and Georgetown University, Washington DC) was held in Warsaw (Poland) from 23 to 25 September on the invitation of the European Academy of Diplomacy (EAD) in cooperation with the National School of Public Administration (KSAP).

In addition to its **Yearbook of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna**, the DA also published the book **(Favorita Paper) Europe – Russia – USA and the crisis in the Ukraine** by Wendelin Ettmayer.
18. Selected Documents

Note: All speeches to be checked against delivery


Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I would like to thank you Mr. President for this important debate and you, Mr. Secretary General, for your leadership in these challenging times.

At the moment we are witnessing a dramatic rise of extremism in the name of religion. Tensions between different religious communities within our societies are increasing.

A brief look into Facebook shows that especially young people seem to be the target of radicalization. This is a dangerous development! And it shows that one of the biggest challenges for my generation is to safeguard the cohesion of our societies.

The situation is particularly dramatic in the Middle East and Northern Africa. Regions, which are suffering from the terror of Da’esh! These terrorists are enslaving children, raping women and beheading men.

In particular minorities are suffering: More than 50 % of the Christians in Iraq have disappeared over the last ten years. Christians are already the most persecuted religious group worldwide, with 100 million suffering from persecution.

We have to call the shocking acts committed by Da’esh by their names: They are war crimes, crimes against humanity and even genocide! We must not let them go unpunished!

Therefore the Security Council should quickly refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Mr President,

In Austria many people have thought that Da’esh is far away and first of all a problem of the Middle East. But via Youtube, Facebook and Twitter they have already reached our homes! They are globally recruiting foreign fighters. And the attacks in Paris and Copenhagen have proven that nobody is safe!

Da’esh poses a threat to our partners in the Middle East, a threat to the wider international security and a direct threat to our societies.
Austria is taking action and intensifying the international cooperation especially with the Western Balkans. Last week we adopted an action plan to confront jihadism together with all Western Balkan countries: It includes, for example, closer cooperation between law enforcement authorities, enhanced border security and joint efforts to remove terrorist content from the Internet.

Mr President,

If we want to succeed in decreasing the tensions within our societies, it is not enough to fight Da’esh by all means. We have to do more:

1) First we have to make clear that this is not a conflict between the Western and the Muslim world, or between different religious beliefs. This is a conflict between all of us and terrorism!

2) Secondly we have to stand up for religious freedom and coexistence. There is no natural law that Muslims, Jews and Christians cannot live together peacefully. We therefore have to use all channels of intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

And we have to encourage religious leaders of each country to raise their voices when people are being persecuted for their beliefs.

3) Thirdly we also have to be credible and live our values. We have to make clear that diversity is an integral part of our culture. There is for instance an ongoing debate, whether Islam is part of Europe, or not. The answer is clear: Yes, it is! Just as Judaism and Christianity are part of the Middle East!

It is possible to be a proud European citizen and a believing Muslim at the same time. And this is also true for any other religious group in any other part of the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
– We must not allow our societies to be divided.
– We must stand up against all forms of intolerance and radicalization.
– And we have to be united in our fight against terrorism.

In all these points the United Nations can and should play an even more important role.

I can assure you that Austria will continue to contribute to this effort with all means.

Thank you for your attention.
Mme. President,

I am taking the floor on behalf of Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Côte d’Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, DR Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Holy See, Honduras, Iceland, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Liechtenstein, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Niue, Norway, Oman, Palau, State of Palestine, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Tuvalu, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and my own country, Austria.

Our countries are deeply concerned about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. Past experience from the use and testing of nuclear weapons has amply demonstrated the unacceptable humanitarian consequences caused by the immense, uncontrollable destructive capability and indiscriminate nature of these weapons. The fact-based discussion that took place at the Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, convened respectively by Norway in March 2013, Mexico in February 2014 and Austria in December 2014, has allowed us to deepen our collective understanding of those consequences. A key message from experts and international organisations was that no State or international body could address the immediate humanitarian emergency caused by a nuclear weapon detonation or provide adequate assistance to victims.
The broad participation at those Conferences, with attendance most recently in Vienna by 159 States, the ICRC, a number of UN humanitarian organisations and civil society, reflected the recognition that the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons are a fundamental and global concern. We firmly believe that it is in the interests of all States to engage in discussions on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, which aim to further broaden and deepen understanding of this matter, and we welcome civil society’s ongoing engagement.

This work is essential, because the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons affect not only governments, but each and every citizen of our interconnected world. They have deep implications for human survival; for our environment; for socio-economic development; for our economies; and for the health of future generations. For these reasons, we firmly believe that awareness of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons must underpin all approaches and efforts towards nuclear disarmament, including in the work of the 2015 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

This is not, of course, a new idea. The appalling humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons became evident from the moment of their first use, and from that moment have motivated humanity’s aspirations for a world free from this threat, which have also inspired this statement. The humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons have been reflected in numerous UN resolutions, including the first resolution passed by the General Assembly in 1946, and in multilateral instruments including the NPT. The world’s most eminent nuclear physicists observed as early as 1955 that nuclear weapons threaten the continued existence of mankind and that a war with these weapons could quite possibly put an end to the human race. The First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament (SSOD–1) stressed in 1978 that “nuclear weapons pose the greatest danger to mankind and to the survival of civilisation.” These expressions of profound concern remain as compelling as ever. In spite of this, the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons have not been at the core of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation deliberations for many years.

We are therefore encouraged that the humanitarian focus is now well established on the global agenda. The 2010 Review Conference of the NPT expressed “deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons”. That deep concern informed the 26 November 2011 resolution of the Council of Delegates of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the decision in 2012 of the General Assembly to establish an open-ended working group to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. It underlies the Special Declaration of the 3rd Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States’ in January 2015 on the urgent need for a nuclear weapons free world. In September 2013, at the High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament, numerous
leaders from around the world again evoked that deep concern as they called for progress to be made on nuclear disarmament. More than three quarters of all countries supported the Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons delivered at the 2014 First Committee of the UN General Assembly. Today’s statement again demonstrates the growing political support for the humanitarian focus.

It is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances. The catastrophic effects of a nuclear weapon detonation, whether by accident, miscalculation or design, cannot be adequately addressed. All efforts must be exerted to eliminate the threat of these weapons of mass destruction.

The only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons will never be used again is through their total elimination. All States share the responsibility to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, to prevent their vertical and horizontal proliferation and to achieve nuclear disarmament, including through fulfilling the objectives of the NPT and achieving its universality.

We welcome the renewed resolve of the international community, together with the ICRC and international humanitarian organisations, to address the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. By raising awareness about this issue, civil society has a crucial role to play side-by-side with governments as we fulfil our responsibilities. We owe it to future generations to work together to do just that, and in doing so to rid our world of the threat posed by nuclear weapons.

18.3. Federal Minister Sebastian Kurz: Speech at the Public Segment of the MFA’s Ambassadors’ Conference, Vienna, 3 September 2015

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me welcome you very warmly to our Ambassadors’ Conference. As you know, the ambassadors, who are otherwise actively engaged around the world working for Austria, have come to Vienna to take part in an exchange with Headquarters and also to gain new ideas from you today. It is a great pleasure to welcome so many guests of honour who have again come to us from the most diverse fields, including business, industry, culture, science – thank you for joining us today. A warm welcome to you all and thanks again for coming.

The last year was a very intensive one for the Austrian Foreign Ministry. Let me therefore just pick out a few highlights and priorities we dealt with throughout the year.

Naturally, our key region – the Western Balkans – played a very prominent role in this context. There was a lot going on in this region, ranging from the
start of EU membership negotiations launched with Serbia at the beginning of the year to the Vienna Western Balkans Summit last week, which not only produced two new border agreements but also very tangible progress in the fields of economic cooperation and infrastructure.

Another matter of major concern to Austria was strengthening its position as a venue for international dialogue. We succeeded in bringing the Iran negotiations to Vienna. After very lengthy drawn-out negotiations it was – thankfully – possible to achieve a breakthrough and reach the Vienna Iranian Nuclear Agreement. I believe that this agreement not only means major progress for the region as such – as it may also contribute to increasing stability, but was also pleasing acknowledgement of Austria’s role as a seat and headquarters of international organisations and traditional venue for dialogue.

We also used this last year to focus on and address new tasks for the future ahead. We are very pleased indeed that we succeeded in winning the bid for the OSCE Chairmanship in 2017. It is always a good opportunity for a country like Austria to assume responsibility within international organisations and to make a contribution that goes beyond our normal range of action.

Although many things went well last year, a number of crises and problematic issues, however, persisted. Regrettably there was only relatively little movement in the Russia-Ukraine crisis – and frankly, there is not much movement in sight either. Over the summer months, we even witnessed some further hardening of the fronts and a resurgence of violence. Nevertheless, we are absolutely convinced that it is imperative that the Minsk Dialogue Process be continued. Not only because it is the only tool we currently have at our disposal, but also, because from the current point of view it offers the only chance for a peaceful solution. We are pleased that in this dialogue process an Austrian, namely Ambassador Martin Sajdik, has assumed a key role in this capacity as Special Representative of the OSCE in Ukraine. As regards the Ukraine issue, Austria will continue to maintain a constructive approach also within the European Union.

It is not possible to change European geography. Therefore it is necessary not only to maintain relations with Russia, but also to revise the European Union’s Neighbourhood Policy. And this is indeed happening right now. Our approach is quite clear: we would like to see a more flexible neighbourhood policy. We do not need an “either-or” policy that forces countries like Georgia, Moldova and also Ukraine to choose between Russia or the European Union. What we need is a policy that facilitates “as well as”, a policy that enables our neighbours to move closer to the European Union while at the same time maintaining a reasonable relationship with Russia. This is an ambitious objective in view of this tense situation. However, we believe that a modernised neighbourhood policy could offer an opportunity in this respect and may make a contribution towards calming the region. As we all know, peace and security on our continent is only possible with and not against Russia.
Unfortunately, not only did we have to face some of the old challenges last year but also a number of new ones. I would like to deliberately address the refugee crisis in this context – which some very rightly call a crisis of solidarity. The refugee crisis is definitely the central challenge for us in Austria and for us as the European Union. It is much more than a heated debate fuelled by the media, with hatred and incitement on the one hand and a lot of openness and solidarity on the other. We are indeed facing a veritable crisis. It had been building up for quite some time already, but this year it has increased massively and to an unexpected extent. In Austria, we traditionally host large numbers of refugees. In the last few years, some 30,000 refugees came to Austria and this year we expect some 70,000 to 80,000. Just to give you some comparative figures, this is as many refugees as the 18 least-affected European countries have taken in together. And since we often engage in a discussion between transit and target countries in Europe: based on the comparative size of our country, this year we have taken in ten times as many refugees as Italy and Greece. Naturally, this means that we in Austria have difficulties in the field of accommodation. On the one hand, because we have been taken somewhat by surprise, also regarding the massive influx we have been affected by, and on the other hand, admittedly also because the warnings that had been issued by the Ministry of the Interior over the last year have not been taken seriously enough – and thus not enough had been done in terms of creating accommodation.

As regards the situation in Austria, I personally am very impressed by the Austrians’ huge readiness to help. At the same time, however, I am concerned, because the gap in society is widening between those who are open and willing to welcome refugees and those who meet refugees with hatred. I am firmly convinced that particularly with such an emotional topic it is all the more important to stick to the facts and keep a sense of perspective. As one thing is clear: we need to do our utmost to effectively integrate all those who are allowed to stay and will stay in Austria. To date, some 8,000 applications for asylum have been granted this year alone. In all probability this figure will reach 30,000 by the end of the year. It will be a major challenge to integrate these people. Many of them do not know how to speak, read or write our language, many come from completely different cultural backgrounds and situations and will also have difficulties in quickly joining the labour market in light of rising unemployment rates. But I am firmly convinced that we can and indeed will be able to manage that in Austria. We are a country that has been used to a lot of immigration. In 2014 alone, the number of immigrants totalled 170,000 of which some 30,000 were refugees.

As important as it is to integrate those people in Austria, it is from my point of view at the same time essential that migration flows to Europe and Austria be reduced. We urgently need a European solution in this respect because no single state – even though many have endeavoured to do so – will be able to solve this issue all alone. And I am concerned that without a European
answer to this crisis, an increasing number of states will try to seek solutions single-handedly. Therefore we take every opportunity to call for action at the European level and to present proposals for a holistic approach.

Let me address a few topics, which should – alongside the accommodation issue – also be the focus of the discussion. When looking at all refugee routes at large, we can identify opportunities for action at each individual stage.

1) First and foremost it is necessary to start by looking at the countries of origin. The majority of the refugees in Austria – and especially those who are granted a positive asylum decision – currently come from Iraq, from Syria and from Afghanistan. These are all countries in which either the “Islamic State” ravages or in which the security situation is deteriorating. Therefore, we should undertake every effort to step up and intensify our fight against IS terrorism. As a neutral country with only limited military capacities it is always difficult to issue this call. This is why we have deliberately decided to make an all-out effort and provide even more humanitarian assistance and supply protective gear and equipment. We also do so in order to enhance our credibility when calling for other states to become more active in line with their capabilities. Without engaging in an active fight against IS terrorism we will just continue to stand by and watch as terrorists bring further regions under their control with an ever increasing number of people falling victim to terrorism and finding themselves forced to flee.

2) A second and equally important objective is the need to succeed in establishing protection zones in which refugees in the region are safe and provided for in the best possible manner, and where they have the opportunity to file asylum applications directly on site. In the absence of such an opportunity we will continue to have to blame ourselves for fostering “people smuggling programmes”, and for the fact that people will only be able get to Europe by putting themselves in the hands of people smugglers. I believe that a system change would prove helpful, namely away from current approaches towards resettlement programmes and also towards filing asylum applications locally.

3) The third area I would like to mention is border security and I refer here to the EU’s external borders. This is a topic that needs to be openly addressed. Because security has indeed become an issue on the Greek, but also on the Italian borders and is not working as it should. We know from Macedonia and other states that the refugees heading for Europe time and again include followers of IS or occasionally foreign terrorist fighters returning from the so-called “holy war”. And after all, our system in Europe – the Europe of open borders – is based on the fact that there are proper controls at the external borders. In our view, there is an urgent need for action in this area.

4) The fourth aspect I would like to raise, is enhanced cooperation in the Western Balkans. In the European Union, we have placed a very strong focus on the Mediterranean-Italy route. In reality, however, the large numbers of refugees are in the meantime coming via the Western Balkans route – and
in particular the majority of refugees heading for Austria. Against this back-
ground we seek to call attention to this region. On this issue, I believe that we need even better cooperation between the European Union and countries like Macedonia or Serbia, whom we should not leave all alone in dealing with this issue.

5) The fifth topic – although it might be difficult and there are people in other EU Member States who don’t want to hear about it – is the fact that we need a fair distribution of refugees within the European Union. A situation where a few states shoulder the main burden, while there are at the most just a few hundred refugees per year in other Member States – is simply neither sus-
tainable nor acceptable. The European Union is a project based on solidarity, and therefore this area too needs to be governed by solidarity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The refugee crisis has unfortunately made it very clear that in many areas the European Union is still not a completed project, and that there is definitely still a need for structures to be changed and for one or the other issue to be better regulated, maybe also at Union level. As a result of the discussion in and about the UK, and the British referendum, the European Union will – over the next few months and also within the next year – be compelled to deal with many, sometimes even quite uncomfortable questions.

There are indeed many who would prefer not to have such a discussion. I, however, believe that we should engage in this discussion and also see it as an opportunity to ask ourselves – in Europe – the questions: “What do we want to achieve in this European Union? Where could we identify opportu-
nities for some fine tuning?

In this context I would like to draw your attention to two topics, I consider to be of particular importance in this respect:

Firstly, the area of subsidiarity and the question of where we need a stronger European Union and on which areas Member States may be better placed to take decisions themselves. The general idea of subsidiarity has been around since the very beginning, but the last time there was a genuine debate on this topic, was during Austria’s EU Council Presidency under Wolfgang Schüssel in the context of a major conference on subsidiarity. I think that we should indeed take the British agenda as an opportunity to resume this discussion. Hopefully, we will succeed in eventually having a Europe that is stronger on the major issues – such as Common Foreign and Security or Defence Policy – while at the same time, however, acting with more restraint in other areas in which Member States and regions can very well decide for themselves.

The second item I would like to address, is the question of the number of Member States in the European Union, as we are currently witnessing a cer-
tain enlargement fatigue and also relatively little movement. We should be aware of the fact that the European Union – at least from the geographic
point of view – can definitely not be considered a completed project as long as the Western Balkan states have not yet become members of the European Union. As the level of rapprochement with the European Union still varies a lot across these countries, their times of accession will therefore also vary. It is important to me, to again underline very clearly that it is our definite goal to support the countries of the Western Balkans in the best possible manner along their path towards EU membership. We will also continue to remain in favour of offering a clear European Union perspective to all Western Balkan states.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Alongside the necessary movements and changes that are going on at European level, a ministry also needs to engage in a discussion on ways and means for changes on how to further develop and move ahead. And over the last year we have achieved a great deal in this respect. As you know, our motto at the Ministry is “Worldwide at Your Service” and our objective is to constantly further develop the services we offer. In the context of a structural reform at the Ministry, we therefore deliberately set up a separate service section with a special “Business Services” department with a view to living up even better to our goal of being “Worldwide at Your Service”. In addition, we have also undertaken a number of adaptations in our representation network. We will close some embassies in Europe, namely in the Baltic States but also in Malta, and instead focus on strengthening our international network. We will open embassies in Moldova, Georgia and Belarus because this is a most interesting and challenging region at the crossroads between Russia and the European Union. Apart from that, and very deliberately, we will also open representations in growth and innovation markets, such as Singapore, Qatar, Colombia as well as a further Consulate General in China. We hope this will enable us to better align the Foreign Ministry’s network with Austria’s needs and we hope that especially with the strengthening of the “services” priority we will be even more successful in meeting your wishes and requirements.

What is most essential for our work is that you tell us what you expect from us, what you need and want us to deliver, while at the same time providing us with some insights into your own work. In this spirit, I am very happy that you are here today to participate in our Ambassadors’ Conference, that you are giving us the opportunity to learn more about your activities and your work in the fields of business, culture, science and beyond. Likewise, I am very happy that we also have the opportunity of showing you today what the Foreign Ministry does on a day-to-day basis.

Allow me to take this opportunity to thank our ambassadors who work for us on a daily basis abroad most warmly for their efforts and dedication. Very warm thanks also to our team for their work! And thank you, dear guests, for having taken the time to be with us today. Thank you very much!
Selected Documents

18.4. Federal President Heinz Fischer: Address at the High Level Side Event “Strengthening Cooperation on Migration and Refugee Movements in the Perspective of the New Development Agenda”, 70th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 1 October 2015

Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very grateful to the Secretary-General for convening today’s meeting.

A few days ago we adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls for “orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration”. The current refugee and migration crisis shows that we have a long way to go to achieve this goal.

As you know, the European Union and many other countries are facing an extraordinary challenge caused by the sudden and enormous increase of refugees and migrants coming via the Balkans and the Southern Mediterranean Route. The majority is fleeing the war in Syria and the atrocities committed by ISIS in the region. Since the beginning of this year hundreds of thousands of people have made their way to Europe.

A number of European countries are particularly affected by this dramatic situation.

As for Austria, with a population of 8 million, let me give you a few numbers:
In 2014 28,000 refugees applied for asylum in Austria,
For 2015, we are expecting 80,000 or more. This is the second highest per capita rate among the 28 EU member states – and similar to Germany’s.
Thousands of persons have been crossing the border into Austria on a daily basis, sometimes up to 20,000. Most of them want to go to Germany, but more and more are staying in Austria.

Behind these numbers stand the individual and often traumatic fates of children, women and men, of families torn apart, of survivors of terrible circumstances and dangerous flight routes.

There are several challenges for us:

1. First of all, receiving and treating these refugees in a humane manner.
I think Austria has done that in an exemplary way. Austria has been providing food, water, shelter, medical support and other basic supplies to the arriving refugees for many weeks.

In this context, I want to highlight the immediate and enormous contribution by civil society to our professional support structures. Without their sustained support Austria would not be able to cope with this sudden influx
of people in the dignified way it is. I have visited reception centres and train stations – and was deeply impressed by the untiring work both of our professional support structures, as well as the many volunteers who coordinate resources – often via social media – to optimise the organisation of support to the arriving refugees.

But the current situation is not tenable.

2. We have to manage these refugee flows in a common approach and to share responsibility at the international level.

Austria supports the recent decisions taken at the European Union level in this regard. We need to work towards an effective common asylum and migration policy, with the joint administration of hot spots at most affected entry points, and with a just, quota-based distribution of refugees among EU member countries. Asylum is an inalienable right, but it does not include the right to pick and choose one’s country of asylum.

Furthermore, the European Union has to and will step up cooperation with all transit countries along the Balkans route. And, most importantly, with those countries that have been shouldering the brunt of the burden of the effects of the war in Syria for the past years, by hosting millions of refugees: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan.

In addition, there needs to be a much stronger international effort to step up support for these countries, in cooperation with UNHCR, IOM and other organisations. This should include burden sharing not only at the European, but also at the international level.

Finally and most importantly, the atrocious war in Syria, already lasting longer than World War One, needs to be stopped.

The blockage in the Security Council over the last four and a half years on Syria has to be ended. This is not only a political, it is also a moral responsibility. We need substantial political progress; we need to avoid another 250,000 dead Syrians, and millions more displaced persons and refugees.

This must be the highest priority, even if it means putting aside certain preconditions that have been blocking progress for so long.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is what we need to do, and we can do it, if we act together.
Selected Documents


Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all let me thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate.

Since World War Two we have never seen higher numbers of people desperately fleeing from conflict to save their lives. Nearly 60 Million people worldwide are on the move. In 2014 alone 13.9 million people became newly displaced – four times the number of the previous year.

We are witnessing a mass exodus especially from the Wider Middle East towards Europe mostly via Turkey, Greece and the Western Balkan states. This mass exodus has several worrying aspects for countries of origin, transit and destination:

1. For countries of origin it increases the brain drain.
2. For countries of transit and destination it poses a significant challenge for societies and their social systems.

Mr. President,

We all know what has been the main trigger of this mass exodus: the barbaric war in Syria and the horrors committed by Da’esh in Iraq and Syria.

To respond to this challenge I believe we have to focus on three key areas:

1. First we have to confront the root causes in the countries of origin.
   In the case of Syria that means that we have to intensify our fight against Da’esh and other terrorist groups.
   Austria actively participates with the means at her disposal in the “Global Coalition to Counter ISIL”. We cannot offer military assistance but we have recently increased our help sending more humanitarian aid, protective equipment and mine detectors.
   We have to engage in this fight also within our societies – we have to do more to stop the flow of foreign terrorist fighters and to cut off financial support to their organisations.
2. Secondly we need a comprehensive approach in fighting against terrorism. The Vienna Agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue has created a unique momentum.
We should now use it to bring Iran more actively on board in our common efforts.

We will only be able to achieve a sustainable solution if it includes all major regional players such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt and Iran.

3. Thirdly we need more unity on international level

Our first priority should be to bring a rapid end to the bloodshed. Here we need clear leadership from the Security Council!

We will only be able to make a difference if the United States and Russia pull in one direction.

We need a mandate not only for action against Da’esh but also for the protection of civilians including the establishment of safe and buffer zones.

Austria would stand ready to contribute to such a UN-mandated operation in the region.

Mr. President,

The positive outcome of the E3+3 negotiations with Iran in Vienna offers a glimmer of hope. What has been possible on the Iran issue – in finding a negotiated diplomatic solution – should also be possible for Syria.

Progress is difficult but not impossible – we have to actively take matters into our hands and stand united to end the war in Syria and fight terrorism.

We owe this to the victims of terror, to the many who have to flee their homes and also to the security needs of our own people.

Thank you.


Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

70 years ago the United Nations were founded as the collective answer to war and genocide, which had cost the lives of millions of people.

The principal idea of the UN was to prevent war, to uphold the respect for international law and human rights and to promote social and economic progress.

I myself have not even lived through half of this period. Nevertheless, I believe that today – 70 years later – we all have to ask ourselves if we have really succeeded.

- We are facing a record high of over 50 violent conflicts, reaching from Syria and Iraq to Yemen, Sudan and Somalia.
• We are facing a rise of radicalisation and extremism.
• And we are facing the highest number of refugees since World War Two.

Nearly 60 Million people worldwide are on the move as refugees or internally displaced persons.

Alone 4 Million of them are Syrians who have left their country fleeing from civil war and terror. Every day over 40,000 people flee from their homes in search of peace, security or a new life.

This challenge is not limited to one region or to one continent. This is a global challenge!

It concerns the Mediterranean region, but also South Asia and large parts of Africa. Europe is currently also witnessing a huge flow of refugees in particular from the Wider Middle East.

These global refugee flows pose serious problems for the countries of origin and transit as well as for the countries of destination.

But all affected countries and regions have one thing in common: No country and no region can solve this crisis alone. And no single measure can provide a solution.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need a comprehensive approach covering the whole refugee routes: the countries of origin, transit and destination!

Which organisation if not the UN can provide the basis for this collective action? And which organisation if not the UN can contribute to this comprehensive approach?

If we want to reduce the number of refugees I believe that we have to focus our efforts on three key areas:

First we have to confront the root causes in the countries of origin: Civil wars, massive human rights violations and terrorism.

In this context we have to intensify our fight against Da’esh and terrorist groups. They have to be neutralised and defeated!

In the case of Syria it also means that we have to push harder for a closing of ranks in the region. We will only be able to achieve any meaningful progress if major regional players such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt and Iran act in concert.

And finally it means that we have to bring all relevant parties to the Syrian civil war on the table, as UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura tries to do.

Let me be clear: that does not mean that the current political leadership of Syria can be part of a long term solution. It has brought endless harm to the people of Syria. But if you want to make peace, you don't only talk to your friends.

Secondly we need more unity on international level.
Huge efforts have already been made – but the UN and its Member States can and should do more!

We will only be able to make a difference if the United States and Russia pull in one direction. The UN Security Council has to demonstrate unity.

We need a mandate not only for action against Da’esh but also for the protection of civilians. This should include the establishment of safe and buffer zones which would increase the security of the people and make access for humanitarian aid much easier. Action by the Security Council would offer many countries the possibility to join in and offer their support.

Our position is clear: Austria would stand ready to contribute to such a UN-peace operation.

Thirdly we need a change of system.

A system which allows only the fittest or those rich enough to pay the smugglers to reach a safe haven like Europe is wrong. The current system is in fact indirectly sponsoring smugglers! More than 24,000 migrants and refugees died on their way to Europe since 2000. The pictures of refugees drowned in the Mediterranean Sea or suffocated in trucks will continue to haunt us.

We therefore need a change of system! We need to create the possibility for refugees to apply for asylum already in their countries of origin or neighbouring countries. The United Nations could help in the establishment of such reception and information centres which would allow to introduce resettlement programs.

In my opinion trafficking in human beings is one of the worst crimes. We should consider systematic and large-scale smuggling as a crime against humanity so that the perpetrators can finally be brought to justice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is another crisis area we shouldn’t forget about.

Last year, like most of you I referred to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as probably the most serious challenge to peace and security in Europe. One year later, we still cannot see a positive development. The conflict is ongoing, the number of deaths has even increased and the socio-economic consequences are huge.

There is only one way ahead: A peaceful settlement based on dialogue and negotiation. We must find a solution that provides for a free and stable Ukraine, which enjoys strong ties with both the European Union and the Russian Federation.

In this respect the Minsk Agreement is and remains the only option on the table! There is no alternative to implementing this agreement. All parties have to live up to their commitments.

In this context let me underline the crucial work the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe is doing. The special Monitoring
Mission and the Trilateral Contact group play a unique role for a peaceful settlement.

The OSCE deserves our full support and Austria will do its utmost to contribute to its work, especially during our OSCE chairmanship in 2017.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All these conflicts show that 70 years after its establishment we need the United Nations more than ever. But in some areas the UN is also pushed to its breaking point. It urgently needs reforms in order to be prepared for the future.

What can be the way forward?
Firstly, we have to remind ourselves of the purposes and principles of the Charter. It is and remains our backbone. Failure is guaranteed if we don’t respect it!

Secondly, we have to look at the functioning of its main bodies. We need a Security Council that is united and can act swiftly.

We welcome the efforts to improve the work of the Security Council. We support the initiatives to suspend the use of the veto in case of mass atrocities. In order to be able to address global challenges we need a UN that is capable of taking action – and a Security Council that is more representative, accountable and transparent.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We highly value the fact that one of the headquarters of the United Nations is in Vienna and we will continue to support it actively. We remain committed to act as a place for international dialogue, such as the Iran nuclear talks that took place in Vienna this year.

We will also continue to contribute to all diplomatic initiatives for a better world. In this sense one key area for us is nuclear disarmament.

The NPT Review Conference last May failed to reach an agreement. But there is a growing international momentum on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. At this conference I delivered a joint statement on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons on behalf of 159 States. And the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons last December resulted in a Humanitarian Pledge which has been endorsed by 116 States!

Austria, together with co-sponsors, will table several resolutions on the humanitarian initiative. We hope that they will receive broad support.

70 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear weapons still pose one of the most serious threats to humankind. I can assure you that Austria will fight for a world free of nuclear weapons to make our world a safer place!
Ladies and Gentlemen,
The global challenges we are facing require a strong United Nations! We deeply value Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his tireless efforts.
The UN and the Secretary General can continue to count on our continuous support.
Thank you for your attention!

18.7. United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution A/RES/70/47 adopted by the General Assembly on 7 December 2015

United Nations A/RES/70/47

General Assembly

Seventieth session
Agenda item 97 (b)

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 7 December 2015

[on the report of the First Committee (A/70/460)]

70/47. Humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons

The General Assembly,

Reiterating the deep concern about the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons,

Stressing that the immense and uncontrollable destructive capability and indiscriminate nature of nuclear weapons cause unacceptable humanitarian consequences, as has been demonstrated through their past use and testing,

Recalling that concern about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons has been reflected in numerous United Nations resolutions, including the first resolution adopted by the General Assembly, on 24 January 1946,

Recalling also that at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, in 1978, the Assembly stressed that nuclear
Selected Documents

weapons posed the greatest danger to mankind and to the survival of civilization.¹

Welcoming the renewed interest and resolve of the international community, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross and international humanitarian organizations, to address the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons,

Recalling that the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons expressed deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons,²

Noting the resolution of 26 November 2011 of the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement entitled “Working towards the elimination of nuclear weapons”,

Recalling the joint statements on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons delivered to the General Assembly and during the 2010–2015 cycle of the review of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons,³

Welcoming the facts-based discussions on the effects of a nuclear weapon detonation that were held at the Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, convened by Norway, on 4 and 5 March 2013, Mexico, on 13 and 14 February 2014, and Austria, on 8 and 9 December 2014,

Cognizant that a key message from experts and international organizations at those conferences was that no State or international body could address the immediate humanitarian emergency caused by a nuclear weapon detonation or provide adequate assistance to victims,

Firmly believing that it is in the interest of all States to engage in discussions on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons with the aim of further broadening and deepening the understanding of this matter, and welcoming civil society’s ongoing engagement,

Reaffirming the role of civil society, in partnership with Governments, in raising awareness about the unacceptable humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons,

Emphasizing that the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons affect not only Governments but each and every citizen of our interconnected world and have deep implications for human survival, for the

¹) See resolution S-10/2.
Selected Documents

environment, for socioeconomic development, for our economies and
for the health of future generations,

1. *Stresses* that it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity
that nuclear weapons never be used again, under any circumstances;

2. *Emphasizes* that the only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons
will never be used again is their total elimination;

3. *Stresses* that the catastrophic effects of a nuclear weapon detona-
tion, whether by accident, miscalculation or design, cannot be adequately
addressed;

4. *Expresses its firm belief* that awareness of the catastrophic con-
sequences of nuclear weapons must underpin all approaches and efforts
towards nuclear disarmament;

5. *Calls upon* all States, in their shared responsibility, to prevent the
use of nuclear weapons, to prevent their vertical and horizontal prolif-
eration and to achieve nuclear disarmament;

6. *Urges* States to exert all efforts to totally eliminate the threat of
these weapons of mass destruction;

7. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its seventy-first
session, under the item entitled “General and complete disarmament”, a
sub-item entitled “Humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons”.

*67th plenary meeting*
*7 December 2015*
Selected Documents


United Nations A/RES/70/48

General Assembly

Distr.: General
11 December 2015

Seventieth session
Agenda item 97 (b)

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 7 December 2015

[on the report of the First Committee (A/70/460)]

70/48. Humanitarian pledge for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons

The General Assembly,

Ever mindful of the unacceptable harm that victims of nuclear weapon explosions and nuclear testing have experienced, and recognizing that the rights and needs of victims have not yet been adequately addressed,

Understanding that the immediate, medium-term and long-term consequences of a nuclear weapon explosion would be significantly graver than was understood in the past and would not be constrained by national borders but have regional or even global effects, potentially threatening the survival of humanity,

Recognizing the complexity of and relationship between these consequences for, inter alia, health, the environment, infrastructure, food security, climate, development, social cohesion, displacement and the global economy, which would be systemic and potentially irreversible,

Aware that the risk of a nuclear weapon explosion is significantly greater than previously assumed and is indeed increasing with increased proliferation, the lowering of the technical threshold for nuclear weapon capability, the ongoing modernization of nuclear weapon arsenals in States possessing nuclear weapons and the role that is attributed to nuclear weapons in the nuclear doctrines of such States,

Cognizant that the risk of the use of nuclear weapons, with its unacceptable consequences, can be avoided only when all nuclear weapons have been eliminated,
Emphasizing that the consequences of a nuclear weapon explosion and the risks associated with nuclear weapons concern the security of all humanity and that all States share the responsibility to prevent any use of nuclear weapons,

Emphasizing also that the scope of the consequences of a nuclear weapon explosion and the associated risks raise profound moral and ethical questions that go beyond debates about the legality of nuclear weapons,

Mindful that no national or international capacity exists that would adequately respond to the human suffering and humanitarian harm that would result from a nuclear weapon explosion in a populated area, and that such capacity most likely will never exist,

Affirming that it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances,

Reiterating the crucial role that international organizations, relevant entities of the United Nations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, elected representatives, academia and civil society play in advancing the shared objective of a nuclear-weapon-free world,

Recalling the three international conferences convened, respectively, by Norway in March 2013, Mexico in February 2014 and Austria in December 2014 on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, and the compelling evidence presented at these conferences,

Welcoming the fact that 120 States have drawn inescapable conclusions from the evidence on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and, consequently, supported or endorsed the Humanitarian Pledge,

1. Stresses the importance of having fact-based discussions and presenting findings and compelling evidence on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons in all relevant forums and within the United Nations framework, as they should be at the centre of all deliberations and the implementation of obligations and commitments with regard to nuclear disarmament;

2. Appeals to all States to follow the imperative of human security for all and to promote the protection of civilians against risks stemming from nuclear weapons;

3. Urges all States parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to renew their commitment to the urgent and full implementation of their existing obligations under article VI, and calls upon all States to identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons and to cooperate with all stakeholders to achieve this goal;

1) See CD/2039 and www.hinw14vienna.at.
4. *Requests* all States possessing nuclear weapons, pending the total elimination of their nuclear weapon arsenals, to take concrete interim measures to reduce the risk of nuclear weapon detonations, including by reducing the operational status of nuclear weapons and moving nuclear weapons away from deployment and into storage, diminishing the role of nuclear weapons in military doctrines and rapidly reducing all types of nuclear weapons;

5. *Calls upon* all relevant stakeholders, States, international organizations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, parliamentarians and civil society to cooperate in efforts to stigmatize, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons in the light of their unacceptable humanitarian consequences and associated risks;

6. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its seventy-first session, under the item entitled “General and complete disarmament”, a sub-item entitled “Humanitarian pledge for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons”.

*67th plenary meeting*
*7 December 2015*
Index

Accession negotiations 30, 31, 92
ADA 100, 158, 199, 200, 209, 223, 225, 227, 247–253, 259, 300
Advice for Travellers Abroad 295
AEC 141, 142, 145
Afghanistan 24, 34, 92, 93, 107, 109, 110, 132, 141, 142, 147, 152, 154, 155, 187, 189, 209, 240, 260, 308, 313
African Union 24, 117, 130, 154, 209, 215, 222, see AU
African Union Mission in Somalia. see AMISOM
Agenda 2030 59, 60
Agriculture 15, 52–54, 177, 223–226, 243, 250, 251
AJC 134
Albania 29, 31, 88, 89, 183, 185, 195, 224, 249, 250, 253, 272, 273, 305
Algeria 24–26, 65, 111, 112, 121, 187, 209, 308
Alliance of Civilisations 277
Alpine Convention 182, 190
Alps 190
Al-Qaida 172
American Jewish Committee 134
AMIF 36, 72, 289
AMISOM 120
Andorra 51, 308
Angola 121, 179, 232, 308
Anti-Corruption Academy 182, 203
APEC 132, 146
APPEAR 250, 254
Argentina 5, 137, 140, 169, 171, 234, 308
Armenia 24, 26, 97, 105, 195, 203, 214, 265, 305
Arms Trade Treaty. see ATT
ASEAN 141, 142, 144–146, 209, 238
ASEF 141
ASEM 141, 144
Asia 18, 27, 52, 56, 95, 106–108, 110, 132, 141–145, 147, 184, 186, 187, 189, 281, 320
Asia-Europe Foundation. see ASEF
Asia Europe Meeting. see ASEM
Association Agreement 19, 26, 31, 32, 89, 90, 101, 105, 106, 136
Association of Southeast Asian Nations. see ASEAN
Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 36, 72, 289
ATT 228, 229, 235
AU 24, 117, 118, 120, 125, 130, 154, 156, 209, 215, 222
Auslandsösterreicher-Weltbund 6
Australia 5, 27, 141, 142, 149, 150, 179, 187, 216, 234
Austria Institute 271, 278–280
Austria Libraries 271, 278, 279, 281–283
Austrian Development Agency. see ADA
Austrian Development Cooperation. see ADC
Austrian German Language Diploma 282
Austrian Integration Fund 292, 305
Austrian representations abroad 2, 4, 280, 293, 295
AU-UN hybrid operation in Darfur. see UNAMID
Azerbaijan 2, 24–26, 105, 184, 193, 195, 207, 210, 239, 308
Bahrain 207, 308
Bangladesh 146–148, 209, 308
Banks 245
Basel Convention 268
Battlegroups 153, 156
Belarus 24, 25, 38, 97, 102–104, 107, 183, 185, 196, 200, 203, 204, 209, 219, 308, 315
Belgium 44, 51, 65, 69, 125, 179, 193, 197, 211
Belize 258, 308
BEPS 51, 241
Bhutan 147, 148, 259
Biodiversity 60, 176, 267
Black Sea region 199, 250, 254, 281, 304
Bolivia 139, 140, 176, 238, 308
Bosnia and Herzegovina 24, 29, 31, 32, 89, 90, 92, 152, 154, 195, 197, 253, 272, 273, 308
Botswana 121, 122, 308
Brazil 27, 81, 136–140, 169, 203, 209, 215, 243, 301, 308
BRICS 27, 42, 97
Brunei 145, 308
Budget 72, 252, 298, 299
Bulgaria 92, 195, 197, 203, 211, 214, 237
Index

Burkina Faso  1, 126, 129, 130, 188, 208, 256, 308
Burma  209
Burundi  117, 125, 173, 204, 208, 265, 308
Business Service unit  8, 9
Cabo Verde  55, 238, 250, 308
Cambodia  145, 308
Canada  27, 134, 135, 260, 265, 308
Caribbean  135–140, 258, 309
CARICOM  258
Caucasus  24, 97, 183, 186, 196, 250, 253, 261, 281, 304
CCPCJ  164
CEDAW  214
CEF  56, 64
CEI  79, 200
CELAC  135, 136, 140
Central African Republic  117, 126, 129, 152, 154, 159, 173, 204, 221, 222, 277, 308
Central America  136, 139, 140, 215
Central American Integration System  140
Central Asia  18, 95, 106–108, 110, 143, 184, 186, 189, 281
Central Citizenship Register  2
Central Civil Status Register  2
Central Europe  79, 133, 135, 200, 254, 271, 281
Central European Initiative.  see CEI
CERN  283
CETA  135, 238
CEWARN  130
CFP  54, 55
CFSP  23, 24, 151, 152, 207
Chad  121, 128, 129, 308
Chile  27, 136, 139, 140, 170, 176, 209, 308
Civilians  155, 170
Civil society  261
Climate Conference  187, 266
CLRAE  196, 197, 199, 200
CND  163
COHOM  207
Colombia  4, 8, 136–140, 243, 308, 315
Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.  see CCPCJ
Commission on the Status of Women.  see CSW
Committee of Ministers  192, 193, 195, 197, 210, 277
Committee of Permanent Representatives.  see COREPER
Committee of the Regions.  see CoR
Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.  see COPUOS
Common Fisheries Policy.  see CFP
Common Foreign and Security Policy.  see CFSP
Common Market of the South.  see MERCOSUR
Common Security and Defence Policy.  see CSDP
Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.  see CELAC
Competitiveness  44, 47, 49, 61, 67
Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement.  see CETA
Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.  see CTBT
Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization.  see CTBTO
Conference of Parties.  see COP
Congress of the Local and Regional Authorities of Europe.  see CLRAE
Connecting Europe  56, 63, 64
Consulate-General  134
Convention on Human Rights  19, 195, 198, 210
Cooperation in the Field of Scientific and Technical Research.  see COST
COP  266
COPUOS  165
CoR  19, 20
COREPER  22, 56
COSAC  23
COSME  49
COST  283
Costa Rica  136, 140, 176, 189, 243, 308
Cote d’Ivoire  127, 221
Cotonou Agreement  131, 262
Council of Europe.  see CoR
Council Presidency  15, 43, 53, 54, 58, 68, 262, 278, 314
Court of Justice of the European Union  18, 19, 133
CPT  196, 211
Crime Prevention  164
Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice  164
Croatia  20, 29, 32, 34, 81, 83, 84, 87, 89, 93, 176, 190, 203, 215, 224, 233, 237, 272, 279, 305
CSDP  18, 23, 24, 34, 90, 91, 151–154, 156
CSocD  164
CSR  167
CSW  206
CTBT  162, 188, 231
CTBTO  181, 188
CTBT Preparatory Commission  231
Cuba  131, 136, 137, 139, 265, 308
Cultural Forum  273, 274, 279, 283
CWC  232
Cyprus  20, 31, 72, 93, 173, 211, 308
Czech Republic  69, 83, 85, 190, 237, 269, 270, 279
DAC  243, 252, 264, 265
Danube area  304
Darfur  120, 221, 249
Democracy  27, 146, 192, 193, 207–209, 218
Democratic People’s Republic of Korea  144
Democratic Republic of the Congo  125, 154
Development Assistance Committee.  see DAC
Digital Agenda  68
Diplomatic Academy  220, 232, 285, 300, 304, 305
Disarmament  161, 162, 181, 229–231, 233, 309
Djibouti  152, 308
Dominican Republic  139, 140, 308
DPR of Korea  203, 205
Drugs  163, 166, 181, 220, 255, 257
EAC  130, 250
EAPC  155
East African Community.  see EAC
Eastern Partnership  26, 65, 98, 105, 106, 194, 254
Ebola  119, 127, 178, 256
EBRD  87, 103, 245
ECB  70–72
ECHR  19, 194, 198, 199, 210
ECJ  16, 19, 39, 40, 210
ECOFIN  20, 51, 71
Economic and Financial Affairs Council.  see ECOFIN
Economic and Monetary Union  23, 28, 69–71
Economic Community of West African States.  see ECOWAS
ECOSOC  159, 164, 174, 175, 264, 292
ECOWAS  131, 256
ECREEE  256
ECRI  196, 211
ECSR  196, 211
ECtHR  19, 192, 193, 195, 196, 198, 199, 210, 211
Ecuador  136, 140, 308
Education  30, 65, 66, 75, 82, 134, 136, 177, 218, 241, 249, 250, 253, 279–282, 284
EEA  27, 28, 80
EEAS  18, 26, 55, 64, 69, 141, 153, 300
EFSF  72
EFTA  27, 28, 80
Egypt  1, 24, 26, 110, 111, 118, 187, 188, 209, 215, 225, 231, 232, 238, 260, 308, 319, 320
EIB  16, 70, 103
EIDHR  208
El Salvador  136, 140, 308
EMBC  283
Employment  51, 52
EMU  23, 69, 71
Energy  12, 22, 30, 47, 56, 58, 60–65, 79, 130, 178, 181, 182, 187, 188, 244, 257, 258, 269
Energy efficiency  61
Enlargement  16, 29
Equality  120, 213, 214, 242, 257
Erasmus+  67, 81, 280
ERDF  34, 48
Eritrea  34, 118, 119, 204, 308
ESA  68, 283
ESF  48
ESM  12, 72
Estonia  20, 51, 65
ETC  48, 88, 218
Ethiopia  38, 118, 119, 121, 213, 224, 225, 254, 255, 260, 308
Index

EUAM 100, 152
EUBAM 152
EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine. see EUBAM
EUCAP 129, 152
EU Council Working Party on Human Rights. see COHOM
EUFOR 90, 129, 152, 154
EU HR 16–18, 23, 24, 37, 153, 156, 187
EU-LAC 135, 136
EULEX 91, 152, 155
EUMAM 129, 152
EUMETSAT 283
EUMM 152, 184
EU NAVFOR Atalanta 152
EUNIC 134, 278
Eurasian Economic Union 97, 104, 107, 109
EURATOM 269
Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. see EAPC
EUROJUST 41
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. see EBRD
European Central Bank 70, 71
European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. see ECRI
European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. see CPT
European Convention on Human Rights. see ECHR
European Court of Auditors 16, 52
European Court of Human Rights. see ECHR
European Economic Area. see EEA
European elections 17
European External Action Service. see EEAS
European Financial Stability Facility. see EFSF
European Free Trade Association. see EFTA
European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. see EIDHR
European Maritime and Fisheries Fund 48
European Molecular Biology Conference. see EMBC
European National Institutes for Culture. see EUNIC
European Organisation for Nuclear Research. see CERN
European Regional Development Fund. see ERDF
European Social Fund. see ESF
European Space Agency. see ESA
European Stability Mechanism. see ESM
European Territorial Cooperation 48, 88
European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. see FRA
Eurozone 12, 14, 69–71, 77, 83, 240
EUSDR 33, 272
EU Special Representative. see EUSR
EUSR 24, 207
EUTM 128, 152
EU Visa Information System. see VIS
Extremism 132, 158, 160, 218
FAO 177, 243
FDRF 223
Federal Council 21, 22, 80, 197
Federal Ministries Act 286, 290
Fiji 219, 308
Financial Framework 72
Financial Transaction Tax 51
Finland 155, 177, 308
Fisheries 48, 52–55
Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. see FAO
Foreign and European Policy Report 295
Foreign Disaster Relief Fund. see FDRF
FRA 181, 194, 208, 209
France 1, 7, 33, 45, 51, 78, 88, 98, 151, 170, 171, 176, 183, 187, 190, 198, 210, 229, 230, 269
FRONTEX 34, 36, 72
FTT 51
Future Fund 284, 305
G7 65
G20 51, 65, 97, 241
Gender 18, 160, 213–215, 257, 262
Geneva Conference on Disarmament 231
Index

Geneva Convention 227
Genocide 176
Georgia 2, 24–26, 106, 152, 184, 189, 195, 203, 209, 211, 215, 221, 253, 308, 311, 315
Germany 5, 13, 33, 34, 44, 45, 51, 62, 76–78, 88, 110, 114, 169, 187, 190, 203, 211, 229, 237, 270, 273, 316
Ghana 127, 180, 256, 308
Great Lakes Region 125
GRECO 196
Greece 1, 12, 32, 34–36, 51, 71, 77, 92, 224, 312, 318
GRETA 196, 211, 220
Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. see GRETA
Group of States against Corruption. see GRECO
Growth 46, 47, 59, 70, 82, 240
Guatemala 136, 137, 224, 281, 308
Guinea 55, 127, 130, 150, 173, 208, 308
Guinea-Bissau 55, 127, 173
Hague Code of Conduct. see HCoC
Hague Convention on Child Abduction. see HCCA
Haiti 308
HCCA 3
HCoC 181, 232, 233
Headquarters 159, 161, 310
Health 50, 51, 178, 179
Holocaust 134, 177, 206, 284
Holocaust Education, Remembrance and 284
Honduras 136, 137, 140, 203, 215, 308
Horizon 2020 67, 81
Horn of Africa 24, 36, 118, 152, 154, 226, 254, 260
HRC 133, 149, 202–204, 212–217
Human rights 218
Human Rights Council. see HRC
Human Rights Dialogue 209
Hungary 7, 34, 35, 86–88, 190, 200, 211, 269, 270, 284
IACA 182, 203
IAEA 115, 133, 167, 181, 187, 229
IBRD 182
ICAN 180
ICAO 179, 180
ICC 130, 169, 170, 220–222
Iceland 27, 28, 30, 31, 308
ICIMOD 258
ICJ 169, 175, 176
ICPDR 181, 190, 191, 201
ICRC 225, 227, 228, 234, 254, 309, 310
ICTR 169
ICTY 169
IEA 244
IFRC 225
IGAD 121, 130
IHRA 284
IIASA 182, 283
ILC 167, 168, 178
ILO 178
IMF 72, 100, 102, 124, 127, 244
IMO 180
Index 242
India 81, 109, 141, 142, 146–148, 169, 178, 188, 230, 231, 237–240
Indonesia 27, 145, 243, 244, 276, 308
Information for All 176
Innovation 33, 61, 123, 133, 244, 272, 283
Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance. see IPA
Integration 36, 72, 75, 106, 130, 140, 158, 174, 217, 286–289, 292, 296, 305
Intergovernmental Authority 121, 130
Internal Energy Market 62, 63
International Anti-Corruption Academy. see IACA
International Atomic Energy Agency. see IAEA
International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. see IBRD
International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development. see ICIMOD
International Civil Aviation Organization. see ICAO
International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River 190, 201
International Committee of the Red Cross. see ICRC
International Court of Justice. see ICJ
International Criminal Court. see ICC
International cultural policy 271
International Energy Agency. see IEA
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. see IFRC
International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance 284
International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis. see IIASA

333
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International King Abdullah Bin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdulaziz Center for Interreligious and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Dialogue. see KAICIID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Labour Organization. see ILO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Law Commission. see ILC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Maritime Organization. see IMO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Monetary Fund. see IMF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Organization for Migration. see IOM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Peace Institute. see IPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Security Assistance Force. see ISAF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Telecommunications Union. see ITU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOM 182, 189, 220, 317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPA 29, 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPI 182, 216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran 18, 24, 65, 78, 96, 107, 115, 131, 133, 187, 188, 203, 205, 209, 229, 231, 239, 276, 308, 311, 319, 320, 322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland 65, 72, 155, 208, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS 97, 110, 160, 313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISAF 110, 147, 155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIL 95, 112–115, 132, 134, 157, 158, 171, 172, 223, 260, 318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel 24–26, 113, 114, 175, 187, 188, 230–232, 279, 283, 285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy 7, 33, 35, 36, 51, 74, 78, 79, 88, 133, 169, 190, 198, 200, 281, 312, 313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITF 284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITU 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan 4, 27, 42, 142–145, 169, 180, 187, 209, 211, 231, 237, 238, 267, 281, 283, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist 134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judiciary 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAICIID 182, 277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan 65, 97, 107, 184, 185, 209, 240, 243, 304, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya 119, 120, 126, 130, 152, 203, 214, 221, 222, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo 24, 30–32, 90–92, 152, 154, 155, 173, 177, 183, 189, 196, 253, 273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait 203, 214, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan 97, 107, 108, 184, 185, 209, 214, 238, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos 145, 146, 209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America 27, 135–137, 139, 140, 178, 205, 246, 258, 309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean. see LAC; see LAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia 17, 198, 243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon 24, 26, 37, 38, 173, 203, 223, 225, 260, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho 122, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia 55, 127, 173, 240, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya 24, 37, 79, 111, 112, 152, 159, 203, 215, 221, 232, 260, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liechtenstein 27, 28, 33, 51, 79, 80, 168, 170, 190, 222, 272, 281, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania 243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg 13, 16, 17, 43, 53, 54, 56–58, 66, 68, 69, 197, 237, 269, 278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia 29, 31, 32, 34, 91, 92, 183, 195, 200, 224, 272, 273, 308, 313, 314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar 55, 122, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Committee 21, 128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi 123, 203, 215, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia 141, 145, 146, 171, 301, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives 147, 149, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali 1, 111, 117, 118, 128–130, 152, 154, 159, 221, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta 43, 65, 118, 155, 203, 308, 315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDGs 60, 162, 174, 188, 245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediterranean 24, 26, 34, 35, 37, 55, 79, 110, 118, 152, 168, 187, 196, 198, 245, 268, 313, 316, 320, 321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediterranean region 24, 79, 320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERCOSUR 136, 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico 7, 27, 131, 136, 138–140, 168, 170, 209, 228, 235, 244, 301, 308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East 18, 24, 36, 78, 79, 95, 113, 151, 156, 161, 162, 170, 227, 231, 260, 277, 304, 306, 307, 318, 320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East Peace Process 24, 113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration 11, 34–38, 72, 81, 117, 118, 160, 182, 189, 220, 262, 283, 289, 292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minorities 185, 196, 211, 212, 216–218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minsk Agreement 78, 98, 99, 321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minsk Process 105, 183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINURSO 129, 173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINUSMA 117, 128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility 38, 201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova 24–26, 102, 183, 186, 189, 195, 199, 200, 209, 220, 249, 250, 253, 254, 308, 311, 315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Index

Monaco 190, 195
Mongolia 145, 203, 214–216, 308
Montenegro 29, 30, 89, 91, 92, 183, 272, 273, 279, 308
Montreal Protocol 59, 269
Mozambique 123, 250, 257, 263, 308
Multilateral Development Banks 245
Municipal Councillors for European Affairs 11, 294, 295
Music 275
Myanmar 141, 142, 145, 146, 179, 203, 205, 207–209, 215, 224, 238, 277, 308
Nagorno-Karabakh 105, 183
National Action Plan for Integration 286–289
National Council 17, 21, 35, 75, 86, 104, 105, 109, 128, 197, 199, 225, 264
National Fund 284
NATO 79, 90–92, 106, 151, 154–156
Neighbourhood Policy 16, 24, 154, 311
NEPAD 165
Nepal 1, 141, 147, 149, 223–226, 249, 258, 308
Netherlands 26, 43, 65, 216, 273
New Partnership for Africa’s Development. see NEPAD
New Zealand 27, 141, 142, 150, 216, 235, 308
Nicaragua 136, 176, 308
Niger 128, 129, 152, 308
Nigeria 34, 38, 117, 121, 128, 130, 189, 208, 215, 239, 245, 277, 308
North Atlantic Treaty Organization. see NATO
Norway 27, 28, 155, 171, 198, 209, 211, 216, 218, 272, 308
NPT 161, 187, 229–231, 309, 310, 322
NSG 234
Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. see NPT
Nuclear Suppliers Group. see NSG
Ocean Shield 154
OCHA 224, 226, 234
ODA 142, 244, 251, 252, 261, 264
ODIHR 103, 104, 109, 184, 185, 193
OECD 51, 240–243, 247, 251, 252, 256, 264
OECD Development Assistance Committee. see DAC
Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. see ODIHR
Office for Outer Space Affairs. see OOSA
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. see OCHA
Official Development Assistance. see ODA
OFID 181
OIC 205, 212
OOSA 166
OPCW 179, 232
OPEC 181
OPEC Fund for International Development. see OFID
Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. see OPCW
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. see OECD
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. see OSCE
Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. see OPEC
Oslo Convention 233
Österreich-Bibliotheken 271, 281, 282
Österreich-Institute 271
Ottawa Convention 233
PACE 192, 194, 195, 197–199
Pakistan 34, 109, 142, 147–149, 169, 188, 189, 209, 230, 231
Palestinian Territories 113, 203, 254
Panama 131, 136, 139, 239, 308
Paraguay 140, 308
Parliamentary Assembly 185, 192, 197, 211
Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. see PACE
Partnership for Peace. see PfP
PBC 173
PCIs 63, 64
Peacebuilding 173, 251, 256
Peacekeeping operations. see PKO
Permanent Representation 15
Peru 136, 139, 140, 209, 243, 308
PfP 155
Philippines 2, 27, 141, 145, 146, 308
PKO 159, 166
Plenary 234
PNR 38, 39, 157
Poland 7, 190, 264, 269, 270, 283, 305
Political and Security Committee. see PSC
Portugal 51, 72
Index

Switzerland  5, 7, 27, 28, 33, 51, 80–82, 155, 169, 179, 190, 209, 222, 227, 228, 250, 259, 270, 308
TAIEX  25, 29
Tajikistan  108, 109, 185, 209
Tanzania  55, 152, 208, 213, 308
Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research.  see ITF
Terrorism  112, 116, 156–158, 168, 192, 193
TFEU  20, 45, 278
Thailand  141, 145, 147, 187, 209, 239, 244, 308
Timor-Leste  4, 308
Tourism  42, 47, 163, 259
Toxins Weapons  232
TPP  132, 142
Traduki  272
Transnistria  102, 183
Trans-Pacific Partnership.  see TPP
Transport  52, 55, 56, 77, 82, 201, 239, 283
Treaty of Lisbon  21, 40, 151, 153, 210
Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.  see TFEU
TTIP  20, 27, 132
Tunisia  1, 24, 26, 113, 187, 194, 209, 238, 308
Turkey  1, 17, 19, 27, 29, 30, 34, 37, 65, 77, 94–96, 105, 156, 180, 195, 196, 203, 214, 223, 225, 226, 260, 317–320
Turkmenistan  65, 109, 185, 209
Uganda  125, 126, 130, 213, 221, 239, 249, 250, 252, 255, 308
UNAMA  148
UNAMID  120
UNAOC  277
UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.  see UNAMA
UNCITRAL  167, 169, 181, 237
UN Commission on International Trade Law.  see UNCITRAL
UNCTAD  166
UNEA  267
UNECE  175, 190, 269
UN Economic and Social Council.  see ECOSOC
UN Environment Programme.  see UNEP
UNEP  181, 190, 267
UNESCO  69, 91, 112, 176, 177, 218, 277
UNFCCC  263
UNFICYP  93, 173
UN General Assembly.  see UNGA
UNHCR  119, 181, 226, 317
UN High Commissioner for Refugees.  see UNHCR
UNICEF  167, 213, 265
UNIDO  130, 167, 181, 188, 250, 258
UNIFIL  173
UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo  173
UN Interim Force in Lebanon.  see UNIFIL
UN Interim Security Force for Abyei.  see UNISFA
UNISFA  121
United Arab Emirates  4, 27, 119, 209, 237, 308
United Kingdom.  5, 14, 45, 187, 210, 229, 269, 283
United Nations Children's Fund.  see UNICEF
United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs.  see CND
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.  see UNECE
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.  see UNESCO
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.  see UNFCCC
United Nations General Assembly.  see UNGA
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.  see UNHCR
United Nations Industrial Development Organization.  see UNIDO
Index

United Nations Secretary-General. see UNSG
United States of America. see USA
Universal Periodic Review. see UPR
UNMIK 173
UNMIL 127
UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara. see MINURSO
UN Mission in Kosovo. see UNMIK
UN Mission in Liberia. see UNMIL
UNODA 181
UNODC 163, 164, 166, 181, 220, 255, 257
UN Office for Disarmament Affairs. see UNODA
UN Office on Drugs and Crime. see UNODC
UNOV 166, 167, 181
UN Peacebuilding Commission. see PBC
UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. see UNRWA
UNRWA 161, 166, 227, 254
UNSG 95, 120, 129, 146, 159–161, 165, 166, 172, 178, 188, 194, 206, 215, 236
UN Women 214, 215, 249
UPR 202, 214
Uruguay 140, 268, 308
Uzbekistan 109, 110, 185, 209
Vanuatu 4, 308
Venezuela 137, 139, 140, 308
Venice Commission 14, 86, 192, 200
Vietnam 27, 141, 142, 145, 147, 209, 238, 239, 274
VIS 4
Visa facilitation 26
Visa Information System 4
WA 181, 235
Wassenaar Arrangement. see WA
West Africa 119, 126, 131, 173, 178, 220, 249, 255–257
Western Balkans 17, 20, 29, 31, 34, 37, 88, 89, 91, 154, 156, 157, 215, 250, 252, 253, 260, 272, 273, 304, 307, 310, 313, 315
Western Balkans Summit 29, 89, 91, 157, 311
Western Sahara 112, 129, 130, 173
WFP 225, 226
WHO 127, 167, 178, 179
WMO 177
World Bank 102, 124, 139, 182, 245, 247, 255
World Climate Conference 187
World Food Programme. see WFP
World Health Organization. see WHO
World Meteorological Organization 177
World Trade Organization. see WTO
WTO 80, 96, 103, 107, 239, 240
Yemen 116, 159, 204, 224, 225, 308, 319
Zambia 308
Zangger Committee. see ZC
ZC 234
Zimbabwe 124, 239, 308
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