

SAYING GOODBYE TO UN MIGRATION AGREEMENT

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Recently, the Austrian government decided to withdraw from the new migration pact of the United Nations. The U.S., Hungary, the Czech Republic and, most recently, Australia and Poland, had done the same, and it is not a coincidence that politics in most of these countries is dominated by right-wing leaders.

The UN's Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migrations is aiming to make migration all over the world safer. "We view some points of the migration pact as very critical, such as the mixing up of seeking protection with labour migration," said Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. The Chancellor also said Austria's "sovereign migration policy" is endangered by the pact. Since Mr. Kurz's government, consisting of his Conservative Party and the far-right Freedom Party, came to power a year ago, several controversial policies have been adapted.

However, many Austrians believe that their country is isolating itself with this decision. "I think it is sad and embarrassing. Austria is already making a lot of negative headlines with this government. But this step is a new peak. Our country now appears to be heading backwards," said Simone Fischer, 26, a teacher in Vienna. "We are now on the same level with Donald Trump and Viktor Orbán. Isn't this a disgrace?" she asked.

The UN pact, which is not binding, addresses issues such as how to protect migrants and how to integrate them into new countries or how to return them to their original home countries.

At the moment, many observers are still surprised about Vienna's decision to leave the pact. The reason is that, in fact, a real political discussion about the issue never took place. During a UN General Assembly meet in 2017, Mr. Kurz, then Austrian Foreign Minister, welcomed the preparation of the pact and said it would secure an "ordered, international approach towards these challenges". Last July, the finished draft of the pact was sent to Vienna, and, apparently, nobody in the government expressed any criticism.

Far-right blogs and social media warriors close to the Freedom Party have mounted criticism against the pact in recent months. Many of these sites started to spread misinformation, often quoting context-less or wrongly translated passages from the document.

However, even renowned media outlets appear to have adapted the narrative. Earlier this month, Jan Fleischhauer, a conservative columnist with *Der Spiegel*, wrote an article in which he stated that Germany should not sign the migration pact. Mr. Fleischhauer says that his views are not similar to those of far-right observers. Instead, he points out that even dictators like Syria's Bashar al-Assad are going to sign the document and that several phrases of the pact are problematic and unrealistic.

Wrong direction

"This step is going towards the wrong direction. More than 100 years ago, the Austrian-Hungarian Empire used to be very multicultural and open-minded. Migration was something normal and people used to speak many different languages. But today, we see this harsh nationalism that is isolating our society more and more. It makes me feel worried," said Davut Sahingöz, a law student from Innsbruck.

Several Austrian artists and actors have also expressed criticism. "I am an opponent of the current government. I don't like them," said actor Cornelius Obonya in a TV discussion. "Many people feel that democracy is going to be at loss and that social agreements are going to be broken."

The Austrian government pulled out of the UN migration pact which stresses on the safety of migrants, saying the agreement threatens the country's sovereign migration policy

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