

Public opinion in Austria – Desk research

National Report

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0. Preface

The present socio-demographic analysis about political, social and cultural attitudes in Austria is based on the most recent Eurobarometer data, i.e. the Special Eurobarometer of November-December 2006 as far as social matters are concerned, and the last wave of the Standard Eurobarometer (September 2006). In order to analyze the Austrian climate of opinion in general and particularly the attitudes towards the EU, we cite a number of national and international studies. Certain national specificities and trends can only be explained by history and by way of example (national events, news). Therefore we especially emphasize the political context and socio-economic explanations.

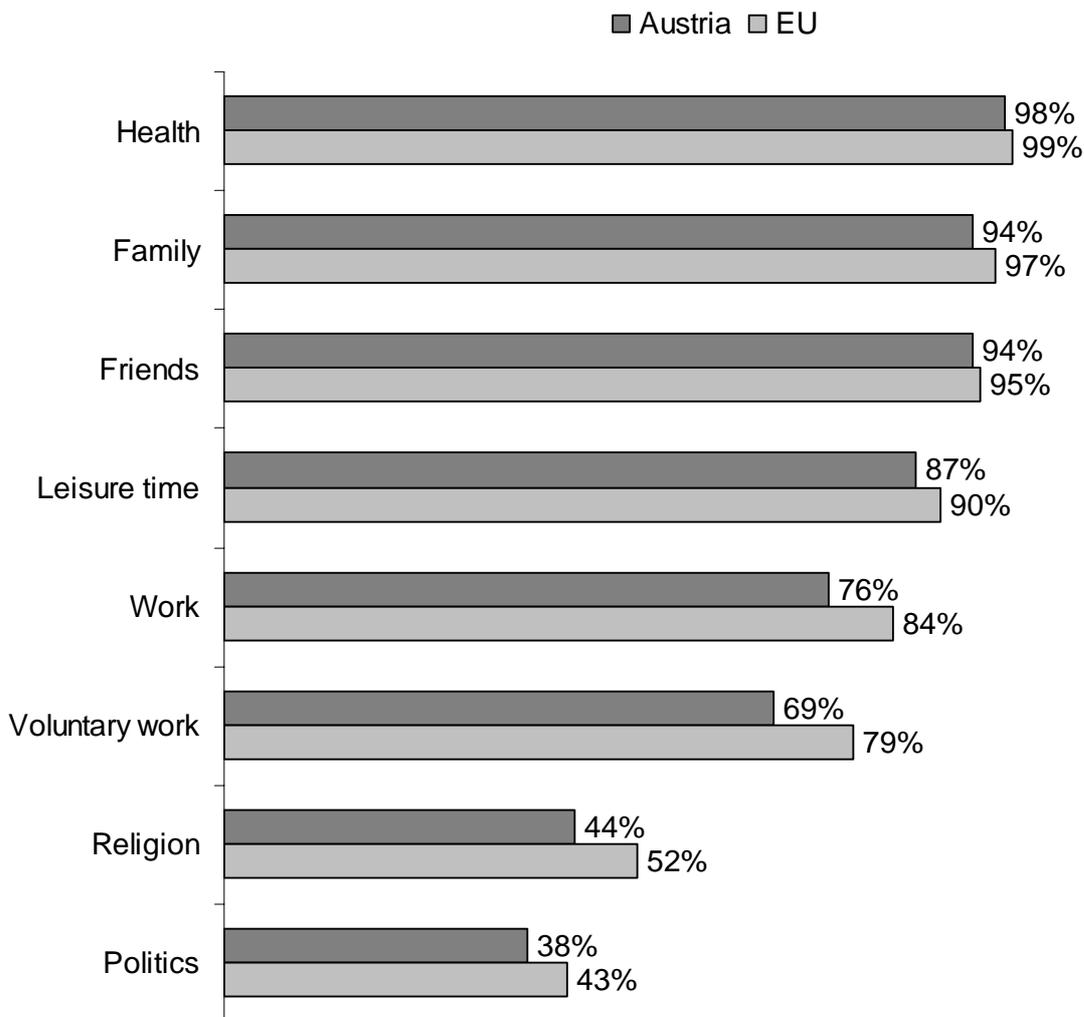
The European Union has been an elitist project from the beginning. In some Member States such as in Austria, one can finish school without learning anything about the European Union. In between, the European Commission tries to bridge the gap – which probably will take generations.

This report about the public opinion in Austria was coordinated by Harald Pitters of Gallup Institute Austria and supervised by Matthias Karmasin of Klagenfurt University. We are particularly grateful to Annemarie Huber from the Representation of the European Commission in Austria and thank her for excellent cooperation.

1. Everyday life

On the whole, the Austrians are satisfied with their current state of life. Their mood is at or above average EU level. The Standard Eurobarometer shows that the overall majority of more than 80% (83% EB 66.1, EB 65.2: 85%) is satisfied with the life they lead (EU: 82%, +1 Pp compared to EB 65.2). The same applies for the self-perceived happiness (81%, EU: 87%), according to the Special Eurobarometer of November-December 2006 (EB 66.3).

Importance of life aspects



Source: Special EB 273; EB 66.3

Regarding the importance of various aspects of life, health, family and friends are indispensable for the population in Austria as well as in the other Member States (more than 90% respondents, respectively). The Special Eurobarometer also shows that leisure time is counting more than work (87 vs. 76%, EU: 90 vs. 84%).

1.1 The importance of helping others

As far as voluntary work is concerned, there is a considerable difference of 10 percentage points between Austria and the other EU countries: I.e. helping others is important for 69% of respondents in Austria vs. 79% in the EU. This interesting result was revealed by the Special Eurobarometer at the end of 2006. At the beginning of this year the new government (a “grand coalition” between the Social Democratic Party and the conservative People’s Party) introduced a new tuition fees model in combination with voluntary work: The tuition fees of around € 400,- per semester, implemented in 2001 by the conservative government under fierce criticism from the Social Democrats, will not be removed. But those students who do 60 hours or more of social work (€6,- per hour) per semester will get their money back. Yet, during the election campaign, the Social Democrats and their leader Alfred Gusenbauer – now head of government – promised the tuition fees would be abolished under a government headed by them. The new tuition fees model engendered huge protests among the students, because they felt betrayed by the Social Democrats – and by politics in general –, arguing that they could earn much more money otherwise e.g. by working at a supermarket. On the other hand, voluntary work especially in social sectors is still rather unusual in Austria (except for e.g. the volunteer fire department or Red Cross in rural regions or sports clubs).

1.2 The role of religion

With regard to other social matters in the day-to-day living, for nearly half of the Austrians (44%, EU: 52%) religion is important to a greater extent than is politics (38%, EU: 43%), according to the Special Eurobarometer. However, it has to be stated that **the catholic religion plays a big role in the Austrians’ everyday life,**

which determines the **Austrian mentality** as well, i.e. as far as values are concerned. Due to the Concordat with the Vatican, religion has an important influence from primary school on (e.g. mandatory classes). As a consequence, social reform ideas are very difficult to realize, as the discussion about a “comprehensive school” for all pupils aged 10 to 14 years – which is part of the school system in almost all other industrialized countries – has repeatedly shown.

Furthermore, as far as the role of religion is concerned, the last Standard Eurobarometer EB 66.1 shows that Austrians trust the religious institutions (50%, -1 Pp compared to EB 64.2) to the same extent as the national parliament (52%, -4 Pp compared to EB 65.2), which is elected directly. Concerning both, the EU average is below these figures: 44% (-3 Pp compared to EB 64.2) have confidence in the religious institutions and only 33% (-5 Pp compared to EB 65.2) in the national parliament. A big majority of **74%** of the Austrians are **Roman Catholic**. As a result of this it must not be underestimated that the politicians act following their religious faith and are serving their “target voters”, too. However, unlike in the USA, in Austria they do not explicitly decide as e.g. catholic Member of the Parliament or the Constitutional Court.¹

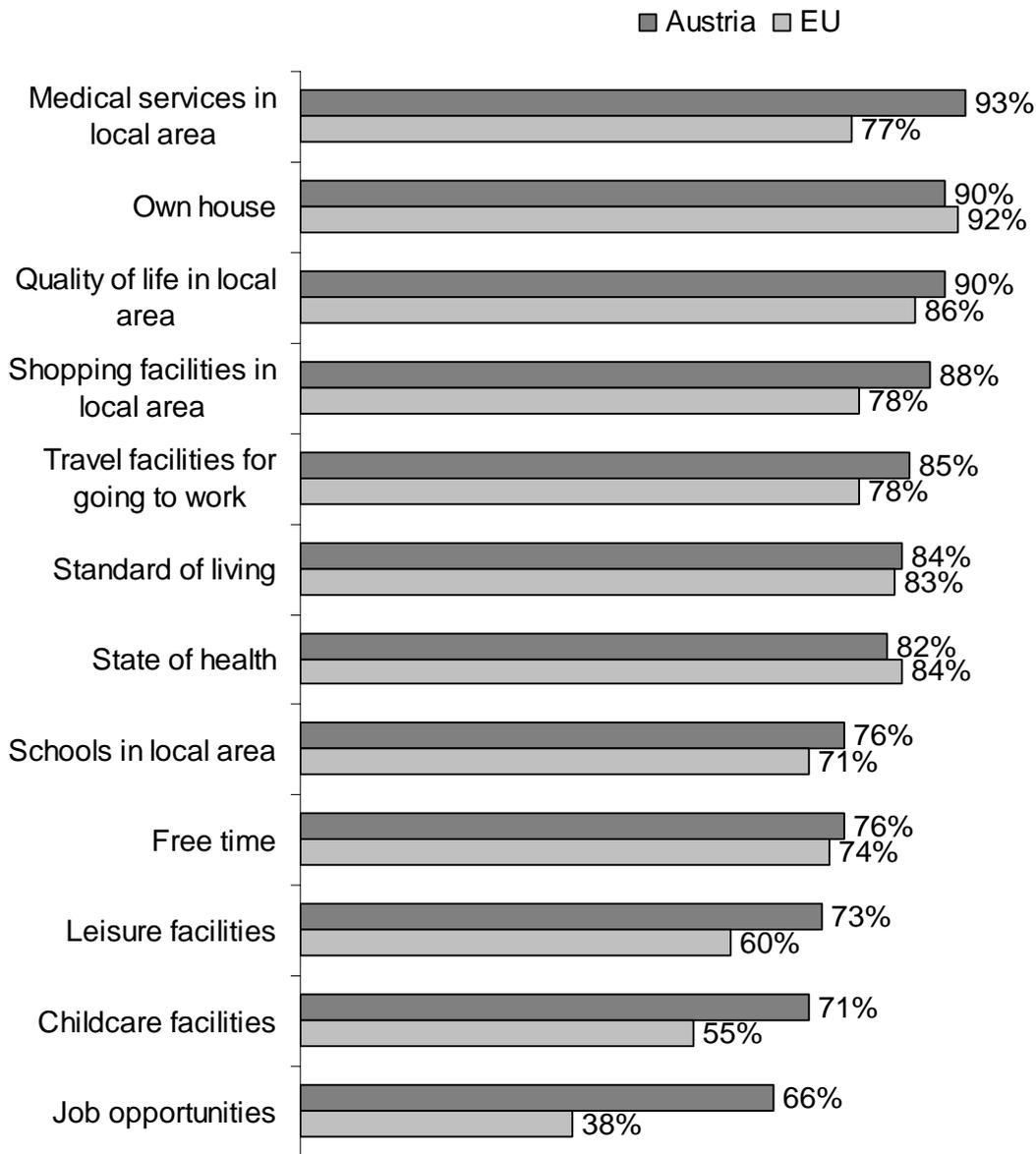
1.3 The Austrian way of getting ahead in life

Among the things for getting ahead in life, only 58% of the Austrians see a good education as important (EU: 62% EB 66.3), whilst in Germany, for instance, an overall majority of 81% underlines the necessity of a good education. Moreover, one third of the Austrians (31%) esteem that “knowing the right people” is important (EU: 26%). Austria also lies above EU level when it comes to the importance of a wealthy family origin (16% vs. 9% in EU) in order to have success in life; e.g. in Hungary, Austria’s neighbour country with which it has a common history (Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1867 until 1918), nearly one third thinks that coming from a wealthy family and knowing the right people (31% and 29%, respectively) is important.

¹ See International Herald Tribune: Catholics dominate U.S. Supreme Court – Subtext of abortion ruling: Religion, April 25, 2007.

Regarding everyday-life issues, almost the whole population in Austria (93%) – and only three quarters at EU level (77%) – is satisfied with the medical services. As reflected by the Special Eurobarometer, an overall majority of 73% of the Austrians (EU: 60%) appreciates the leisure facilities in the local area. They are satisfied to a great extent with the travel facilities for going to work or shopping (85%, EU: 78%) and with the shopping facilities in their local area, too. A majority of two thirds (66%) is satisfied with their **job opportunities** in general, which reflects a **much better** situation in comparison to the average EU level (38%). As far as the different aspects of working life are concerned, the Austrians' satisfaction is at or above EU average. Much more than in the other Member States, here the respondents feel well paid (52%, EU: 43%) and have more prospects for career advancement (57%, EU: 40%). The Austrians can make use of their knowledge and skills (80%, EU: 77%) and they work with people they like (77%, EU: 80%). Their job gives them the opportunity to learn new things (71%, the same as at EU level), to take part in making decisions that affect their work (69%, EU: 65%) and to balance professional, family and private life (65%, EU: 69%).

Satisfaction with everyday life issues



Source: Special EB 273; EB 66.3

1.4 Children – dream and reality

The Special Eurobarometer also reveals that an overall majority of 71% of the representatively surveyed Austrians are satisfied with the childcare facilities in their local area; at an average EU level only half of the respondents (55%) show this

tendency. Other surveys as well as statistical reports on national level mirror another situation: Especially the rural and the female population – women still being in charge of childcare for most of the time – esteem the opportunities particularly for babies and infants as insufficient.

In Austria there has been a long-standing discussion about additional need for childcare places particularly for children below 6 years. During the last decade, improvements in the supply of care places were reached especially for small children and pupils, even though the opportunities are still insufficient. That has been revealed in a study by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in Vienna.²

In comparison to OECD figures Austria is placed in the bottom third with its care quotas for children below 3 years, i.e. **13%** in 2005. Following that and in order to fulfil the *Barcelona target* of **33%** by 2010 – set by the EU heads of State and Government in 2002 after the *Lisbon strategy* in 2000 – around 50,000 places are still lacking. Austria is in the middle range as far as the facilities for children between 3 and 5 years (85%) are concerned, i.e. around 10,000 places are lacking in order to meet the *Barcelona target* of 90%. The afternoon care of pupils is underdeveloped, too (opening hours etc.). Here Austria lags behind not only the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries but also behind some South-European countries. These substantial shortcomings hamper the reconciliation of work and family life. Moreover, there is a negative trade-off between the fertility rate per woman and the lack of childcare places. In Austria, the birth rate has been constantly decreasing since the 70s and is currently at 1.42, whereas the Eurobarometer data of 2001 and 2006 reveal that the rate of desired children is at an average of 1.69.³ France, that has a traditionally dense network of child care facilities, has a birth rate of 1.91, which is the highest among the EU countries.

² Michael Fuchs et al.: Demand for Formal Child Care in Austria: Between 10,000 and 100,000 places. European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna; see: http://www.euro.centre.org/print_detail.php?xml_id=434

³ Wolfgang Lutz: Was kann die Demographie über die Zukunft sagen und was kann sie nicht?, Vienna Institute of Demography/Austrian Academy of Sciences; see: www.oew.ac.at/vid/download/Lutz_AK061211.pdf

2. Future expectations

The **economic outlook** for Austria is considered to be **positive**. Concerning economic- and job-related questions the Austrians are optimistic and at or above EU level, which can be explained by the relatively low unemployment rate of 4.4% – in comparison to the EU rate of 7.3% – by the end of April according to Eurostat.

2.1 Short-term expectations

Asked about their employment expectations within the following twelve months, a quarter of the population in Austria is in positive mood. The majority says the situation will remain the same. In late 2006 (EB 66.1), 22% (+7 Pp in comparison to EB 65.2) expected a better **job situation** in general, which represents a **considerable increase in optimism** since spring of the same year. 63% (-5 Pp compared to EB 65.2) expected their personal employment situation to remain stable, and only 9% (-1 Pp compared to EB 65.2) were pessimistic. The level of perceived job security, examined by the Special Eurobarometer in November-December 2006, is high in all the Member States. In Austria, 88% of the respondents (EU: 85%) stated that they were confident to keep their job in the coming months; 10% were not confident (EU: 13%).

As far as the **economy in their country** is concerned, according to EB 66.1 a quarter of Austrians, i.e. 24% (+1 Pp compared to EB 65.2 of spring 2006), expect a better situation within the coming months. 53% (+3 Pp compared to EB 65.2) say it will remain the same. The **pessimists** are a clear minority of 18% (-4 Pp compared to spring 2006), which constitutes **only a half of the EU average** (35%, ± 0 Pp). The mood is apparently the same when it comes to the personal life. 23% (+3 Pp compared to spring 2006) of the Austrians are expecting a better life in general. About two thirds (63%, -4 Pp) say it will remain the same. The same percentage as at EU level is pessimistic in Austria (12%, respectively).

2.2 Expectations in the long run

The Austrians are optimistic about their personal situation in the long run, i.e. in the course of the next five years. 30% (EU: 41%) say it will improve (EB 66.3), and a majority of 56% (EU: 40%) expect it to be the same.

3. The direction in which things are going

Asked about the direction in which things are going in their country, Austrians show a **more positive** trend than the EU average: According to the last Standard Eurobarometer EB 66.1, 35% (+6 Pp compared to EB 65.2) say that “in general, things are going in the right direction in Austria” (EU: 28%, -6 Pp). It is interesting to see that a persistent group of more than a quarter of the population (27%) – and more than the EU average (19%) – say things are going neither in the right nor in the wrong direction. On certain socio-cultural or EU key-questions, a considerable part of Austrians are sometimes not able to make up their mind and define their position.

We have a comparable situation concerning the expectations for the lives of future generations, as revealed by the Special Eurobarometer of the end of 2006: Almost one half of the Austrians seem to be highly indecisive, compared to the EU average, and believe that the life of those who are children today will be “neither easier nor more difficult” (30%, EU: 16%). The majority of Austrians is pessimistic – to a lesser extent than the EU average – saying that the lives of future generations will become more difficult (51%, EU: 64%). Only a small fraction of the population expects an easier life for the young people (16%, EU: 17%).

As for the **leadership in the European Union**, the Austrians are still dissatisfied with the EU. However, in 2006, i.e. from EB 65.2 to EB 66.1 wave, the support for the EU’s course has **slightly increased** in Austria (30%, +6 Pp compared to EB 65.2) and is currently at EU level, which itself has decreased (33%, -6 Pp). More than one third, with a decreasing tendency, is critical saying that “things are going in the wrong direction” (37%, -7 Pp vs. EU: 33%, +6 Pp compared to EB 65.2).

As a result we can say that, apparently, the **EU presidency** headed by Austria in the first half of 2006 has had a **slightly positive effect** on the population’s scepticism. Although the public and the media – including the tabloid and most read daily newspaper “Kronen Zeitung” – were focusing on the presidency, this hype of European issues was reduced dramatically to a “normal” extent from the second half of the year 2006 on.

It is a matter of fact that the conservative government – at that time, the Christian Democrats and the party BZÖ (“Union for the Future of Austria”) headed by the chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel – failed to set significant initiatives at European level. E.g. agreements on the EU financial perspective from 2007 on and the common point of view in the service directive were finally reached during Austria’s second EU presidency.

Apart from this, the so called “reflexion period” about the European constitution treaty, for instance, ended without any concrete result – which, of course, is not the fault of the Austrian presidency alone. As far as the EU enlargement is concerned, Austria’s initiatives remain often at rhetoric level and commonplace declarations. Especially the proven benefits of enlargement, not only from an economic point of view, seem to be attributed to national efforts rather than to the EU. Foreign investment (e.g. the acquisition/take-over of Austrian enterprises) is frequently still regarded as a threat to the national economy; see recent example of the Böhler-Uddeholm take-over by the Austrian steel group Voest-Alpine AG instead of the British CVC Capital Partners.

Austria is a small and relatively young Member State (since 1995). However, the example of Luxemburg and particularly Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker shows that also small EU countries are able to play an important role on the European stage and to outline European visions. As shown in the report “Bargaining power in the European Council”, the big states (Britain, France and Germany) are gaining power in the EU – except for Italy.⁴ The EU’s fourth largest Member State is weaker than other similar-sized states due to unstable domestic politics and, until recently, due to the “unpredictability of Silvio Berlusconi as prime minister”, says Jonas Tallberg from the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies. The author of the report describes Juncker as the head of government “who by himself commands the greatest respect and authority” not only because of his extreme experience, competence and networking abilities. Tallberg underlines especially Juncker’s “capacity to **put European interests before national** (of which there are few)”. Moreover, in specific cases small countries can “punch above their weight”, as with Nordic states in

⁴ Jonas Tallberg: Bargaining Power in the European Council, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, February 2007, see: http://www.sieps.se/publ/rapporter/2007/bilagor2007/2007_01_web.pdf.

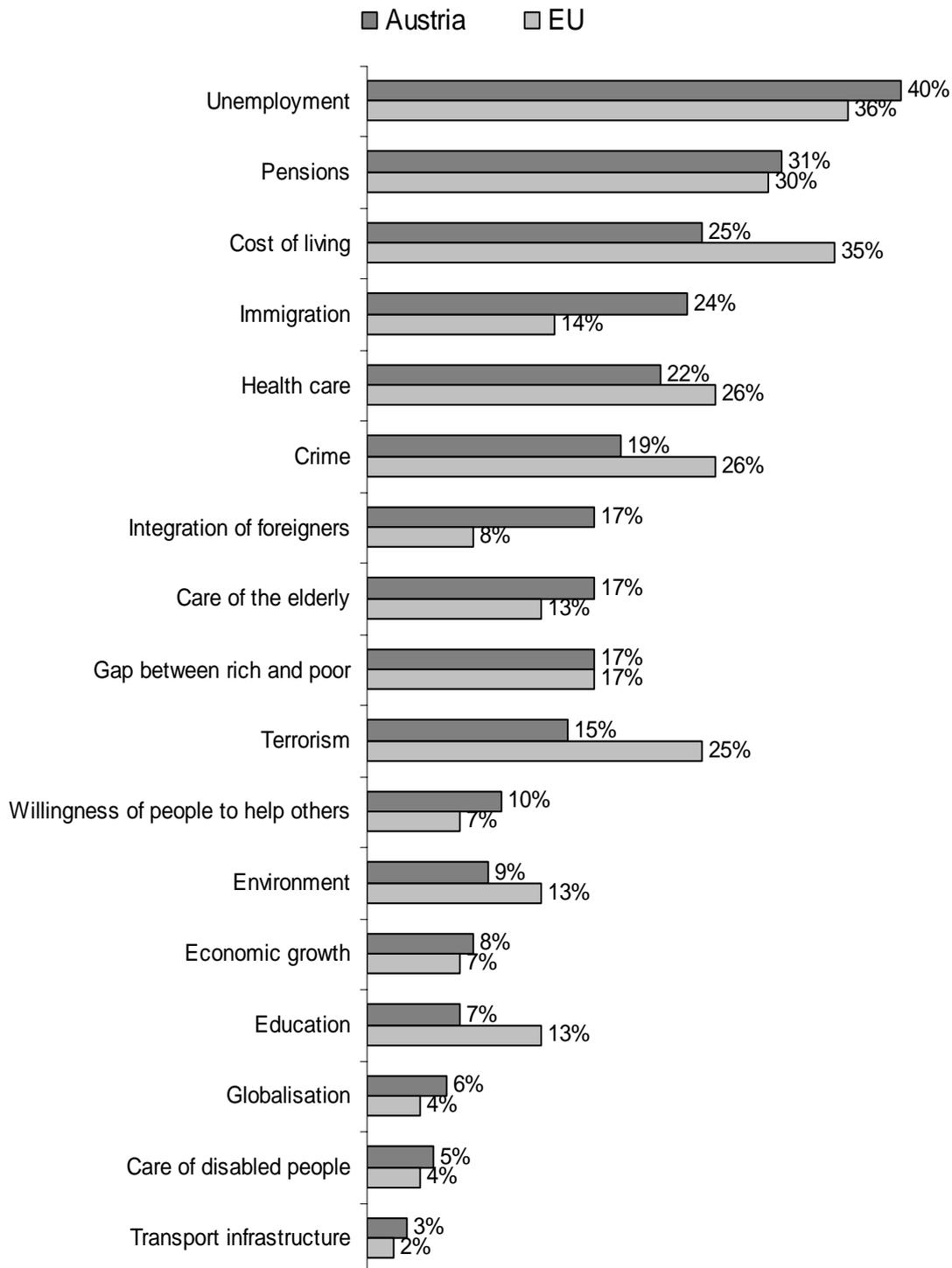
matters of employment policy and environmental policy or as with “particularly involved states” such as Cyprus on the Turkey issue.

Austria was not able to “punch above its weight” during the EU presidency in 2006. Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel, at the time one of the most experienced European politicians among the heads of government, chose a rather pragmatic way and saw the EU presidency more or less as “a mere matter of duty”.⁵ From the logistic point of view, Austria did a good management and professional work. Nevertheless, in the Austrian planning the cultural atmosphere (“Sound of Europe”, “Cafés d’Europe”) seemed to be more important than new European initiatives.

⁵ Almut Metz/Kristina Notz: So klingt Europa – Eine Bilanz des österreichischen EU-Vorsitzes im ersten Halbjahr 2006, Centrum für angewandte Politikforschung/Bertelsmann Forschungsgruppe Politik, München 2006, see: <http://www.cap.lmu.de>.

4. National issues

4.1 Major concerns



Source: Special EB 273; EB 66.3

Even if the Austrians are optimistic concerning economic- and job-related questions, as mentioned above, they see unemployment and pensions as key issues. Following the Special Eurobarometer from the end of 2006, these two questions concerned the population the most (40% and 31%, respectively; EU: 36% and 30%, respectively) at that time. They are seen as key issues for the next generation as well (39% and 40%, respectively; EU: 40% and 30%, respectively). Other important topics in Austria are the cost of living (25%, EU: 35%) and health care (22%, EU: 26%), both for the present respondents as well as for the next generation (21% respectively, EU: 26%).

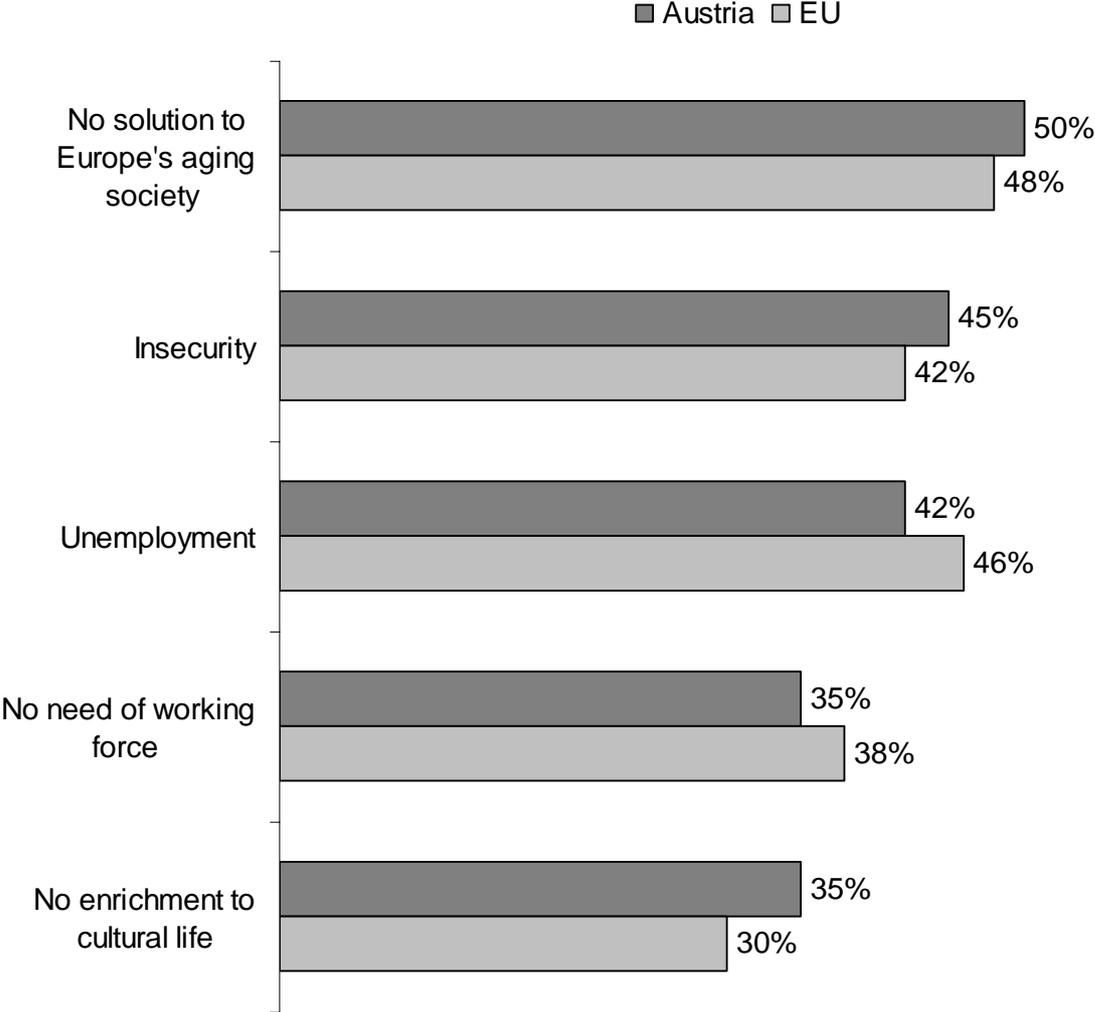
4.2 Concerns regarding multi-ethnicity

Immigration is another big concern for a quarter of the population and multi-ethnicity is broadly seen as something negative. According to the Special Eurobarometer of the end of 2006, a quarter of Austrians (24%) is worried about the migration question; that is a substantially higher portion than the EU average (14%). Slightly more than a third of Austrians (**37%**) consider **multi-ethnicity** as **enrichment to the cultural life** in their country; that is a considerable difference of 17 percentage points to the absolute majority at EU level (**54%**). Another third (35%) clearly disagrees with the argument (EU: 30%). Following the statement “people from other ethnic groups are enriching the cultural life of Austria”, 24% of the respondents say “**it depends**” (EU: 11%).

We have a comparable situation when it comes to the necessity of immigrants to work in certain economic sectors or concerning unemployment and insecurity and the question whether immigration can be made responsible for an increase in that regard. Around 20% of Austrians say “it depends” (EU average: 10%). The agreement and disagreement among Austrians is lower than at an EU level as far as the need of foreign working force is concerned (41% agree and 35% disagree, EU: 48% and 38%, respectively) and with regard to a possible trade-off between immigrants and unemployment (42% agree and 30% disagree, EU: 46% and 40%, respectively). For nearly half of the Austrian population, multi-ethnicity is linked to insecurity in the country (45%, EU: 42%). Only one quarter of the respondents disagrees with that argument (25% versus 41% at EU average). Moreover, the

majority of the Austrians does not see the necessity of immigrants for solving the problem of Europe’s aging population (50%, EU: 48%). A quarter of the respondents agrees with the argument (24%, EU: 32%). 16% and 10%, respectively, say “it depends” or “I do not know” (EU: 9% and 11%, respectively).

Concerns regarding multi-ethnicity



Source: Special EB 273; EB 66.3

Migration, especially “Turkey-bashing” (not only by the far right FPÖ), as well as social issues such as unemployment, pensions and social security, were major topics in the election campaign for Austria’s **general elections** on **Oct. 1st 2006**.

Particularly migration was discussed in a very emotional way, a matter which might be reflected in the Eurobarometer (EB 66.1) results of last autumn, too. They revealed, for instance, an overall disagreement with Turkey's possible EU membership within the next years. With only 5% of the respondents favouring Turkish membership, Austria gave the least support among all Member States. The result is underlined by the negatively seen multi-ethnicity, as mentioned above.

4.3 “The paradox Republic”

The Austrian expert for European History, Oliver Rathkolb, described Austria as “The paradox Republic” in his latest book.⁶ Looking back in history, it has to be reminded that Austria is the product of intensive migration within the Habsburg Monarchy (until 1918), with the German speaking minority dominating other ethnicities. At the moment around **10% of foreigners live in Austria** (8.1 million inhabitants). Due to old prejudgements that still exist, nowadays many Austrians, e.g. in day-to-day conversations, consider especially the Slav neighbour countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia) as being inferior. That might also explain the behaviour of Austrian politicians in recent years, as far as bilateral issues such as the nuclear power plant of Temelín in the Czech Republic are concerned. The Temelín dispute was even transferred to the European stage during the Czech EU membership negotiations (“Melk process”) and is still going on (border blockades between the two countries etc.). Temelín can be seen as a symbol for Austria's pride and prejudice against “the Bohemians” and “Slavs”.

⁶ Oliver Rathkolb: Die paradoxe Republik, Zsolnay Verlag, Wien 2005

5. Welfare

The Austrians give the most favourable answers here. On the one hand, more than half of the population say Austria's social welfare system "could serve as a model for other countries" (58%, EU: 42%). On the other hand, the Scandinavian (especially Swedish) model is often cited as THE possible reform model regarding the financial and the employment situation, particularly as far as the situation of women and child welfare is concerned. As already mentioned above, the EB data reflect a highly subjective and **ambiguous attitude** of Austrians towards welfare-related questions as well as towards economic internationalization, the European Union, and the degree of information concerning EU matters (personal feeling vs. real situation).

Furthermore, in the Special Eurobarometer 66.3 from the end of last year⁷, the overall majority of Austrians say that their social security system provides wide enough coverage (64%, EU: 51%). Only one third considers it as too expensive for the Austrian society (33%, EU: 53%). The self-estimated risk of falling into poverty is at EU level (25% respectively). Almost half of the Austrians do not feel the risk that they could fall into poverty (46%, EU: 54%), whilst 25% do so. That means, in comparison to the Special Eurobarometer 56.1 from the year 2001,⁸ the self-perceived poverty risk nearly doubled during the last five years, from 13% (EB 56.1) to **25%** (EB 66.3). And the part of those who do not feel any poverty risk decreased considerably by 19 percentage points, from 65% (EB 56.1) to 46% (EB 66.3). Actually, a recent study concerning social inclusion in EU Member States shows that in reality the poverty-at-risk rate in Austria is at **12%** and that additional measures should be initiated particularly for women – with regard to job opportunities and childcare facilities –, for children and the elderly.⁹

⁷ Eurobarometer 66.3, European Social Reality (2006)

⁸ Eurobarometer 56.1, Poverty and social devaluation in Europe (2001)

⁹ National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007; see: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/naps_en.htm

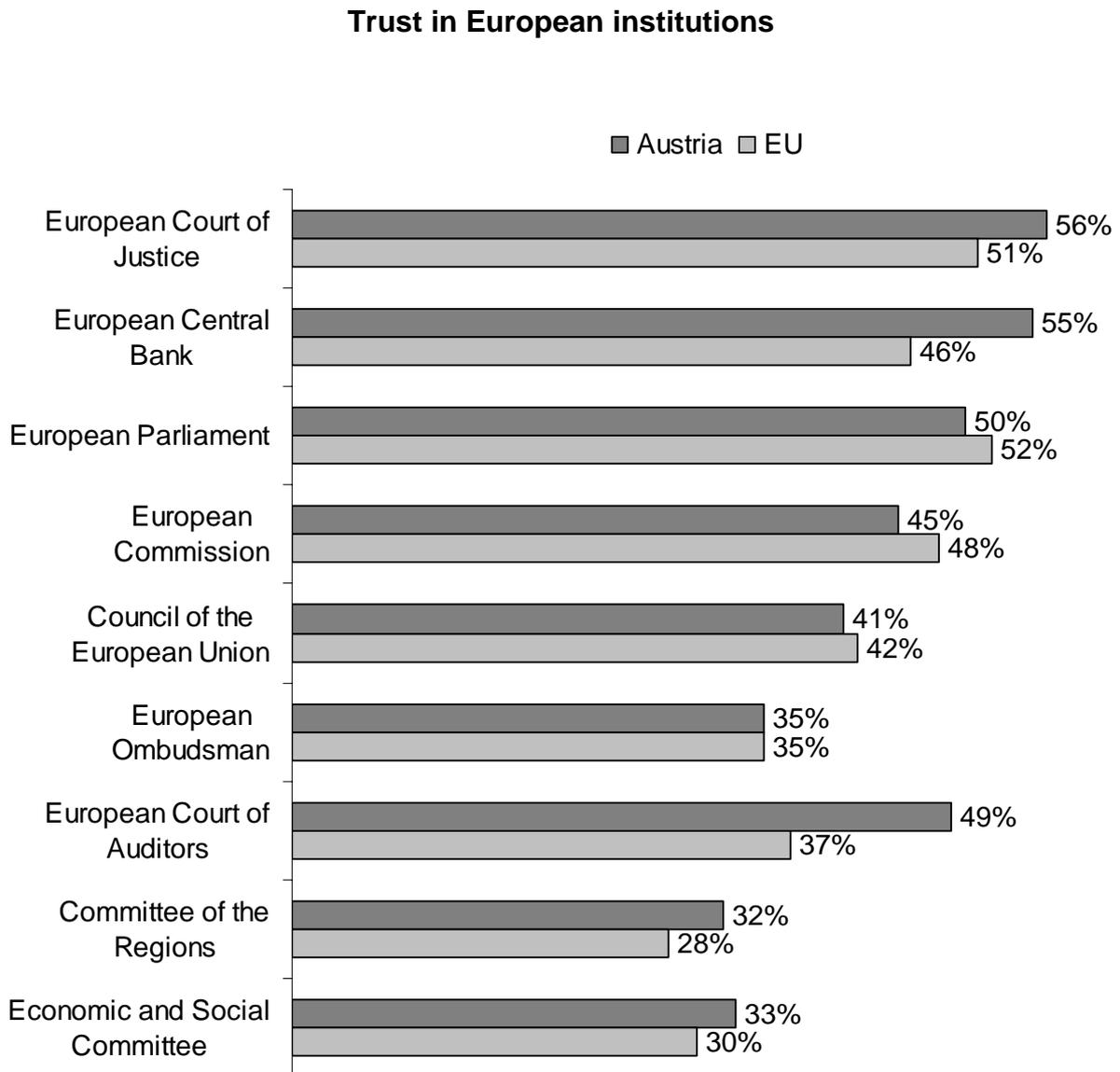
6. Trust in institutions

6.1 National institutions

The Austrians' trust in the national parliament and government as well as in their political parties is **considerably higher** than the EU average. Nevertheless, among the institutions in a democratic society it is the council of city/village that the respondents in Austria and in the other Member States trust the most, i.e. 59% and 49%, respectively. The Special Eurobarometer 66.3 also reflects that almost half of Austrians are confident with their government (46%) and with their parliament (48%). Whereas at EU level the results are considerably lower than that (31% for each) and show a clear lack of trust (61% and 62%, respectively) in the national institutions. The population is less confident with the political parties, even if Austria – where 31% trust them and 60% do not – scores again much higher than the EU average (20% and 73%, respectively). As a result, we can say that the “closer” a democratic institution is to the people the higher is the confidence. That might also explain the fact that pride in the nation runs high across the EU, according to EB 66.1: In Austria, 87% (-1 Pp compared to EB 64.2) say they are proud to be Austrian (EU: 85%, -2 Pp).

Furthermore, a **major banking scandal** around the trade unions' BAWAG bank rocked the Austrian political elites in 2006. By consequence, Austrians' distrust in the **trade unions** exploded: In the course of the last year, the positive respondents fell from 52% to 33% (-19 Pp compared to EB 65.2). According to EB 66.1, the absolute majority of 55% (+20 Pp) does “rather not” trust the unions. This is of major importance, since in Austria the trade unions – which in former times helped to secure the welfare system (again **ambiguous attitude**: distrust in trade unions vs. high esteem in welfare system) – have such a high standing, i.e. **political influence of the social and industrial partners**. Yet, this political speciality of the Alpine Republic cannot exclusively be regarded as an advantage.

6.2 European institutions



Source: EB 66.1

Concerning the European institutions, the Austrians score more or less at EU average: As shown by the Standard Eurobarometer EB 66.1, 50% (+6 Pp in comparison to EB 65.2) trust the European Parliament – with a slightly positive tendency (EU: 52%, ± 0 Pp). 45% (+2 Pp) of Austrians are confident with the European Commission (EU: 48%, +1 Pp) and 41% (+1 Pp) with the Council of the European Union (EU: 42%, -1 Pp). In Austria, the highest approval rates are reached by the European Court of Justice (56%, EU: 51%) and the European Central Bank

(55%, EU: 46%), the lowest figures are obtained by the Committee of the Regions (32%, EU: 28%) and the Economic and Social Committee (33%, EU: 30%). Thus, there is a direct relationship between the media presence, due to the decision making process, of certain European institutions and the confidence people have in them.

However, it has to be noted that the Eurobarometer survey lacks detailed questions concerning the duties and differences between the Commission and the Council, for instance. Due to our experience, we assume that the bulk of the population is NOT informed sufficiently in that regard. Even though in 2006, 42% of Austrians declared to understand how the European Union works (EB 66.1).

Generally speaking and with an increasing tendency, the Austrians are **rather satisfied with the way democracy works in their country**: 75% according to EB 65.2, +7 Pp compared to EB 63.4. In that regard they score higher by 19 percentage points than the EU average (56%, +3 Pp). This result is a strong contrast to the Austrians' constantly critical view towards the democratic process in the European Union, the split between satisfied and unsatisfied being even: In the EB 65.2 survey, 45% (± 0 Pp compared to EB 63.4) are "satisfied", 47% (+1 Pp) are not (EU: 50% and 34%, respectively).

7. Views on the EU

Behind the United Kingdom Austria is expressing the least positive view of the EU according to the Standard Eurobarometer EB 66.1. Asked about the image of the European Union, one third of Austrians says it is positive (34%, +2 Pp compared to EB 65.2), slightly more than that consider it as neutral (37%, +1 Pp), and 28% (-3 Pp compared to EB 65.2) have a negative image.

In addition, almost half of the Austrian population does not see the benefits of EU-membership: 42% (-1 Pp) say that, on balance, Austria has not benefited from being a member of the European Union, 43% (+4 Pp) say it has benefited. As far as the core question of the Standard Eurobarometer survey is concerned, i.e. if, generally speaking, Austria's membership of the European Union is "a good thing" or "a bad thing", there are only 36% (+2 Pp compared to EB 65.2) of positive respondents and 23% (-1 Pp) of negative respondents. More than one third of Austrians are not able to state a clear position: 37% (+2 Pp) say that their EU membership is neither good nor bad, according to EB 66.1.

The reasons for the Austrians' scepticism regarding EU related questions may be due

- to the ambiguous position of national **politicians** (searching for populist headlines, pointing to the EU in case of unpopular decisions; lack of charismatic EU politicians),
- to EU sceptical **media**, especially the highly influential tabloid "Kronen Zeitung" as well as the charge-free daily "Heute" (the latter being available only in Vienna),
- to the lack of interest regarding EU matters on part of opinion makers such as **teachers** and, finally,
- to the fact that the EU's communication activities seem still to aim at an **elitist circle** instead of the broad public.

In recent times several Austrian senior EU officials, e.g. the former EU ambassador Gregor Woschnagg and Peter Jann, Judge and President of the First Chamber of the

European Court of Justice, have publicly criticised Austria's schizophrenic attitude towards the EU ("ignorance" of the common law, "Brussels-bashing" etc.) in interviews.

It is our impression that the EU sceptical Austrians do not search actively for information, although it is available e.g. via internet. Therefore, we suggest that special efforts should be made to reach them, e.g. by involving them in discussions on EU topics.

8. Conclusion

Austria is the country of Sigmund Freud, who was Jewish-born in 1856 in Moravia/Austria-Hungary (now Czech Republic). In 2006, Austria headed the rotating EU presidency for the second time and the Salzburg-born Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was omnipresent, since the official Austria celebrated his 250th anniversary. Freud, who had his 150th anniversary, was “omniabsent”.

Following the founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud, Erwin Ringel, a famous Austrian physician and psychoanalyst (born 1921 in Temesvar/Romania, who lived in Austria) described the ambivalence as an essential part of the Austrian mentality. Ambivalence is the main symptom of neuroses – and Austria a country of neurosis, according to Ringel. In his legendary book “The Austrian Soul” he explains that this tendency towards neuroses is due to the more-than-usual emphasis on obedience, politeness and thrift in our upbringing.¹⁰

From the Austro-Hungarian Empire remained only a small catholic-dominated country. After the “Anschluss” by the Nazi regime, the Second World War and the Holocaust, after the signing of the Austrian State Treaty and the withdrawal of foreign troops, the declaration of permanent neutrality led to a surge of “Austria euphoria”. For Austria, neutrality was a means of recovering its sovereignty. National sectionalism as well as economic patriotism and selfishness (“solipsism”) are a result of this.¹¹ The same applies for the more or less openly expressed xenophobia, especially towards “the foreigners” from the neighbour countries, the not-German speaking former “Crown lands” of the Habsburg empire. Against this background, the globalization and EU membership are a big challenge for Austria.¹²

Austria’s roads to Europe were by no means straight. Its European identity crisis will take time to cure.

¹⁰ Erwin Ringel: Die österreichische Seele (The Austrian Soul), Böhlau Verlag, Wien 1984.

¹¹ O. Rathkolb, The Paradox Republic, ibd.

¹² Fritz Breuss: Austria’s Approach to the European Union, Research Institute for European Affairs/University of Economics and Business Administration, Working Paper, Vienna 1996; see: <http://www.wu-wien.ac.at/europainstitut/pub/workingpaper/wp18>

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