

## party profile *DIE GRÜNEN*, Austria

In November of 1986 the Austrian Greens entered the Nationalrat (National Assembly). *DIE GRÜNEN* have since become an essential political force addressing environmental, social and general political issues.

After a setback in the December 1995 general elections (4.81%), *DIE GRÜNEN* recovered and gained strength. In the general election of 3rd October 1999, *DIE GRÜNEN* scored 7.40% with 342,260 votes which gave them 14 MPs. The right-wing populist Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the christian-democratic ÖVP each gained 26.9% of the vote, Jörg Haider's FPÖ coming in second just 415 votes in front of ÖVP. The Social Democrats (SPÖ) maintained their position as No. 1. Nevertheless, on 4th February 2000, ÖVP leader Wolfgang Schüssel formed a right-wing government together with FPÖ. In the years to follow, *DIE GRÜNEN* severely criticized this government, particularly with regards to its social politics as well as in the field of environment and democracy.

In July 2001, the 20th Congress of *DIE GRÜNEN* passed a new party program that includes 6 basic principles: ecology, solidarity, autonomy, grass-root democracy, non-violence and feminism. Since March 2002, Alexander Van der Bellen, University Professor for economy, president of the Green Parliamentary Group and party spokesperson since December 1997, has two vice-chairpersons: Madeleine Petrovic, former MP and currently president of the Green Group in Lower Austria, and Eva Glawischnig, environmental expert and vice president of the Green Parliamentary Group.

In regional elections, *DIE GRÜNEN* also did well:

- In the capital Vienna they achieved 12.45% of the vote and 11 seats out of 100 (plus one member of the city government without portfolio) in the elections in March of 2001. In the elections to the Viennese urban districts, held also on 25th March 2001, the Greens became strongest political party with 32.55% in the 7th district, Neubau, thus obtaining the district mayor. EU citizens living in Vienna were entitled to vote for the district councils, too and 42.5% of them voted Green.

- In Tyrol, *DIE GRÜNEN* scored their best ever election result so far in the regional election of September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003: 15.6% of the vote gave them 5 seats.

- In Upper Austria, the critical position of the regional Christian Democrats towards certain aspects of the Federal Chancellor Schüssel's politics enabled a so called "black-green" cooperation after the regional election of September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003: *DIE GRÜNEN* scored 9.06% and Rudi Anschober became member of the regional government, responsible for environment. A protest of Upper Austria against the federal law on asylum, the decision on a regional anti-discrimination act, the agreement on a stop of new highway projects and several concrete steps for stronger promotion of renewable energies are some of the measures this new coalition has taken.

- A great and pleasant surprise was the green victory in the Carinthian regional elections of March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004: They overcame the quite high threshold and gained 2 seats in the Landtag of a region where Jörg Haider was re-elected governor (this

time forming a coalition with the regional Social Democrats!) and where Greens have always had a very difficult stance.

Today (autumn 2004) *DIE GRÜNEN* are represented in all nine Regional Parliaments with an average of 8.8% and altogether 38 seats: Tyrol 15.59% (5 seats, 2003), Vienna 12.45% (11 seats, 2001), Vorarlberg 10.17% (4 seats, 2004), Upper Austria 9.06% (5 seats, 2003), Salzburg 7.99% (2 seats, 2004), Lower Austria 7.22% (4 seats, 2003), Carinthia 6.71% (2 seats, 2004), Styria 5.61% (3 seats, 2000) and Burgenland 5.49% (2 seats, 2000).

*DIE GRÜNEN* now have four seats in the 62 seat Federal Council (Bundesrat) - one each for Vienna, Lower Austria, Upper Austria and Tyrol.

On a local level, the Greens are represented in the city councils of all the regional capitals and have hundreds of municipal councillors all over Austria. Green or green-affiliated lists have seats in all but 6 towns with over 10,000 inhabitants. The Viennese Greens took the initiative in bringing together green local councillors from all over Europe to discuss common issues and networking. In December 2003 a congress took place in Vienna attended by about 300 participants, a lot of them from the new EU candidate countries. A resolution tabled by the Viennese Greens at the Rome congress of the European Greens in February 2004 includes a catalogue of demands and goals for green politics on the city level.

In autumn 2002, the right-wing government in Austria collapsed due to FPÖ internal disputes and chancellor Schüssel decided to call General Elections on 24th November 2002. A "red-green" majority was not achieved: ÖVP became strongest party for the first time since 1966 (42.30%), SPÖ came in second (36.51%), FPÖ was defeated (10.01%). *DIE GRÜNEN* scored their best result ever in national elections (9.47% with 464,980 votes) and stayed just one seat behind FPÖ. The 17 elected green MPs are Dieter Brosz, Eva Glawischnig, Kurt Grünwald, Theresia Haidlmayr, Werner Kogler, Ulrike Lunacek, Sabine Mandak, Gabi Moser, Karl Öllinger, Peter Pilz, Wolfgang Pirkhuber, Heidi Rest-Hinterseer, Michaela Sburny, Terezija Stoisits, Alexander Van der Bellen, Brigid Weininger (since spring 2003, instead of Madeleine Petrovic) and Wolfgang Zinggl (since summer 2004, instead of Eva Lichtenberger). From May 2003 till June 2004, *DIE GRÜNEN* held the best Green Party result in general elections world-wide.

After some initial scepticism, the enlarged party committee decided on 5th February 2003 to start coalition negotiations with ÖVP. One argument for this was the attempt to prevent a revival of a new ÖVP-FPÖ government that still had an arithmetical majority. The Greens in Vienna, some Greens in other regions and a number of MPs opposed negotiations because they did not perceive the ÖVP to be willing to seriously leave the political right-wing path it had followed with the FPÖ over the last three years. After one and a half week of negotiations, *DIE GRÜNEN* decided to break off the negotiations on 16th February, at 5 in the morning after 16 hours of negotiations, because ÖVP was not willing to compromise over crucial issues like a fair pension model, the abolition of university tuition fees, the renouncement of interceptor planes, stronger support for railway transport, partnership regulations for lesbian and gay couples, etc.

It was the first time in Austria that Greens have been in a position to negotiate on forming a government. After the failure of ÖVP to embark on serious reforms, chancellor Schüssel decided to continue to govern together with FPÖ. For the Greens entering into negotiations about forming a government coalition was

neither an error nor did it bring about failure. The press and the public paid tribute and respect for their seriousness in the negotiation process. Although the Greens did not enter government then, the days of negotiations have strengthened und changed the Green Party: They are no longer considered the "little sister" of the Social Democrats and the public is aware that the Greens are able to be a partner in a future coalition government.

In the elections to the European Parliament on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2004, the tendency of green growth (6.81% in 1996, 9.29% in 1999) prevailed. With 12.89% of the vote (322,429 votes), *DIE GRÜNEN* held 2 seats. Johannes Voggenhuber was re-elected MEP with the top score of over 30,000 preference votes. His active role in the debate on a new European constitution has been honoured by the voters. The second green MEP is Eva Lichtenberger, former member of the regional government of Tyrol and then MP, who has been struggling against truck transit and for a sustainable transport policy since many years. In the Tyrolean capital Innsbruck (28.52%) and in 5 out of the 23 urban districts of Vienna, *DIE GRÜNEN* became the strongest party.

The next general election is going to take place in 2006. The right-wing FPÖ most probably will be further reduced (at the European elections in June 2004 they came in fifth with only 6.31%), a possible government may then be formed by SPÖ-ÖVP, SPÖ-GRÜNE or ÖVP-GRÜNE. Anyway, the Greens will be well-prepared for negotiations and for democratic, sustainable and socially fair reforms, whatever the next Austrian government coalition will be.