

# The Austrian Presidency of the Council

The Austrian Presidency of the Council, which will start on July 1<sup>st</sup>, **will be the last full semester before the Brexit and the European elections.** Austria will therefore have a tight implementation schedule for an ambitious agenda. As usual, 3BS carried out a five-point analysis of what to expect these next six months ...

## 1 Austria under Sebastian Kurz

- Austria's new chancellor is often compared to Emmanuel Macron, since he was elected at 31 after a meteoric rise forged in the rejection of traditional parties.
- He forged a coalition with the far-right Freedom Party FPÖ. The motto for this presidency is therefore « **A Europe that protects** » .
- He is liberal on economic issues, restrictive on migratory issues, and conservative on society issues — in this Catholic country of 8.7 million inhabitants.
- He is against most of Macron's reform projects for Europe, **Vienna being in favour of more subsidiarity and closest to the positions of Hungary or Poland on migration.**
- Austria's proximity to the Visegrad Group offers an opportunity to « **build bridges between Member States and reduce tensions** » - in the conclusions reached at a Kurz-Macron meeting on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

## 2 The Presidency's priorities

**Security and migration**, which Austria would like to examine from the point of view of border protection rather than refugee allocation, notably by extending Frontex's mandate.

**Competitiveness through digitization.** Austria will have to achieve consensus on outstanding proposals of the digital single market, notably the taxation of digital giants and Platform-to-Business regulation.

**Stability in Austria's neighbouring countries**, in line with the Bulgarian presidency. Austria aims to stabilize South-Eastern Europe by maintaining hopes for EU membership in the region.

## 3 Key dates

July

Aug.

Sept.

Oct.

Nov.

Dec.

• 05-06 : informal meeting of EU leaders  
• 18-19 : informal meeting of EU defence officials

• 29-30 : informal meeting of EU Defence Ministers  
• 30-31 : informal meeting of EU Foreign Affairs Ministers

• 17-18 : high level conference on Energy  
• **20 : special summit on migration and security**

• 02 : high level conference on the European Defence Fund  
• 03-04 : international conference on sustainable energy

• 20-21 : conference on a European strategy for energy technologies  
• **23-24 : UE-Asia conference**

• 03-04 : conference on cybersecurity  
• **13-14 : European Council**

## 4 Issues that matter

Russia

Given the strong diplomatic ties between Vienna and Moscow, Sebastian Kurz's government will seek to re-establish the EU-Russia dialogue, in the context of a trade war with the United States. In June, Austrian Vice Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache urged the EU to end the sanctions against Moscow.

Budget

Austria will oversee the negotiations on the adoption of the next multiannual financial framework 2021-2027. Reaching a consensus will be difficult, especially on the issue of increased Member States contributions. Kurz already said that it was unacceptable. He defends a vision of Europe that does less, but better.

## 5 People that matter



**Barbara Kappel**  
MEP (ENF)

Very active in the EU Parliament, she is part of the ITRE committee and will work on digital issues.



**Gernot Blümel**  
Minister for European Affairs

A 36-year-old ÖVP executive who embodies renewal alongside Sebastian Kurz.



**Alexander Winterstein**  
European Commission deputy spokesperson

He carries a lot of clout in the Commission, especially in DG COMP and DG BUDG.



**Johannes Hahn**  
EU Commissioner for Regional Policy and EU Integration

He is a key player on the Balkan question.